



MAPPING BAI EN AS MALE FEMINIZATION FIGURE  
IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE FACEBOOK:  
FOCUS GROUP STUDIES ON SELECTED  
MALAYSIAN CHINESE YOUTH IN KLANG VALLEY

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22AAB02446

A RESEARCH PROJECT  
SUBMITTED IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE AWARD OF  
BACHELOR OF COMMUNICATION (HONS) JOURNALISM  
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE  
UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

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SIA JEAN VIE

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## ABSTRACT

The Malaysian Chinese community is deeply influenced by traditional gender norms, shaped by both cultural and national policies. In Malaysia, LGBT issues are heavily prohibited, with homosexuality considered a criminal offense. Within the Chinese context, being LGBT is often viewed as shameful and dishonorable to the family, and LGBT individuals are perceived as abnormal. Older generations tend to resist accepting the LGBT community, while younger generations are generally more open-minded toward embracing new ideas and culture, including the LGBT identities. The rise of social media has provided the LGBT community with a safer and freer space to express themselves, affirm their rights and explore their gender identities. However, this has also led to negative effects, such as discrimination, marginalization, and the commodification of LGBT culture within the entertainment industry. LGBT subcultures are deeply intertwined with societal moral panics and the hegemony of capitalism, which prioritizes profit over cultural heritage. Through the findings, respondents aligned with integrated theories that successfully mapped Bai En as a male feminization social media influencer. By forming focus group discussions, Bai En was analyzed across various categories and caused impacts. Ultimately, Bai En play a significant role within the Malaysian Chinese community, especially among youth. However, respondents agreed that while he promotes LGBT subcultures, his style is not universally accepted and has generated mixed public perceptions.

**Keywords:** LGBT, Malaysian Chinese Youth, Bai En, Culture Industry, Male Feminization

**Subject Area:** HQ75-76.8 Homosexuality. Lesbianism

## DECLARATION

I declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

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## APPROVAL FORM

This research paper attached hereto, entitled “Mapping Bai En as Male Feminization Figure in Social Networking Site Facebook: Focus Group Studies on Selected Malaysian Chinese Youth in Klang Valley” prepared and submitted by “Sia Jean Vie” in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Journalism is hereby accepted.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor

Supervisor's name: Mr. Chang Yi Chang

Date: 18 MAY 2025

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.0 Introduction

The creation of cyberspace has brought numerous benefits to citizens, with everything going digital and becoming more convenient, they no longer need to step outside our homes to access news from around the world. Social media has emerged as an alternative source of information, often replacing physical newspapers. It offers a wealth of information beyond what traditional newspapers provide. However, it's important to recognize that not all information found online is accurate, there are hidden traps within social media. As of 2024, Facebook stands as the largest social media platform, boasting 3.1 billion active users monthly, based on Geuens (2024) research, meanwhile on average, users spend 19 hours and 47 minutes per month on the platform. It has also improved its ranking, moving from being the third or fourth most engaging social media platform within the year 2010 to 2014 to its current position (Wikle & Comer, 2014).

Social media serves as a “stage” for citizens, offering an unlimited range of self-presentation styles (Han, 2023). People can choose different ways to perform and promote their ideas on social networking sites, thanks to the freedom provided by cyberspace. As this phenomenon evolves, it gives rise to subcultures, since subcultures often exist outside of the mainstream community (Ma, 2010). Moreover, social media platforms provide spaces of anonymity, allowing individuals to express themselves more freely and personally (Huang, 2001). This encourages the bold sharing of new and unconventional ideas. Therefore, social media platforms can be seen as online subcultures, where what is considered “new” or “queer” often becomes the foundation of emerging subcultures.

Facebook has become a daily staple for people around the world. With nearly two decades of history since its founding in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, it has had a significant

influence on social, economic, cultural, and even political spheres (Nogalski, 2022). As a global entity, Facebook can easily reach targeted audiences worldwide (Taylor, 2020). However, sometimes, the vast amount of content posted on the platform is not easily monitored by government, even though they are the powerhouse of their respective countries due to the floods of information, considered a big challenge for the respective government (Muhammed T & Mathew, 2022). As a social media platform often considered the core of social networking, its monthly active users making it a massive database of daily interactions. This abundance of information includes both valuable insights and misinformation, which can mislead users, particularly the youth, if genuine education is not provided to help them navigate the digital landscape.

The development of technology, along with the rise of diverse subcultures, it has been proven that the functions of social media platforms provide a wealth of options for exploring topics outside of one's usual interests. According to Brodowicz (2024a), users can easily follow or subscribe to topics they enjoy, share content, and engage in discussions. These actions indirectly reshape people's minds, attitudes, lifestyles, personalities, and even hobbies, often diverging from traditional norms to create something new. This process is how a subculture is formed, and current culture has transformed how the people understand community. A subculture refers to groups or individuals whose beliefs, practices, or identities differ from mainstream norms. This distinction can encompass a variety of aspects, including objects, mindsets, or orientations. As social media becomes more accessible, it fosters greater openness and visibility for these subcultures, leading to an even broader array of cultural expressions.

### **1.1 Background of Study**

The LGBT community, encompassing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, represents a group that diverges from traditional social gender norms where

heterosexuality is deemed standard. Their characteristics, personalities, and gender identities are distinct and become particularly noticeable in public settings since the 1980s (Mahmud and Zainol, 2022), marking a clear demarcation from what many consider ‘normal’. Social networking platforms are a convenient way for people from all walks of life, including the LGBT community, to access and share information related to sex education online. However, while social media can appear neutral, it largely depends on the actions of its users (Hanckel et al., 2019). In practice, it’s not entirely free from discrimination, LGBT individuals often face marginalization within the community itself, especially those who are perceived as “not queer enough” (Berger et al., 2021). While Western nations have made significant strides in advancing LGBT rights and recognition, this openness is largely absent in Asia due to differing cultural mindsets and values which tend to be less liberal, fostering a more constrained social atmosphere, or can describe it as a traditional mindset that locked the freedom of future generations in demonstrating their characteristics, obviously shows in Chinese families and culture that I deemed to research on it. Taiwan stands out as an exception in Asia, having taken pioneering steps to legalize same-sex marriage and protect LGBT citizens from harassment and social discrimination (Doan, n.d.). Conversely, Malaysia struggles with these issues due to its diverse cultural background and deep-rooted gender norms.

In Malaysia, the LGBT community often faces public discrimination for deviating from conventional gender roles (Shah and Mustafa, 2022). This study focuses on Bai En from Malaysian Chinese community, a typical male social media influencer that are actively on one of the famous social media platforms, Facebook, who are popular among the Chinese youth’s group, these will be proven in the chapter 2, literature review based on online analysis and live experience of mines, by the concept of male feminization as the main theory of the entire research, accompanying with supported culture industry’s theory with the

intertwined with hegemony and moral panics. Bai En's portrayal of LGBT identities, his achievements in social media are considered avant-garde within the context of the conservative Chinese community in Malaysia. Although Confucian principles emphasize rigid gender roles (Gao, 2020), there remains a significant resistance to LGBT content.

This research aims to explore the understanding, factors, and the values within the content released by Bai En some more the influencing of Malaysian Chinese youth's engagement on him. Additionally, it seeks to understand how influencers affect and persist within a conservative environment, is it a sincerely demonstration of their real characteristics and bias or it is actually a commercial product for entertainment, the researcher will find out through the studies and making their insights particularly valuable for the society.

Malaysia is a predominantly Muslim country with a diverse population that includes three major ethnic groups and their respective religions which are Malay, Chinese, and Indians. However, the majority of the population and the ruling authorities adhere to Islam, which significantly influences national laws and social norms (Barlinti, 2013). In Islamic law, LGBT identities, or rephrase it as abnormal personalities, relationships, are considered non-halal (something that are not under the standard requirements of Islamic law that will harm the soul of believers) or haram (harmful) (Iqbal et al., 2020), also known as forbidden, or haram. Such sexualities are not seen as normative and are often labeled as abnormal (Zaharin, 2022). Consequently, Malaysian laws do not recognize same-sex relationships or marriages, and Muslim citizens are expressly forbidden from engaging in same-sex partnerships, and also irregular same-sex sexualities behavior are considered as a crime in Malaysia landscape (Shah, 2013) Meanwhile, according to Li (2016), in the Chinese community, which has traditional values and many restrictions on media content, there is also a widespread reluctance to accept the LGBT community. Homosexual behavior has long

been considered taboo, and it was even criminalized, much like how the Islamic law proposed.

Defining someone as “abnormal” often depends on the societal norms that have been established since the 1970s, particularly those surrounding masculinity and femineity (Kosut, 2012) and these terms refer to gender identities shaped by the observation of daily actions, preferences, speech, appearance, and so on. When someone deviated from these socially constructed gender norms, such as boy wearing pink, playing with dolls, or engaging in cooking games, they are more likely to defined as abnormal, to face social rejection, and in some cases, even abandonment or marginalization (N.Venkataramu & Banerjee, 2021). However, among all ethnic groups in Malaysia, there is a rising trend of nonconformist communities, particularly within the LGBT community, although there is no official statement of calculating the demographics of LGBT individuals in Malaysia. Their presence in society has become more visible, and they are increasingly eager to showcase their identities (Tan et al., 2021). Despite living in a traditionally conservative environment, many individuals in this community embrace their uniqueness with confidence. While they’re officially defined as growing bigger community, I would like to define it as a growing sense of self-acceptance and pride among them. They dare to express their true selves, and this can largely be attributed to advancements in technology and the influence of social media.

The presence of the LGBT community is a reality in Malaysia, as in many other parts of the world. The advent of social media has significantly altered the landscape, acting as a major catalyst in increasing awareness and discussion about LGBT issues globally due to internet has become the main median for getting information worldwide (Aiman, 2015). While Western countries have begun to accept and legalize LGBT rights, leading the way in this regard, countries like Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Indonesia maintain anti-LGBT laws.

However, Taiwan stands out in Asia for its progressive stance, having legalized same-sex marriage more rapidly than its neighbors (Ting et al., 2023).

Social media offers a substantial platform for creative expression and advocacy. Influencers often engage with their audiences through tactics like male feminization and female masculinization to challenge gender norms, thus gaining popularity (Abidin, 2016). Plus, in the context of Malaysia's online landscape, there is not complete freedom in expressing emotions, particularly in a sensitive country with numerous restrictions (Mia et al., 2021). Therefore, Bai En as prominent gay social media influencer in Malaysia known for sharing daily lives dressed in traditionally female attire, becoming well-known figures representing the LGBT community within the country. Bai En's activities on social media are widely regarded as part of the subculture, largely due to his prominent presentation of male feminization. The subculture defined by Brodowicz (2024b) consist of a community that embraces practices and values that are unique or in opposition to the dominant, mainstream culture. Within this group, the norms and ideals significantly differ from those of the broader society. One might question whether they truly dare to express themselves by challenging the rules and regulations of Malaysia, or if they are merely commercializing themselves as entertainment products or seeking validation through follower counts on social media. It is also important to consider the reactions of the youth audience to Bai En's unconventional social media content. These questions will be explored and addressed in the following chapters.

## **1.2 Problem Statements**

First, the focus of this study is the Malaysian Chinese community's interaction with social media, and will be focus on the Chinese youths' group, and their attitudes towards the LGBT community, and the case studies of Bai En within the Malaysian social media landscape. Traditionally, the Chinese community in Malaysia has been influenced by cultural



norms that do not support same-sex relationships and homosexual (Yap, 2020). However, the emergence concept of male feminization representatives on social media, such as Bai En, provides a unique opportunity to explore shifting perceptions. This study aims to investigate whether exposure to these influencers leads to acceptance or rejections, positive or negative impact, and what is the view of youths on gender roles and identities of the LGBT community among Malaysian Chinese youths' viewers.

Besides, a significant aspect of this research will be crucial to assess how these influencers impact Chinese youths' viewers, particularly in terms of mental, psychological, and social attitudes. By observing reactions to male feminization as portrayed by influencers, the researcher will examine the effects of gender nonconformity within the Chinese youths as well. Other than that, changing the perspective angle from influencers to youths' audience, what are the reasons they intend and been attracted to follow the information and latest news of Bai En rather than the influencers adapted with gender norms.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To explore the beliefs of the Malaysian Chinese youth community towards LGBT influencers (Bai En)
2. To identify the factors influencing the Malaysian Chinese youth's intention to engage with content from LGBT influencers (Bai En)

#### **1.3.1 Research Questions**

1. What are the beliefs of Malaysian Chinese youth community towards the LGBT influencer? (Bai En)
2. Why Malaysian Chinese youths watch LGBT influencer's content? (Bai En)

The reason for exploring the respondents' beliefs is that "belief" refers to the attitude we hold when we generally accept something as true (Schwitzgebel, 2010). Since Bai En represents this "fact", it is important to uncover the attitudes Malaysian Chinese youth have toward him, which can include any forms of feelings, mindsets, or beliefs. According to Zimmerman (2018), different individuals can hold different beliefs and attitudes about the same matter, so understanding the respondents' beliefs is essential.

#### **1.4 Significance of Research**

The study of LGBT issues in Malaysia, especially within the context of social media and the Malaysian Chinese community, offers significant insights into cultural dynamics and perceptions of LGBT identities. According to Abdullah et al. (2022), the use of social media has been steadily increasing, particularly among youths, who are increasingly turning to online platforms, especially social media, for information. Howe (2024)'s analysis of social media usage in Malaysia, conducted in May 2024, revealed that youth make up the largest demographic of social media users in the country, with 17.9% of males and 15% of females in this group. This trend has influenced the focus of the research, which targets the Malaysian youth community to participate in the study. Additionally, as Bai En is of Chinese ethnicity, focusing on the beliefs of Chinese youth audiences are deemed more relevant than those of other ethnic groups. Given the sensitivity and legal restrictions surrounding LGBT topics in Malaysia, this research study provides crucial knowledge on how these issues are perceived and understood by Malaysian Chinese youth and trying to release the truth of male feminization social media influencers real thoughts by assuming their actions, potentially indicating shifts in traditional cultural norms.

It is important to highlight that in Malaysia, where homosexuality faces strict legal restrictions, the traditional and conservative viewpoints of the Chinese community present unique challenges. This study aims to explore how influencers like Bai En navigate these

challenges, willing to disseminate the concept of subculture and impact the perceptions and attitudes of their youth audience. Understanding their strategies and the reactions they provoke will provide deeper insights into the dynamics at play. The success of Bai En in engaging the audience raises important questions about how young people perceive these influencers through their frequent appearances on social media. This presents a valuable opportunity to gather opinions and experiences from the youth, fostering educational initiatives that can guide future strategies aimed at promoting the acceptance of LGBT individuals in a community where such acceptance is currently limited.

Not only consist of significant towards the social media users, but this study will also benefit entire community such as the group of think tanks which role as advocate for important decisions based on policies and research analysis for certain area of interest (Harridon et al., 2022). Upon completion, this study could serve as a valuable resource for Malaysian advocates, offering new directions on how to shape public opinion on LGBT issues effectively. By analyzing the data on interactions between Malaysian Chinese youth and LGBT social media influencers, Bai En, this research can contribute to efforts and advance the rights of LGBT individuals in Malaysia. furthermore, as academic research continuously evolves, this study will also serve as a foundation for future research. Given its unique focus on the intersection of homosexuality, male feminization and social media influencers, which rarely deep-explored in Malaysia, can enrich the discussion about how social media serves as a platform for advocating LGBT rights with greater freedom on social media and within the Malaysian Chinese community. This research will not only fill existing gaps but also pave the way for subsequent studies concerning LGBT issues.

### **1.5 Research Scope**

The primary objective for our study is to delve into the perceptions and motivations behind Malaysian Chinese youth's engagement with LGBT community and LGBT social

media influencers, specifically Bai En. The researcher aims to understand his sentiments and the dynamics of information dissemination within a society that upholds traditional gender norms. The focus is specifically on Malaysian Chinese youth in Klang Valley, aged 20 to 30 years old which within the Malaysian recognized youth age range. The Youth and Sports Ministry of Malaysia has verified the age group within the 15 to 40-year-old demographic as the age limit of youth until the end of 2025 (“Youth age limit to be lowered to 30 by Jan 1, 2026”, 2023). The researcher will conduct focus group discussions with 12 individuals, divided equally among three distinct groups based on gender orientation, which is female, male, and gay individuals. Given the explorative and interpretative nature of the subject matter, a qualitative research methodology will be employed. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of attitudes, experience and emotions (Nyberg, 2012), which are crucial for addressing the nuanced aspects of LGBT community issues.

The research will be conducted through focus group discussions, chosen for their effectiveness in eliciting rich qualitative data. Each group will consist of four participants, who will answer the provided questions one by one and engage in discussions. The group discussions are designed to address two key research questions stated in section 1.3.1, along with various sub-questions based on the ongoing process. The gay focus group is expected to offer particularly insightful perspectives, given the direct relevance of these discussions to the participants’ identities.

## **1.6 Research Gap**

A research gap exists when the available information is insufficient to fully answer specific questions or reach conclusive results (Robinson et al., 2013). This study identifies a significant research gap in the existing literature concerning the perceptions of the Malaysian Chinese community on LGBT social media influencers, Bai En. Despite some academic insights into the perceptions of Malaysian Sikh youth perceptions towards the broader LGBT

community by Kaur et al. (2015), there is a notable lack of information specifically focused on the Chinese youth community in Malaysia and their reactions to LGBT content presented by influencers. Additionally, while social media influencers, Bai En is popular figures, rarely mentioned in scholarly research. This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring how these influencers shape perceptions and attitudes toward the LGBT community among Malaysian Chinese youth, a subject currently underrepresented in academic research.

### **1.6.1 Theoretical Gap**

Despite the research by Kaur et al. (2015) that investigates the perceptions of the Malaysian Sikh group towards the LGBT community, it was a study by Tan et al. (2021) that significantly inspired my research. Tan et al. found that many Malaysians harbor negative attitudes towards the LGBT community, citing reasons linked to morality and expressing reluctance to have LGBT individuals as neighbors. Their findings suggest a prevailing close-mindedness among the majority of Malaysians towards the transgender community in particular. This backdrop sets a crucial stage for my research, aiming to delve deeper into the dynamics of LGBT representation on social media.

Additionally, Juaini et al. (2017) noted that LGBT individuals in Malaysia often conceal their identities to conform with legal and societal expectations. However, influencers like Bai En stand out by openly expressing his identities on social media, seemingly unaffected by potential repercussions. This raises intriguing questions about his courage, targets, and the specific strategies employ to navigate the complexities of Malaysian social norms and laws.

Besides, in one of the Gong (2015) studies on “Nv-tong-zhi” (lesbians in Chinese) within the context of Taiwan, which has recognized as one of the most

thriving and progressive LGBT friendly cities in East Asia (Anber, 2010). Gong examines whether a free-speaking mass media environment empowers the rights of lesbians or reduces their marginalization, this was the aim of the study. Gong's thesis primarily focuses on the empowerment of lesbians in the social media, mass media phase in Taiwan, but it does not address the perceptions or attitudes of audiences, particularly fans or ordinary netizens in Taiwan. Malaysia as a Southeast Asian country, share similarities with Taiwan, particularly in that a minority of its population speaks Chinese. This highlights an obvious research gap regarding the perceptions of third parties, as Gong's work does not explore the outcomes of empowerment.

These contexts have inspired me to specifically explore the perceptions of the Malaysian Chinese youth community towards LGBT content on social media, Facebook, and figure out the strategies adopted by Bai En to protect himself in spreading LGBT content within Chinese community plus their willingness to do so. From Tan et al.'s research, questions arise about the specific experiences and perceptions of the Chinese community, which will guide my efforts to identify and address this research gap.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.0 LGBT, Male Feminization, and Gender Identities

LGBT, a specific term for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender, refers to a group of individuals whose gender identity or sexual orientation may not align with the sex assigned to them at birth (Nabila, 2020). For example, a person born male may identify as female, which adjective as male feminization, a subculture that are abnormal to the construction of ordinary society (Valsecchi et al., 2023). He can be attracted to the same gender, or vice versa. This divergence from traditional gender norms is what characterizes the LGBT community. Historically, such individuals were often referred to as homosexuals, particularly in the 1960s (Sullivan, 1990). However, as the term did not encompass the full spectrum of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, like the emergence of transgender are created by the raising of high medical technology, which allows individual to change their identities at birth. Therefore, the broader term “LGBT” emerged to represent and protect these communities more inclusively.

