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# ***Yaoi* Media Consumption and Travel Motivation: Evidence from Filipino Viewers of Thai Boys' Love Series**

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The Thai *yaoi* culture is getting a lot of attention in several parts of the world. Numerous Thai boy's love (BL) series are a huge hit in Thailand and other countries. Despite the notable success of Thai *yaoi* and BL culture, there is less attention given to this topic in past studies and literature. Moreover, no study has investigated how *yaoi* culture may affect travel motivation. Hence, the present study examines the effect of *yaoi* media consumption on travel motivation of Filipino viewers of Thai boys' love series. A prediction approach was employed, and partial least squares (PLS) path modelling was used to measure the hypothesized relationships. The study reveals that all dimensions of cultural proximity significantly affect Thai *yaoi* media consumption, and Thai *yaoi* media consumption was found to have an influence on emotional involvement and travel motivation. Emotional involvement was also found to significantly affect travel motivation, and, at the same time, act as a mediator between Thai *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation. The current research offers novel theoretical insights about media consumption and its relation to travel motivation in the context of Thai pop-cultural boys' love series.

**Keywords:** Cultural Proximity; Emotional Involvement; Thai BL Series; Travel Motivation; *Yaoi* Media



## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism relies heavily on the various projections of favorable images to attract people to visit a destination (Pan, 2011). There are myriads of factors that affect the level of motivation of tourists when choosing a destination to visit. Different media platforms massively influence the tourism industry as they affect tourism destination images (Chang, 2015). Several studies have identified that media platforms have an impact in shaping destination images and the level of motivation among tourists (Chang, 2015; Damanik et al., 2019). Visual media such as television and movies, which are considered part of the daily lives of people, shape favorable and unfavorable images toward a destination (Hahm & Tasci, 2019; Xu et al., 2020).

One factor that has an influence in shaping destination image and tourists' motivation is popular culture (pop culture). Pop culture of a country has been utilized in promoting tourism destinations (Iwashita, 2008). The different representations in a country's pop culture have been used as media for entertainment, as a knowledge source, and for appreciating the world (Chang, 2015). Television has been considered a potent medium in transmitting pop culture to various audiences. Through production of TV drama series and movies, the pop culture of a country is easily conveyed to mass audiences (Kim & Richardson, 2003). When viewers watch TV drama series and movies, their exposure to these programs transforms their viewership to traveling to places (Gjorgievski & Trpkova, 2012). With this, film-induced tourism has been getting more attention because of the influence of films in the development of tourism (Ng & Chan, 2020).

The growth of the audio-visual sector, the emergence of new media platforms, and the rise of TV and video consumption on mobile phones have contributed a lot in the formation of opportunities in the tourism industry (Vila et al., 2021). Television series, employing popular celebrities and directors, and embedding attractive and unique shooting locations, have reached wider audiences (Rajaguru, 2013; Vila et al., 2021; Yen & Croy, 2016) and have generated strong connections with audiences because of extended and repetitive viewing (Schmidt et al., 2019). Many locations of TV drama series have experienced growth as manifested in the number of visits among tourists (Ng & Chan, 2020).

Aside from the massive impact of Korean pop culture around the world, Thai pop culture is also currently attaining curiosity in different parts of the globe. Thai TV dramas, commonly known as *lakorn*, are getting attention among viewers, and Thailand is now considered a new player in media circulation in Asia (Jirattikorn, 2018). With the upsurge of *lakorn* also comes the rise of the *yaoi* phenomenon in Thailand (Prasannam, 2019), which involves media genres portraying romantic love between two men. In Thailand, *yaoi* TV drama series are popularly known as “Y (wai) series,” short for *yaoi* series, and in other countries this genre is commonly called boys' love (BL) series (Baudinette, 2019; Prasanman, 2019).

It has been noted from past studies that pop culture, such as TV drama series and movies, influences travel motivation (Chang, 2015; Damanik et al., 2019; Ng & Chan, 2020; Rajaguru, 2013; Vila et al., 2021). Furthermore, TV drama series and movies have the propensity to arouse emotional engagement among viewers. The formation of attitudes and personal emotions towards a TV series or movie has been argued by prior film-induced tourism studies (Chang, 2015; Kim, 2012; Lee et al., 2008). Furthermore cultural proximity plays an important factor in the travel motivation process (Chang, 2015).

Many of the prior studies on the factors affecting travel motivation are in the context of Korean pop culture or the *Hallyu* (Chang, 2015; Gong & Tung, 2017; Kim et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2012; Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). There is a scarcity of studies addressing the rising popularity of *lakorn*, and, in particular, of Thai BL series and how *yaoi* culture affects travel motivation. With the increasing popularity of Thai BL series and the growing fandom of Thai BL culture in several countries (Baudinette, 2019; Carreon, 2020; Koaysomboon, 2020; Yukari, 2020; Yuqiao, 2020), the need to investigate the *yaoi* phenomenon in relation to travel

motivation is not only timely and relevant but also will provide a different way of examining film-induced tourism. Based on the literature review, there is no single study that investigates how *lakorn*, especially Thai BL series, affects travel motivation. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by exploring how cultural proximity influences *yaoi* media consumption towards Thai BL series, which in turn affects travel motivation. Additionally, since it has been noted in the past literature that emotional involvement towards TV drama series affects travel motivation, the present study also scrutinizes the mediating effect of emotional involvement on the link between *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation. Based on the primary aim of the study, the following are the research questions:

1. How does cultural proximity influence the Thai *yaoi* media consumption of the participants?
2. How do Thai *yaoi* media consumption and emotional involvement, directly and indirectly, influence the travel motivation of the participants?

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### Film-induced Tourism

Film-induced tourism is a type of tourism where visitors discover the location or destination that appeared in a movie, TV drama, or drama series (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). Shooting locations of movies and TV dramas are now considered powerful tools in attracting and arousing the interest of viewers to visit a particular tourism destination (Kim & Kim, 2018). More and more researchers and practitioners have been interested in how films affect tourism destinations (Kim & Kim, 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Teng & Chen, 2020).

