

Aware but Unchanged: Indonesian Audiences' Perceptions of LGBTQIA+ Representations in GMMTV Boys' Love Series

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Abstract

This study examines how Indonesian audiences perceive LGBTQIA+ representations in GMMTV Boys' Love series and to what extent such exposure produces attitudinal change toward LGBTQIA+ communities. A quantitative descriptive survey of 333 respondents, analyzed through Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) norm diffusion theory, Acharya's (2004) localization framework, and Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, reveals a consistent pattern of reception-level acceptance alongside limited internalization. At the reception stage, large majorities acknowledge that GMMTV BL series influence their general perspective (78.0%), endorse the quality of its LGBTQIA+ representations (77.8%), and credit it with enhancing their understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues (67.5%). However, far fewer report meaningful attitudinal change toward LGBTQIA+ communities at the individual level (22.8%) or attribute tolerance-building capacity to BL at the societal level (31.5%). This sharp divergence between reception-level acceptance and internalization-level change constitutes the study's principal finding: Indonesian audiences are broadly receptive to LGBTQIA+ representations in GMMTV BL series but do not translate that receptivity into substantive normative revision. The findings contribute empirical evidence that media exposure and norm internalization operate as separable processes in transnational popular culture reception, consistent with localization dynamics in conservative cultural contexts.

Keywords: Boys' Love, GMMTV, norm diffusion, audience reception, Indonesia

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1. Introduction

Indonesia presents a compelling case for examining the reception of transnational queer media. LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual) related content is explicitly prohibited under the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission's Guidelines for Broadcasting Conduct and Broadcast Program Standards of 2012, which classifies such representations as violations of decency and child protection standards. Content distributed through over-the-top (OTT) digital platforms, however, is not subject to the same mandatory filtering mechanisms required for broadcast and cinema content under Law No. 33 of 2009 on Film. This regulatory asymmetry creates a digital space through which foreign queer representations reach Indonesian audiences with comparatively fewer institutional constraints.

Within this landscape, stigma, discrimination, and hostile policy toward LGBTQIA+ communities remain central concerns in Indonesian society (Rokhmansyah, 2020). This includes periodic public controversies, media criticism, and moral discourses that frame LGBTQIA+ identities as incompatible with dominant social and religious norms. At the same time, digital platforms have substantially expanded the visibility of LGBTQIA+ cultural productions, enabling flows of queer media that cross national and regulatory boundaries (Berry et al., 2003). LGBTQIA+ communities across Asia are also negotiating identity formation processes that engage with global queer frameworks while remaining grounded in region-specific cultural and social conditions, producing configurations of queer identity that are not simply derivative of Western LGBTQIA+ categories (Martin et al., 2008).

The Boys' Love (BL) genre has its roots in Japanese shojo manga and yaoi culture and later developed into a television genre in Thailand. An early milestone was the release of *The Love of Siam* (2007), which brought queer romantic narratives into Thai mainstream media (Baudinette, 2019). The genre began to gain broader industrial traction between 2011 and 2015, with series such as *Hormones* and *Love Sick* establishing recognizable narrative conventions for Thai BL television (Prasannam, 2019). A subsequent queer turn in post-2020 productions has shifted the genre toward more explicit representations of queer identity, moving beyond the ambiguity that characterized earlier series (Prasannam, 2024).

GMMTV has become one of the most commercially visible producers within this evolving landscape, with its series gaining recognition across regional markets including Indonesia (Wahyuni et al., 2021). This study focuses on GMMTV because its distribution through freely accessible platforms such as YouTube, alongside subscription-based streaming services, makes it one of the most consistently accessible sources of BL content for Indonesian audiences. Multilingual subtitles available on YouTube further reduce linguistic barriers that typically limit foreign content reception, making GMMTV's productions readily accessible to Indonesian audiences (Avramenko, 2024). Its regional partnerships, including collaborations with TV Asahi in Japan and ABS-CBN in the Philippines, reflect a broader pan-Asian pop culture infrastructure through which Thai, Korean, and Japanese productions circulate across shared digital networks (TV Asahi Corporation, 2020; Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008).

While Thai BL had circulated earlier through informal and niche fan networks, its visibility expanded significantly in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. *2gether The Series* (2020) served as a notable

entry point, accumulating at least 100 million views on the LINE TV streaming platform and reaching approximately 30 million viewers per episode (CNN, 2020; Muliadi et al., 2024). This reception marked a period in which Thai BL became one of the more widely discussed forms of foreign digital content among Indonesian audiences, providing access to LGBTQIA+ representations largely absent from domestic broadcast media.

The implications of this shift extend beyond audience preference. BL content is increasingly recognized for its economic significance in Thailand and its potential to shape perceptions of queer identities across regional markets (Poowin et al., 2024; Tortermvasana et al., 2022). This dynamic situates GMMTV's productions within a broader regional formation in which Asian media functions as a site for producing and circulating queer representations on culturally specific terms. As GMMTV director Nuttapong Mongkolsawas has noted, the genre holds potential to bring non-mainstream representations into wider cultural visibility (De Guzman, 2022).