In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, the term “queer” first emerged in society to describe someone or something as abnormal, out of the ordinary, or odd (“Queer,” 2021). By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it began to refer specifically to homosexual individuals or the LGBT community, gaining popularity as a broader identifier (Kenning, 2023). The LGBT community is closely intertwined with queer theory, which actively challenges hegemonic ways of thinking and seeks to dismantle stereotypes that insist on heterosexuality as the norm of society (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). As the term “queer” became more widely embraced by the public, it became clear that there are not only groups with LGBT identities but also a multitude of unique characteristics that are challenging societal norms. This recognition led to the creation of the term LGBTQIA+, which includes queer individuals, intersex

individuals, asexual individuals, and a plus sign “+” to represent those whose identities may not fit neatly into any specific category (Klepacki, 2021).

Despite increasing legal recognition in various countries like China, Australia, Denmark, and Taiwan, the legislative does not eras the discrimination and opposition of the society to the LGBT community, LGBT individuals continue to face widespread discrimination (Wilkinson et al., 2017). This discrimination persists because their appearance, behaviors, and lifestyles differ from what is conventionally accepted, leading many to hide their true personalities and specific sexual orientation to avoid social prejudice and exclusion. By the 21<sup>st</sup> century, recognition and acceptance of LGBT individuals have grown, particularly in Western countries (Nabila, 2020). the LGBT rights movement has played a crucial role in this change, advocating for equal rights, and promoting the understanding that LGBT individuals are no different from others (Kuriakose & Lyer, 2020). For instance, not all women choose to wear skirts, and such personal choices are normal and not supposed to have discrimination against them.

As everyone knows, the most symbolic item of the LGBT community is the rainbow flag (Hauksson-Tresch, 2021), which represents the unique diversity of the community, with each color carrying its own meaning, the flag is prominently displayed in public spaces during the 1990s as a way to assert their presence, remind society of their existence, and challenge the cultural norms as well as the country’s rules and regulations (Laskar et al., 2017). While the rainbow flag symbolizes the community, there are also various methods by which LGBT individuals identify themselves. For instances, some may express their identity through their clothing choices, such as men wearing traditionally feminine attire or wearing earrings on the left ear, which signifies the probability of being gay (Oktrianda et al., 2022). Women might sport short, edgy hairstyles typically associated with men. Additionally, LGBT individuals often possess an intuitive ability, or the science of “Gaydar” to recognize



others who are not heterosexual by watching their face, or a short conversation, allowing them to identify potential allies or members of their community (Lehmiller, 2017). This sense of intuition can be viewed as a unique strength that helps them navigate their social environments and protect their rights and mental well-being, often through discreet conversations rather than overt displays.

In 2015, Meresman conducted a survey with 50 participants from different areas and races, primarily gay men, titled “How Do You Know You’re Gay?” The results showed that the majority of respondents discovered their identities through the internet, especially those living in rural area. These individuals often felt isolated within their communities, unsure of their identities, and sought out online resources to learn more about being queer. They reported that the internet provided a positive space where they could find belonging during a time of uncertainty. Many participants emphasized that they used online platforms to explore sexual education, as traditional schools often lacked the necessary information for LGBT individuals. Meresman’s findings illustrate how the emergence of the internet has allowed the queer community to express their true selves and understand that being queer is not something to be ashamed of. Ultimately, these individuals reported that the internet played a crucial role in helping them embrace their identities and find their place in the world.

Other than that, the ongoing challenges for the LGBT community are often rooted in traditional cultural values related to marriage, relationships, and social norms which may feel the LGBT community challenges. Traditional mindsets often lead to significant challenges for LGBT individuals, including bullying and marginalization in the workplace and society. Unfortunately, despite violence being recognized as a crime, there are still no complete comprehensive regulations in place to protect the rights of LGBT individuals even though United Nations has entitled to remove the discrimination and violation against LGBT community in 2015 (“Ending Violence and Discrimination Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,

Transgender and Intersex People”, 2015). This legal inequality contributes to a pervasive stigma that affects many aspects of their lives, including access to healthcare. Additionally, youth in particular face bullying in schools, which further exacerbates these issues.

However, with an increasingly open-minded global society, movements and legal protections aimed at preventing discrimination and promoting equality have become more prevalent (Ayoub, 2010). For example, high schools around the United States have authority to protect their students from gender identity and sexual orientation’s discrimination, giving them support (Kay, 2022). These efforts underscore the importance of recognizing LGBT rights as human rights, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, are respected and protected under the law.

The LGBT community disproportionately faces mental health issues, largely due to public discrimination and homophobia. Homophobia is a term that exclusively describe people that dislike and restrict for homosexual individuals (Hermans, 2016). During more conservative times, when there was little to no support for homosexual individuals, the fear of discriminations was particularly acute. This feat extended beyond social interactions to affect professional lives as well. Despite legal advancements in some countries, such as the United States enacting laws in 2020 to protect LGBT workers, discrimination persists in the workplace, some companies continue to reject job applications or even terminate employees based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Stromberg, 2020). Consequently, it may take longer for the LGBT community to achieve full acceptance and legal recognition of their identities and rights within society if the phenomenon still remains the same.

Outland (2016) conducted research that results from 640 participants to understand the LGBT minority stress measure within society. Minority stress for LGBT individuals refers to the chronic stress that arises from discrimination, marginalization, and prejudice faced by queer individuals, and this stress is formulated through their experiences in a society

that often stigmatizes and excludes them (McConnell et al., 2019) found that bisexual individuals had significantly higher minority stress scores than gay individuals. Additionally, research found that Asian individuals scored significantly higher on the minority stress scale than White individuals. The majority of gay individuals indicated that they would resort to drugs or, even worse, contemplate suicide if their same-sex relationships were discovered. Furthermore, the research revealed that stress is closely related to LGBT minority stress, as LGBT individuals often face injustice when seeking healthcare, which discourage them from doing so. LGBT minority stress is intertwined with the trivialities of everyone's daily lives, yet they remain a unique minority group with limited legal protections. As a result, this situation is difficult to change.

“Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression”, quoted from bell hooks (Hooks, 2000). Feminization refers to the process of individuals, typically men, increasingly adopting behaviors or practices traditionally associated with women. It describes men who step outside conventional gender norms by embracing roles or professions that were once exclusively female (Riska, 2008). For example, women have traditionally been seen as sensitive, nurturing, showing greater emotional expressions, and responsible for caring for children (Chaplin, 2015). The roots of male feminization can be traced back to the second post-feminist movement in the 1960s in western countries, when the mainstream media began to objectify male bodies. This was done to attract both male and female audiences to the fashion industry, inadvertently fostering a phenomenon where men appreciated the aesthetic of other men, thus highlighting homosexual relationships among them (Adhikari, 2020). It is becoming more common nowadays to see men's clothing being fancier and more colorful than women's. and even more extravagant than what real women wear. I think this is similar to the concept of a male peacock displaying its feathers

to attract a female peacock. The only difference is that, in this case, men are dressing to attract other men. This can also be studied and treated as a normal phenomenon.

The emergence of male feminization has opened new doors, challenging the traditional notions that boys and men should adhere strictly to masculine behaviors to appear powerful and strong. In this consequence, homosexual relationships among men have become more prevalent, possibly outnumbering bisexual and transgender relationships (Gates, 2011). Men are increasingly taking on roles traditionally associated with women, such as household duties, while women are assuming roles traditionally held by men, leading to a swap in societal gender roles contrary to the historical gender hierarchy. However, feminization challenges these stereotypes and promotes gender equality, as men also engage in traditionally feminine activities, effectively “breaking” these norms. Women are often perceived as more sensitive, more expressive in their emotions, and more likely to act on their feelings. These traits are typically associated with femininity. However, when a man exhibits these characteristics, he is often labeled as being ‘feminized’ (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019).

Falomir-Pichastor et al. (2019)’s research also mentioned that, in a more traditional way, men were typically viewed as warriors, powerful leaders, and educators, those designation that need powerful abilities, who adhered to cultural and societal norms that emphasized their role in providing and leading. The belief that men should be stronger, have larger bodies, and possess superior intelligence and abilities compared to women is deeply ingrained in people’s minds. This mindset can be traced back to the time of the Chinese dynasties, where the army and warriors were predominantly male (Lewis et al., 2024). Meanwhile, their wives and fragile family members were often left behind, waiting for their return after victorious battles. Men were glorified as brave and heroic figures. In contrast, women were often seen as delicate, beautiful, and non-threatening, and have always held the

lowest social status compared to men, especially in those under development or developing countries, often belonging to communities that are underprivileged and lacking sufficient protection (Dahal et al., 2022). In traditional society, women are the most vulnerable to suffering. For example, in cases of sexual assault, there are often accusations that the female victim was at fault, even blamed for her clothing or her behavior, which supposedly “tempted” the male perpetrator (Moor, 2010). This reflects a deeper societal issue, whenever a social incident occurs, the immediate tendency is to place the blame on women, projecting the problem onto them. This happens simply because, in many people’s minds, women are considered the weaker gender.

This can also be supported by Valsecchi (2023)’s research, the adherence to traditional male norms and the dominance of gender hierarchy still heavily influences societal attitudes. If traditionalist men believe that masculinity and gender dominance should be preserved, other men are likely to emulate these beliefs. Conversely, if a man supports the idea of male feminization as a modern trend, it does not necessarily mean that others will agree with him. This shows that traditional male ideologies are deeply entrenched, which can place significant pressure on mental health of minority groups within the society to conform or struggle to find acceptance, leading to a more conservative social landscape.

According to Johnson & Otto (2019), while most countries have made significant strides toward greater acceptance of gender equality, women and the LGBT community continue to face gender inequality in the workplace. In many workplaces, there is still a lack of inclusivity for these groups, and they often encounter sexism from heterosexual individuals. Women, in particular, working in male-dominated environments may also experience misogyny in the workplace (Denissen & Saguy, 2014). So, it is reasonable to assume that when men begin to exhibit feminine traits, especially in cases where these traits are particularly pronounced, such as in the LGBT community, particularly among gay

individuals, they may face gender discrimination similar to what women experience. This discrimination arises simply because they display psychological or physical traits that are typically associated with women. For example, women are often viewed as more sensitive, less courageous, and weaker compared to men. Similarly, when a male-identified, feminine individuals face gender-based discrimination from other, it's likely that their response would be similar to that of a typical female victim, who are choosing silence. In contrast, when a traditional man faces gender discrimination, research has shown that he is more likely to react, whether with immediate retaliation or through premeditated action. A typical man is less likely to remain silent in the face of such discrimination and will have actions of blaming the victims, unlike a typical woman (Johnson, 2010). This highlights the unique challenges and difficulties faced by men who display feminine traits, and the particular obstacles they must overcome.

According to Osborn (2021), gay men and women are often viewed through a biased lens, with their social interactions being perceived as problematic or abnormal. This perception largely depends on the level of aversion that heterosexual men have toward homosexuality. If a heterosexual man holds strong negative feelings and resistance towards the topic of homosexuality, he is more likely to reject the issue of same-sex harassment. In contrast, he may be more accepting of, or tolerant toward, heterosexual sexual harassment, as it may be seen as less threatening or even entertaining to men (Castillo et al., 2011). Furthermore, research by James (2018) indicates that heterosexual men, when faced with a scenario in which a gay man is sexually harassed by a heterosexual man, are more likely to support the attacker rather than the victim. This is because gay men are perceived as having more "feminine" traits, and women are often seen as the more vulnerable gender. However, when both the perpetrator and victim are heterosexual men, society tends to blame the attacker rather than the victim.

This suggests that men who exhibit more feminine traits, traits that align to some degree with those associated with women, are treated in a similar way to women when it comes to sexual harassment. In cases where women are victims of sexual harassment, society often directs more blame toward the female victims rather than the male perpetrators (Davies et al., 2012). This also implies that men with feminine characteristics, who share certain gender traits with women that are aside from biological sex, may face similar treatment in such situations. The conclusions drawn by Osborn and James further support this hypothesis.

The idea of describing a man as “pretty” was considered strange, and any deviation from the masculine norm was seen as improper (Rajeshwari, 2022). With the advent of modern technology and the rise of the queer community, people began to express their true personalities, and the focus shifted, especially within the gay community. Many men began adopting traditionally feminine practices such as makeup, skincare, softening their voices, and paying more attention to their appearance and fashion (Vechviboonsom, 2018). They became more delicate, elegant, and refined, challenging the traditional male stereotypes of being rough, disheveled, and unconcerned with personal grooming. In some cases, these “feminized” men were even seen as “womanlier” than women themselves.

Looking at the fashion and creative industry as an example, it’s clear that male fashionistas often outshine their female counterparts, showing more creativity, boldness, and innovation, creative people throughout history, most famous and well-known goes to Leonardo DaVinci, or Aristotle (Skillicorn, 2024). Male fashion has evolved to be as, if not more, influential than women’s fashion, further breaking the boundaries of traditional gender roles and expectations. According to Brown (2018), Vismay Sharma, the Chief of L’Oreal has expected to see make up counter demonstrating men’s make up products within five years. Additionally, the trend of men’s grooming is growing in Thailand, with an increasing number of younger men taking more interest in their appearance and self-care (Weil, 2018).

Before the world began relying on social media as the primary source of information, traditional media was the mainstream and primary platform for audiences to explore cultural topics, including LGBT community. For example, the famous TV show *The Real World*, which premiered in 1992, was the first reality show to portray the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals (PapersOwl, 2020). In the past, the LGBT community, as a minority group, was often portrayed negatively in the media, subjected to stereotypes, and used as a source of humor in television shows and films (Gonta et al., 2017). For instance, *The New York Times* described the LGBT community as promiscuous and deviant in its first articles about LGBT community (Alwood, 1996). These mainstream media outlets, including both TV shows and journalism, contributed to shaping public perceptions of the LGBT community. This was particularly influential at a time when many audiences had limited exposure to LGBT individuals and were uninformed about the community. As a result, news media played a significant role in perpetuating discrimination and marginalization of the LGBT community (Hughes et al., 2017). However, since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, media support for the LGBT community has increased. According to Fisher et al. (2007), between 2001 and 2003, TV content related to homosexuality accounted for about 15% of overall programming. Not only have storylines become more reflective of real-life LGBT individuals, but entertainment media content has also evolved to become more supportive of the LGBT community (Landau, 2009).

## **2.1 Male Feminization and Social Media**

Social media serves as a cyberspace that fosters virtual interconnectedness, providing an easier and more accessible way for people to interact and connect with the world (Hsu, 2018). These platforms, in particular, offer specific spaces for individuals to express themselves, share their lives, engage with others, and demonstrate their identities. Social media is a powerful platform for the LGBT community, as it provides a virtual space where



individuals do not need to rely on face-to-face conversations or physical interactions to access truthful information. This is particularly beneficial for LGBT individuals, who may feel uncomfortable engaging in online interactions due to their status as minority groups within society (Gudelunas, 2012). One of the most significant advantages of social media and minority groups is that it allows individuals, particularly those involved in male feminization, to access self-relevant information. This includes details about LGBT-related activities, sexual health, queer culture, and other topics that may be difficult to discover in offline settings (Craig & McInroy, 2014).

Moreover, as noted by Brandt & Carmichael (2020) and Chan (2021), LGBT groups, including the male feminization community, often face rejection and lack support in offline environments. In contrast, social media enables them to form connections and build relationships with like-minded individuals in virtual spaces. This not only helps them express their true identities safely but also fosters a sense of belonging within a supportive community. According to Pacey et al. (2022), LGBT minority groups frequently use social media to explore and engage with the LGBT community, strengthening their sense of connection and maintaining friendships.

Social media does not only provide a platform for individuals from minority groups to express their self-identities, but it also creates a broader space for groups, such as those involved in male feminization, to affirm their gender identities in relation to societal norms (Harper et al., 2016). The cyberspace, or more broadly, the internet, has become a space where LGBT communities can challenge and redefine dominant concepts of gender identity (Das & Farber, 2020). Bates et al. (2020) argue that digital platforms, such as social media, have become transformative tools, allowing minority groups to perform identity work that deviate from traditional norms. These platforms provide a means for individuals to receive identity-related support from communities that sharing similar experiences, such as other

LGBT or male feminization individuals. In turn, users gain social acceptance, a sense of belonging, and validation, proving their significant in society through online support networks (Colosi et al., 2023). Furthermore, social media helps sexual and gender minorities, including the male feminization community, manage and protect their self-presentation, highlighting the multifaceted nature of digital media (Colosi & Lister, 2019)

However, the reality relationship between social media and the phenomenon of male feminization is complex and often unfriendly toward this cultural expression, as there is a great deal of judgement directed toward individuals who embody male feminization. People tend to use social media as a platform for attention-seeking, as it provides an opportunity to garner attention that may be difficult to receive in real life. While social media platforms allow for increased visibility, they can also have negative consequences for communities that engage in frequent self-presentation. Individuals who post regularly online are often judged as “needy” or “needier”, that is seeking attention from others, and these individuals are frequently viewed as weak or vulnerable, characteristics often attributed to women (Thomas et al, 2020). In this sense, attention-seeking behavior on social media, such as frequent posting has become a way to demonstrate vulnerability and emotional need, positioning these individuals as “needier” for recognition and validation.

“Frequent-posting femininity stereotype” is the idea that men who post frequently on social media are perceived as more feminine or even gay, it emerges as a result of such judgements. According to Panek et al. (2018), their research indicates that the more frequently individuals post curated content on social media, the more likely they are to be treated as embodying femininity, a characteristic historically associated with women. This is because posting and sharing one’s daily life on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok are seen as behaviors more commonly associated with women than with men (Osle

& Rosales, 2023). Men, on the other hand, are typically less active on such platforms, as frequent engagement is often viewed as “unmanly” or even emasculating.

In modern consumer culture, the constant dissemination of information suggests that men should be resilient and self-sufficient (Akestam et al., 2021). In contrast, frequent posting on social media sends an opposite signal. Therefore, Edelblum & Warren (2023) argue that men’s frequent posting behaviors may be seen as signs of powerlessness, feminization and vulnerability. For minority groups, such as the LGBT community, social media offers a broad opportunity to share their unique identities and beliefs with the world. According to Halpern et al. (2016), much of the literature frames the phenomenon of selfies and frequent posting as rooted in vanity and a desire for admiration. From this perspective, the researcher argues that the act of frequent posting on social media implicitly reflects a need for attention. Consumers tend to perceive individuals who post frequently or as opposed to less frequently, as needing more recognition, validation, and attention. This behavior is particularly prevalent within the LGBT community, where individuals are eager to showcase their distinct identities and seek acceptance from a broader audience through social media. Frequent posting becomes a tool for gaining recognition and connection in a world that may not always offer these forms of acknowledgement in offline spaces.

Reception studies are particularly suitable for exploring how audiences react to male feminization content on social media because they focus on examining how audience receive, interpret and respond to specific texts, content, or information (Bullo, 2014). Messages from the sender are engaged with and released by the receiver in ways that are influenced by the social and cultural context (Singh & Pratima, 2022). This, in turn, can shape individuals’ self-recognition, thoughts, and behaviors. From an audience perspective, Fried (2020) argues that advertisements featuring LGBT minorities, where LGBT individuals are not the main characters, tend to elicit more inclusive attitudes from audiences towards the advertisement

as a whole. In contrast, if the LGBT character in the advertisement is awkward or the plot is poorly executed, audiences may have negative reactions toward the LGBT community. Furthermore, Dhaenens (2012) found that well-developed LGBT characters in social media or television show can positively influence heterosexual viewers' perceptions of LGBT individuals. For instance, in one of the Dhaenens (2012) research, the character Omar Little from *The Wire* was particularly impactful. Though Omar was portrayed as a gay man, he defied stereotypes by being strong, independent, and unapologetically himself, which significantly altered participants' views of gay individuals.