It has been noted by prior studies that film-induced tourism is formed due to the increasing relationship between tourism and popular media (Gammack, 2005; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Ng & Chan, 2020). For instance, watching a TV drama provides a similar escapism attribute (Carl et al., 2007) and unique experience (Gjorgievski & Trpkova, 2012). Moreover, according to Huang (2009), TV dramas have the capacity to empower individuals to better understand other tourism destinations outside their normal territory. Beeton (2010) and Zeng et al. (2015) even argued that these TV dramas provide viewers an experience of the depicted location that may induce them to visit those destinations.

### ***Yaoi* Media Consumption and the Thai BL Series Phenomenon**

The explosion of Japanese media, such as anime and manga, led to the fame of the *yaoi* subgenre around the globe. *Yaoi* is a Japanese term that refers to media (e.g., anime, artwork, short stories, and comics) created by fans where the theme is concentrated on homoerotic romantic love between two men (Mizoguchi, 2003; Zsila et al., 2018). This *yaoi* phenomenon that started in Japan is now part of the popular culture of Thailand.

The earliest account of Thai *yaoi* culture was in the 1990s in the cartoon *phuchai* that was translated into Thai language (Nainapat, 2017). In 2007, “Love of Siam,”

an acclaimed gay romance movie, was a blockbuster film. The movie was considered the first BL film (Lertwichayaroj, 2017; Vespada, 2017) that attracted a lot of *yaoi* fans (Lertwichayaroj, 2017). In 2014, “Lovesick the Series,” a Thai drama series depicting male-male romantic relationship was broadcast on satellite TV by the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand (MCOT) and brought a lot of viewership. The popularity of “Lovesick the Series” among Thai viewers broke the tradition of male-female romance in a typical Thai TV drama (also called *lakorn*). After the success of the said series, BL culture became a staple in the media landscape of Thailand (Baudinette, 2019; Vespada, 2017).

With the rising admiration for *yaoi* culture from across the region, it has been identified that Thai BL series could be a primary source of entertainment export (Koaysomboon, 2020). Thai BL series have penetrated the markets of some countries including China (Yuqiao, 2020), Indonesia (Nugroho, 2020), the Philippines (Carreon, 2020), and other parts of world (Watson & Jirik, 2018). Despite the male-male romance being portrayed in Thai BL series, the target audience of the *yaoi* genre is not only the LGBT community, but also, mostly young, women (Babal, 2019; Watson & Jirik, 2018). For instance, in the Philippines most of the Filipino avid followers of Thai BL series are young women. The plot of Thai BL series does not only revolve on homoerotic male-male relationships, but it also incorporates romance, love, and to some extent, homophobia (Babal, 2019). With the advent of the Thai *yaoi* genre, an exact opposite of the conventional male-female relationships in Filipino TV dramas, more and more Filipino viewers are consuming the Thai BL culture through *yaoi* TV series (Carreon, 2020).

The Thai BL phenomenon is now an integral component of Thai pop culture. Looking at the context of *yaoi* culture, viewers consume Thai BL series because these TV dramas are characterized by pro-gay attitudes and romantic love without gender. These Thai BL series allow viewers to understand themselves better and provide them the opportunity to self-analyze and understand sexual dilemmas in a much better sense. The entertainment value, emotional elements and the aesthetic appeal add more to the propensity of viewers to consume more Thai BL series (Zsila et al., 2018). With all identified reasons and motives, this is how Thai *yaoi* media consumption is operationally defined in the present study.

### Cultural Proximity

Culture is regarded as a factor that influences the behavior of consumers, and, in particular, of tourist behavior (Li et al., 2015). Prior studies even identified authentic culture and cultural proximity as factors in visiting a tourism destination (Chang, 2015; Lu et al., 2019; Su et al., 2011). As a result, the cultural proximity theory is often utilized in the field of media consumption. It espouses that viewers would look for media products that are similar or proximate to their background (Lu et al., 2019; Straubhaar, 1991). Cultural proximity is about identity sharing and the feeling of belongingness to certain groups, sharing cultural similarities such as geography, history, ethnicity, values, language, and religion, among others (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005; Lu et al., 2019; Su et al., 2011). In the context of media studies, cultural proximity constitutes preferences of viewers in terms of social, cultural, political, economic, historical,

and linguistic aspects of a TV program (Singhal & Svenkerud, 1994). Like many other countries, Thailand and the Philippines share similarities in geography, values, and a concept of collectivism. Cultural connections between Thais and Filipinos are evident in several aspects including being service-minded, belief in the existence of spiritual beings, a happy-go-lucky personality, and superstitions (Bohwongprasert, 2013).

Geographic proximity refers to physical distance between two players (Howells, 2002), and, in the case of the present study, between two countries (Chang, 2015) – the Philippines and Thailand. Values, on the other hand, are the enduring beliefs that guide actions and judgments of individuals or groups in different situations and circumstances. They are the utmost manifestation of culture that can affect the behaviors of an individual (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Li et al., 2015). Collectivism, in the context of the present study, refers to similarities of two nations in terms of attitudes towards group members, individuals and society, harmony within groups, and interpersonal conflict (Su et al., 2011). As emphasized in the theory of cultural proximity, viewers consider consuming media products that are proximate to their cultural background (Lu et al., 2019). Furthermore, cultural proximity is a vital factor in understanding why viewers accept or reject a particular TV program (Straubhaar, 1991). Since media, including TV dramas, are expressions of everyday life, consumption of media products by viewers is likely to be affected by how the media portrays similarities of cultural characteristics (DeLorme & Reid, 1999). In a specific study, Anh (2016) argued that the reason why Vietnamese viewers consume TV dramas of Thailand and the Philippines is due to cultural proximity. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

*H<sub>1a</sub>. Geographic proximity significantly influences Thai yaoi media consumption.*

*H<sub>1b</sub>. Values significantly influence Thai yaoi media consumption.*

*H<sub>1c</sub>. Collectivism significantly influences Thai yaoi media consumption.*

### **Emotional Involvement**

Media viewers may form a bond with the characters of a TV drama. The level of audience involvement has been regarded as a construct of media use (Kim, 2012). Audience involvement is grounded on the parasocial theory that suggests that an audience may build a connection with the characters portrayed in media (Giles, 2002). It has been highlighted by past studies that the involvement of audiences may come from vicarious, emphatic, and emotional responses (Kim & Kim, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2018; Reijnders, 2010). For example, TV drama viewers' emotional involvement is contended to be a result of their identification and assimilation to the consumed TV drama (Kim & Kim 2017; Kim & Kim, 2018). Thus, in the present study, emotional involvement is defined as the connection formed between the viewers and the characters in Thai BL series.