Existing scholarship has examined BL reception across Southeast Asia, finding that audiences engage actively rather than passively with its queer representations (Baudinette, 2020; Shimauchi, 2025). Within Indonesia, research indicates that GMMTV BL consumption is associated with both increased tolerance and ambivalent responses among viewers (Al Jihani & Norhabiba, 2025). Most existing studies, however, rely on small-scale qualitative approaches, limiting the ability to systematically assess broader patterns of audience reception and attitudinal response. This study addresses that gap through a quantitative descriptive survey of 333 Indonesian respondents. It is guided by the following research question: How do Indonesian audiences who watch GMMTV Boys' Love series perceive the series' representations of LGBTQIA+ identities, and to what extent do they report attitudinal change toward LGBTQIA+ communities?

2. Literature review

The global development of Boys' Love (BL) media demonstrates a complex process of cultural production and adaptation that transcends national and cultural boundaries. Early studies situate BL within its Japanese origins, where it emerged as a cultural form shaped by specific socio-cultural dynamics surrounding gender and sexuality. Shimauchi (2025), through critical discourse analysis, finds that while BL and LGBTQIA+ representations in Japan rarely engage directly with broader social issues such as gender inequality or discrimination, there are emerging indications of gradual transformation. This suggests that BL does not inherently function as a politically progressive medium, but rather as a flexible cultural form whose meanings evolve over time. Expanding beyond Japan, Dela Cruz (2022) highlights the process of glocalization in the Philippine context, where local BL productions selectively adapt and reject dominant Thai BL tropes. These findings indicate that BL narratives are not passively reproduced but actively reshaped to align with local cultural contexts.

Within Southeast Asia, Thailand has emerged as one of the central hubs of BL production and distribution, transforming the genre into a significant transnational cultural commodity. Baudinette (2020) demonstrates that the circulation of Thai BL across borders involves active reinterpretation by audiences, as seen in Filipino fandoms that engage in creative misreadings of queer narratives. These reinterpretations displace the authority of producers and reposition audiences as co-creators of meaning in transnational settings. Expanding this perspective, Baudinette (2023) illustrates how the Thai BL industry has developed a highly organized ecosystem integrating celebrity culture, fan service, and transnational distribution networks. This industrial system enables the global circulation of queer narratives while maintaining ambiguity between performative and lived identities. Complementing this, Prasannam (2024) identifies a queer turn in post-2020 Thai BL, reflecting a shift toward more fluid and globally adaptive representations of gender and sexuality.

The role of audiences in interpreting and reshaping BL narratives has been increasingly emphasized in recent scholarship. Shimauchi (2025) conceptualizes fandom as a contact zone where transnational and trans-cultural interactions enable audiences to construct and negotiate meanings collectively. Similarly, Amporn (2025) demonstrates that Chinese BL fans actively construct hyperreality through practices such as shipping and engagement with fan service. These practices blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, highlighting the active role of audiences in meaning-making processes. Such findings confirm that BL consumption involves negotiation rather than passive reception. However, these studies are largely based on limited qualitative samples and remain context-specific, restricting their broader applicability. These findings highlight the importance of examining audience reception not merely as individual interpretation but as a broader process through which transnational media meanings are negotiated and potentially translated into social attitudes.

In the Indonesian context, existing research reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape regarding LGBTQIA+ discourse. Putri et al. (2025) highlight that societal attitudes remain strongly shaped by religious, cultural, and moral norms, resulting in a general tendency toward rejection. Tauzia et al. (2024) further argue that BL media is sometimes perceived as a psychosocial influence that may encourage non-heteronormative orientations, although this perspective is influenced by strong normative assumptions. In contrast, audience-centered studies offer more nuanced insights into reception dynamics. Al Jihani and Norhabiba (2025) find that engagement with GMMTV BL content produces both increased tolerance and ambivalent responses such as cognitive dissonance. Similarly, Putri and Damaiyanti (2023) identify both positive and negative impacts of BL consumption, ranging from expanded understanding to social stigma and internal conflict.

Despite these contributions, significant gaps remain in the existing literature. Most Indonesian studies rely on small-scale qualitative samples or focus on specific communities, limiting their ability to capture broader patterns of audience reception at the national level. In addition, empirical research that systematically examines how exposure to transnational BL content relates to audience perceptions and attitudes remains limited. The role of Indonesian audiences as active interpreters of transnational media narratives is therefore insufficiently understood, particularly in terms of how such interpretations may translate into shifts in normative attitudes. Furthermore, existing studies rarely situate local findings within broader frameworks of transnational

media flow and audience reception, resulting in a fragmented understanding of the relationship between global media and local socio-cultural contexts. This study addresses these limitations by employing a quantitative descriptive survey to examine how exposure to GMMTV BL series shapes audience perceptions and attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ identities in Indonesia.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) norm diffusion theory as its primary analytical framework. They define a norm as "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity" and describe norm diffusion as the process through which such standards spread across the international system (Finnemore & Sikkink, p. 891). Their norm life cycle model identifies three sequential stages: norm emergence, driven by norm entrepreneurs who strategically frame new ideas to attract broader support, norm cascade, triggered when a critical mass of actors adopts the norm and social pressure for conformity intensifies (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 901); and internalization, in which the norm becomes taken for granted and embedded in routine behavior and institutional structures (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 904–905).