In the context of male feminization and their identity formation while their actions, reception studies are especially relevant. Social media offers a platform for members of the LGBT community, including those who express male feminization, to either embrace their identities or conceal them, depending on the prevailing social media climate (Jerome & Hadzmy, 2022). Owens (2017) identifies social media as both an emancipatory space and a precarious one. This duality has led male feminization youth to adopt three common strategies on Facebook, which are openly identifying as gay, selectively disclosing their sexual identities to a chosen few, or completely hiding their sexual identities. These strategies are shaped by the unpredictable nature of social media and its diverse social networking environments. As Hanckel et al. (2019) suggest, different individuals craft and perform their identities based on the affordances provided by the platform. The strategies they employ reflect how they decode the messages and opportunities available within the social media space.

Obviously, criticism will also exist, as discussed in the research by Fried & Oprea (2023). They found that backlash and criticism might occur from audiences in one of their focus group discussions, social media advertisements that overly emphasize inclusivity of the LGBT community can unexpectedly provoke negative reactions from audiences due to their

overly idealized portrayals. For example, they found that advertisements on social media that objectify gay people, presenting them as a means to an end, such as “accepting gay people will help you successfully apply for a loan”, are viewed negatively by both LGBT and heterosexual audiences. These viewers perceive such advertisements as forced attempts at inclusivity rather than genuine acceptance. They argue that if the inclusivity were truly sincere, there would be no need for such special advertisements to showcase how tolerant the company is.

Reception studies also explore the actions individuals take when receiving messages and how they respond after analyzing the content. Kimmel’s (2020) research reveals an interesting finding, there were surprisingly few negative comments on social media videos featuring minority groups. Instead, there were numerous supportive and praising comments. Kimmel analyzed possible factors from the reception studies perspective, suggesting that in such cases, minority groups briefly become the dominant or mainstream group in that context, while heterosexuals are seen as a “co-culture” community. As a result, heterosexual viewers may hesitate to express opposing or critical opinions out of fear of backlash, since they are not part of the mainstream at that moment. This indicates that the reactions in reception studies are not always uniform, they depend on the messages received and the context in which those messages are delivered.

The Malaysian media industry start from 2011, has occasionally produced content featuring LGBT minorities concepts, although not as frequently as in Western countries due to legal restrictions and required to have a repentant action after watching the films (Yan, 2013). One example is *Dalam Botol*, a Malaysian local film that showcases the LGBT community (Jermadi, 2019). Despite these constraints, the social media landscape in Malaysia actively supports minority communities by encouraging acceptance of their differences and affirming their gender identities, even in a restricted societal context, fully

demonstrated the power and importance of social media as a medium in disseminating social identity. Not only that, research by Ghazali & Nor (2012) highlights that transgender individuals in Malaysia feel a sense of relief and respect when they see themselves represented respectfully in the media. Besides, he also found that the powerful of media in forming social identity helped the minority groups, which is the homosexual individuals to practice their gender identity how transgender or homosexual individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

## **2.2 Bai En as Male Feminization Social Media Influencer**

Male feminization as part of LGBT groups, involves individuals playing the roles that challenge societal gender norms. It can also be seen as a cultural practice outside mainstream society. When define “culture” as a group of people who share common beliefs and norms that are inherited from the past and considered as “normal”, subculture refers to a set of practices that go against the mainstream activities and are often isolated from normative societies (Blackman, 2014). Subcultures create new and specific beliefs that diverge from the dominant culture. In this sense, subcultures can be seen as a temporary culture, since they believe that culture has an essential role in shaping “family”, which is central to societal norms (Skawinska, 2008), however, are often separate from the traditional concept of family.

According to Woods (1929), subculture has been defined as a group of social problems or social inefficiencies, which were considered abnormal in terms of psychology and biology. This idea aligns with Merton’s (1968) theory of subcultures, which he describes as a form of deviant subculture based on psychoanalytic concepts. Evidence from Millers’ (1958) research suggests that subcultures are more likely to form in rural or lower-class areas. Due to structural tensions in class status, working-class youth often hard or cannot achieve success through conventional means. As Cohen (1955) noted, the high rate of failure within

working-class communities increases the likelihood of innovating alternative methods to achieve success. This process is like what Freud (1958) described as “reaction formation,” where underlying psychological forces drive individuals to replace frustration or failure with its opposite behavior.

The LGBT community exhibits a degree of independence in terms of values, beliefs, and behaviors, which distinguishes them from the wider, normative society. The most important is, the homosexuality are not accepted by the society (“LGBT Subculture”, 2024). Subcultures, by definition, occupy these spaces and operate according to their own set of rules, norms, expectations, and traits. Therefore, the LGBT community can be considered a subculture, as its members share commonly secondary rules, norms, and expectations. They also often exhibit similar styles of dress and society evolves, subculture like LGBT may also adapt and change. What makes the LGBT community a typical subculture is the shared symbols and language within it. These include specific styles of clothing, jewelry for men, body piercings, tattoos, and other forms of self-expression (Brodowicz, 2024c). Gay bars, for example, serve as gathering places and community strengthens their collective identity. The strong sense of interconnectedness and solidarity within the LGBT community is a key characteristic that aligns it with the concept of subculture.

Bai En is a Malaysian male social media influencer who often shared humorous videos and content, particularly on Facebook, where he boasts around 390K followers on his personal account. Originally named Bryan Wee, Bai En changed his name to a more feminine-sounding name in Chinese. According to “Bryan Wee’s reason for flying to Thailand and refused to do surgery is revealed! Xiao A La’s exposed their conversation in her comment section” (2024), after announcing his name change to Bai En, he revealed plans to undergo gender confirmation surgery in Thailand. He uploaded a video on Facebook showing himself preparing to travel to Thailand, explaining that he had carefully considered

this decision and was aware that the path ahead would not be easy, but he had chosen to pursue the surgery in a foreign country. However, just two days later, he appeared at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), holding a banana and stated that he would continue living as a “beautiful women with male genitalia”, and that he remained as Bai En, not Bryan Wee. From this news, it can be inferred that Bai En currently identifies as male but presents himself in feminine attire and could be categorized under “male feminization” and is considered part of the LGBT community, though this is based solely on the information presented in the news, and no final conclusion has been made.

According to Woah (2024), Bai En admitted that during his high school years, he developed an interest in men. However, at that time, he was afraid of being discriminated against and felt that his emotional resilience was not strong enough to handle potential bullying while his classmates and people surrounding him describes him as “*niangniangqiang*”, means he was a male feminization people. As a result, he pretended to be more masculine. He also shared that he had always exhibited feminine behaviors from a young age, such as liking pink color, wearing female clothing, skirts, and high heels. Despite this, he knew in his heart that he did not identify as a boy. After entering the workforce, he realized that there were many people who would not discriminate against male feminization like him, and some even encouraged him to be himself. Therefore, he decided not to live his life to please others and to stop pretending, choosing instead to live authentically.

From these perspectives, the researcher can argue that subcultures often arise from psychological needs and social pressures. They reflect a form of psychological displacement, where the inability to fit into mainstream culture leads individuals to seek alternative identities or practices. These subcultures require greater attention, as they may highlight underlying mental health challenges and the need for social understanding and support. In Woah’s news report, Bai En mentioned that while many people supported him in expressing



his true identity and sexual orientation, the number of people who dislike the LGBT community is still greater than those who accept it. This is particularly true for people who cannot accept the existence of gay individuals (Pew Research Center, 2024). In addition to their own strong adherence to traditional views, many are also influenced by external factors and societal panics.

The concept of “moral panic” was first coined in the early 1970s by Stanley Cohen, and it used to describe a condition or a group of people that is perceived as a threat to societal norms and values (Young, 2009). The term refers to the spread of fear and panic, often driven by moral concerns, to the public. Jenkins (1999) further explained that moral panics involve the widespread dissemination of social fear, which can expand over months or even year, but until the end, it will actually fade to nothing. Moral panics are often linked to political agendas or legal frameworks within a country, where the spread of fear is intentionally magnified to remind the public of perceived moral dangers (Furendi, 1994). In such cases, the events or behaviors fueling the panic may be genuine, exaggerated, or even fabricated, deliberately designed to create a sense of urgency and form negative stereotypes about particularly groups or issues. This can lead to the demonization of certain communities or individuals, known as “folk devils” (Rohloff, 2011).

Rohloff (2011) also noted that moral panics may arise from incidents that governments either cannot or choose not to address, allowing such fears to persist and grow unchecked. In this sense, moral panics often serve as a distraction or a way to avoid confronting deeper societal problems. Malaysia as an officially Islamic country, has a clear stance on LGBT issues, with homosexuality being strictly condemned and treated as a taboo. Under Section 377 of the Penal Code (2018), individuals involved in “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” can face up to 20 years in prison (Penal Code, 2006). There are no laws in place to protect LGBT individuals in Malaysia.

The portrayal of homosexual issues by the government is crucial in shaping public perception. Former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, stated that same-sex marriage is a “Western” value, not aligned with Malaysia’s culture and values, and should remain a practice confined to the West (Reuters, 2018). This Minister of Religious Affairs also declared that homosexual individuals like gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender are “unnatural”, and that the government aims to guide them back to a “normal” life (The Guardian, 2018). However, former Deputy Prime Minister, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail suggested that the government should provide equal rights to the LGBT community, if they keep their practices private and do not spread their lifestyle (Jamaluddin, 2018). Meanwhile, politicians like Charles Santiago from the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition have called for an end to the demonization of LGBT groups, advocating for equal rights and justice (Sukumaran, 2019).

Moral panics surrounding LGBT issues are often planned and orchestrated. According to Ting et al. (2021), Malaysian newspaper have depicted LGBT individuals in a controversial and negative light, often featuring intolerant commentary from ministers and government officials. The majority of Malaysian newspapers take a negative stance on LGBT issues. Furthermore, Subir (2019) found that the less attention LGBT issues emphasize in Malaysia, the less coverage the public receive in the media, and the less likely it is that positive views on LGBT issues are expressed. Jasmine (2022) also highlighted that both the government and the media have the power to control what information reaches the public and given Malaysia’s controversial stance on human rights and gender norms, it is difficult to find positive comments or calls for equal rights for LGBT individuals in official government discourse, despite the increasing visibility of homosexuality in the country. Jasmine (2022) also noted that social media serves as a “gatekeeper”, filtering out information that contradicts the country’s official image and laws, making LGBT individuals

a marginalized and resisted group in Malaysia. therefore, it is clear that moral panics surrounding LGBT issues are not merely spontaneous but are strategically designed by leaders and policymakers to influence public perception, create stereotypes, and achieve their broader socio-political goals.

Beyond moral panics, the culture industry manipulated the entire world. According to Adorno & Horkheimer (1944), the culture industry operates as an industrial system where those in power or with hegemony have the authority to decide what gets produced and presented to the public. Although, initially, the industry may produce content based on audience preferences, the amount of such content is minimal. Those with power are fulfilling their own interests and forcing society to conform to their desires. They blur the audience's perception, with profit as the sole objective (Lears, 2016) and everything is industrialized, and anything that challenges the established rule is not produced. The audience is used as an excuse for this system.

Hegemony is when people of lower status are controlled by those at the top, even though it doesn't benefit them (Herrmann, 2017). when they accept this situation, it formed hegemony. This concept can apply to areas like the military, economy, or politics of a country, where leaders and those in power dominate controlling the people. In Marxist terms, hegemony starts with the relationship between capitalists, who have the resources to create power, and workers, who realize the difference in social status but feel powerless to change it. According to Gramsci (1971), hegemony occurs when force and consent happen at the same time. The power of a country forces people to accept certain ideas, and they begin to see these as social norms, such as a normal male individuals should be manly, stronger, tougher. This process creates hegemony. The dominant group imposes their ideology on the oppressed group, making them believe in certain norms and ignore others, even if those norms harm their own interests (Newby et al., 1978).

Under monopoly, everyone shares the same culture and norms, but this is not a natural outcome, it is the result of hegemonic control. The culture industry seems to offer people the freedom of choice, but in reality, it is a form of subtle deception (Shi, 2021). It cleverly integrated culture into people's lives and guides them to make the same choices. For example, mass media such as movies, television, and radio all produce entertainment content through a unified system, resulting in a formulaic style (Gunster, 2000). All information that enters the market undergoes scrutiny and evaluation by capitalism, and only content that aligns with capitalist interest is given value and disseminated to the public (Adorno, 1991). The nature of the culture industry is closely linked to subcultures, which social media serves as an outlet for subcultures, powerful capitalists can choose to block the spread of various subcultures (Park, 2008). However, once capitalists identify the potential profit in a subculture, even if it could significantly influence societal trends, they will leverage their power to promote it, transforming the subculture into a new cultural discourse. This process ultimately commercializes and commodifies the subculture, reducing it to a tool of capitalist.

Take the example of the EDM (Electronic Dance Music) subculture, initially, EDM was viewed as a strange and avant-garde subculture, with futuristic ideas reflected in its music and song titles (Reynolds, 1999). However, due to concerns about the widespread use of drugs, the government initially saw the EDM subculture as a promoter of drug culture (Weinstein, 2000). Despite this, the government eventually extended an olive branch to the EDM community upon recognizing the rise of the subculture. For this subculture to become legalized, its only path was to transform into a legitimate cultural industry. However, this transformation inevitably means that the core characteristics of EDM would be entirely altered. This illustrated a key point which is under absolute power, all subcultures are either distorted to survive or erased entirely if they maintain their original spirit, ultimately becoming pawns of capitalism (Conner & Katz, 2020).

Bai En, as a subculture figure, in these phenomena, is he truly expressing a unique gender identity, or has he become part of the culture industry? This can be seen through his sponsorship by Yao Wang Herbal, where he was invited to host a live-stream sales event, promoting and selling their products. It is clear that Bai En's popularity is being leveraged to increase the brand's visibility. This situation can be inferring that Bai En is being commodified, transforming from a self-expression of gender identity into a tool for marketing. As such, this can be considered part of the culture industry, as Bai En himself has seemed to be industrialized.

### **2.3 Malaysian Chinese Youth Audience Perceived Bai En's Representation on Facebook: Research on LGBT Impact Towards Audiences**

Homosexuality is often seen as deviating from the social norms that emphasize group harmony and conformity. As Lin & Lin (1981) suggest, this has led to widespread stigma and discrimination against the LGBT community, affecting their mental health and daily lives. Unlike Western countries, traditional cultures like China's are deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts that emphasize the "rule of nature" (Yang et al., 2016). This view stresses the importance of conforming to gender identity norms widely accepted by society. Confucianism, which has been central to Chinese values for centuries, places family above individual rights. In this context, family reputation in social interactions is of utmost importance (Lin, 1981).

For many Chinese families, having a member who identifies as LGBT is seen as a source of shame. The family may be gossiped about, with others criticizing them for failing to raise their children properly according to traditional expectation (Wong, 2015). Besides, Chinese parents often hold strong beliefs in traditional heterosexual marriage as the means of carrying on the family bloodline (Hu & Wang, 2013). Homosexual relationships are seen as a direct challenge to these norms. According to Badgett et al. (2014), the acceptance and

tolerance of the LGBT community in a given country is often linked to the nation's economic development. Regions with higher economic growth tend to show greater acceptance, while areas with slower economic progress tend to exhibit more discrimination.

Malaysia is often considered a developing country, which, according to Badgett et al.'s (2014) research, correlates with lower levels of inclusivity for the LGBT community. In Malaysia, there exists a heavily criminalized environment for LGBT individuals, particularly under Section 377A of the Penal Code (Act 574), which punishes same-sex relationships (Tan et al., 2021). According to Flores (2019), Malaysia ranked 89<sup>th</sup> in the Global Acceptance Index (GAI) for public beliefs regarding LGBTQ+ people and policies in 2017. However, by 2021, Malaysia's ranking had dropped significantly to 115<sup>th</sup> (Flores, 2021). This decline reflects increasingly negative attitudes towards LGBT individuals. Manalastas et al. (2017) found that Malaysia exhibits the most negative attitudes towards LGBT people, particularly gays and lesbians when compared to other Southeast Asian nations like Philippines and Singapore, which have fewer rejecting stances.

More than 50% of Malaysians express a reluctance to have LGBT neighbors, while approximately 40% view homosexual individuals as mentally ill (Tan, 2022). Age also plays a significant role in these attitudes. Older Malaysians, when compared to other ages, are more likely to reject having gay or lesbian neighbors. In contrast, K. K. H. Tan (2021) found that less than 30% of young Malaysian adults held negative views toward the LGBT community, and Kaur & Kaur (2022) reported that 11.9% of Malaysian youth held negative attitudes toward homosexuality. This suggests that younger generations are more inclusive of LGBT people compared to older generations. In summary, in Malaysia, individuals often feel compelled to conform to cisgender or heterosexual norms to avoid discrimination based on gender orientation or identity (Barmania & Aljunid, 2017). Flores (2019) also noted an increasing level of acceptance of LGBT individuals among younger generations, a trend

further supported by Malayalam (2020), who attributed the shift in perceptions to the growing influence of social media. Younger people, who adapt to social media more quickly than older generations, have greater access to information about the LGBT community, allowing them to form more informed and diverse opinions.

There has been significant research on the attitudes of older generations in the Chinese community toward the LGBT community, often shaped by traditional mindsets. However, there is a lack of research focusing on the reactions of Chinese youth toward LGBT issues. According to MacNaughton & Smith (2005), youth research should prioritize the perspectives of young people themselves, rather than solely relying on data from parents and social workers. Kirk (2007) believes that one of the main factors influencing youth inclusion in social research is the recognition of their right to participate, from a human rights perspective. Young people have the right to be involved in research about their own lives and should not be represented solely by others (Mizrahi & Davis, 2008).

Mason & Hood (2011) found that as youth participants' competence in research has been increasingly recognized, their involvement has expanded. In the past, youth were often seen as unreliable, incompetent, or immature, but now they are viewed as capable of shaping the world and guiding research (Kirk, 2007). This is supported by Coyne (2010), who stated that the expressions of capability among youth are based on their life experiences, such as maturity, moral development, and psychological state, not merely their age. Flores (2007) emphasized that age is not the determining factor for participation, rather, it influences how someone participates. Research also shows that youth are effective when involved in health care studies, especially when their voices are included in the research (Fleming, 2010).

When youth are included in research, they are typically involved as participants, providing their perceptions on various topics, completing surveys, participating in focus groups, or contributing to the scope of the research (Fleming, 2010). When engaging with

LGBT youth or other socially marginalized groups, youth participants may bring insights based on their experiences. According to member of Youth Advisory Council (2024), the benefits of involving youth in research far outweigh traditional beliefs that they are unreliable. Youth, with their own lived experiences, can contribute valuable insights beyond the research scope, enabling researchers to better understand shifts in youth perspectives and address these changes effectively. Moreover, involving youth helps to fill gaps in research data that may otherwise be missing.

Since the research focuses on Malaysian Chinese youth, the researcher believes this group, the Malaysian Chinese Youth, is the most appropriate research subject, as they present a distinct demographic, combining both youth and Chinese cultural perspectives.

#### **2.4 Malaysia National Cultural Policy and the Norms in Malaysian Chinese Society**

The Malaysian National Culture Policy (NCP), established in the early 1970s, aimed to foster unity among Malaysia's diverse religious communities by emphasizing Malay culture and the national language. According to National Culture Policy (2019), the policy recognized the country's multicultural makeup, stating that various cultures could coexist as long as they did not clash with or threaten Malay culture. The policy sought peaceful integration with the Malay community, particularly after the 1969-racial riots. It promoted Malay culture as the coordinator of national identity, requiring all citizens to learn Malay, which inadvertently marginalized other cultures, their languages, and social identities. The policy was intended to reinforce the status of Malays, a political move that strengthened their position in the government sector. However, this focus neglected non-Malay citizens, leading to feelings of marginalization and dissatisfaction. By the late 1980s, the effectiveness of the policy waned as the government shifted towards fostering a more inclusive social environment, focusing less on Malay status and more on the development of Malay entrepreneurs (Mandal, 2008).