Audience involvement can be based on emotions. Emotion has been considered to affect the decision of a viewer (Murphy et al., 2011). Prior studies have suggested that TV viewers are often faced with emotionalized presentations (Angelini et al., 2012; Mutz & Gerke, 2018). When they consume media products such as TV dramas, the

emotional involvement of viewers may come from the drama's plot and characters, sequence of narratives, special effects, music, and other unique features. The overall emotional experience establishes the connection of a viewer to a TV drama (Chang, 2015; Liu & Pratt, 2019). The level of affinity to the characters of a TV drama intensifies the level of emotional connection of viewers. Furthermore, TV drama series enhance the connection between the viewer and characters (Connell, 2005). Hence, it is hypothesized that:

*H<sub>2a</sub>. Thai yaoi media consumption significantly influences emotional involvement.*

### **Travel Motivation**

Travel motivation is considered a vital force that affects the decision of an individual to travel (Chang, 2015; Li & Cai, 2012). In film-induced tourism studies, the success of portrayal of a location or a destination in a film attracts viewers to visit those places (Gjorgievski & Trpkova, 2012; Macionis, 2004). Moreover, TV dramas provide an opportunity for viewers to experience a destination, and, thus, induce them to visit the featured place (Beeton, 2010; Zeng et al., 2015). It has been noted that TV dramas are now considered an integral factor in arousing the interest of viewers to travel (Iwashita, 2008).

Viewers of TV drama series are now more exposed to the plot and characters of the story. Their exposure augments their internal motivation to visit a destination (Chang, 2015; Vila et al., 2021). TV drama series allow viewers to have deeper connections with the series itself. Since the exposure of viewers to TV drama series tends to be longer, it permits the formation of intimacy with the locations featured in the program. Accordingly, the pattern of viewing and the travel behavior of the audience may be affected by these TV drama series (Chang, 2015; Kim & Long, 2012). The consumption of media products considerably affects the level of travel motivation of viewers, as in the case of Korean TV dramas (Chang, 2015; Ng & Chan, 2020). Hence, it is postulated that:

*H<sub>2b</sub>. Thai yaoi media consumption significantly influences travel motivation.*

Media products that portray romance (Riley & van Doren, 1992) motivate audiences to visit a destination (O'Neill et al., 2005). Media products are consumed by viewers because they can relive the emotions they have felt in a film, such as in TV dramas (Beeton, 2010). The level of influence of media products on viewers' motivation to visit a place largely depends on their emotional connection to these films (Kim, 2012). Despite the fact that the viewers have the capacity to differentiate fiction and nonfiction in media products, films, such as TV dramas, allow audiences to momentarily escape into fantasy and nostalgia, and re-experience another dimension of their loved films (Kim, 2012; Lin & Tong, 2009).

There are specific film tourists, or those who seek destinations that they have seen in TV dramas, who travel to places to attain self-actualization or to relive the TV dramas' fantasy or romance (Beeton, 2010; Ryan et al., 2009). When specific film tourists visit the featured destination in a TV drama, they show attachment with the

program by taking photos of shooting locations and re-enacting the performances of the characters. All these experiences are considered by these tourists as personal (Kim, 2010). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

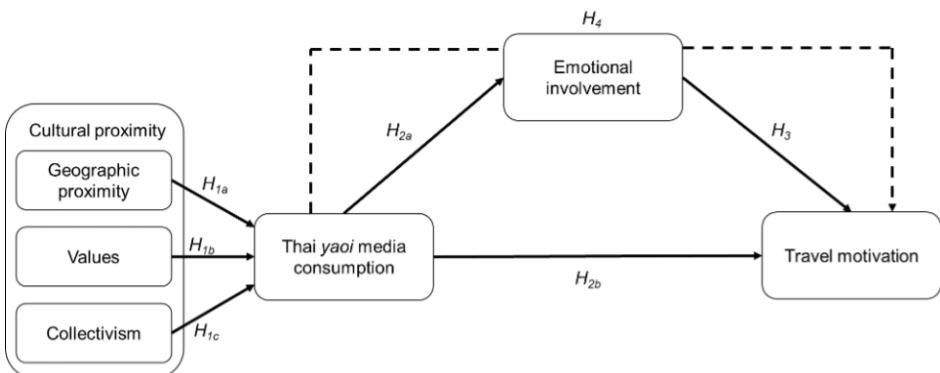
*H<sub>3</sub> Emotional involvement significantly influences travel motivation.*

The popularity of Thai *yaoi* culture among Filipino audiences (Carreon, 2020) is evident with the number of Thai BL series available in online stream applications in the Philippines (Smith, 2020). The attention given by the Filipino viewers to Thai BL series is significantly increasing. Thai *yaoi* media consumption is seen to influence Filipino travel motivation because of the plot and characters (Chang 2015; Vila et al., 2021) of Thai BL series. It can be noted that TV drama viewers may form deeper connections to the series itself (Chang 2015; Kim & Long, 2012). Furthermore, it has been established that media consumption may affect the emotional involvement of TV drama series viewers. Parasocial theory establishes this relationship (Giles, 2002).

Due to the possible bond between viewers and TV drama characters (Kim & Kim, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2018), emotional involvement may affect audiences’ travel motivation. The emotions and the emotional connection developed between the viewer and the TV drama may induce these individuals to visit a destination (Kim, 2012). The experience of reliving the performance of the characters of a TV drama, or simply photographing the shooting location of a film induces viewers to visit a destination (Kim, 2010). Consequently, the present study addresses the gap on how emotional involvement may act as a mediator on the link between Thai *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation. Hence, it is postulated that:

*H<sub>4</sub> Emotional involvement mediates the relationship between Thai yaoi media consumption and travel motivation.*

Based on the theoretical underpinnings and the postulated hypotheses, the conceptual framework of the present study is established (see Figure 1). In the conceptual framework, the study examines how cultural proximity measured in three dimensions – geographic, values, and collectivism – influences Thai *yaoi* media



**Table 1.** Conceptual framework (own compilation)



consumption ( $H_{1a}$ ,  $H_{1b}$ , and  $H_{1c}$ ). It also explores how Thai *yaoi* media consumption affects travel motivation ( $H_{2b}$ ) and emotional involvement ( $H_{2a}$ ). Furthermore, emotional involvement was also tested on how it affects travel motivation ( $H_3$ ). Finally, it scrutinizes the intervening effect of emotional involvement on the relationship between Thai *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation ( $H_4$ ).