Within this framework, media is identified as a key accelerant during the cascade stage (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 902–903). This study operationalizes norm diffusion through three analytically distinct mechanisms directly mapped to measurable variables. Transmission refers to the mediated dissemination of LGBTQIA+ -related norms through GMMTV's BL series, operationalized through respondents' self-reported exposure levels including frequency and duration of consumption. Reception refers to the active interpretation of transmitted norms, operationalized through attitudinal survey items. Internalization refers to the degree to which transmitted norms are integrated into audiences' normative understanding, operationalized through items measuring attitude change toward LGBTQIA+ identities (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 904–905).

It is important to note that this study does not claim to capture full internalization in the Finnemore-Sikkink sense, which describes a long-term and society-wide process. What is examined here are indicators of early-stage internalization, specifically attitudinal shifts among individual respondents following exposure to GMMTV's BL content. The digital infrastructure through which Indonesian audiences access this content provides the structural basis for transmission. Appadurai's (1996) mediascapes concept is noted as contextual background here, describing the global distribution of media content and the imaginative representations it generates for audiences beyond their immediate environment (Appadurai, 1996, p. 35).

The reception stage is examined through Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, which conceptualizes media communication as a process in which producers encode messages through ideologically embedded codes and audiences decode them from their own social and cultural positions (Hall, 1980, pp. 129–131). Hall identifies three decoding positions: dominant-hegemonic reading, in which audiences fully accept the intended meaning; negotiated reading, in which they partially accept but adapt the message to their own context; and oppositional reading, in which they reject the intended meaning entirely (Hall, 1980, pp. 136–138).

In this study, dominant readings are reflected in agreement with survey statements measuring attitudinal shift, negotiated readings in neutral responses, and oppositional readings in disagreement.

Acharya's (2004) localization framework operates as a complementary analytical lens at the reception stage, defined as "the active construction through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in the former developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices" (Acharya, 2004, p. 241). Unlike simple norm adoption, localization recognizes that receiving actors may reject a norm in its original form while accepting a locally reconstructed version (Acharya, 2004, p. 251). Hall's decoding positions and Acharya's localization are treated as mutually reinforcing frameworks: negotiated and oppositional decoding at the individual level aggregates, across communities and over time, into the collective cultural reconstructions that localization theory captures at the meso level.

The intra-Asian dimension of this transmission process is treated as relevant contextual background rather than a primary analytical variable. Iwabuchi's (2002) concept of cultural odor, defined as "the cultural smell of a country of origin and the associated racial and ethnic or national images of the country" (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 27), provides a plausible contextual explanation for why Thai BL may be particularly accessible to Indonesian audiences. Thai BL carries Asian cultural proximity in aesthetics, social values, and regional sensibilities that may lower the threshold of engagement among Indonesian viewers, though this study does not include comparative data on Western queer media reception and therefore cannot verify this claim empirically.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine Indonesian audiences' perceptions of LGBTQIA+ issues following their exposure to Boys' Love (BL) series produced by GMMTV. Survey research enables the systematic collection of self-reported data from a defined sample using structured questionnaire instruments, allowing response patterns to be identified across a large number of respondents (Kerlinger, 1973). Data were collected between 1 March and 2 April 2025 using an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms.

The survey was distributed through digital platforms, including Instagram Stories, WhatsApp groups, and Telegram channels, enabling access to respondents actively engaged in online media consumption and fan communities. The study applied purposive sampling, targeting individuals who have prior experience watching BL content produced by GMMTV, with the minimum criterion being the completion of at least one full GMMTV BL series in its entirety, regardless of which series. A total of 333 valid responses ($N = 333$) were obtained. The respondents were primarily drawn from urban areas in Indonesia, specifically Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya. This geographic focus reflects regions with high levels of internet penetration, digital media access, and participation in transnational popular culture, including BL fandoms. These urban centres are therefore considered relevant sites for examining audience reception of cross-border media content.

The questionnaire was structured into four main variables: (1) Background Exposure to LGBTQIA+, (2) Media Consumption Behavior, (3) Perceived Representation of LGBTQIA+ in BL, and (4) Perceived Social Influence of BL. Items were measured using categorical and Likert-scale response options to capture variations in audience attitudes and experiences. For example, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements such as whether BL series influence their perceptions of LGBTQIA+ individuals, reduce social stigma, or contribute to increasing tolerance. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical techniques, focusing on frequency distributions and percentage-based interpretations of responses. According to Sudjana (2005), descriptive statistics involve the processes of collecting, organizing, summarizing, and presenting data in a concise and comprehensible manner.