National Culture Policy allowed all religions to exist freely as part of the national culture. However, it emphasized that the national culture should be based on the culture of the indigenous peoples, and Islam would be a key element in the development of national culture (Karthigesu, 1994). Culture, being all-encompassing, touches nearly every aspect of individuals life (Ocholla-Ayayo, 2002). Yet not every aspect of individual life can be entirely shaped by public policy, nor can it be guaranteed to penetrate all areas. For instance, while all children use Malay in school, they may return home and continue speaking their ethnic dialects. The researcher cannot force everyone to abandon their cultural habits, whether it is language, dress, or religion, national policy largely embraces and allows citizens to express their personal rights in private domains (Ishak, 1999). The NCP, for example, incorporated the inclusiveness of ethnic's cultures, while promoting the mainstream national culture. This enhances national unity, allowing for cultural diversity to thrive. As a result, Chinese culture can also continue to exist and flourish within Malaysia.

The norms within the Malaysian Chinese society are heavily influenced by traditional Chinese values, especially concerning respect and relationships (Heng, 1984). Elders are highly respected regardless of familial ties, due to their experience and assumed responsibilities. Social interactions often adhere to hierarchical norms alike with the interpretation of Confucius (Shi, 2021), such as waiting for elders to begin eating before the younger ones start. These practices, deeply rooted in tradition and are still prevalent, although some have waned with modernization. Besides, Chinese New Year is also a great example, it is surrounded by various customs such as avoiding wearing black during the festival due to black brings bad luck in stereotypes, and not sweeping on the first day to prevent sweeping away good fortune, or not seek medication during Chinese New Year or else it will suffer someone in illness for the whole year (Chen, 2012) These norms, while evolving, remain a significant part of the Malaysian Chinese cultural identity.

The Malaysian Chinese community is deeply rooted in Confucian values, particularly the concept of *bai shan xiao wei xian*, which emphasizes that filial piety (*xiao*) should be prioritized above all else by Chinese. Filial piety requires children to respect their parents, always care for them, and never go against their wishes, regardless of the circumstances (Liu, 2023). Furthermore, Chinese culture places great importance on caring for descendants, with the continuation of the family bloodline being seen as essential (Chua, 2007). In this traditional framework, it is imperative that the son of a family marries and has children to fulfill the role of preserving the family lineage (Song et al., 2015). Song et al. (2015) also discusses the significance of the patrilineal ideology, where the son is considered an indispensable part of the family, as he carries on the family's surname through ancestor worship. This legacy must be continued and perpetuated solely by men. Failing to do so brings embarrassment to both the parents and the entire family (Xu, 2019). In more traditional families, a son who does not fulfill this role is no longer regarded as a true son (Becker & Barnes, 1961). In these social norms that restrict men's freedom in life and their societal status, people become deeply rooted in traditional pathways that treat those who do not conform to these norms as outsiders or abnormalities, grouping them outside the accepted individuals.

Social and gender norms are areas where traditional views persist (Zhang & Xu, 2021), particularly among the older generations. Traditionally, the Chinese community has been conservative, who often view behaviors such as homosexuality, remarriage, or gender transition as unacceptable. Throughout history, under the patriarchy, women have often been depicted and labeled as delicate and weak, places in a vulnerable position in society. Women are expected to maintain traditional feminine traits, such as slim, petite figure, a gentle demeanor, fair skin, and long dark hair, all of which align with the patriarchal ideal of what a "proper" woman should look (Shang, 1975a). If a woman fails to meet these standard

feminine characteristics, she is often stigmatized with labels that suggest she is unnatural or not truly feminine, leading to derogatory treatment (Ang, 2023). For example, according to (Shang, 1975b), even if a woman has extraordinary beauty, having dark skin may result in her being considered unattractive and in the past, such a skin tone was associated with lower social status (Jia, 2017).

In addition to skin color, a woman's body is often forced to conform to the patriarchal ideal, where being slim and delicate is seen as desirable. Overweight women, on the other hand, are often viewed as clumsy and lacking grace, which makes them targets of exclusion and marginalized from both men and women (Pan, 1976) in the family sphere, women are traditionally expected to "support their husbands and teach their children," which means caring for the household and children (Beauvoir, 2004). For parents, a married daughter is often seen as "water spilled out," reflecting the patriarchal view of women's and mother's role (Beauvoir, 2004). Within the family, women are expected to be submissive, as the concept of "men working outside and women staying inside" places the man as the head of the family, with the woman expected to obey her husband in order to be considered a good wife (Shang, 1975a).

A woman is often considered to have contributed to the family only if she gives birth to a son, as it is believed that only a son can carry on the family lineage (Li, 1998). This reflects the importance of male descendants and the extremely low status of women in traditional Chinese views on gender. In these traditional beliefs, same-sex relationships are seen as unnatural, and homosexuals are often overwhelmed by public opinion. Under the collective consciousness shaped by state policies and societal norms, they are led to adopt a misleading sense of identity. This includes the widespread belief that true happiness comes only through having a husband or wife, and children, resulting in the persecution of homosexuals, such as the mass killing targeting them (Foucault, 2012). Additionally,

Malaysia issued a ban on blood donations from homosexuals in 2016, signaling that the government associates' homosexuality with being a major source of HIV (Bourdieu, 2002).

Although it is challenging to change such deep-rooted beliefs, younger Chinese Malaysian, particularly those born in late 1980s to present, are gradually becoming more accepting of the LGBT community. This according to Noodou (2022), which surveyed Chinese Malaysian within various age groups and found that the majority acknowledged that sexual orientation and gender identity are personal choices, and that personal happiness is what matters most. However, a minority of older individuals still resist these changes, viewing them as a betrayal of traditional Chinese values and norms.

In fact, the norms of Chinese society in Malaysia are closely intertwined with the broader multicultural Malaysian community. As stated in the Malaysia National Culture Policy, Malay culture is considered the cornerstone of national identity, and its practices and beliefs, including the taboo against LGBT lifestyles, influences the societal norms of other ethnic groups. This integration of Malay prohibitions gradually shapes the collective mindset, reinforcing the notion that LGBT identities are unacceptable or even criminal. In such a diverse society, social norms are shared and influence each other, demonstrating the interconnectedness of cultural attitudes and the slow but ongoing evolution of societal change.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.0 Qualitative Social Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodology is chosen for this study to delve into the social phenomena surrounding LGBT topics. Unlike quantitative research, which relied heavily on statistical data. Qualitative research offers a more profound and comprehensive approach. It enables researchers to gain a deep understanding of human beliefs, behaviors, opinions, and experiences, as well as the underlying factors influencing these aspects by using a more humanity interview conversation overlay with human feelings. It is also an effective method for clarifying and obtaining specific information, examining new phenomena, and gaining new insights or beliefs on existing issues, allows for a deeper understanding of emotions and experiences that are difficult to convey through quantitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This method emphasizes the value of insights into specific topics, allowing researchers to emphasize and adapt findings to social phenomena (Austin & Sutton, 2015). It is a research method filled with human touch, focusing beyond mere numbers and data.

The key difference between qualitative and quantitative research lies in the nature of the responses. quantitative research typically yields more objective data through structured questions and answers, resulting in close-ended responses (Hyman & Sierra, 2016). In contrast, qualitative research provides more subjective insights, allowing participants to freedom express their interpretations openly. However, according to Ahmad et al. (2019), qualitative research methods also face challenges, including the time-sensitive nature of data collection and detailed analysis, which can prolong the duration of the study. Additionally, organizing larger focus group for qualitative studies can be challenging and complex compared to the broader reach and larger respondent-based accessible in quantitative research.

Values, which cannot be expressed through statistics, numbers, or numeric data, are also better understood through qualitative research, as it does not rely on statistical test (Eisner, 1991). For example, the values and belief of Chinese youths towards Bai En are hard to executed through systematical data and numbers of satisfaction but a more subjective belief. Additionally, qualitative research methods often involve interviews or focus group discussions, which enable the asking of open-ended questions. This approach allows for meaningful, non-limited, and explanatory answers, with no predetermined responses (Howard, 2011). Qualitative data provides a richer, more complex understanding of a specific context, topic, or phenomenon, such as LGBT issues, with emerging themes derived from the data (Patton, 1990). The researcher has selected this research approach due to it is particularly suited for exploring the nuanced feelings and attitude of individuals, especially when examining the perspectives of Malaysian Chinese youth towards LGBT issues and influencers like Bai En. For data collection, the researcher utilizes focus group discussions, which are ideal for uncovering diverse values, beliefs, and social norms in social science's field that emerge during discussions (Mishra, 2016). This method enables us to deeply understand the impacts of the LGBT community and social media influencers on youth. In contrast, a quantitative approach would limit us to just numbers, tables, and figures (Nenty, 2009), devoid of real and emotive insights.

Qualitative research is an interpretative research method, as its core is not based solely on yes-or-no questions (Wiesner et al., 2017). It is not only concerned with causality but also aims to explore the details of a phenomenon, including explanations of *how* things occur. Interpretative research helps to interpret, understand, and experience the social world by observing, listening to, and reading about people's perspectives, thereby generating new insights into specific cultural contexts (Upadhyay & KC, 2014). Quantitative research focuses directly on people's lived experiences regarding specific topics and explores how

the social world is interpreted and constructed (Barnad et al., 2004). It relies heavily on common sense, personal experiences, emotions, and creativity, making it particularly suitable for researching topics related to feelings, culture, and other phenomena that are difficult to quantify or conclude through structured data and predetermined questions. Unlike the algorithms used in quantitative studies, interpretative research often involved unpredictable emotions, agreements, sympathy, and personal feelings (Geertz, 1973).

For this study, the researcher will organize focus groups comprised of Malaysian Chinese youth aged between 20 to 30 years old within Klang Valley, divided into three distinct groups, which are one group of females, one group of males, and one group of gay individuals. All of the respondents will not require revision of Bai En's content on social media to ensure collecting the real ideas from respondents in their daily interactions to the entire topic. This segmentation will allow for a comprehensive and interpretive analysis of the perspectives gathered during the discussion. The focus group discussions will be held in a quiet, semi-private area to ensure an environment conducive to focused and uninterrupted dialogue.

### **3.1 Case Study Research in Qualitative Social Science**

Qualitative research methods are in-depth and case-oriented studies that involve exploration through either a number of cases or a single case within the entire study (Finlay, 2006). Abercrombie et al. (2006) defines a case study as unreliable for studying broader classes. Case studies are often used in conjunction with qualitative social science research methods, as they open pathways for a wider variety of discoveries (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1990). Therefore, to make the research more detailed and comprehensive, a case study often focuses on a specific setting or topic, emphasizing a particular group and its characteristics (Hasan, 2014). The results of a case study involved an intensive analysis of specific members or groups, focusing on the cases selected by the researcher ("Case Study,"

2024). It can target individuals, documents, or events, exploring and uncovering the relationships between various variables (Dewi et al., 2023). In the context of the topic, *Mapping Bai En as Male Feminization LGBT/LGBT in Facebook: Focus Group Study on Malaysian Chinese Youth in Klang Valley*, this can be considered a community case study. The researcher will conduct focus group discussions focusing on interviews with a specific group of people who are familiar with Bai En or have seen his content. The discussion will be guided by specific intentions, where interviewers will ask questions regarding to “how” and “why”, and interviewees will respond based on their own experiences and perspectives (Way et al., 2015).

According to Dewantara (2022), the steps involved in case study research include case selection, where the researcher chooses a relevant case based on the research problem and objectives; data collection, where appropriate data collection techniques are selected that align with the problem and environment; data analysis, where data is organized into manageable units for analysis; refinements, where the data is refined and updated as necessary throughout the study; and report writing, where the findings are clearly and communicatively presented in the final report. As qualitative research is interpretative in nature, case studies rely on previously established generalizations and apply them to a specific research context, thereby helping to reveal the characteristics of the current case (Ruzzene, 2014). This is similar to how the LGBT subculture emerged from the social norms of gender.

According to Eckstein (2000), the case is explained by subsuming it under established propositions. The explanation of the case is considered successful if it is logically derived from the theory, such as gender norms. Additionally, according to Yin (2023), a case study approach is suitable when researchers are unable to assume or manipulate the answers, interpretations, and behaviors of participants involved in the study, due to feelings are hard



to be defined in numeric data, or when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. For example, the phenomenon of Bai Ean is not generally accepted by Malaysian policy. In this regard, the research topic exploring works effectively and appropriate when case studies are used as the primary method to investigate it.

### **3.2 Focus Group: Discussion on Selected Malaysian Chinese Youth Audience**

According to Mishra (2016), a focus group is a type of discussion that involved in-depth interviews within a group of individuals who share similar characteristics, following the structure of the proposal and interview procedure. It is an effective method for gathering people with similar demographics and experiences related to a specific topic or issue, facilitating interactions among participants. In a focus group, individuals influence one another by expressing their answers, contributions, and ideas during the discussion, which is centered around a specific topic of interest to the research. Interaction is key to a successful focus group discussion, and the size of the group can vary, each with its pros and cons. For example, having too many people in a group may lead to chaos and make it difficult to manage the conversation. Focus groups are conducted to understand people's insights on specific topics, issues, or phenomena, and to generate new ideas for new production. This is similar to the aim of this research, which seeks to explore the reasons why Chinese youth watch LGBT content.

For this research, I will employ focus group discussions among the Malaysian Chinese youth community, consisting of 12 participants divided into three groups, and each group contains four participants. The first group will include all Chinese female participants, aged between 20 to 30 years old, residing in Klang Valley. The second group will consist of all Chinese male participants with same living area, Klang Valley, and the third group will comprise all Chinese gay LGBT individuals, which all sharing the same demographic profiles as the other groups. The researcher will try to request her friends that living in Klang

Valley to give a favor on the discussions, while gay respondents will also request from her friends since the LGBT community nowadays not resist to provide their real expressions on queer culture. Each group will address two research questions sequentially, which is the beliefs of theirs towards LGBT influencers, Bai En, and the reasons they watch LGBT influencers, Bai En's content. The total discussion time of 45 minutes. All discussions will be voice recorded to avoid any potential misunderstandings or errors in capturing the participants' interactions, and to serve as a reference for my data analysis process. After the discussion concluded, all dialogues will be coded before being presented as research findings in the study report. These will be analyzed and discussed in relation to the reception studies on Malaysian Chinese audiences, aligning with all elements considered in the study, including the influence of Bai En.

This focus group will be conducted based on self-conscious of their own interpretations, and these interpretations directly reflect their own history and cultural context (Creswell, 2005). The study aims to extract community information by understanding it within its own cultural context (Moisander et al., 2020), and group's culture (Draper, 2015). In these focus group, the discussion will be conducted in Chinese, as are focusing on Chinese youth whose mother tongue is predominantly Chinese. This approach allows them to express themselves more clearly and comfortably.

The interview will be conducted using a structured interview method, where a set of pre-drafted questions are followed. This is also known as a standardized interview, which consists of a series of designed questions for the respondents, aiming to elicit answers within a fixed range (Park & Ahn, 2012). This type of interview is easier to administer, as respondents are required to answer the given questions directly and in a consistent order (Gill et al., 2008). According to Bryman (2012), the advantages of structured interviews include greater standardization, which helps minimize errors due to the fixed nature of the questions,

and the ease of clarifying the meaning of questions while assuming specific answers. Unlike semi-structured interviews, which allow respondents to discuss issues beyond the specific questions and potentially introduce unrecognized or unestablished theories (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992), structured interviews limit responses to predefined questions. This allows for more control and consistency but does not provide the flexibility to explore complex or nuanced answers that may arise in a more open-ended interview format.

### **3.3 Developing Themes to Facilitate Focus Group**

In this research, which involved conducting focus group discussions, various sets of themes are likely to emerge, each sharing similar patterns on particular topics. Thematic analysis is an effective method for identifying and elaborating on these patterns within the data set, potentially leading to new insights for the study (Thomas, 2006). It can be structured into several data sets or conceptual models through the use of keywords, coding, interpretations, and quotations selected from the findings (Naeem & Ozuem, 2022). This process is crucial for identifying themes in the series of interpretations, as it involved initial statements and potential codes that will ultimately be refined into a final model for analysis.

During the data coding process, which involved analyzing the focus group discussion, researchers will search for keywords used by participants and systematically organize them into themes. This approach enhances the depth of the research findings, as the words used by respondents may include feelings and emotions that bring additional layers of meaning to the entire topic (Xu & Zammit, 2020). The process involved six key steps, first to transcribe the verbatim data after the interview is completed; second, filtering and selecting keywords during the transcription process; third, coding keywords, phrases, or words into segments significantly to the research; fourth, assigning themes and organizing them into meaningful groups; fifth, conceptualizing the patterns and relationships between the research

topics to gain insights; and finally, organizing the themes to answer the research questions (Naeem et al., 2023).

### **3.4 Verbatim Transcription of Research Data: Focus Group Discussion Conversations**

Upon completing the research, the next step is to transcribe the data collected from the three focus group discussions into readable dialogue. The researcher will employ the Verbatim transcription method to meticulously transcribe the conversation. According to UWC Staff (2015), although a Verbatim transcription is less formal than a structured interviews, it must be as accurate as possible to maintain the authenticity and precision of the manual transcription. The researcher will use Intelligence Verbatim to filter out unnecessary filter words such as “erm”, “ah” and “oh”, to enhance the professionalism of the readable conversation. Nonetheless, all words and information, excluding non-verbal cues, will be recorded in the report.

The written verbatim report will begin with an introduction that outlines the basic concept of the research conducted and provides fundamental knowledge to help readers understand the purpose of the focus group discussion. It will also detail the interview settings, including the location, number of participants and their demographics, among other relevant details. The dialogue from the discussion will then be presented in text form. No quotation marks are needed, but it is critical to accurately attribute each piece of dialogue to the corresponding speaker and ensure all notes align with the conversation. The aim is to faithfully convert spoken words into written form without omitting any part of the discussion. Finally, a conclusion will be added to distribute the value of the meaningful discussions to the readers, providing a coherent closure to the insights gathered from the focus group.

### 3.5 Social Research Ethics: Sensitive and Confidential

The topic the researcher is researching is considered sensitive, as it related to the concern of sexuality and it related to political and culture taboos (McCosker et al., 2001), and also content that is not widely legalized globally, particularly in Malaysia which is a predominantly Muslim country where the LGBT community is often deemed immoral and criminal. This necessitates careful consideration and protective measures in both the research and focus group discussions. In Malaysia, where the legal recognition of LGBT marriages does not exist, and societal views are conservative, specific terms like “gay”, “lesbian”. And “bisexual” must be used cautiously to avoid inadvertently labeling individuals. It is also crucial not to disparage the Malaysian culture but to respect the environment in which conduct the research.

For the focus group participants, it is essential to select individuals who are mentally healthy and hold personal views. The researcher must avoid those with childhood psychological or psychological trauma, as this could skew the discussion towards non-neutral, potentially offensive perspectives (Decker et al., 2011). Therefore, in the selection process, the researcher aims to filter out individuals with particularly traumatic experiences related to LGBT topics to prevent any unintended harm during discussions on sensitive subjects.

Confidentiality is paramount. According to Baez (2002), the ultimate goal of a research is to protect research participants with a complete confidentiality, and researchers are compulsory to avoid harming their participants. During the research, the identities of focus group participants including their names, age, appearances, and voices must be fully protected to maintain anonymity. This precaution is critical to protect participants from potential discrimination after the publication of the report, as the sensitive nature of the topics discussed could place individuals at risk if their personal details were known to dissenting

readers (Kaiser, 2009). By ensuring all information is accurate yet private, and by maintaining ethical sensitivity and politeness throughout the research, the researcher uphold the highest standards of confidentiality and respect for all involved.

## Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis

### 4.0 Source and Data of Findings and Analysis

This entire chapter is crucial for the research, which aims to explore two key research questions using a qualitative research method through focus group discussions. Once the raw data is collected from the focus groups, it will be transcribed into text and categorized into several themes based on the respondents' answers along with the theory and concept learnt from Chapter 2, literature review. The chapter will include seven themes, compiling the opinions of respondents from three focus groups, each group consisting of four respondents. These findings will be analyzed in relation to the literature review and supplemented with the researcher's interpretations and conclusions.

#### 4.1 Theme 1: Male Feminization

Male feminization referred to the adoption of traditional female behaviors by biological men, which was then displayed and exposed to the public, contrasted with general gender norms. To easily categorize Bai En as a member of the LGBT community, the simplest approach was first to classify him as exhibiting male feminization, as this was a prominent way to label men who are considered 'abnormal'.