## METHODS

### Respondents of the Study

Since the present study examines Thai *yaoi* media consumption and its impact on travel motivations of Filipino viewers of Thai BL series, the participants were identified using a snowball sampling technique. The respondents were Filipino viewers and fans of Thai BL series. In the data collection phase, Google Forms was used. The respondents were recruited through referral since the population is unknown. The online survey questionnaire was posted in social media and initial respondents were asked to identify other potential participants. Moreover, initial participants likewise referred BL fan groups where the online survey can be posted. Several Philippines-based, fan-made Facebook groups supporting Thai BL series and Thai BL series actors were asked permission to post the self-administered online survey in their respective online groups. Four Thai BL series Facebook groups (with approximately 19,000 to 83,000 members) responded positively to the request. Out of 525 retrieved responses, 494 adequately answered all required items in the instrument, a completion rate of 94%.

The online survey contains the consent form where information about the aim of study, the potential risks and hazards associated with the undertaking, the duration of the respondent's participation, contact details and information about myself as the researcher and my institutional affiliation, and a statement of voluntary participation in the study. Moreover, an ethical clearance was secured from the ethics review committee of my affiliated higher education institution.

The online dissemination of the instrument started on August 1, 2020 and ended on August 20, 2020. To measure whether the sample size is sufficient to support the results of the hypothesis testing, inverse square root and Gamma-exponential methods (Kock & Hadaya, 2018) were applied. Using a minimum absolute beta coefficient of 0.129, significant level of 0.05, and power level of 0.80, the minimum sample size based on inverse square root method is 372, while the Gamma-exponential method reflected minimum sample size of 358. Hence, the sample size of 494 is robust enough to support the results of the hypothesis testing.

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the respondents. Out of 494 respondents, 29.8% were heterosexual female, 27.5% were gays, 24.1% were bisexuals, 6.9% were heterosexual male, 0.8% were transgenders, 0.6% were lesbians, 8.1% prefer not to say, and 2.2% were classified as others. In terms of age, more than half of the total participants were in the age group 18 to 20 (53.8%) and 21 to 25 (26.9%) years old. They were also asked regarding the number of Thai BL series they have watched, and 72.7% of the total respondents watched at least 10 Thai *yaoi* series. The findings also show that 53.4% started watching Thai BL series in 2020 and video-sharing platforms such as YouTube and Dailymotion were the most frequently used mode for accessing the said series.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS	N	%
<i>Sexual orientation / Gender identity</i>		
Heterosexual male	34	6.9
Heterosexual female	147	29.8
Lesbian	3	.6
Gay	136	27.5
Bisexual	119	24.1
Transgender	4	.8
Prefer Not to Say	40	8.1
Others	11	2.2
<i>Age</i>		
18 – 20	266	53.8
21 – 25	133	26.9
26 – 30	61	12.3
31 – 35	21	4.3
36 – above	13	2.6
<i>Number of Thai BL series watched</i>		
1 – 3	37	7.5
4 – 6	49	9.9
7 – 9	49	9.9
More than 9	359	72.7
<i>Year started watching Thai BL series</i>		
2013 – 2015	34	6.9
2016	41	8.3
2017	44	8.9
2018	52	10.5
2019	59	11.9
2020	264	53.4
<i>Most frequently used mode of watching Thai BL Series</i>		
Video-sharing platform (e.g., YouTube, Dailymotion)	372	75.3
Paid streaming services (e.g., Netflix, Viu)	23	4.7
Local streaming services (e.g., IwantTFC)	11	2.2
Online sites / blogs	24	4.9
Social media sites (e.g., Facebook pages, groups)	62	12.6
Others	2	.4

**Table 1.** Respondents' characteristics (own compilation)

### Research Instrument and Measures

The research instrument used in the study was an online survey via Google Forms. The said instrument was divided into two major parts – the characteristics and profile of the respondents (see Table 1) and the constructs used in the study.

As for the constructs utilized in the study, Thai *yaoi* media consumption was measured using five dimensions, namely: a) love without gender and pro-gay attitude (4 items); b) identification/self-analysis (3 items); c) melodramatic/emotional elements (3 items); d) arts and aesthetics (3 items); and e) pure entertainment (3 items).

This construct and its dimensions were adopted from the study of Zsila et al. (2018).

Cultural proximity was gauged using three aspects, namely: a) geographic (3 items); b) values (4 items); and c) collectivism (4 items). This construct with the three dimensions was adopted from the study of Su et al. (2011). On the other hand, emotional involvement was measured using six items that were taken from the research of Kim and Kim (2017). For travel motivation, eight items were adopted from the work of Li and Cai (2012), and these items were refined in the study of Chang (2015).

All items in all the constructs used in the study were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 means *strongly disagree* and 5 means *strongly agree*. A 5-point Likert scale was used in the present study as this is less confusing, it increases response rate (Babakus & Mangold, 1992; Devlin et al., 1993), and results in better data quality especially for agree-disagreement scales (Revilla et al., 2014).

## DATA ANALYSIS

The study employed a prediction approach to examine the direct and indirect relationships identified in the hypotheses. Moreover, partial least squares (PLS) path modelling using WarpPLS 7.0 (Kock, 2020) was used as the statistical approach. This technique is appropriate in the study because the research involves the measurement of the direct and mediating effects, includes first-order and higher-order constructs, and gauges reflective and formative variables (Hair et al., 2019).