This approach enables the identification of dominant response patterns without employing inferential statistical methods, while still providing a transparent empirical basis for interpretation. This study acknowledges several limitations. First, although the survey was primarily distributed in major urban centers such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya, a small number of responses were collected from participants outside these areas. As such, the findings are best understood as reflecting predominantly urban, digitally connected audiences, rather than strictly representing urban populations in a rigid geographic sense. The focus on these cities is theoretically justified, as they represent key nodes in Indonesia's media and digital ecosystem, characterized by high levels of internet penetration, exposure to transnational cultural flows, and active participation in online fan and media consumption practices.

These conditions make urban populations particularly relevant for examining processes of norm diffusion, reception, and localization in the context of GMMTV's BL content. Nevertheless, this concentration limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader Indonesian population, particularly audiences in rural or less digitally connected regions. Second, the use of purposive sampling means that the findings are representative of a specific audience group, namely individuals who have been exposed to BL content, rather than the general population. However, this focus is methodologically appropriate given the study's objective to examine audience reception and normative interpretation among viewers who actively engage with transnational media flows. Consequently, the study provides targeted insights into media-exposed audiences who are more likely to participate in contemporary digital and fan cultures.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Respondent Profile

The demographic profile of the 333 respondents ($N = 333$) is presented across gender, age, and geographic distribution. These characteristics provide contextual background for interpreting the findings presented in subsequent sections. The variables are reported descriptively and are not used for inferential or causal analysis.

5.1.1 Gender Distribution

Female respondents constituted the majority of the sample at 207 individuals (62.2%), while male respondents numbered 126 (37.8%), producing an approximate five-to-three ratio, as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents (N = 333)

Gender	n	%
Female	207	62.2%
Male	126	37.8%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

This distribution is consistent with patterns documented in existing BL scholarship, which has identified female audiences as the primary consumer base of BL media across multiple national contexts, including Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Baudinette, 2023; Shimauchi, 2025; Liu, 2021). The gender composition of this sample therefore reflects the broader structural demographic of BL viewership rather than a sampling anomaly.

It should be noted that this study did not examine attitudinal or behavioral differences across gender groups. The distribution reported in Table 5.1 serves as a descriptive characteristic of the sample and should not be interpreted as indicative of differential reception or internalization patterns between male and female respondents. Any such interpretation would require a dedicated cross-variable analysis that falls outside the scope of this study's quantitative descriptive design.

5.1.2 Age Distribution

The sample is heavily concentrated in the youngest cohort of the three age brackets included in the survey. Table 5.2 presents the frequency and percentage breakdown by age group.

Table 5.2: Age Distribution of Respondents (N = 333)

Age Range	n	%
18–25 years	271	81.4%
25–34 years	56	16.8%
35–44 years	6	1.8%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

Respondents aged 18 to 25 comprised 271 individuals (81.4%), making this cohort the overwhelmingly dominant segment. The 25 to 34 group accounted for 56 respondents (16.8%), while the 35 to 44 bracket

contributed only 6 respondents (1.8%). Together, the two younger cohorts account for 98.2% of all respondents, indicating participation was almost exclusively drawn from adults under 35.

This concentration in the 18 to 25 cohort is consistent with the study's sampling parameters and reflects the demographic reality of BL fandom in Indonesia. Digital streaming platforms and social media channels, which serve as the primary distribution infrastructure for GMMTV's content, are disproportionately used by younger audiences, a pattern consistent with broader media research indicating that younger audiences engage more intensively with digitally mediated content and transnational popular culture (Gehrau et al., 2016). BL fan communities on platforms such as X, Instagram, and TikTok are similarly populated by individuals in this age range (Al Jihani & Norhabiba, 2025). The age profile visible in Table 5.2 is therefore an expected outcome of purposive sampling within this population rather than an artifact of methodological bias.

The dominance of the 18 to 25 cohort establishes a significant boundary condition for the generalizability of the findings reported in subsequent sections. Results are most appropriately interpreted as reflective of young adult Indonesian BL audiences within this specific age range and should not be extended to older demographic groups without further dedicated research. The limited representation of respondents aged 35 and above also means that the study cannot speak to how longer-term generational exposure to BL media, accumulated across different life stages, may shape attitudinal outcomes differently from the concentrated youthful engagement captured in this sample.

5.1.3 Geographic Distribution

Respondents were recruited from urban centers spread across multiple regions of Indonesia, though the sample remains concentrated in Java-based cities.