“...他的形象就有点...怎么讲呢...有点娘娘的，有时候会不自觉地扭动他的手和腰，摆出一些兰花指，偏女性的那种特征，会穿女生的裙子然后画口红，带女生的发箍，戴耳环...”，Female Respondent A

(“...his image is somewhat... how should I describe... a bit feminine. Sometimes, he unconsciously sways his hands and waist, making delicate gestures with his fingers, features that lean toward femininity, he wears women's dresses, applies lipstick, wears headbands typically for girls, and puts on earrings...”, Female Respondent A)

“...他的声音会不自觉嗲一点，行为举止像是女生会做的动作...”，Female Respondent C

(“... his voice naturally sounds a bit soft and sweet, and his gestures and movements resemble those typically made by women...”, Female Respondent C)

“... 他偏向于喜欢穿裙子还有比较喜欢戴假发，画一个红红的口红...”，Male Respondent B

(“...he tends to prefer wearing skirts, enjoys wearing wigs, and likes applying bright red lipstick...”, Male Respondent B)

“... 跳舞比较妖娆一点点...”, Male Respondent C

(“... his dancing is a bit more graceful and alluring...”, Male Respondent C)

“...那个时候看到他已经比较女性那个时候觉得他也有 transgender 的这样子，他会穿裙扮女生，有一点点那个转性的意思...”, Gay Respondent A

(“... at the time, seeing him already quite feminine, I felt that he also had some traits of being transgender, he would wear skirts and dress like a woman, giving the impression of transitioning to some extent...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...其实在我们 LGBT 里面有一样东西叫 “Gaydar”，就是 Gay Radar 就是其实我们会很像通过一个人的 appearance 大概我们可以看出他到底是不是 gay or LGBT...”, Gay Respondent B

(“... actually in the LGBT community, we have something called “Gaydar,” which stands for “Gay Radar.” It means that we can often tell if someone is gay or part of the LGBT community based on their appearance and demeanor...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...就是他的那个 vibes 啊，外貌打扮这些东西 or 行为上就其实可以看得出，他的 content 也是通常都会比较偏向 LGBT 的东西...”, Gay Respondent D

(“... it’s about his vibes, appearance, style, or behavior, these things can actually give it away, even his content tends to be more aligned with LGBT topics...”, Gay Respondent D)

Based on the opinions of three groups of respondents, female, male and gay, they all shared the similar views in recognizing Bai En as exhibiting male feminization through his adoption of typical feminine behaviors, such as wearing skirts, putting on makeup, using a high-pitched voice, and so on. Gay respondent B mentioned the concept of “Gaydar,” which referred to the exclusive ability of gay individuals to detect others within the gay community. This concept was also discussed by Lehmiller (2017), who stated the “Gaydar” was the ability to detect or recognize homosexual individuals through their appearance and talking and the research believed that gay respondent B, who lived in Malaysia, also shared a similar ability of “Gaydar” and was able to detect the potential male feminization of Bai En as an LGBT individual. These observations aligned with the theories of male feminization outlined in the entire research. Therefore, based on the opinions of respondents and the theories studied, Bai En could be easily categorized as non-masculine. The researcher believed that Bai En was indeed a male feminization member of the LGBT community, as he did not



conform to traditional notions of male strength and masculinity, instead incorporated feminine elements into his identity.

#### 4.2 Theme 2: Moral Panics

As studied in the previous chapter, moral panic was a phenomenon in which a group of people was perceived as a threat to society by spreading ideas that went against moral norms, instilling fear among the public. In Malaysia, the law strictly prohibited LGBT community and did not provide them with any human rights protection such as the rights to voice freedom for LGBT community. In such an environment, moral panics was considered as a product of the government, used to create public awareness about not breaking the law. It was also often a controversial topic.

“...个人看了会觉得很奇怪但是会去接受有这一群人他们的存在，有时候会觉得有点 geli，你看他们拍一些比较奇奇怪怪的或者是那种自拍的或者是那种比较露一点的会让我有一种怪怪的感觉...”，Female Respondent D

(“... personally, I find it a bit strange, but I accept the existence of this group of people but sometimes I feel a bit uncomfortable, when I see them taking some weird photos, selfies, or those that are a bit revealing, it gives me a strange feeling...”, Female Respondent D)

“...geli 的话时会有一点啦因为他展现出来的 image 啊，我是觉得有一点 low 和有一点厌恶...”，Female Respondent A

(“... there is a bit of uncomfortable feeling because of the image he presents, and I find it somewhat low and a bit disgusting...”, Female Respondent A)

“...看的当下我会觉得心里不舒服，会觉得为什么你一个男生你要这样子...”，Male Respondent C

(“... when I see it, I feel uncomfortable and wonder why a guy would act like that...”, Male Respondent C)

“...反感咯我看了，我看到他的 video 我就划走了...”，Male Respondent D

(“... I feel disgusted when I see it, when I come across his video, I just scroll away...”, Male Respondent D)

Although the majority of respondents accepted the LGBT community, most of them felt uncomfortable when watching Bai En's content or videos due to his unique image and personal style, which they went against the dominant culture and did not consider a normal LGBT style in their minds. As a result, they often did not finish his videos due to the

discomfort they felt. However, this was not due to a dislike of LGBT content but specifically because of Bai En's content.

“...我觉得不是好的影响啦就是她们会觉得 gay 都是 Bryan Wee 那样的...”, Female Respondent C

(“... I don't think it's a good influence because it makes people think that all gay individuals are like Bryan Wee...”, Female Respondent C)

“...有一些人看了就觉得, “你看, 如果你是 gay 的你就会是这个样的咯”, 就会有这样子不好的 stereotype 在人家的印象里面...”, Female Respondent D

(“... some people, upon seeing it, think, “Look, if you're gay, you'll be like this,” which creates a negative stereotype in their minds”, Female Respondent D)

“...我只是希望就是社会不要把他的行为举止当作是 LGBT 都会做的事情, 因为他要怎样做是他的事情但是他并不能代表 LGBT 会这样子做, 因为不是每个 LGBT 的人都会是这样子的 pattern 的或者是这样子的性格这样子的 style 的...”, Gay Respondent B

(“... I just hope that society doesn't assume his behavior represents all LGBT people, what he does is his own choice, but he cannot be seen as a representative of the LGBT community because not every LGBT person has the same pattern, personality, or style...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...可能会败坏社会风气这样子...”, Gay Respondent D

(“... it might negatively impact social values...”, Gay Respondent D)

“...如果他是对于那种中学生以下的, 他们思想还没有完全固定的时候其实是蛮大影响的...”, Male Respondent C

(“... if it's towards those under high school age, when their thoughts are not fully formed yet, it can actually have a significant impact...”, Male Respondent C)

“...他们可能会觉得 “yer 做么这个男的穿到女生这样子, 不正常 “...”, Gay Respondent A

(“... they might think, “Ew, why is this guy dressing like a girl? That's not normal” ...”, Gay Respondent A)

The responses above truly aligned with the concept of moral panic, which spread fear and panic by presenting a perceived threat to society. Most respondents, regardless of their gender or sexuality, shared the same concern about the fear of negative stereotyping the LGBT community. They worried that the public would see Bai En as a representation of LGBT individuals, associated his actions, style, and appearance with what all LGBT people did or looked like. This had become a major threat to both society and the LGBT community itself. Gay respondent B explicitly stated that Bai En's actions did not represent the entire

LGBT community. Meanwhile, female respondent C and D expressed concerns that Bai En's behavior reinforced stereotypes about gay people. Additionally, it posed a societal risk, as younger individuals might adopt Bai En's behavior if his content does not promote positive attitudes and values.

“...只是为了...博取流量的人我觉得是 negative 的...”, Male Respondent D  
 (“... I think those who do it just to gain attention and traffic are negative...”, Male Respondent D)

“...有时候我看到会觉得 too much too over 了, over 到会不知道要支持还是不支持, 他是太做自己呢还是他做这些只是为了 influence 为了博取流量之类的...”, Gay Respondent B  
 (“... sometimes when I see it, I feel like it's too much, too over, so that I don't know whether to support it or not, is he just being true to himself or is he doing all this just to influence others and gain attention...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...白嫖他的那些行为举止可能会比较让人难以接受因为他的情绪和反应太大了...”, Gay Respondent B  
 (“... Bai En's behavior and mannerisms might be harder for people to accept because his emotions and reactions are too exaggerated...”, Gay Respondent B)

Moral panics often overlapped with the concept of hegemony, as mentioned in previous chapters. Hegemony referred to the dominant culture controlling society, while subculture, such as the LGBT community, often struggled to be accepted by societal norms and were frequently rejected. Gaining public attention was a way to create opportunities for acceptance within the dominant culture and become part of capitalism. As a social media influencer, Bai En highlighted LGBT-related actions and male feminization in his content. The researcher believed that, to some extent, this is a product of hegemony, and an attempt was made to integrate into the dominant society, however, Bai En's content was often overly exaggerated, made it difficult for the public to accept and support.

### 4.3 Theme 3: Culture Industry

The culture industry manipulated the entire world, as stated by Adorno & Horkheimer (1944). It controlled and influenced societal products and phenomena while shaped by dominant preferences within society. As a result, content often became

standardized and industrialized, with audiences playing a passive role in consuming this information. Although it might have seemed like individuals had the freedom to choose what to consume, in reality, their options were carefully controlled and manipulated by the industry for maximizing the profits.

“...他为了要流量他也是有去找我们非常讨厌的 Alice 跟 Adeline 的时候, 他也是有去找他们合作那些东西, 他在以这些方式来博取流量...”, Female Respondent D

(“... in order to gain traffic, he even went to collaborate with Alice and Adeline, whom we really dislike, using these methods to attract attention...”, Female Respondent D)

“...完全就是大数据自然推送给我我才会看到他的这个东西...”, Female Respondent A

(“... it was entirely the algorithm’s natural recommendation that pushed it to me, that’s the only reason I saw it...”, Female Respondent A)

“...就觉得他太过博流量然后他也没有以前那些 content 这样好笑了...”, Female Respondent B

(“... I just feel like he’s trying too hard to chase traffic, and his content isn’t as funny as it used to be...”, Female Respondent B)

“...黑红也算是红, 他就维持住了那个 pattern 的话他就还蛮有流量...”, Female Respondent A

(“... negative fame is still fame, as long as he maintains that pattern, he’ll continue to get quite a lot of traffic...”, Female Respondent A)

“...他还蛮厉害维持住他自己的曝光率还有流量...”, Female Respondent A

(“... he’s pretty good at maintaining his exposure and traffic...”, Female Respondent A)

“...然后他也会看到什么时候有比较火的话题, 他也会去蹭热度这样子所以他的曝光率就很高...”, Female Respondent B

(“... he also keeps an eye on trending topics and jumps on the hype, which is why his exposure is so high...”, Female Respondent B)

“...我不排除有一种可能是他在利用 LGBT 的这个东西去吸引别人的注意, 就是放大他自己的那些言行举止或者是去跟别的这些 LGBT 的 influencer 合作...”, Female Respondent B

(“... I don’t rule out the possibility that he’s using the LGBT topic to attract attention, either by exaggerating his own behavior or collaborating with other LGBT influencers...”, Female Respondent B)

“...我觉得他是抱着那种黑红也是红的心态去弄 content 啦, 反正他这样子做也骂, 不做也骂, 他被骂反而是在给他红...”, Female Respondent C

(“... I think he’s creating content with the mindset that negative fame is still fame, either way, he’ll get criticized whether he does it or not, and in the end, the criticism is actually making him more popular...”, Female Respondent C)

“...他的 video 其实他都有根据现在发生的事情, 也可以讲说是在蹭热度, 很多人都在讨论所以他就去拍这些东西, 还有我觉得他就是为了红而已...”, Female Respondent D

(“... his videos are actually based on current hot topics, so you could say he’s riding the trend, since many people are talking about the entire topic, he makes content about it, I also think he’s doing it just to gain popularity...”, Female Respondent D)

“...多数人都是抱着去看他笑话的心态...”, Male Respondent C

(“... most of the people are going with the mindset of watching him make a fool of himself...”, Male Respondent C)

“...他会去制造话题引起流量, 跟上 trend 然后辅助是因为他是同性恋所以让更多人看得到他罢了...”, Male Respondent C

(“... he creates topics to attract traffic, follows trends, and the fact that he is gay just helps him gain more visibility...”, Male Respondent C)

“...他的 content 会比较大胆一点, 很 controversial, 就是他会做很多人家不做的东西所以这样子他就吸引到大众啦...”, Gay Respondent A

(“... his content is a bit bolder and quite controversial; he does things that many people wouldn’t do, which is how he attracts the public’s attention...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...但是我觉得他的 video 性格上我觉得很不像是以 LGBT 代表...”, Gay Respondent B

(“... but I feel like his personality in his videos doesn’t really seem like that of an LGBT representative...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...因为其实他们这种做 social media 的他们要得到别人的关注, 或者是他们要得到那种关注的话其实他们需要做比较大动作...”, Gay Respondent B

(“... because for people doing social media, if they want to gain attention or attract that kind of attention, they actually need to be more dramatic in their actions...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...我觉得白葱的 content more like 就是娱乐化, 但是他不是那种只是的角度去分享的 content 咯...”, Gay Respondent B

(“... I think Bai En’s content is more entertainment-focused, but it’s not the kind of content that is purely about sharing from a personal perspective...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...因为哗众取宠吧, 他的 content 那些都是很夸张的 topic, 然后人们就会因为他太夸张了而关注他...”, Gay Respondent C

(“... because it’s all about seeking attention, his content features exaggerated topics, and people pay attention to him because he’s so over the top...”, Gay Respondent C)

Like what the culture industry promoted, the findings from the three groups of respondents were basically the same. They stated that Bai En purposely made video featuring viral content, controversial topics, and exaggerated gestures to gain attention and views. It seemed that Bai En’s videos had become standardized since he had developed his own style, which people labeled as “too over-the-top”, doing things that ordinary people would not typically have done. Due to this unique exposure, people were drawn to him and gave him social media attention.

Moreover, based on these findings, there was even a stereotype in people's minds that Bai En was an LGBT influencer known for his overly hyped actions and topics. While this perception might have seemed negative to some, many people still watch his content. This reflected the success of the culture industry; it standardized content while making people believe they had the freedom to choose what they preferred to watch. In reality, Bai En's content was tailored to match audience preferences and expectations. Once he gained attention, profits were maximized. This was how Bai En operated within the culture industry, was described as using the LGBT label to earn profits, which was an unethical approach, though not legally problematic.

#### 4.4 Theme 4: Deviance Against Norms

A deviance was someone's action or attitude in society that was treated as abnormal, behavior that most people would not have adopted, and which stood outside the normal social order. In a cultural context, the Chinese community in Malaysia had heavily stereotyped gender norms, with previous studies suggested that men should have been strong and powerful, while women should have been tiny and slim, fulfilling traditional gender expectations. However, within the LGBT community, personalities and appearances often contradicted these traditional Chinese gender norms, which was also referred to as deviance against the norms. This could be demonstrated through responses from several respondents.

“...就是可能 70 后 80 后来讲可能更难以接受一点因为他们还是比较传统的，然后他们也没有通过网络了解到很多这些性取向不一样的人，他们会觉得男生就是要找女朋友，要找漂漂亮亮的女朋友...”，Female Respondent A

(“...for those born in the 70s and 80s, it might be harder to accept because they are still relatively traditional. They also haven't been exposed to many people with different sexual orientations through the internet, they tend to believe that boys should find a girlfriend, a pretty one at that...”, Female Respondent A)

“...很像比较年轻一代啊，90 后 00 后这样子的话算是相对来讲比较可以接受，可是如果是长辈那一代他们毕竟是受到上一辈的思想所影响所以就会比较接收不到 LGBT 这样...”，Female Respondent C

(“... for the younger generations, like those born in the 90s and 00s, they are relatively more accepting, but for the older generation, they were influenced by the mindset of the generation before them, so they tend to be less receptive to LGBT concepts...”, Female Respondent C)

“...比如说我的父母他们是不能接受他的孩子是有出柜的这种情况，我也是有听过我一些朋友的父母也是不允许自己的孩子是这样的...”, Female Respondent D

(“... for example, my parents can't accept their child are the member of LGBT community, I've also heard that some of my friends' parents don't allow their children to be like that either...”, Female Respondent D)

“...在他们的观念里，男生跟男生在一起就是不对的，然后在我们这个年代就是00后，就是我的朋友圈子跟我所认识的和所看到的，他们都OK with it，因为我们都会觉得爱是不分性别的...”, Female Respondent D

(“... in their view, a relationship between two men is simply wrong, but in our generation, the 00s among my friends and the people I know, they are all okay with it since we believe that love has no gender gap...”, Female Respondent D)

“...我觉得老一辈的可能接受程度没有那么高，因为在上一个 generation，LGBT 还没有被讨论，他是 minority，所以小到人家不会去注意 or 人家会觉得很奇怪，但是在这个年代不一样了，这个年代 LGBT 也很多所以很多人关注，所以当很多人关注的时候就变成他不是一个奇怪的事情了...”, Male Respondent A

(“... I think the older generation may not be as accepting because in the previous generation, LGBT topics weren't really discussed, it was a minority, so people either didn't pay attention to it or found it strange, but things are different in this era, there are many LGBT individuals now, and a lot of people are paying attention to it. When more people pay attention, it stops being seen as something strange...”, Male Respondent A)

“...老一辈的人他们是会偏向比较保守派的，例如讲我们现在90后00后的会比较可以接受...”, Male Respondent B

(“... the older generation tends to be more conservative, whereas those of us born in the 90s and 00s are generally more accepting...”, Male Respondent B)

“...如果就是 around 40 岁以上的，多数对于这种性别观念是很不开放的就是他们会可能觉得男的就是男的，女的就是女的...”, Male Respondent C

(“... for those around 40 years old and above, most of them are not very open-minded about gender concepts. They tend to believe that a man is a man, and a woman is a woman...”, Male Respondent C)

“...我觉得华人老一辈可能他们会很反感啦，然后年轻一辈可能是保持中立吧，因为 new generation 他们比较开放一点，就是以前的人他们没有滑 social media 那些东西所以我觉得他们会比较保守一点，然后新一代的人他们都有滑 social media 那些他们会看到很多 LGBT 的人，看看下可能就习惯了然后就觉得没有东西很 normal...”, Male Respondent D

(“... I think the older generation of Chinese people might be quite resistant to it, while the younger generation tends to be more neutral. The new generation is more open-minded, the older generation didn't use social media, so they tend to be more conservative, but the new generation is always on social media, where they see a lot of LGBT people, after seeing it enough, they get used to it and start to see it as something normal...”, Male Respondent D)

“...亚洲都是比较属于保守的因为我们从小到大被灌输的那个 family value 都是男跟女结婚生孩子传宗接代，so 传宗接代对华人尤其来讲是最重要的东西...”, Gay Respondent A

(“... Asia is generally more conservative because from a young age, we are taught family values that emphasize a man and a woman getting married, having children, and continuing the family line. For Chinese people especially, carrying on the family lineage is considered the most important thing...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...如果你去问现在比较年轻的 let's say Gen-Z or Gen-Alpha, most of the time 他们都是 OK 的就很像我身边的朋友很多是华人...(作者选择屏蔽一小段叙述)...他们都 OK, but 你讲老一辈的华人因为他们还是有那个传统思想就是男的要跟女的结婚生孩子因为他们要抱孙那些...”, Gay Respondent A

(“... if you ask the younger generation, like Gen Z or Gen Alpha, most of the time they are okay with it, for example, many of my friends are Chinese...(the researcher decided to mute part of the description)... they are all fine with it, but when it comes to the older generation of Chinese people, they still hold traditional beliefs that a man should marry a woman and have children, because they want to have grandchildren...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...我也是觉得 Malaysia 老一辈的人他们是比较 close-minded 的, 但是其实我认为现在的人可以接受的东西越来越多了啦, 因为我发现越年轻的人是越可以接受这样的群体, 但是讲老一辈的人的话我还是觉得他们会比较 close-minded 一点...”, Gay Respondent C

(“... I also feel that the older generation in Malaysia is relatively close-minded, but I think people nowadays are becoming more accepting because I've noticed that the younger someone is, the more they can accept such communities. However, when it comes to the older generation, I still feel that they tend to be more close-minded...”, Gay Respondent C)

“...如果你是比较年轻的话大家还是都蛮 open 的啦, 但是如果你是讲老一辈的话就是可能有些还是蛮 open 的就是那种比较 city, 住在城市的那种长辈, 他也是那种比较会接触到这类型 information 所以他们就是可以比较容易接受, 可是如果是比较少接触 LGBT 咨询的那些长辈的话就可能比较难接受, 就是因为他们不了解也可能不会有人特地去讲因为可能有些人就是比较保守的长辈他们会觉得这是一个错, 或者有些比较极端的人他们会觉得这是一个病, 就是他们不愿意去提起, 就是觉得讲了都会觉得很羞愧这样子...”, Gay Respondent D

(“... if you're younger, most people are quite open-minded, but when it comes to the older generation, some can still be quite open especially those who live in cities, as they are more exposed to this kind of information, making it easier for them to accept. However, for elders who have had little exposure to LGBT topics, it can be harder for them to accept because they don't understand it, and no one may specifically talk to them about it. Some more conservative elders may see it as something wrong, while more extreme ones might even think it's an illness, they don't want to bring it up because they feel ashamed just talking about it...”, Gay Respondent D)

As Heng (1984), Chua (2007), and Song et al. (2015) stated, the Chinese community placed a strong emphasis on respect and relationships, especially family lineage. The deviation from gender norms in the Malaysian Chinese community was more evident in the generational gap. The majority of respondents expressed the same opinion that there was a clear difference in perspectives on the LGBT community between younger and older generations. Older people found it much harder to accept the LGBT community, while



younger generations were generally more accepting and had a broader understanding of gender fluidity. The difference largely depended on age, as the current era was more technology-driven, allowed people easy access to a vast amount of information that they might not have encountered in real life but could learn about through social media daily. In contrast, the older generation grew up in a less technologically advanced era, where exposure to topics like gender fluidity and the LGBT community was limited. Due to this lack of knowledge and awareness, they naturally found it more difficult to accept these concepts.