## Results

The present study utilized PLS path modelling to measure the hypothesized relationships. In PLS path modelling, the first phase is to evaluate the measurement model, also called the outer model analysis. The second phase is to evaluate the structural model, also called the inner model analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

### Measurement Model Evaluation

The first stage of PLS path modeling is the evaluation of the validity and reliability of the constructs used in the present study. Table 2 presents the results of the reliability of the constructs using composite reliability. To say that the constructs exhibit internal consistency, the composite reliability should be equal to or higher than 0.70 (Kock, 2014). As shown in Table 2, all latent constructs have composite reliability coefficients of more than 0.70; hence, they exhibit internal consistency.

Part of the assessment of construct validity is convergent validity. Item loadings and average variance extracted (AVEs) were assessed to measure the convergent validity of the first-order reflective constructs. According to Kock (2014), to say that a latent variable exhibits convergent validity, each item loading must have a value of at least 0.50 and each factor loading must be significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Moreover, each latent construct must possess AVE equal to or higher than 0.50. As shown in Table 2, all first-order reflective constructs possess convergent validity.

CONSTRUCT / ITEM (Reflective – First Order)	Item loading
<b>THAI YAQI MEDIA CONSUMPTION</b>	
<i>I watch Thai Boys' Love Series because...</i>	
<b>Love Without Gender &amp; Pro-gay Attitude – AVE = 0.531; CR = 0.819</b>	
...there are no gender differences in it.	0.762
...feelings have priority over gender in it.	0.662
...gay men have equal rights in it.	0.786
...this genre portrays a positive picture of gay men.	0.698
<b>Identification/ Self-Analysis – AVE = 0.753; CR = 0.901</b>	
...it helps me better understand my life events.	0.841
... it gives me an opportunity to better understand my feelings.	0.885
... it provides me with a guide to better understand my sexual dilemmas.	0.877
<b>Melodramatic/ Emotional Elements – AVE = 0.641; CR = 0.843</b>	
...it portrays intense feelings.	0.768
... it has a stronger emotional impact on me than other stories.	0.813
... it evokes deep emotions in me.	0.821
<b>Arts and Aesthetics – AVE = 0.552; CR = 0.787</b>	
... it as an aesthetic appeal.	0.747
... erotica is artistically portrayed in it.	0.772
... I like its graphics.	0.708
<b>Pure Entertainment – AVE = 0.689; CR = 0.869</b>	
... it is entertaining.	0.815
... it fills my free time.	0.842
... it is relaxing to me.	0.832
<b>CULTURAL PROXIMITY</b>	
<b>Geographic Proximity – AVE = 0.696; CR = 0.872</b>	
Thailand is geographically not far away from the Philippines.	0.758
The convenient transportation makes it easy to travel to Thailand.	0.862
The geographical proximity makes it easy to travel to Thailand.	0.877
<b>Values – AVE = 0.654; CR = 0.883</b>	
Thais' attitudes toward family values are similar to those of the Philippines	0.780
Thais' attitudes toward cultural traditions are similar to those of the Filipinos.	0.742
Thais' attitude toward filial piety (respect to parents, elders) is similar to that of the Filipinos.	0.865
Thais' attitude toward the elderly is similar to that of the Filipinos.	0.843
<b>Collectivism – AVE = 0.589; CR = 0.850</b>	
Thais' attitude toward the member of groups is similar of that of the Filipinos.	0.779
Thais' attitude toward the individual and society is similar to that of the Filipinos	0.853
Thais' attitude toward harmony within a group is similar to that of the Filipinos.	0.595
Thais' attitude toward interpersonal conflict is similar to that of the Filipinos.	0.817
<b>EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT – AVE = 0.571; CR = 0.888</b>	
I feel that Thai BL series and my favorite character(s)/actor(s) keep me company.	0.822
I like hearing the voice(s) of my favorite character(s)/actor(s).	0.795
I feel comfortable when watching Thai BL series as if the character(s)/actor(s) were my friends.	0.743
I really miss Thai BL series and my favorite character(s)/actor(s) whenever I am unable to watch them.	0.725
My favorite characters/actors in Thai BL series are like old friends.	0.732
When watching Thai BL series, I feel that I am a part of the story.	0.710
<b>TRAVEL MOTIVATION – AVE = 0.505; CR = 0.890</b>	
<i>After watching Thai BL series, I plan to visit Thailand...</i>	
To let others know that I have been to the place(s) shown in the series.	0.628
To taste authentic Thai food.	0.572
To visit a Thai destination that many people are talking about.	0.626
To help fantasize myself being a part of the BL series.	0.735
To experience the location(s) appeared in the series.	0.767
To see the scenery and landscape shown in Thai BL series in real life.	0.789
To feel the romance and emotions represented by the character(s)/actor(s) in the BL series.	0.770
To relive the storyline of my favorite BL series.	0.766

Notes: All item loadings are significant,  $p < .05$ . AVE-average variance extracted; CR-composite reliability.

**Table 2.** Convergent validity and reliability of first-order reflective constructs (own compilation)

Discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion was gauged by identifying the correlations among latent variables and square roots of AVEs as shown by the diagonal values (highlighted coefficients) in Table 3. When the diagonal values are greater than the off-diagonal coefficients, constructs are said to exhibit discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Based on the results in Table 3, all latent constructs passed the discriminant validity test.

	LW	SA	MELO	AA	PE	GP	VAL	COL	EI	TM
LW	<b>0.729</b>									
SA	0.405	<b>0.868</b>								
MELO	0.446	0.496	<b>0.801</b>							
AA	0.325	0.287	0.439	<b>0.743</b>						
PE	0.411	0.318	0.459	0.442	<b>0.830</b>					
GP	0.308	0.199	0.275	0.215	0.323	<b>0.834</b>				
VAL	0.306	0.206	0.218	0.204	0.298	0.327	<b>0.809</b>			
COL	0.262	0.224	0.181	0.266	0.269	0.204	0.571	<b>0.768</b>		
EI	0.459	0.455	0.500	0.473	0.507	0.246	0.258	0.258	<b>0.756</b>	
TM	0.309	0.337	0.347	0.439	0.380	0.168	0.210	0.286	0.579	<b>0.711</b>

Notes: LW-love without gender & pro-gay attitude; SA-identification/self-analysis; MELO-melodramatic/emotional elements; AA-arts and aesthetics; PE-pure entertainment; GP-geographic proximity; VAL-values; COL-collectivism; EI-emotional involvement; TM-travel motivation.