Table 5.3: Geographic Distribution of Respondents (N = 333)

Region	n	%
Bandung	134	40.2%
Jakarta	84	25.2%
Surabaya	55	16.5%
Yogyakarta	20	6.0%
Outside Java (Kalimantan, Bali, Sulawesi, etc.)	40	12.0%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

As shown in Table 5.3 Bandung contributed the largest share at 134 respondents (40.2%), followed by Jakarta at 84 (25.2%), Surabaya at 55 (16.5%), and Yogyakarta at 20 (6.0%). The remaining 40 respondents (12.0%) were located in provinces outside Java, encompassing Kalimantan, Bali, Sulawesi, and other regions. In aggregate, respondents based in Java account for 88.0% of the total sample. This distribution directly

reflects the purposive sampling strategy, which prioritized areas with high internet penetration and established audiences for transnational streaming content.

Access to GMMTV's BL productions through platforms such as YouTube and subscription-based streaming services is contingent upon reliable digital connectivity, which in Indonesia remains most developed in major urban centers, particularly those on Java. The inclusion of respondents from outside Java, while modest at 12.0%, adds geographic breadth and suggests that engagement with GMMTV's BL content is not entirely confined to Java's metropolitan centers. However, the sample does not support systematic regional comparisons. Audiences in rural areas or regions with limited digital infrastructure are not represented, constituting a recognized boundary of the study's generalizability.

5.2 Media Consumption Patterns

Four consumption variables operationalize the transmission stage of norm diffusion (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998,): duration of exposure (MC1), frequency of consumption (MC2), primary motivation for watching (MC3), and channel of first LGBTQIA+ exposure (MC4).

5.2.1 Duration of Exposure

The durational profile in Table 5.4 indicates that the sample is composed primarily of established rather than newly converted BL viewers, suggesting repeated and sustained exposure to BL narratives over time.

Table 5.4. Duration of Exposure to GMMTV BL Series (N = 333)

Duration	n	%
Less than 6 months	46	13.8%
6 months to 1 year	76	22.8%
More than 1 to 2 years	132	39.6%
More than 2 years	79	32.7%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

Within the framework of Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998), such sustained exposure constitutes a structural condition that facilitates the gradual transmission of normative ideas. This pattern is further contextualized by Arjun Appadurai's (1996) concept of mediascapes, through which digital platforms enable Indonesian audiences to maintain continuous engagement with transnational representations of gender and sexuality that are less visible in domestic broadcast media. The relatively small proportion of respondents with less than six months of viewing experience (13.8%) reinforces that recent

or casual viewers constitute a minority. Accordingly, the findings of this study primarily reflect audiences situated within sustained media exposure environments, rather than first-time or incidental viewers.

5.2.2 Frequency of Consumption

The largest group, comprising 129 respondents (38.7%), reported watching one to two times per month. This was followed by 88 respondents (26.4%) who watched three to five times per month, 81 respondents (24.3%) who watched once every two months, and 35 respondents (10.5%) who watched more than five times per month. The modal category of one to two times per month indicates that regular but moderate-frequency viewing is the most common consumption pattern within this sample. Read alongside Table 5.4, the frequency distribution in Table 5.5 suggests that sustained long-term viewership does not necessarily correspond to intensive consumption. A respondent watching for over two years but only once or twice per month accumulates exposure gradually.

Table 5.5. Frequency of Watching GMMTV BL Series per Month (N = 333)

Frequency	n	%
Once every two months	81	24.3%
1–2 times per month	129	38.7%
3–5 times per month	88	26.4%
More than 5 times per month	35	10.5%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

Both patterns are enabled by the on-demand nature of digital streaming platforms, which as Appadurai (1996) notes allow audiences to engage with transnational content independently of broadcast schedules (p. 35). Respondents who watch three or more times per month, comprising 36.9% of the sample in aggregate, represent a more intensively engaged viewing segment. For this group, BL consumption constitutes a more regular feature of their media diet, which increases the cumulative volume of LGBTQIA+ representational content they encounter within a given period. This distinction in viewing intensity is noted as a descriptive characteristic of the sample rather than as a predictor of differential attitudinal outcomes, since frequency was not cross-tabulated with attitudinal variables in this study's analytical design.

5.2.3 Audience Motivation

Respondents' motivations for watching GMMTV BL series offer insight into how LGBTQIA+ representations are encountered through media consumption. The distribution of primary motivations is summarized in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6. Primary Motivation for Watching GMMTV BL Series (N = 333)

Motivation	n	%
Character appeal	162	48.6%
Compelling narrative	67	20.1%
Entertainment value	62	18.6%
Authentic queer representation	19	5.7%
Meaningful moral messages	16	4.8%
Recommendations from friends or social media	9	2.7%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

Character appeal was the most frequently cited motivation, identified by 162 respondents (48.6%), followed by compelling narrative at 67 (20.1%), entertainment value at 62 (18.6%), authentic queer representation at 19 (5.7%), meaningful moral messages at 16 (4.8%), and recommendations from friends or social media at 9 (2.7%). Character appeal, narrative, and entertainment together account for 87.3% of all primary motivations. The dominance of character appeal indicates that for most respondents, engagement with LGBTQIA+ representations in BL occurs as a by-product of narrative and character investment rather than as an explicitly sought-out experience.