While age was a significant factor, the most important aspect was the level of understanding of LGBT issues and the opportunity to access relevant information. It was believed that if such information had reached to older generations nowadays, they might also have been able to accept and not have criticized the topic and tried to live with them peacefully without any judgements, but the core of the progress should have been done with neutral stands without any bias against LGBT community. Not only that, but there were also some respondents who expressed the level of acceptance towards deviances would also be influenced by the gender.

“...女性朋友啊就是跟我可以玩到一起的朋友，都是可以接受并且有时候还会一起去磕 cp 这样子...”, Female Respondent A

(“... female friends, those who can have fun with me are generally accepting, and sometimes we even fangirl over boylove couples...”, Female Respondent A)

“...我觉得对我跟身边的女性朋友，差不多同龄的来讲的话是 OK 的但是同龄男生或者是长辈们我觉得可能他们还是有一些保守或者是坚持自己的想法的地方...”, Female Respondent A

(“... I think for me and my female friends of a similar age, it's totally fine, but when it comes to guys of the same age or older generations, I feel like they can still be somewhat conservative or stick to their own beliefs...”, Female Respondent A)

“...然后女生的话会相对来讲比较容易接受 gay，因为他们会觉得是 like 姐妹这样子，因为我本身也是有几个 gay 朋友，因为也是有看过那种直男很抗拒 gay 的存在...”, Female Respondent C

(“... girls tend to be more accepting of gay people because they see them more like sisters, I personally have a few gay friends, and I've also seen straight men who are very resistant to the existence of gay people...”, Female Respondent C)

According to Gulevich et al. (2023), women tended to hold fewer negative attitudes towards homosexual individuals and gay men, whereas straight men exhibited more negative attitudes. The researcher believed that this pattern applied globally, as respondents across the study shared similar perspectives and opinions. Female respondents were generally more likely to accept gay individuals and were more inclined to have gay friends in their lives. This difference might have been attributed to biological and psychological differences between men and women, as well as the extent to which individuals adhered to gender stereotypes (Cadinu & Galdi, 2012). In other words, the more people believed in maintaining existing gender differences, the more likely they are to hold negative attitudes toward homosexual individuals. This concept was reflected in the response of female respondent C, who stated that straight men tended to be highly resistant to gay people.

#### 4.5 Theme 5: Subculture and Styles

A subculture was literally considered a cultural group that existed outside of mainstream society and did not align with the general public's way of thinking or even acting. As Brodowicz (2024c) stated, the LGBT community was part of a subculture and could be identified through their queer appearances, such as tattoos, piercings, clothing styles, and other visible traits. Bai En, as a member of the LGBT community, was recognized by three groups of respondents as visibly belonging to this subculture through his style.

“...他就开始以女生的形象示人，就是他会穿女生的裙子然后画口红，带女生的发箍，戴耳环，当然我不是讲这些东西是女生的啦，男生喜欢的话也是可以...”，Female Respondent A

(“... he started presenting himself with a feminine appearance, he would wear skirts, apply lipstick, wear hairbands, and put on earrings, of course I'm not saying these things are only for women, if a man like them, he can wear them too...”, Female Respondent A)

“...然后他就开始穿裙子，然后还有戴假发那些...”，Female Respondent B

(“... then he started wearing skirts and also a wig...”, Female Respondent B)

“...一开始可能对他的印象就是一个很正常的男生，但是后面的时候就感觉他拍的照片有点奇怪，有时候会自拍...”，Female Respondent D

(“... at first, the impression of him might have been that he was just a straight guy, but later on, his photos started to feel a bit strange, sometimes he would take selfies...”, Female Respondent D)

“...刚开始接触这个人的时候会觉得他就是会拍那种照片或者是讲那种奇奇怪怪的话, 会觉得为什么你要拍这种就是很没有意义的东西...”, Female Respondent D

(“... when I first came across this person, I felt like he would take those kinds of photos or say weird things, I wondered why he would take such meaningless photos...”, Female Respondent D)

“...欸今天这个奇怪的人又做了什么奇怪的事情...”, Female Respondent A

(“... hey, what weird thing did this strange person do today? ...”, Female Respondent A)

“...我知道他是男生但是他比较偏向喜欢穿裙子还有比较喜欢戴假发, 也比较喜欢画一个红红的口红...”, Male Respondent B

(“... I know he is a guy, but he prefers wearing skirts, wearing wigs, and putting on bright red lipstick...”, Male Respondent B)

“...跳舞比较妖娆一点...”, Male Respondent B

(“... his dancing is a bit more flamboyant...”, Male Respondent B)

“...留长发然后穿裙子这样在大众面前...”, Male Respondent C

(“... growing out his hair and wearing skirts in public...”, Male Respondent C)

“...为什么这个人是这样子的? 为什么他讲话是这样? 为什么他是长头发可是明明他是男生然后要穿着裙子? ...”, Male Respondent C

(“... why is this person like this? Why does he talk like that? Why does he have long hair even though he is a guy, and why does he wear skirts? ...”, Male Respondent C)

“...因为他现在有要变性的取向, 他会穿裙扮女生...”, Gay Respondent A

(“... because he now has the intention of transitioning, he wears skirts and dresses like a woman...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...他越来越 like 很喜欢穿裙子这样, 然后那些动作比较女生一点...”, Gay Respondent C

(“... he increasingly likes wearing skirts, and his movements are becoming more feminine...”, Gay Respondent C)

“...他也有讲他要去泰国做手术, 然后又换了名字...”, Gay Respondent A

(“... he also mentioned that he wants to go to Thailand for surgery and has even changed his name...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...我妈妈也是以前有讲过这个 Bryan Wee 不正常...”, Gay Respondent A

(“... my mom also said before that Bryan Wee is not normal...”, Gay Respondent A)

The most prominent responses with similar answers indicated that most respondents felt curious about Bai En's actions, as he intentionally dressed like a girl despite being biologically male. This included wearing dresses, wigs, and lipstick, as well as engaged in

traditionally feminine behaviors. All of these went beyond typical gender norms, as Bai En did not conform to the conventional image of a ‘normal’ man who was expected to appear strong and powerful. These traits made it easy to categorize him as part of a subculture, as the majority of respondents initially perceived his actions as unusual at first glance. Additionally, they demonstrated an awareness of what was considered normal in society versus what was seen as abnormal. Furthermore, they mentioned that Bai En stated his intention to undergo gender-affirming surgery but later refused. This served as an important cue that indicated that Bai En was part of the LGBTQIA community and a member of a subculture.

Around the world, even in countries like Taiwan and Thailand, gender norms were deeply ingrained in people’s minds. Regardless of nationality, the concept of gender was widely shared (Cislaghi & Heise, 2019). Therefore, it was reasonable to believe that if Bai En’s actions had occurred in a foreign country outside of Malaysia, people there would also likely have taken notice and questioned his identity as part of a subculture.

“...以他的风格来讲，就是蛮嫌弃的感觉...”, Female Respondent A  
 (“... I feel quite unappealing of his style...”, Female Respondent A)

“...我觉得是 based on 他的 content 是怎样的，他之前好像有为某一个事件发声还是什么之类的，那种的话我觉得算是挺有意义的，起码他发挥了他当一个公众人物的作用，但是如果是那种废废的 content 我就觉得很浪费时间...”, Female Respondent C  
 (“... I think it depends on his content. It seems like he has spoken out about certain events before, which I find quite meaningful because at the very least, he fulfilled his role as a public figure. But if it’s just meaningless or low-quality content, I feel like it’s a waste of time...”, Female Respondent C)

“...我有一个朋友他刷 insta 的时候他就是有看到那一些 gay 的人他们 post 的照片还是自拍那些东西，他就不能接受很想要去 unfollow 掉这个男生...”, Female Respondent D  
 (“... I have a friend who, when scrolling through Instagram, saw some photos or selfies posted by gay people, he couldn’t accept it and really wanted to unfollow that guy...”, Female Respondent D)

“...他就是坚持走他那个有点奇怪，颠颠的风格，然后我也没有想到另一个网红是像他这个 pattern 就可以做出一些让你想要骂他可是就有点莫名其妙的，就是他从以前到现在只会越来越夸张越来越激进就是走点有点让人难以评价...”, Female Respondent A

“... he just insists on sticking to his somewhat weird and eccentric style. I never expected another influencer with a similar pattern to be able to do things that make you want to criticize him, yet in a way that feels kind of inexplicable. From the past until now, he has only become more exaggerated and extreme, making it hard to even comment on him...”, Female Respondent A)

“...我觉得他很吵啊，我不喜欢的点是他很吵他什么都要拿来讲什么都要拿来拿关注这样子...”，Male Respondent A

“... I think he’s really annoying, what I don’t like about him is that he is always loud and talks about everything just to get attention...”, Male Respondent A)

“...你懂很像那些三姑六婆啊，那种八婆啊这种...”，Male Respondent A

“... you know, kind of like those gossiping aunties or nosy busybodies...”, Male Respondent A)

“...我会有一点点的不是很舒服啦所以我基本上都会选择不看，看的当下我会觉得心里不舒服，会觉得为什么你一个男生你要这样子...”，Male Respondent C

“... I feel a little uncomfortable, so I usually choose not to watch, when I do see it, I feel uneasy and wonder why as a guy, he chooses to be like this...”, Male Respondent C)

“...我觉得会影响到我，我要洗眼睛...”，Male Respondent D

“... I feel like it affects me, I need to wash my eyes...”, Male Respondent D)

“...他的 content 会比较大胆一点，很 controversial，就是他做很多人家不做的东西...”，Gay Respondent A

“... his content is rather bold and controversial, he does things that most people wouldn’t do...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...他就是乱乱来，就是存粹搞笑...”，Gay Respondent A

“... he’s just messing around, purely trying to stir things up...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...只是说白葱他们做的东西会比较让人不舒服咯...”，Gay Respondent B

“... it’s just that what Bai En and the others do tends to make people feel uncomfortable...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...有时候我看到会觉得好像有一点点 too much too over 了，他是太做自己呢还是为了博取流量...”，Gay Respondent B

“... sometimes when I see it, I feel like it’s a bit too much, too over-the-top, is he just being himself, or is he doing it for attention and clout? ...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...他就是那种比较思想开放的人，然后他也是那种很敢做自己的人...”，Gay Respondent D

“... he is the kind of person with a more open mindset, and he is also someone who dares to be himself...”, Gay Respondent D)

“...因为他的情绪和反应太大了...”，Gay Respondent B

“... his emotions and reactions are too exaggerated...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...他的 content 都是那种很夸张的 topic 很夸张的 content...”，Gay Respondent C

“... his content is always about exaggerated topics and overly dramatic content...”, Gay Respondent C)

“...最多 positive 的 comment 就是他做自己，但是没有人讲他的东西 content 很好啦...”，  
Gay Respondent B  
 (“... the most positive comment he gets is that he’s being himself, but no one really says his  
 content is good...”, Gay Respondent B)

In terms of neutrality, the respondents, regardless of gender, all of them disliked Bai En’s style of expression, not because he was a member of the LGBT community, but due to his personality and content style. Many found him annoying because he made loud, disruptive noises, created meaningless content, and sought attention by exploiting trending topics. This behavior was seen as unprofessional and not in line with the ethical standards of a public figure which was supposed to influence the people in a positive trait (Strand, 2021).

Male respondents showed the strongest dislike towards Bai En, as they could not understand why he, as a man, behaved like a gossiping woman, which went against their moral values of what a strong and powerful man should be. Meanwhile, female and gay respondents also expressed dislike, but their concerns were more focused on his meaningless content and overly exaggerated emotions. Additionally, they acknowledged that Bai En dares to be himself, even though many people struggle to accept his form of self-expression. However, this was the only positive comment he received during the focus group discussions.

Overall, Bai En had his own unique style, but it was not one that the majority of people accepted. What made it even worse was that his style not only offended and annoyed people but also led to him being labeled as gossiping and uncontrollable. This indirectly affected how others perceived LGBT or gay individuals.

#### **4.6 Theme 6: Social Media Audience’s Patterns and Engagement**

Social media audience patterns could actually define the characteristics of a particular content piece, determining whether it was popular, unpopular, preferred, or unpreferred based on users’ usage (Rijitha, 2021). Factors such as platform usage, consumption time, age demographics, and preferred topics all influenced social media

engagement between content and users. Additionally, user actions such as likes, comments, and shares played a significant role in the dissemination of content, depending on the type of media, whether videos, images, or text, attracted engagement (Mishnick & Wise, 2024). Social media algorithms also played a crucial role, as platforms adapted to user-generated content and pushed relevant content based on user preferences, often using engaging clickbait or headlines. All these patterns and engagement metrics helped define users' preferences toward content or specific social media pages (Chalke & Mishra, 2023).

“...我看到他的时候通常是推送给我的，完全就是大数据自然推送我才会看到他这个东西...”，Female Respondent A

(“... I usually see him because he is recommended to me through the algorithm, it's entirely due to big data automatically pushing his content to me...”, Female Respondent A)

“...有时候会刷到他的 video 还是什么之类的就会看咯...”，Female Respondent C

(“... sometimes when I come across his videos or something similar, I'll watch them...”, Female Respondent C)

“...我的观点有分成几种，第一就是网红类的 influencer，就好像 Bryan Wee，另一种是明星类的 influencer 那个就好像可能是歌手，网红类的话多数我都是能不看就不看，好像歌手的话有些就是当作欣赏他的作品来看...”，Male Respondent C

(“... I have different perspectives on this. First, there are influencer-type internet celebrities like Bryan Wee. The other type is celebrity influencers, such as singers. For internet influencers, I usually avoid watching them if I can. But for singers, I sometimes watch their content just to appreciate their work...”, Male Respondent C)

“...我是喜欢看就看，不喜欢看就不看...”，Male Respondent B

(“... if I like it, I'll watch it, if I don't, I won't...”, Male Respondent B)

“...本身是没有 follow 白嫖可是还是会刷得到...”，Male Respondent C

(“... I don't follow Bai En, but I still come across his content...”, Male Respondent C)

“...有刷到的话会看咯，没有刷到我就会不会特地去看他的...”，Male Respondent D

(“... if I come across it, I'll watch it, if I don't, I won't purposely look for his content...”, Male Respondent D)

“...很经常会看到，就是其他人 share 就会看到...”，Gay Respondent D

(“... I see him quite often because other people share it...”, Gay Respondent D)

Based on the references above, none of the respondents intentionally or sincerely searched for his content on social media. Nonetheless, all respondents came across his content through social media algorithms. This might have been due to shared demographics,

the same region, the same ethnicity, or similar content preferences, leading the algorithm to naturally recommended Bai En's content. However, after encountering his content, the majority of respondents, regardless of gender, first examined the caption of the thumbnail of the video before deciding whether to continue watching or scroll past it.

“...我基本上是看一下他的文案看封面然后要么点进去看 2 秒我就会退出来...”, Female Respondent A

(“... I usually just glance at his captions and thumbnail, and if I click on the content, I'll exit after watching for about two seconds...”, Female Respondent A)

“...低级的那种就会直接滑掉...”, Female Respondent B

(“... I just scroll past the low-quality ones right away...”, Female Respondent B)

“...他有一些 video leh 我看到前面 3 秒, 刷掉...”, Female Respondent D

(“... for some of his videos, I watch the first three seconds and then scroll away...”, Female Respondent D)

“...封面你给我看到 Adeline 的我就刷掉了...”, Female Respondent D

(“... if I see Adeline on the cover, I just scroll past it...”, Female Respondent D)

“...不管做什么 video 他的 comment 那边还是会有很多人在骂他...”, Female Respondent C

(“... no matter what kind of video he makes, there are always a lot of people in the comments criticizing him...”, Female Respondent C)

“...我其实是多数是朋友来找我讨论, 就可能某一次他被警察抓, 然后我朋友就会可能会跟我讲这些东西...”, Male Respondent C

(“... most of the time, it's my friends who bring it up for discussion, for example, if he gets arrested by the police, my friends might talk to me about it...”, Male Respondent C)

“...我是怎样去知道这些东西真的是透过我身边的 gay 朋友跟我讲的...”, Male Respondent A

(“... the way I find out about these things is really through my gay friends telling me...”, Male Respondent A)

“...我本身就不是很喜欢看她的 content...”, Gay Respondent C

(“... I personally don't really like watching his content...”, Gay Respondent C)

“...我身边的 LGBT 朋友也是会跟我们一起讨论关于这个人的 video or everything, 我都会参与讨论但是我都是听的那个, 很少给予评论...”, Gay Respondent B

(“... my LGBT friends also discuss this person's videos and other things with us, I join the discussions, but I mostly just listen and rarely give my own opinions...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...当作是看一种娱乐影片就好...”, Gay Respondent D

(“... I just treat it as watching an entertainment video...”, Gay Respondent D)



“...那些可能不喜欢的人也是会 share, 因为他们就是要跟其他人一起骂那个 content creator 这样子...”, Gay Respondent D  
 (“... even those who don’t like him will share his content because they want to criticize the content creator together with others...”, Gay Respondent D)

As mentioned above, it was evident that none of the respondents genuinely enjoyed watching Bai En’s content. The reasons varied, some found the captions low-quality, some considered the content itself lacking in quality, some disliked his collaboration with other public figures, and some simply had no interest in his content at all. Most respondents became aware of Bai En through their friends. During discussions about him, whether about his content, videos, personality, or even Bai En himself, they perceived him as comedic, a source of entertainment, or simply gossip material. Considering all these aspects, Bai En did not project a positive image to the public. Moreover, none of the 14 respondents reported gaining any valuable knowledge from his content, labeling it as purely entertainment, unhealthy, and widely criticized. Based on their social media behavior and engagement with Bai En’s content, they demonstrated a clear rejection of his presence online, further amplifying the bias against him.