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity test of first-order reflective constructs using Fornell-Larcker criterion (own compilation)

Discriminant validity was also identified by gauging the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. To say that the reflective constructs exhibit discriminant validity, the HTMT ratio of correlations in Table 4 must be lower than 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). The results in Table 4 confirm that the latent constructs in the present study possess discriminant validity.

	LW	SA	MELO	AA	PE	GP	VAL	COL	EI	TM
LW										
SA	0.526									
MELO	0.628	0.638								
AA	0.500	0.408	0.647							
PE	0.560	0.396	0.616	0.655						
GP	0.416	0.247	0.368	0.313	0.419					
VAL	0.408	0.250	0.283	0.294	0.372	0.406				
COL	0.361	0.281	0.242	0.398	0.354	0.263	0.722			
EI	0.590	0.541	0.640	0.670	0.622	0.304	0.310	0.324		
TM	0.389	0.392	0.434	0.609	0.462	0.211	0.256	0.360	0.669	

Notes: LW-love without gender & pro-gay attitude; SA-identification/self-analysis; MELO-melodramatic/emotional elements; AA-arts and aesthetics; PE-pure entertainment; GP-geographic proximity; VAL-values; COL-collectivism; EI-emotional involvement; TM-travel motivation.

**Table 4.** Discriminant validity test of first-order reflective constructs using HTMT ratios (own compilation)

In the present study, Thai *yaoi* media consumption as a variable was treated as a higher-order construct. Using a disjoint two-stage approach (Becker et al., 2012), Thai *yaoi* media consumption (formative) was evaluated with the following dimensions: love without gender and pro-gay attitude; identification or self-analysis; melodramatic or emotional elements; arts and aesthetics; and pure entertainment. The measurement model assessment of a higher-order construct includes scrutiny of weights of the indicators and their corresponding p-values, variance inflation factors (VIFs), and full-collinearity VIF.

The collinearity test was performed by assessing all indicator weights. The five dimensions of Thai *yaoi* media consumption must be significant, meaning the p-value of each indicator must be  $< .05$  (Ramayah et al., 2018). Moreover, the VIF of each indicator must satisfy the threshold of 3.30 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006). Based on the results in Table 5, all indicators of Thai *yaoi* media consumption are within the acceptable thresholds for indicator weights and significance, and VIFs.

Full collinearity VIF for the higher-order construct Thai *yaoi* media consumption was also evaluated to measure its discriminant validity (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). To say that the higher-order construct has discriminant validity, full collinearity VIF coefficient must be at most 3.30 (Kock, 2015). Based on the results, the full collinearity VIF of Thai *yaoi* media consumption is equal to 2.070; hence, this higher-order construct exhibits discriminant validity.

Higher Order Construct	Indicator weight	<i>p</i>	VIF	Full collinearity VIF
<b>Thai Yaoi media consumption</b>				
<i>Love Without Gender &amp; Pro-gay Attitude</i>	0.273	$<0.001$	1.412	2.070
<i>Identification/ Self-Analysis</i>	0.263	$<0.001$	1.412	
<i>Melodramatic/ Emotional Elements</i>	0.305	$<0.001$	1.695	
<i>Arts and Aesthetics</i>	0.260	$<0.001$	1.376	
<i>Pure Entertainment</i>	0.278	$<0.001$	1.470	

**Table 5.** Measurement model assessment of the formative higher order construct (own compilation)

### Structural Model Evaluation

The evaluation of a structural model, as shown in Figure 2 and Table 6, involves the assessment of the path coefficients of the hypothesized relationships. Analysis of the data shows that the dimensions of cultural proximity – geographic proximity ( $\beta = 0.269$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), values ( $\beta = 0.129$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), and collectivism ( $\beta = 0.219$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) – significantly and positively influence Thai *yaoi* media consumption with small effect sizes (GP  $\rightarrow$  YAOI:  $f^2 = 0.102$ ; VAL  $\rightarrow$  YAOI:  $f^2 = 0.046$ ; COLLECT  $\rightarrow$  YAOI:  $f^2 = 0.081$ ). Therefore, H1a, H1b, and H1c are supported.

The results also reveal that the higher-order construct Thai *yaoi* media consumption is significantly and positively related to emotional involvement ( $\beta = 0.665$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and to travel motivation ( $\beta = 0.216$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, the findings show that YAOI  $\rightarrow$  EI exhibits large effect size ( $f^2 = 0.443$ ) and small effect size for YAOI  $\rightarrow$  TM ( $f^2 = 0.108$ ). Hence, H2a and H2b are supported.

The influence of emotional involvement on travel motivation was also evaluated, and the result indicates that EI and TM are significantly and positively related ( $\beta = 0.440, p < 0.001$ ) with a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.255$ ). Therefore, H3 is supported.

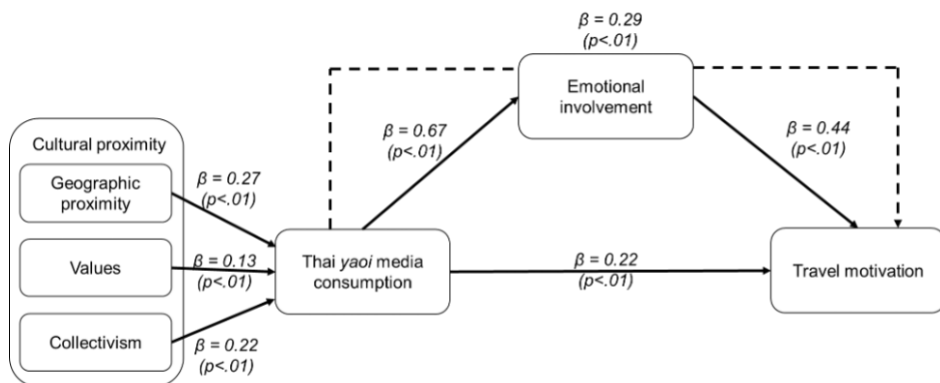


Figure 2. Structural model and the corresponding beta coefficients (own compilation)

The mediation analysis shows that emotional involvement indirectly affects the relationship between Thai yaoi media consumption and travel motivation ( $\beta = 0.293, p < 0.001$ ) with a small effect size ( $f^2 = 0.147$ ). This signifies that Thai yaoi media consumption significantly affects emotional involvement, which, in turn, influences travel motivation. Therefore, H4 is supported.