Baudinette (2023) notes that GMMTV's productions are structured around emotionally compelling character dynamics and celebrity-driven fan culture, which function as the primary draw for broad audiences, including those not specifically seeking queer content. Only 19 respondents (5.7%) identified authentic queer representation as their primary motivation, constituting a minority that actively seeks the representational content the majority encounters incidentally. This motivational profile provides relevant context for interpreting the reception findings in Section 5.3: audiences whose primary engagement is organized around character and entertainment approach the content from a different interpretive starting point than those motivated by representational considerations.

5.2.4 Initial Exposure to LGBTQIA+ Concepts

The final transmission variable examines the channel through which respondents first encountered the concept of LGBTQIA+, providing context for how BL media fits within the broader landscape of LGBTQIA+ awareness.

Table 5.7. Channel of First Exposure to LGBTQIA+ Concepts (N = 333)

Channel	n	%
Social media	163	48.9%
Series or films	91	27.3%
Friends or family	48	14.4%
School or university	31	9.3%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

Data in Table 5.7 show social media was the most frequently cited first source, identified by 163 respondents (48.9%), followed by series or films at 91 (27.3%), friends or family at 48 (14.4%), and school or university at 31 (9.3%). Social media and series or films together account for 76.2% of first-exposure pathways, indicating digital and media channels are the dominant routes through which LGBTQIA+ first became known to respondents. The relatively low proportion who first learned about LGBTQIA+ through formal education (9.3%) reflects the Indonesian institutional context, in which LGBTQIA+ topics are largely absent from school and university curricula due to prevailing religious and cultural norms (Putri et al., 2025).

This absence positions digital media and popular culture as the primary first-exposure channels for this demographic, not by design but by structural default. Notably, 27.3% identified series or films as their first exposure to LGBTQIA+ concepts, a category that may include BL media alongside other genres. Read alongside the social media figure, the data indicate that respondents in this study entered their engagement with GMMTV's BL series having already encountered LGBTQIA+ concepts primarily through digital and media channels rather than through interpersonal or institutional sources.

5.3 Audience Reception

Audience reception is examined across three attitudinal dimensions: perceived influence on personal perspective (S1), evaluation of representational quality (S2), and perceived contribution to LGBTQIA+ understanding (S3). Drawing on Hall (1980), audience reception is understood as an active process of decoding, in which responses to media representations may vary depending on how viewers interpret and negotiate meaning. At a broader level, these variations can be situated within Acharya's (2004) concept of localization,

whereby external normative ideas are selectively adapted within local cultural contexts. The following sections present the distribution of responses across these dimensions.

5.3.1 Perceived Influence on Personal Perspective

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement that watching GMMTV BL series has influenced their personal perspective toward the LGBTQIA+ community.

Table 5.8. Perceived Influence of GMMTV BL on Personal Perspective toward LGBTQIA+ Community
(N = 333)

Response	n	%
Strongly agree	62	18.6%
Agree	198	59.5%
Neutral	31	9.3%
Disagree	33	9.9%
Strongly disagree	9	2.7%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

Table 5.8 shows that 62 respondents (18.6%) strongly agreed and 198 (59.4%) agreed, producing a combined agreement rate of 78.0%. A neutral response was recorded by 31 (9.3%), while 33 (9.9%) disagreed and 9 (2.7%) strongly disagreed, yielding a combined disagreement rate of 12.6%. Mapping these distributions onto Hall's (1980) decoding positions, dominant-hegemonic reading is reflected in the 78.0% agreement, negotiated reading in the 9.3% neutral response, and oppositional reading in the 12.6% disagreement. This finding requires careful interpretation. Acharya (2004) cautions that receiving actors may acknowledge that foreign normative content has affected their thinking without endorsing that content in its original form.

The 78.0% agreement indicates BL has successfully entered the cognitive frameworks of the majority, but does not confirm the direction or depth of attitudinal change produced. Acknowledging influence and internalizing that influence as normative change are analytically distinct acts. The 12.6% registering oppositional readings are analytically significant. Within Acharya's (2004) framework, this group represents audiences for whom localization has produced principled rejection rather than reconstructed acceptance, consistent with the strong religious and normative environment that Putri et al. (2025) identify as characteristic of Indonesian public discourse on LGBTQIA+ issues. These respondents consume BL yet resist its representational logic, illustrating Hall's (1980) point that decoding positions are determined not by exposure alone but by the social subject position from which the audience reads.

5.3.2 Evaluation of Representation Quality

The second reception variable asked respondents to evaluate whether GMMTV's BL series provide a positive representation of the LGBTQIA+ community. As shown in Table 5.9, 37 respondents (11.1%) strongly agreed and 222 (66.7%) agreed, yielding a combined agreement rate of 77.8%. A neutral position was recorded by 30 (9.0%), while 36 (10.8%) disagreed and 8 (2.4%) strongly disagreed, producing a combined disagreement rate of 13.2%.