#### **4.7 Theme 7: Content Authenticity or Performance**

The authenticity and performance of Bai En’s content were closely intertwined with the concept of the culture industry. His portrayal could either be influenced by the industry or a genuine reflection of his identity. People tended to prefer authentic content from in-person content over deceptive social media content (Smith et al., 2019), making the performance of a public figure crucial in influencing their followers. Whether he conveyed positive and genuine emotions or negative and fabricated appearances significantly impacted audience perception.

“...首先我的想法是如果他真的为了流量为了赚钱为了红的话, 可以做到这样子, 那我觉得他是蛮成功的...”, Female Respondent A

(“... first of all, my opinion is that if he is doing all this just for attention, money, and fame, and he actually achieves it, then I think he is quite successful...”, Female Respondent A)

“...一开始我觉得他也是为了博流量才这样子做，可是如果问我认为他是不是真的 gay 的话我觉得应该是...”, Female Respondent A

(“... at first, I though he was doing this just to gain attention, but if you ask me whether I think he is truly gay, I will say he probably is...”, Female Respondent A)

“...因为据我自己的经验我看到我身边的 gay 朋友表现出来的那个感觉，感觉上是啦...”, Female Respondent B

(“... based on my own experience and the way my gay friends around me express themselves, it seems like he is...”, Female Respondent B)

“...我觉得他就是，他自己本身就是这样子...”, Female Respondent C

(“... I think he is just like that by nature...”, Female Respondent C)

“...我觉得是他真的性取向...”, Female Respondent D

(“... I think it's really his sexual orientation...”, Female Respondent D)

“...我不觉得会有任何一个 straight 的男孩子会特地去演 gay for 这样长的一段时间啦，所以我后来就觉得他可能真的是 gay...”, Male Respondent A

(“... I don't think any straight guy would intentionally pretend to be gay for such a long time, so eventually, I started to believe that he might actually be gay...”, Male Respondent A)

“...比较不象是剧本可是我也不能讲 100%确定...”, Male Respondent C

(“... it doesn't really seem scripted, but I can't say I'm 100% sure...”, Male Respondent C)

“...他有讲他要去泰国做手术，然后有换了名字，那个时候就觉得他是真正是 gay，以前可能他还不知道所以他乱来，我看他应该也不知道他在做着什么，但是现在我知道他真正是想要去变性的这个意思...”, Gay Respondent A

(“... he said he wanted to go Thailand for surgery and even changed his name, at the moment, I felt that he was truly gay, maybe in the past, he didn't know himself well and was just messing around. I think he might not have even known what he was doing before, but now I understand that he genuinely wants to transition...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...可是之后当他讲他要去泰国变性的时候，他好像越来越真正的展示他自己的性取向了...”, Gay Respondent C

(“... when he said he wanted to go to Thailand for gender transition, it seemed like he was gradually showing his true sexual orientation...”, Gay Respondent C)

“...我觉得她应该是真的吧，就应该不是剧本，我觉得他应该就是真正是想要找男朋友，就这真的是他的性取向...”, Gay Respondent D

(“... I think he is probably real and not just acting, I believe he genuinely wants to find a boyfriend, and this is truly his sexual orientation...”, Gay Respondent D)

All of the female respondents, along with over half of the male and gay respondents, genuinely believed that Bai En was a real LGBT figure. This was due to his prominent feminine identity, gestures, actions, intention to undergo transition surgery, and his consistent

demonstration of femininity over a long period. Additionally, his characteristics aligned with what the respondents perceived as gay traits, such as his desire to find a boyfriend, changing his name to a feminine one, and expressing feminine emotions.

“...我觉得他没有一个方面看到像女孩子，我只是觉得他是故意弄出来的因为真正的 gay 不是这样子的...”，Male Respondent D

(“... I don't think he looks like a girl in any way, I just feel like he's doing it on purpose because real gay people aren't like that...”, Male Respondent D)

“...我觉得是假的，因为我觉得真正的 gay 他们的肢体动作，手势或者他的那个表情都不是这样子的，不应该是那么大动作，不会很象特地想要表达出来，他就比较大动作，就很像特地表达出来他很 gay 这样子，感觉上很故意...”，Male Respondent D

(“... I think it's fake because in my opinion, real gay people don't act like that in terms of body movements, gestures, or facial expressions. They don't exaggerate their actions or deliberately try to express it, but he, on the other hand, has exaggerated movements, as if he's intentionally trying to show how 'gay' he is. It feels very forced...”, Male Respondent D)

“...因为 gay 通常不会留长发的，他这种不算 gay，比较算是一种心理病，觉得自己是女孩子...”，Male Respondent D

(“... because gay men usually don't have long hair, what he has isn't really bring gay, it's more like a psychological condition where he thinks he's a woman...”, Male Respondent D)

“...但是我觉得他的 video 性格上很不像是以 LGBT 代表...”，Gay Respondent B

(“... but I think his videos and personality don't really represent the LGBT community...”, Gay Respondent B)

However, a few respondents firmly believed that Bai En was not a real LGBT member due to his exaggerated appearance, over-the-top gestures, and the fact that real gay individuals do not excessively showcase their identity, even where their sexual orientation is already known. He appeared to be overly deliberate in portraying himself as gay. Moreover, gay respondent B, who was also a member of the LGBT community, did not genuinely feel that Bai En was authentically gay. As a social media influencer, much of his content included artificial elements designed to attract attention. These actions, according to gay respondent B, went against the essence of being gay, as they were overly exaggerated to the point of seeming artificial rather than natural.

“...他的动作有争议性吧，不能讲是好的可是就是会引起人们的注意...”，Female Respondent B

“... his actions are controversial, they can't exactly be considered good, but they do attract people's attention...”, Female Respondent B)

“...我觉得他很 fake, 他讲要去泰国做手术变成女孩子结果他又回来讲我突然间害怕...”, Male Respondent D

“... I think he's very fake, he said he wanted to go to Thailand for surgery to become a woman, but then he came back and said he suddenly got scared...”, Male Respondent D)

“...LGBT 只是其中一个小的看点罢了更多的是他很厉害去制造话题引起流量...”, Male Respondent C

“... LGBT is just a small part of it, the bigger aspect is that he is very skilled at creating topics and attracting attention...”, Male Respondent C)

“...我本人身为其中一个 LGBT 的一个人物, 我不会欣赏, 但是我不会反对, 只是做你自己就好了...”, Gay Respondent B

“... as someone who is also part of the LGBT community, I don't particularly appreciate it, but I don't oppose it either, just be yourself, and that's enough...”, Gay Respondent B)

“...我觉得他的 video 没有给我 inspiration, 因为我会那他的跟外国的比较, 他们会 provide 很多他们的 daily life 或者是一些知识 about LGBT 但是白嫖不会, 我觉得白嫖的 content 不是那种知识的角度去分享的...”, Gay Respondent A

“... I don't find his videos inspiring because I compare them to foreign content creators who share a lot about their daily lives or provide knowledge about LGBT topics, but Bai En doesn't do that, I feel like his content isn't shared from an educational perspective...”, Gay Respondent A)

In the context of performance, there was more negative feedback regarding Bai En's content. Critics felt that his content appeared fake, that he used trending topics to grab attention, and that he even exploited the idea of transition surgery as a hook for his content. Additionally, his exaggerated actions and scripted performances were seen as exploiting the LGBT community. Many also believed that his content lacked value, as it did not provide any meaningful or educational information.

“...我觉得他有影响别人, 算是一个相互影响吧...”, Female Respondent B

“... I think he does influence others, it's more of a mutual influence...”, Female Respondent B)

“...我觉得他的 video 有 value, 以前没有, 现在他也是有搞笑就是有时觉得他的梗也蛮 OK 的, 帮助人的那个 intention 有看到, 所以我觉得那个 value 有...”, Gay Respondent A

“... I think his videos have some value. He doesn't before, but now he does, he still tries to be funny and sometimes I found his jokes quite okay, and his intention to help people, so I found there's value there...”, Gay Respondent A)

“...他有一个 video 跟那些人讲什么 ‘你们这样已经算是网络霸凌了’ 之类的，我觉得那个时候他有为那些 LGBT 发声到...”，Gay Respondent C  
 (“... he had a video where he told people something like, ‘what you’re doing is already considered cyberbullying’, I think at that moment, he was speaking up for the LGBT community...”, Gay Respondent C)

But eventually, there were still a few positive impacts noted by respondents. Some stated that Bai En had helped the LGBT community by standing up against cyberbullying, influencing people through some of his content, and showing improvement from the past to the present. In the context of Malaysia’s cyberspace, there were many opportunities and categories for self-expression, and freedom of speech was relatively well-adapted in the country. As an LGBT figure, Bai En had the ability to express himself through feminine appearances. He should have taken advantage of this privilege to spread positive information about the LGBT community to the public, rather than consistently portraying himself as a comedic figure without meaningful or educational content. However, this had been Bai En’s style for the past 10 years. People hold different perspectives on him, and he remains a certified controversial figure.

## **Chapter 5     Discussions and Conclusion**

### **5.0 Social Media Influencer Bai En between Gayness, Male Feminization, and Audience**

Brambilla et al. (2013) suggested that the more exposure individuals had to the LGBT community, the easier it was to identify someone as LGBT. Almost all respondents reported having gay friends or being familiar with LGBT individuals, which enhanced their ability to recognize gay people around them. The majority of the data collected suggested that audiences believed Bai En's sexual orientation was genuine, as he presented it publicly. However, his way of expressing his true identity was perceived as overly exaggerated, triggering strong reactions from online audiences. Evidence from respondents' responses indicated that while Bai En's gender nonconformity evoked curiosity and respect, many respondents, regardless of gender, including gay respondents, found it difficult to relate to him.

His gender nonconformity had also sparked moral panic within society, reinforcing stereotypes about the LGBT community and leading to resistance, denial, and even hostility toward the broader LGBT population. Although most respondents believed Bai En was being himself, his lack of educational or informative content about the LGBT community prevented him from positively impressing audiences, instead contributing to negative beliefs. It was worth mentioning that female respondents were generally more accepting of the LGBT community and their feminine expressions, such as those displayed by Bai En in public. This aligned with the idea that gay individuals tended to have more female friends than male friends due to shared sexual orientation and common interests. As Steffens & Wagner (2004) stated, women were more likely to accept the LGBT community compared to men.

However, in the findings chapter, the researcher discovered that some respondents still struggled to accept the LGBT community, particularly due to certain characteristics that challenged traditional gender norms and contributed to moral panic. Using Bai En as a case study, the research found that his actions, such as feminine gestures, speaking in a high-pitched voice, frequent screaming, and exaggerated body movements, created a strong sense of gender nonconformity among respondents. Their reactions indicated that they hoped people like Bai En, or gay individuals who expressed themselves in a similar manner, would not interfere with their lives, as they found it difficult to accept such personalities in their social circles.

Regarding Bai En's characteristics, the researcher argued that while Bai En was sexually attracted to men, similar to how women typically fell in love with men, his presentation aligned more with male feminization than traditional notions of gayness. One of the most prominent elements was his long hair. A discussion on Quora (2025) that posted 10 years ago about gay men's hair length found that 99.9% of gay men have short hair rather than long hair, cited various reasons, including patriarchal norms that associated men with short hair, a preference among some gay men to appear more masculine, and the perception that long hair did not necessarily enhance femininity.

Furthermore, Phua (2002) stated that gay men were more likely to exhibit masculinity rather than femininity in their gestures, body size, facial expressions and so on. Skidmore et al. (2006) also suggested that gay men were generally more attracted to strong, masculine partners, as masculinity was often perceived as more appealing within the gay community. Based on this, the researcher believed that most gay men were unlikely to have long hair, as it might have made it harder to attract partners with the same sexual orientation. Therefore, having a short hairstyle might have provided a greater opportunity for forming romantic connections within the LGBT community.

On the other hand, some respondents mentioned that they had gay friends, but these individuals did not behave as energetically or dramatically as Bai En. Instead, they presented themselves a ‘normal’ male who did not overly emphasize their LGBT identity. They spoke softly and calmly, which contrasted with Bai En’s highly expressive mannerisms. As a result, when these respondents saw Bai En’s exaggerated self-expression, they felt a sense of rejection and denial, distanced themselves from LGBT individuals who shared similar traits with him. Within the gay respondent group, one participant’s expressed hope that public would not use Bai En as the standard representation of the LGBT community. Beyond his behavior, Bai En’s choice of clothing also triggered strong reactions from respondents. His preference for traditionally feminine attire, such as skirts, high heels, bra tops, and hairbands, led some respondents to perceive him as not fully male or female, further reinforcing their discomfort with his gender nonconformity.

### **5.1 Research Question One**

Based on the findings, research question one was fully addressed by the respondents, as most of them were familiar with Bai En’s content and had followed him for nearly a decade. The majority recognized Bai En as part of the LGBT community mainly due to his visibly feminine traits, such as wearing dresses, applying makeup, and using soft, graceful gestures. In Malaysia, these characteristics were widely associated with LGBT expression. However, opinions among respondents varied. Those from the younger generation had been born in the 1990s to 2000s were generally more open-minded and accepting of LGBT individuals like Bai En. They believed he was genuinely expressing himself and had maintained a consistent identity over the years. In the findings, most respondents also described Bai En as a non-mainstream figure, identifying his femininity through his voices, appearance, and feminine gestures. Unlike any LGBT individuals who may struggled with self-acceptance or felt the need to conform to heterosexual norms (Cheves, 2023), Bai En’s



public expression of his identity reflected the final stage of personal acceptance (Devor, 2004). This openness allowed audiences to clearly recognize his gender orientation.

On the other hand, some still thought he might have been leveraging the LGBT label for attention or popularity. Despite these differing views, both groups did not deny his role as an LGBT social media figure in Malaysia, they simply perceived him through different lenses. Meanwhile, respondents referenced the older generation, typically those born in the 1970s and 1980s, as more conservative. Many in this age group found it difficult to accept non-traditional gender identities and expressed discomfort or disapproval, which reflected a broader pattern of ongoing societal resistance. In the end, beliefs about Bai En as an LGBT influencer appeared relatively balanced. While some people remained hesitant to accept him fully, they didn't actively reject him either. Instead, they tended to view him more an entertainer or part of a subculture, someone who provided comedic or dramatic content, rather than a serious advocate for LGBT representation.

## **5.2 Research Question Two**

The reasons Malaysian Chinese youths watched Bai En's content were fairly consistent across responses. Most did not actively seek out his videos, instead, they encountered Bai En through social media algorithms, which automatically suggested trending or relevant content. When the content was pushed to them, some respondents paused and watched, especially if the topic seemed interesting or carried some form of social value. If not, and the video appeared to be purely for gossip or annoying information, they tended to scroll past it quickly. Conversely, others might still have enjoyed his videos even if they didn't intend to watch them initially. His entertaining, humorous, and dramatic content appealed to those who were looking for light-hearted material, even if it lacks educational or informative value.

It's also worth noting that some of Bai En's video featured collaborations with controversial or trending public figures in Malaysia, such as Adeline and Alice. These videos often received higher viewership than his solo content because they sparked curiosity and went viral. However, this interest didn't necessarily translate into support, viewers are more drawn to the spectacle than the message.

Overall, respondents saw Bai En's content as more focused on entertainment and gossip than on LGBT awareness or advocacy. Bai En's presence on digital platforms also reflected how the culture industry commodified subcultural groups for mainstream consumption (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944). As a social media influencer, his overly dramatic content might have been part of a larger strategy to attract visibility and profit. This supported the idea that audiences were not necessarily drawn to his identity, but rather to his exaggerated performance, which blended entertainment with commercialization. While he was recognized as an LGBT influencer, most views were more interested in his attention-grabbing content than in his identity. As such, his presence online was largely seen as amusing or controversial rather than informative or inspiring.

### **5.3 Culture Industry and Resistance**

As Devor (2004) mentioned, the process of discovering oneself was not considered mainstream, as society followed two processes, which were self-realization, followed by acknowledgement, synthesis, and acceptance. The process of confirming a person as queer needed to be compared with those considered the norm, such as gender (Valentine & Skelton, 2003). There were many gay individuals who were afraid to come out due to lack of self-acceptance regarding their true gender identity and sexual orientation (Cheves, 2023). They may try to present themselves as part of the heterosexual community by engaging in actions that contradicted their true feelings such as marrying a woman to appear more 'normal'.

Since most respondents believed Bai En was expressing his real identity, it was important to acknowledge that, as a social media influencer, he could not avoid incorporating paid advertisements and sponsored content into his videos and profile. At times, his overly energetic and exaggerated behavior was believed to be intentional, primarily to attract attention and generate profit. However, the power of the culture industry enabled the commodification of subcultural groups, such as the LGBT community, made it a pathway for these groups to be normalized in everyday life through continuous exposure and attention-grabbing tactics.

In Bai En's case, his eccentric and exaggerated persona had made him one of the most recognizable figures representing Malaysia's Chinese LGBT community. This was not only because he presented himself as gay but also because of his status as a social media influencer. Many respondents mentioned that they first encountered Bai En around ten years ago, when he had already established his signature energetic and gender-nonconforming style. His current persona is consistent with how he presented himself back then. Initially, some questioned whether his behavior was merely an act or part of a scripted persona. However, after witnessing his consistent portrayal of this identity for over a decade, many concluded that no one would willingly maintain a persona for such a long period if it did not align with their true sexual orientation and identity. Therefore, they determined that Bai En is indeed an authentic member of the LGBT community.

From the perspective of the culture industry, the commercialization and commodification of cultural elements exist primarily to generate profit and financial gain as mentioned before. In the era of social media, the culture industry had become an essential component of digital content because visibility and engagement drove revenue. As a result, social media platforms were saturated with advertisements and business-oriented content, and subcultures, including LGBT culture, were inevitably involved in this process. For

example, in Bai En's case, without the support of the culture industry, he might not have been able to confidently present himself as a feminine man to the public and gain widespread recognition, ultimately helping people become more familiar with the LGBT community.

His commitment to portraying a gay identity for over a decade had solidified public value of him as an authentic LGBT individual. Additionally, it indirectly proved that despite society's resistance to subcultures, Bai En, as a subcultural figure, did not conform to the dominant culture by rejecting subcultures. Instead, he persisted in expressing his subcultural identity, leveraging the culture industry to spread awareness of the LGBT community across digital platforms, making it more visible and familiar to the public.

#### **5.4 Digital Subculture**

Advertising on social media platforms had experienced significant growth (Knoll, 2016). In this context, businesses sought effective strategies to optimize online advertising and leverage social media as a primary advertising channel (Munoz-Leiva et al., 2019). The success of an advertisement might have depended on various factors, including audience perception of the brand, style, identity, or even the advertisement's ambassador (Vera & Espinosa, 2019). According to Prendergast et al. (2009), the platform itself could influence consumer reactions, as each social media site had unique characteristics. While traditional online advertising typically used banner ads, social media advertising often blended seamlessly with user-generated content, like nowadays there were generally increasing amounts of social media influencers as the audiences of social media preferred the ambassador's trend. Therefore, it was valuable to explore whether users experienced distractions when leaving social media and how this might have affected their overall perception of advertisements within the platform (Jung et al., 2016).

Subcultures were organized around various elements, including sexual orientation (Solomon, 2004). However, marketing studies often placed excessive focus on brands and commodities, implying that subcultures revolved entirely around them. This viewpoint failed to consider the core reasons behind the formation of subcultures, along with their historical and symbolic importance. Schouten & McAlexander (1995) argue that as long as a group shared common values, a subculture of consumption could form around any consumption activity and actively contributed to market and product development.

As some respondents mentioned, they did not reject the LGBT community as part of society. This indirectly suggested that they accepted LGBT individuals as representatives in mainstream advertisements, just like any other group in society. Furthermore, whether individuals chose to accept or reject the LGBT community, they were still participated in shaping a new culture based on the dominant culture and without resistance. Therefore, Elliott & Davies (2006) suggested that contemporary subcultures of consumption were defined more by their social structures rather than by resistance to mainstream culture.

Back to Bai En's case, he was considered a well-known LGBT social media influencer within the Malaysian Chinese community. His content on Facebook consistently generated high traffic and engagement. Even those who did not follow his social media pages still recognized him through family and friends. This presented a business opportunity where social media platforms could leverage his online presence to promote online activities. Celebrity endorsements in advertisements would impact consumers' purchasing decisions (Mwendwa & K. Mberia, 2014), and Bai En himself acted as a walking advertisement, although he was often criticized and scrutinized, his presence alone ensured sustained traffic, additionally, his gender identity is a part of subculture, making him a unique figure (Saarinen, 2022). Moreover, he excellend at generating viral topics, which as confirmed by most respondents, aligned with the demands of digital popular culture.