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	p	SE	Effect size	Decision
<b>Direct effects</b>					
H <sub>1a</sub> . GP $\approx$ YAOI	0.269	<0.001	0.044	0.102	Supported
H <sub>1b</sub> . VAL $\approx$ YAOI	0.129	0.002	0.044	0.046	Supported
H <sub>1c</sub> . COLLECT $\approx$ YAOI	0.219	<0.001	0.044	0.081	Supported
H <sub>2a</sub> . YAOI $\approx$ EI	0.665	<0.001	0.041	0.443	Supported
H <sub>2b</sub> . YAOI $\approx$ TM	0.216	<0.001	0.044	0.108	Supported
H <sub>3</sub> . EI $\approx$ TM	0.440	<0.001	0.043	0.255	Supported
<b>Indirect effect</b>					
H <sub>4</sub> . YAOI $\approx$ EI $\approx$ TM	0.293	<0.001	0.031	0.147	Supported

Notes: Effect sizes follows Cohen's (1988) criterion: 0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large. SE = standard error;  $\beta$  = standardized path coefficient. GP-geographic proximity; VAL-values; COLLECT-collectivism; YAOI- Thai yaoi media consumption; EI-emotional involvement; TM-travel motivation.

Table 6. Direct and mediating effects (own compilation)

Predictive relevance using the Stone-Geisser  $Q^2$  test and the coefficient of determination or  $R^2$  were also gauged as part of the assessment of the structural model. The coefficient of  $Q^2$  must be greater than zero to say that the structural model adequately predicts each endogenous latent variable's indicators (Kock, 2020). The  $Q^2$  coefficients of 0.443 (emotional involvement), 0.364 (travel motivation), and 0.227 (Thai yaoi media consumption) reflect substantial predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017); thus, the model passed the predictive relevance test.

As for the coefficient of determination, an  $R^2$  value of  $< .02$  shows that the effect is too weak to be included as vital from a practical point of view (Kock, 2014). The  $R^2$  coefficients of 0.443 (emotional involvement), 0.364 (travel motivation), and 0.228 (Thai *yaoi* media consumption) reflect weak to moderate prediction effects (Chin, 1998).

To check whether lateral and vertical collinearities exist in the model, a common method bias test was performed (Kock & Gaskin, 2014). In the test of common method bias, full collinearity VIF of each construct must not exceed to 3.30 (Kock, 2015). As shown in Table 7, all latent constructs in the study passed this requirement.

Construct	Full collinearity VIF	$R^2$	$Q^2$
Geographic proximity	1.222		
Values	1.621		
Collectivism	1.566		
Emotional involvement	2.087	0.443	0.443
Travel motivation	1.595	0.364	0.364
Thai <i>yaoi</i> media consumption	2.070	0.228	0.227

**Table 7.** Common method bias test,  $R^2$ , and  $Q^2$  (own compilation)

## DISCUSSION

The present study showcases interesting results. First all dimensions of cultural proximity – geographic, values, and collectivism – were found to significantly and positively influence Thai *yaoi* media consumption. The result indicates that Filipino viewers find Thailand as a country that is geographically near to the Philippines; therefore, Filipino viewers find it easy to travel to Thailand. Moreover, the findings also suggest that the Filipino audience of Thai BL series finds similarities in terms of Thais' attitude toward family values, traditions, members of the group, society, and interpersonal conflict. Therefore, when Filipino viewers consume Thai BL series, they see similarities in cultural backgrounds between the Philippines and Thailand. Looking at the cultural proximity theory, the study confirms that consumption of media products is related to the proximity that viewers experience when it comes to cultural background shown in a TV drama (Lu et al., 2019). Anh (2016) even contended that cultural proximity is a vital factor in why viewers consume TV dramas of other nations.

Second, the study also found that Thai *yaoi* media consumption significantly and directly affects emotional involvement. This result suggests that consumption of Thai BL series leads to connections between the viewers and the characters and story of a TV drama. The *yaoi* phenomenon is an important aspect of the pop culture of Thailand today. Thai BL series are TV dramas that do not only portray homoerotic and romantic love between two men (Babal, 2019), but also incorporate positive attitude towards gay and gay relationships and allow viewers to better understand themselves and the society in general (Zsila et al., 2018). Aside from the entertainment value and aesthetic appeal of most Thai *yaoi* media, Thai BL series permit viewers to see sexual dilemmas in a better perspective. Hence, when viewers consume Thai BL series, the emotional connections with the characters and drama itself (Connell, 2005) are evident. This is also aligned with parasocial theory and past studies that indicate that TV



dramas evoke emotional connection between the viewers and the characters of the media products (Chang, 2015; Liu & Pratt, 2019).

Third, the results of the study also revealed that Thai *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation are significantly and positively related. This finding suggests that the exposure of Filipino viewers on Thai BL series affects their decision to travel to a particular destination. As viewers watch more Thai BL series, they become more attracted and have better motives to visit the location featured in a Thai BL series, or to visit Thailand as a tourism destination. This is in consonance with the findings of past studies that argued that TV dramas provide an avenue for viewers to experience a destination, which, in turn, induces them to visit the place (Beeton, 2010; Zeng et al., 2015). It was also noted that TV dramas are powerful devices to arouse the viewers to travel (Iwashita, 2008).

Fourth, emotional involvement was found to be significantly and positively related to travel motivation. This finding means that the exposure of viewers to the plot and characters of Thai BL series augments the level of motivation of the viewers to visit a destination. Chang (2015) and Kim and Long (2012) even maintained that travel behavior of viewers is shaped by several factors including their exposure to TV drama series. TV dramas allow audiences to be deeply and emotionally involved with the characters and the series itself, increasing their intimacy with the TV drama (Chang, 2015; Vila et al., 2021).