Table 5.9. Evaluation of LGBTQIA+ Representation Quality in GMMTV BL Series (N = 333)

Response	n	%
Strongly agree	37	11.1%
Agree	222	66.7%
Neutral	30	9.0%
Disagree	36	10.8%
Strongly disagree	8	2.4%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

The 77.8% agreement in S2 is nearly identical to the 78.0% recorded in S1, indicating that respondents who acknowledge BL's general perspectival influence overwhelmingly also affirm the quality of its representations, rather than applying a markedly more discriminating evaluative standard at this stage. The 13.2% oppositional response rate is broadly consistent with S1's 12.6%, suggesting a stable minority applying a consistently critical decoding framework across reception variables. For this group, GMMTV's representational content is evaluated not merely as lacking in quality but as actively problematic, a reading consistent with Acharya's (2004) localization framework, in which receiving actors decline to graft foreign normative content onto existing value systems perceived as fundamentally incompatible with local religious and cultural standards.

5.3.3 Perceived Contribution to Understanding

The third reception variable measured whether respondents perceived GMMTV's BL series as contributing to increased understanding of the LGBTQIA+ community. As shown in Table 5.10, 63 respondents (18.9%) strongly agreed and 162 (48.6%) agreed, yielding a combined agreement rate of 67.5%. The neutral category was recorded by 59 respondents (17.7%), the highest neutral proportion across all three reception variables. Disagreement was registered by 38 (11.4%) and strong disagreement by 11 (3.3%), producing a combined disagreement rate of 14.7%. The 67.5% agreement in S3 is the lowest of the three reception variables, falling below both S1 (78.0%) and S2 (77.8%), yet it remains substantially higher than the internalization-level responses recorded in S4 (22.8%) and S5 (31.5%), underscoring that even the most selective reception variable still far exceeds the level of attitudinal change respondents report.

Table 5.10. Perceived Contribution of GMMTV BL to Understanding of LGBTQIA+ Issues (N = 333)

Response	n	%
Strongly agree	63	18.9%
Agree	162	48.6%
Neutral	59	17.7%
Disagree	38	11.4%
Strongly disagree	11	3.3%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

This pattern across Tables 5.8, 5.9, and 5.10 is theoretically interpretable. Audience recognition of BL's perspectival influence (S1) and endorsement of representational quality (S2) are nearly identical and both broad, while assessment of understanding-enhancement (S3) is comparatively narrower. This suggests that audiences readily collapse general influence and representational quality into a single, largely positive evaluative judgment, but apply a more demanding standard when assessing whether BL substantively deepens their understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues, requiring audiences to assess epistemic adequacy rather than simply affective or evaluative impact. The 17.7% neutral response in S3 is the largest neutral cluster across all five attitudinal variables. Within Hall's (1980) framework, this elevated proportion suggests a substantial segment occupying a genuinely negotiated decoding position on BL's understanding-generating function.

These respondents neither endorse nor reject the premise that BL enhances LGBTQIA+ understanding, reflecting the broader ambivalence Al Jihani and Norhabiba (2025) identify as characteristic of Indonesian BL audiences, where increased tolerance and cognitive dissonance coexist rather than resolve into stable attitudinal outcomes. Taken across S1, S2, and S3, reception data reveal a differentiated rather than uniform audience response. Dominant-hegemonic readings command the largest share across all three variables, but the magnitude of endorsement varies substantially depending on the evaluative dimension assessed. This is consistent with Acharya's (2004) localization framework: the comparatively lower endorsement of S3 reflects a localization process in which audiences selectively graft BL's representational norms onto their existing frameworks — accepting its perspectival influence and representational legitimacy, while declining to fully reconstruct their epistemic understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues, which Acharya (2004) would identify as localization that partially contains rather than fully transmits the foreign norm.

5.4 Norm Internalization and Attitudinal Change

The internalization stage is operationalized through two variables: perceived influence on views toward non-heteronormative romantic relationships (S4) and perceived contribution to societal tolerance (S5). Within Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) norm life cycle model, internalization refers to the stage at which a

norm becomes taken for granted and embedded in routine behavior. As noted in the theoretical framework, this study examines indicators of early-stage internalization, specifically whether BL exposure has produced measurable shifts in normative attitudes at the individual level.