Instead, he disseminated subculture, indirectly defining his own social status without aggressively proving that the LGBT community is capable of thriving. Bai En was in a way, creating and shaping the LGBT community in Malaysia with his unique style. He was also largely supported by gay respondents, who appreciated his role in promoting subculture. However, the content and methods he uses might have sparked mixed reactions from netizens. Bai En's style was often viewed primarily as entertainment rather than a reflection of his identity as an LGBT influencer. Many respondents found his presence amusing or attention-grabbing on social media but paid little attention to the deeper meaning behind his feminine gestures or self-expression. This focus on surface-level humor rather than identity had caused a blurring of his role within the broader subcultural phenomenon, leading to uncertainty about whether he represented LGBT advocacy or simply digital entertainment.

### **5.5 Outcomes of Subculture's symbolization of Bai En in Digital Spaces**

As a media practitioner, professional ethics were essential as they ensured the authenticity of information and maintained social harmony. One of the important ethical issues for influencers was to be involved in disclosing their commercial relationships with brands (Eagle et al, 2020). If such relationships were not disclosed, followers often assumed the content was unbiased, blurring the boundary between paid promotions and organic content. This lack of transparency could lead to deceptive practices, as audiences may have been unaware of the commercial nature of the content. However, Bai En's content was not criticized by respondents for misleading audiences through sponsored content. Therefore, the researcher believed that, in terms of honesty and transparency, Bai En adheres to ethical standards.

Bai En had been criticized by all respondents for having a negative impact on his audience, especially on underage viewers, who were more easily influenced by his over exaggerated actions in social media cyberspace. There were two main perspectives from

respondents regarding Bai En, some believed he was admirable for being true to himself where he dared to dress up in a nonconforming way while others thought he took it too far. It was notable that out of Bai En's 10 videos, 9 featured highly energetic emotions, not outright screaming, but bordering on it. Additionally, he often discussed trending topics from unusual perspectives, such as the Adeline and Alice case, where they frequently failed to pay for their purchases. In response, Bai En collaborated with them and publicly offered to pay on their behalf. His overly exaggerated actions seemed to set a standard for younger audiences, leading them to imitate and mock him, whether by mimicking his high-pitched speech, his use of makeup, or his behavior. This could result in a negative social phenomenon, as these individuals did not truly understand LGBT issues but merely treated them as entertainment for ridicule.

Bai En's content lacked educational value, instead prioritizing trends and viral topics to generate traffic. For example, the topic of plastic surgery often involves moral considerations. Advertisements promoting plastic surgery were intended to help people feel more confident through external enhancements (Griffiths & Mullock, 2017). However, if ethical standards were neglected, such promotions could become harmful. For instance, using insults about others' appearances to pressure them into undergoing surgery to avoid social criticism. While both approaches promoted plastic surgery, their underlying messages were vastly different (Kauffmann & Vaiciunaite, 2024).

Moreover, marketing materials had to avoid using gender stereotypes that could harm or offend a large audience (Kuzminov, 2023). When it came to Bai En, the researcher believed he showed little concern for the potential harm he might have caused to society, as he always acted according to his own desires, often making others feel uncomfortable. Since social media was a rapidly evolving digital space, Bai En's exaggerated content easily

reached a broad audience, triggering moral panics within the community and seriously violating the ethical standards of digital platforms.

The lack of moral considerations could significantly impact audiences, especially younger individuals who were more susceptible to developing anxiety, depression, or body image issues due to the way social media was structured (Popescu, 2023). This could ultimately lead to mental health problems, as they tended to compare themselves with the people they saw online. Bai En's failure to promote positive moral values to the public might have contributed to potential social issues in the future, as younger audiences might have struggled to differentiate between what was appropriate and what was not.

### **5.6 Audience Reception in Neutrality**

According to Pelsy (2021), the elder LGBT community received less recognition in queer culture, as the term was more commonly used by younger generations to describe to entire LGBT group. This could be due to lack of digital media in the past and limited exposure to LGBT topics, whereas today, there was significantly more visibility. In the findings, respondents expressed that older generations, such as those from their parents' or grandparents' era, were more likely to reject the LGBT community, viewing it as 'queer' and contrary to traditional gender norms.

As mentioned in the literature review, older generations found it harder to accept LGBT culture as part of the mainstream, which led to a lack of neutrality in cultural perspectives. According to Ye (2018), the difficulty older generations had in accepting LGBT individuals and their tendency to discriminate was mainly caused by a lack of social embeddedness. Kuyper & Fokkema (2010) also found that older LGBT individuals had fewer opportunities to meet other LGBT people due to limited social exposure and discussion. This lack of interaction led the heterosexual members of older generations to have little



exposure to the homosexual community, resulting in social exclusion and the formation of stereotypes that portrayed LGBT individuals as unusual and subject to discrimination.

In contrast, younger generations who were the largest group in the world today were generally more accepting of LGBT culture and holding a more neutral beliefs because they were more connected to and engaged with the community. Their familiarity with LGBT lives and experiences fostered understanding and acceptance. Some respondents mentioned that they had gay friends, and they felt that these friends were often more in tune with what girls thought and how they behaved, which made them feel understood by their gay friends. However, Bai En's portrayal had raised concerns about potential stereotyping within the LGBT community. Not all gay social media influencers shared Bai En's style, and not many openly exposed themselves on screen in an exaggerated way. Even within the gay community, some feared that the public might use Bai En as a standard representation of all gay individuals, assuming that all gay people were like him, which could lead to annoyance and misrepresentation.

Among homosexual respondents, some assumed that Bai En would behave like their gay friends which adapted soft-spoken, fashionable, and elegantly expressive traits. However, they felt that Bai En's current demeanor did not align with these expectations. Instead of being attractively feminine, they perceived his behavior as overly exaggerated, almost like that of a 'crazy woman'. Some respondents also expressed that makeup was not exclusively for women and that men who were interested should be able to explore it as well. However, they believed that Bai En takes things that were generally acceptable and pushed them to an extreme, making them seemed annoying or even offensive due to his exaggerated actions and characteristics.

Despite receiving heavy criticism, Bai En continued to maintain his personal style. Nonetheless, respondents acknowledged that he had the right to express himself as he wished.

Their stance remained clear, “we observed, we saw, we might not have understood, but we respected, as long as society remained peaceful.”. Through conversations with all the respondents, it became clear that some were not very vocal in expressing their thoughts about Bai En. The researcher believed that these individuals may have opinions but chose not to share them openly, possibly due to the sensitive nature of the topic in Malaysia or for personal reasons. Nonetheless, the overall tone of the discussions remained neutral throughout.

## **5.7 Research Contributions**

### **5.7.1 Empirical Research Contributions**

In this research, the empirical contribution lay in offering new insights drawn from real-life contexts (Sebrechts et al., 2019). The findings highlighted that Bai En was not just an online personality but a social phenomenon in Malaysia. Unlike how people typically defined what was considered ‘normal’, Bai En stood out as an extraordinary figure in the digital space. Through the combination of academic literature and firsthand responses from interview participants, the study clearly demonstrated that Bai En represented a real and recognized social presence. It also shed light on how Malaysian Chinese youth perceived and responded to him, revealing deeper social beliefs and attitudes toward gender expression and LGBT representation in the country.

### **5.7.2 Theoretical Research Contributions**

In terms of theoretical contribution, the entire research applied existing theories such as the culture industry, moral panics, and hegemony to the research objectives, using Bai En as the case study. The findings challenged these established theories, refining them by incorporating elements of subcultures, the LGBT

community, and gender norms. Adorno and Horkheimer's ideas on the culture industry did not originally cover the context of online social media and influences. However, the research demonstrated that Bai En could be understood as a product of the culture industry within the online community, provided an important theoretical contribution. Additionally, the concept of moral panics helped to better understand how the Malaysian public reacted to gender-nonconforming figures like Bai En, contributed to the discourse on male feminization in conservative societies.

### **5.8 Recommendations for Future Research**

This research focused on the sexual orientation of the respondents, categorizing them into female, male, and gay participants. Their response provided expected answers that effectively addressed the research questions and met the research objectives. For future research on LGBT-related topics, it was recommended that focus groups were formed based on gender, without considering sexual orientation. This approach would allow for more in-depth discussions among individuals of the same gender but with different sexual orientations, potentially offering additional layers of insight or even unexpected responses.

### **5.9 Conclusion**

This research had provided a comprehensive understanding of subcultures and their interconnection with key theoretical concepts such as hegemony, the culture industry, moral panic, and male feminization. These theories were deeply intertwined and collectively essential to shaping the framework of this study. The selected case study, Bai En clearly illustrated the dynamics of male feminization, gender nonconformity, and the challenges to traditional gender norms, as well as the effects of stereotyping and the growing acceptance of younger generations in Malaysia. importantly, this research marked the first time Bai En was discussed in a university project, opening the door for future academic discourse on the

LGBT community in Malaysia. Through this research, it was evident that LGBT topics were becoming increasingly familiar to the Malaysian public, contributed to a gradual shift toward broader awareness and acceptance. This study not only highlighted the factors influencing this progress but also explored the impact of digital visibility on the perception of LGBT identities and the diverse expressions of gender beyond conventional norms.

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## APPENDIX A: TURNITIN REPORT

### FYP II Turnitin Checking

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

<b>1</b> %	<b>1</b> %	<b>0</b> %	<b>1</b> %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

<b>1</b>	Submitted to University of Warwick Student Paper	<1 %
<b>2</b>	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1 %
<b>3</b>	Submitted to Higher Education Commission Pakistan Student Paper	<1 %
<b>4</b>	www.researchgate.net Internet Source	<1 %
<b>5</b>	soax.com Internet Source	<1 %
<b>6</b>	Submitted to University of Hertfordshire Student Paper	<1 %
<b>7</b>	Submitted to University of the West Indies Student Paper	<1 %
<b>8</b>	aoyama.edublogs.org Internet Source	<1 %
<b>9</b>	Darja Grigoreva, Bence Szaszko. "Minority stress and psychological well-being in queer	<1 %

APPENDIX B: CONSULTATION FORM

APPENDIX II: FYP MEETINGS WITH SUPERVISOR

Note:  
Incorporation of Blended Learning for UAMJ3073 and UAMJ3083

As per the DJR meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> May, Wednesday, after FBO in P108, Block P, HOD Ms. Michelle has informed the department staff that DJR has nominated UAMJ3073 FYP 1 and UAMJ3083 FYP 2 to incorporate Blended Learning (OTL - Online Teaching and Learning) with effect June 2024 Trimester and onwards.

To implement OTL for UAMJ3073 FYP 1 and UAMJ3083 FYP 2, the supervisors can now arrange for consultation with the students ONLINE (OTL) for a minimum of 4 weeks and a maximum of 8 weeks.

FYP Student Name: Sia Jean Vie		ID: 2202446	HP Number: 01156226608
Title: Mapping Bai En as Male Feminization Figure in Social Media Networking Site Facebook: Focus Group Studies on Selected Malaysian Chinese Youth in Klang Valley			
Date	Attended by	Progress	Signature
19/2/2025	Sia Jean Vie Mr. Chang Yi Chang	1. Inquiry for Chapter 4	鄭
11/3/2025	Sia Jean Vie Mr. Chang Yi Chang	1. Chapter 4 Feedback 2. Guidance for Chapter 5	鄭
17/4/2025	Sia Jean Vie Mr. Chang Yi Chang	1. Chapter 5 Feedback	鄭
14/5/2025	Sia Jean Vie Mr. Chang Yi Chang	1. Rehearsal for FYP Presentation	鄭

## APPENDIX C: PRESENTATION SLIDES

### JOURNALISM DEPARTMENT UAMJ 3083 FINAL YEAR PROJECT PRESENTATION



#### Mapping Bai En as Male Feminization Figure in Social Networking Site Facebook: Focus Group Studies on Selected Malaysia Chinese Youth in Klang Valley

By : [Sia Jean Vie](#)

##### Introduction

This study explores the influence of Bai En, a male Chinese social media influencer in Malaysia, within the LGBT community. It examines his roles in challenging traditional gender norms through online platforms like Facebook, particularly among Malaysian Chinese youth. Despite Malaysia's conservative stance on LGBT issues, Bai En's content promotes self-expression and acceptance. The research also investigates the impact of social media on subcultures and what are the reasons and beliefs of Malaysia Chinese youth on consuming LGBT influencer, like Bai En that navigate societal restrictions, and blending personal identity with commercial entertainment.

##### PROBLEM STATEMENT

- 1 The impact of social media influencers like Bai En on Malaysian Chinese youth's attitudes towards the LGBT community, particularly regarding the acceptance or rejection of gender nonconformity and shifting beliefs on gender roles and identities.
- 2 Exposure of influencers portraying male feminization influences the mental, psychological, and social attitudes of Malaysian Chinese youth, exploring why they are drawn to follow these influencers over those adhering to traditional gender norms.

##### Research Objectives/ Significance

i. To explore the beliefs of the Malaysian Chinese youth community towards LGBT influencer (Bai En)

ii. To identify the factors influencing the Malaysian Chinese youth's intention to engage with content from LGBT influencer (Bai En)

This study will be beneficial as it examines LGBT issues in Malaysia, focusing on social media's influence on Chinese youth and influencers like Bai En. It explores how these influencers challenge traditional views, shaping beliefs of LGBT identities. This research aims to inform policies, promote acceptance, and inspire future studies on LGBT advocacy in Malaysia.

##### LITERATURE REVIEW

###### 1) Male Feminization

Male feminizations refers to men adopting behaviours traditionally associated with women, challenging gender norms. Emerging alongside feminist movements and the queer community, men express femininity through fashion, grooming, and roles (Riska, 2008; Adhikari, 2000). This shift reflects societal changes towards gender equality and breaking stereotypes (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019)

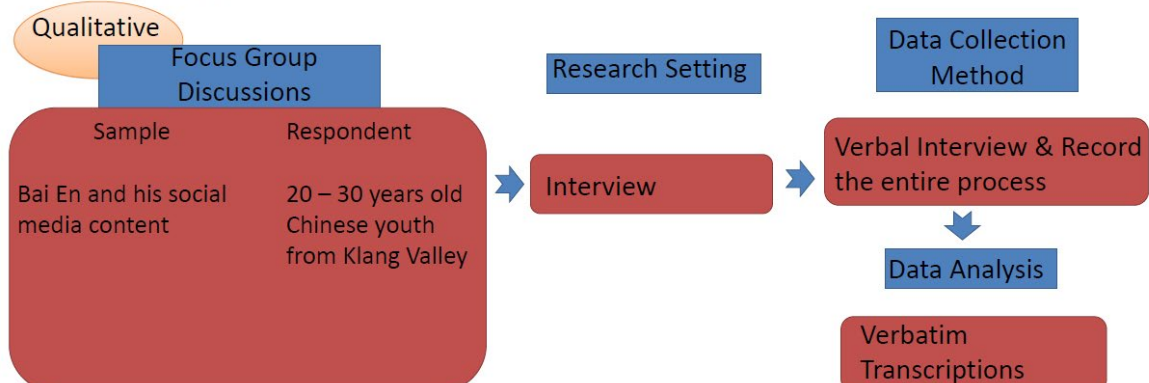
###### 2) Moral Panics & Culture Industry

Moral panics surrounding LGBT issues in Malaysia are orchestrated by the government and media to shape public opinion and reinforce negative stereotypes (Ting et al., 2021). Similarly, the culture industry manipulated subcultures like EDM, commercializing and distorting them for profit (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1994; Reynolds, 1999)

###### 3) Malaysia Chinese Gender Norms

Traditional Chinese values in Malaysia emphasize respects for elders, filial piety, and patrilineal family structures (Heng, 1984; Liu, 2023). Gender norms are deeply rooted in patriarchal ideas, with men expected to continue family bloodline with marriages and giving birth. Younger generations show greater acceptance of LGBT rights, older individual resist these changes due to traditional beliefs (Noodou, 2022).

##### METHODOLOGY





## FINDINGS

Several topoi could be made out from the article analysis :-

- i) Male Feminization
- ii) Moral Panics
- iii) Culture Industry
- iv) Deviance Against Norms
- v) Subculture and Styles
- vi) Social Media Audience' Patterns and Engagements
- vii) Content Authenticity or Performance

### Male Feminization

Bai En is recognized as exhibiting male feminization, wearing makeup, skirts, high-pitched voice, etc. He is perceived a non-masculine and possibly LGBT due to these traits.

### Culture Industry

Bai En's content is shaped to go viral, controversial, exaggerated, and formulaic. He thrives in the culture industry by profiting from standardization and audience manipulation

### Subculture & Styles

Bai En's feminine presentation places him in a subculture. His behaviours are seen as abnormal, disruptive, and attention-seeking, even by LGBT individuals

### Content Authenticity or Performance

Some believe Bai En is genuinely LGBT, others see him as performative. His exaggerated style raises doubts about authenticity and seems exploitative.

### Moral Panics

Bai En's exaggerated content triggers discomfort and fear of misrepresentation. Respondents fear he reinforces stereotypes of LGBT individuals and causes moral panic over public perceptions.

### Deviance against Norms

Older people struggle to accept Bai En's gender expression. Younger generations are more open due to digital exposure and information access

### Patterns & Engagements

Respondents don't seek Bai En's content intentionally, they find it through algorithms. Most find it low quality, superficial, and purely for entertainment or gossip

## DISCUSSIONS

### Audience Believes

Bai En's content evokes strong responses. Some admire his boldness, others feel discomfort due to his exaggerated self-expression. He's seen more as entertainment than an advocate for LGBT representation.

### Moral Panic & Stereotyping

Bai En's behaviour causes moral panic, especially among older generations. The public fear he reinforces negative LGBT stereotypes, becoming a misrepresentative public figure.

### Subculture & Visibility

Despite backlash, Bai En increases LGBT visibility in Malaysia. His consistent identity affirms authenticity, making subcultures more visible, although it happens in a controversial way.

### Role of the Culture Industry

Bai En thrives in the culture industry, using drama, trends, and controversy for visibility and profit. His style shows how subcultures get commodified.

### Contested Norms to Youth

Young viewers may imitate Bai En without understanding LGBT realities. His exaggerated actions raise concerns about mental health and ethical content creation.

### Neutrality & Generational Divide

Older generations struggle with LGBT acceptance due to limited exposure. Younger people, more informed by digital culture, hold neutral or respectful views of Bai En.

### Overall Social Impact

Bai En sparks national conversations on gender and identity. He challenges norms, provoke critique, and reshapes how Malaysian youth engage with LGBT content.

## Conclusion

- This research provided a fundamental understanding and mapping of subcultures and their relationship with male feminization, moral panic, culture industry, and hegemony.
- Bai En's case highlights gender nonconformity, stereotyping, and shifting societal norms.
- It' is the degree-level study on Bai En, contributing to Malaysian LGBT discourse which is challenging and controversial
- Findings show growing awareness and acceptance of LGBT identities, especially among younger generations.
- This study reveals how digital visibility influences public perception of gender expression and challenges conventional norms.

## Recommendations

- This study categorized respondents by sexual orientation (female, male, gay), and the responses enabled the researcher to interpreted and addressed the research questions.
- For future LGBT research, it is recommended to form focus groups **based on gender**, rather than sexual orientation.
- This approach would foster in-depth discussions among individuals of the same gender but with diverse sexual orientations, potentially revealing new insights.

## Limitations

### 1. Focus on sexual orientation, not gender identity

This may have limited deeper insights into how people of the same gender but different orientations perceive Bai En.

### 2. Geographic and Cultural Specificity

Focused on Malaysian Chinese youth, limiting its generalizability to other ethnic or national contexts

### 3. Single Case Study Focus

Centered solely on Bai En, may not apply to other LGBT influencers or representations

### 4. Needed on Longitudinal Perspective

Captures responses at a single point in time, does not account for how public believes or Bai En's persona may evolve over time.