Lastly, emotional involvement was found to mediate the link between Thai *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation. This result signifies that emotional involvement strengthens the relationship between Thai *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation. In short, Thai *yaoi* media consumption influences emotional involvement, which, in turn, affects travel motivation. With the popularity of Thai *yaoi* culture among Filipino viewers (Carreon, 2020), travel motivation among Filipino viewers to visit Thailand is heightened. This increased level of travel motivation among Filipino viewers is affected by their emotional connection with the characters and the Thai BL series they have watched. Since emotional involvement allows viewers to establish deep connections with the characters or plot of a TV drama, audiences become motivated to relive the experience they have felt from the program they have watched, in this case, the Thai BL series.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The current study highlights how pop culture can be an instrument to attract film tourists and presents how a pop-cultural product of one country can be a source of competitive advantage of another nation, as in the case of Thai *yaoi* culture. It has been noted that the *yaoi* phenomenon started in Japan (Mizoguchi, 2003; Zsila et al., 2018), and now Thailand has embraced this boys' love phenomenon and became part of its pop culture. This cultural extension is evident in Thai *yaoi* films (TV dramas and movies) and now favorably affects Thailand as a tourism destination. The presence of Thai *yaoi* fandoms and Thai pop cultural products (e.g., Thai celebrities and artists, *lakorn*, and Thai BL series) in several countries (Baudinette, 2019; Carreon, 2020; Koaysomboon, 2020; Yukari, 2020; Yuqiao, 2020) is a manifestation of Thai pop-cultural success.

The explosion of Korean wave or *Hallyu* is a clear evidence that pop culture is a powerful travel motivation tool. Many of the studies in the past only examine Korean pop culture in relation to travel motivation (Chang, 2015; Gong & Tung, 2017; Kim et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2012; Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). The present study provides a novel direction by exploring the context of Thai pop culture, particularly of Thai *yaoi* culture, and its link to travel motivation. It is interesting to highlight that Thai pop culture, especially Thai BL series, is getting the attention of a wider market outside Thailand. More and more viewers, especially in the Philippines, are now embracing the Thai *yaoi* culture through consumption of Thai BL series (Carreon, 2020). Hence, the research at hand offers significant implications. One of the relevant implications of the present study is that the exploration of Thai *yaoi* culture in the context of film tourism addresses the gap in the literature. Many of the past studies related to film-induced tourism focus on dramas or movies with male-female lead roles. As with Thai BL series, where male-male leads are the primary emphasis of the story, the current undertaking fills the underexplored areas in film tourism scholarship.

Cultural proximity is an important factor when it comes to media consumption. In the present study, the cultural proximity of Thailand and the Philippines affects Thai *yaoi* media consumption of the Filipino viewers. Similarities of the two mentioned countries in terms of geography, values, and the concept of collectivism are reasons why Filipino viewers consume Thai *yaoi* media, particularly Thai BL series. Additionally, the emotional connection that is formed between Filipino viewers and the Thai BL series and its characters induces the audience to visit Thailand. From this, it can be argued that devices such as the use of cultural factors and emotions are important aspects that need to be considered when utilizing TV dramas to motivate people to visit a destination. Thus, the study implies that film tourism practitioners, such as film producers and tourism marketers, may work collaboratively to come up with relevant strategies in promoting a destination through films. Film makers and tourism practitioners may take advantage of the popularity of *yaoi* culture in producing film products that center on romances between men while highlighting tourism destinations. The acceptance of viewers to *yaoi* media products and the rise of fandoms of BL actors are indicators of massive successes of the BL genre as a unique selling point in the entertainment industry.

*Yaoi* media products appeal not only to the LGBT community, but also to young women (Babal, 2019; Watson & Jirik, 2018). This is also true to the Filipino followers of Thai BL series (Carreon, 2020). The present study proves that Thai *yaoi* media products, such as Thai BL series, have a huge potential to attract travelers to visit Thailand. Film-induced tourists, who seek to relive the experience they have felt from the Thai *yaoi* dramas they have watched and to have the opportunity to personally be involved in Thai culture, location, and destinations, show that Thai *yaoi* media consumption can greatly influence their decision to visit Thailand. Therefore, mainstreaming the *yaoi* genre in TV dramas, or any other media products, may positively affect travel motivation of viewers. Though considered a niche market, the LGBT community and young women's acceptance of Thai *yaoi* media can be a source of competitive advantage to Thailand's tourism sector.

The present study offers new insights about media consumption and its relation to travel motivation. Film-induced tourism studies focusing on Thai pop culture are considered underexplored, or to large extent, unexplored. The present study is possibly the first study to investigate media consumption and travel motivation in the context of the Thai pop culture of boys' love series. Moreover, it is also the first study to test the relationship between Thai *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation with Filipino viewers as respondents. Interestingly, even though the Philippines is known to be a gay-friendly country (Manalastas et al., 2017), media contents portraying male-to-male relationships are limited. One of the primary reasons for this is that most Filipinos are Catholics, and homosexuality is considered a sin. With the limited media content on male-to-male relationships, the younger Filipino viewers today embrace pop cultural products such as the Thai BL series. Thus, the present study offers a way of looking at film-induced tourism, where male-to-male relationship media contents result in travel motivation, which drives tourism.

### LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Though it offers novel findings, the present research also has limitations. Given that the respondents were Filipino viewers, and they were selected non-randomly, it may yield different results if this study were tested in different contexts and if a random sampling technique was employed. Second, Thai BL series are considered a new genre to Filipino audience. Therefore, future researchers may find interest in exploring *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation in a different Asian context to confirm or to negate the claims of the present study. Moreover, other researchers may also investigate comparison between Filipino viewers of *lakorn*, where the leads are usually male and female actors, and of Thai BL series, in relation to travel motivation. The results may offer another new insight into how Filipino viewers perceive both *lakorn* and Thai BL series in relation to travel motivation. Third, since the online survey was distributed to select online Thai BL series Facebook fan groups, this may pose a limitation due to their stronger opinions on the topic of the present study. Hence, it is recommended that future researchers may expand the current research by including a broader set of participants. Fourth, most of the respondents were from the LGBT community. It would be interesting to recommend to future researchers to explore how *yaoi* media consumption and travel motivation differ between heterosexual and non-heterosexual participants. And fifth, since the present study utilized predictive research design, other researchers may conduct similar studies using other designs, such as qualitative or mixed methods.



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