5.4.1 Influence on Non-Heteronormative Relationships

The fourth reception variable assesses the extent to which GMMTV's BL series are perceived to influence respondents' views on non-heteronormative romantic relationships. The distribution of responses is reported in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11. Perceived Influence of GMMTV BL on Views toward Non-Heteronormative Relationships
(N = 333)

Level of Influence	n	%
Very significant	28	8.4%
Fairly significant	48	14.4%
Not very significant	100	30.0%
No influence at all	157	47.1%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

The largest single group, comprising 157 respondents (47.1%), reported no influence whatsoever, while 100 (30.0%) reported not much influence, yielding a combined low-or-no-influence rate of 77.1%. In contrast, 48 respondents (14.4%) reported a fairly significant influence and 28 (8.4%) a very significant influence, for a combined meaningful-influence rate of 22.8%. This stands in sharp contrast to the reception data in S1, where 78.0% acknowledged general perspectival influence. This divergence of over fifty percentage points is the most diagnostically important finding of the study. Acknowledging that BL has shaped one's general perspective is a lower-threshold cognitive act than conceding a concrete shift in one's normative stance toward a specific and socially sensitive category of relationships. The former can occur through affective engagement with characters without requiring revision of underlying beliefs; the latter demands direct confrontation with normative frameworks governing relationship evaluation in the Indonesian religious and cultural context.

Acharya (2004) anticipates precisely this dynamic: receiving actors may acknowledge exposure to foreign normative content while declining to graft its normative implications onto their existing value frameworks, effectively containing rather than internalizing the foreign norm. The 77.1% low-or-no-influence rate is also coherent within Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) framework: the weakness of internalization signals in S4 is consistent with a diffusion process remaining in early stages. The structural conditions necessary for cascade to produce internalization, including widespread social legitimacy and institutional endorsement, are absent in the Indonesian context. The 22.8% reporting meaningful influence represent a minority for whom

repeated exposure has produced some degree of attitudinal recalibration. Whether this segment expands over time will depend on structural factors extending well beyond media consumption patterns, including changes in institutional discourse and the broader social environment in which normative attitudes toward non-heteronormative relationships are formed and sustained.

5.4.2 Contribution to Societal Tolerance

The final variable assesses the extent to which GMMTV's BL series are perceived to contribute to increasing tolerance toward LGBTQIA+ communities in Indonesian society. This framing shifts the evaluative scope from individual attitudes to perceived collective social impact.

Table 5.12. Perceived Contribution of GMMTV BL to Societal Tolerance toward LGBTQIA+ Community in Indonesia (N = 333)

Level of Contribution	n	%
Very significant	26	7.8%
Fairly significant	79	23.7%
Not very significant	160	48.0%
No influence at all	68	20.4%
Total	333	100%

Note. Authors' survey data (2025).

Table 5.12 shows that the largest group comprised 160 respondents (48.0%) who assessed BL's contribution to societal tolerance as not very significant, while 68 (20.4%) perceived no influence at all, producing a combined low-or-no-contribution rate of 68.4%. Meanwhile, 79 respondents (23.7%) rated the contribution as fairly significant and 26 (7.8%) as very significant, for a combined meaningful-contribution rate of 31.5%. Comparing Tables 5.11 and 5.12, the combined low-or-no-influence rate decreases from 77.1% in S4 to 68.4% in S5, while the meaningful-influence rate increases from 22.8% to 31.5%. This modest shift suggests respondents are somewhat more willing to attribute tolerance-building capacity to BL at the societal level than to acknowledge individual attitudinal change, a reading consistent with Shimauchi's (2025) conceptualization of fandom as a contact zone for collective meaning-making.

The dominant finding, however, remains that the majority of respondents do not assess BL as a significant driver of societal tolerance. This is coherent within the structural context documented by Putri et al. (2025), where religious and cultural norms constrain the societal reach of any single media form. A respondent who experiences some perspectival shift through BL consumption may nonetheless accurately perceive that the broader social environment does not provide conditions under which that shift can translate into increased collective tolerance. Combined, the findings from Tables 5.11 and 5.12 indicate that the internalization stage of norm diffusion remains limited within this sample. Sustained and regular exposure, as documented in Section 5.2, and the reception-level attitudinal awareness in Section 5.3, have not for the majority translated

into substantive attitudinal revision at either the individual or societal level. The data describe surface-level acceptance: BL's representational content is acknowledged as influential in general terms but has not disrupted the underlying normative frameworks.

6. Conclusion

Indonesian audiences who watch GMMTV Boys' Love series perceive their LGBTQIA+ representations in a selective and graduated manner, but do not, for the majority, report substantive attitudinal change toward LGBTQIA+ communities. This finding, drawn from a quantitative descriptive survey of 333 respondents analyzed through norm diffusion theory (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998), localization (Acharya, 2004), and encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980), reveals a norm diffusion process that is active at the transmission and reception stages but constrained at the internalization stage. The findings directly answer the research question. Indonesian audiences acknowledge general perspectival influence (S1: 78.0%) and similarly endorse representational quality (S2: 77.8%), but report a comparatively lower understanding-generating capacity (S3: 67.5%). This pattern confirms that audiences decode BL content from their own social and cultural positions rather than accepting encoded meanings uniformly, with a stable oppositional minority of 12 to 15 percent maintaining principled resistance across all three reception variables. Critically, even this highest level of reception-stage endorsement (S1: 78.0%) does not translate into comparable internalization, establishing the reception-internalization gap as the study's central empirical finding.

The divergence between reception and internalization is the central empirical contribution of this study. While 78.0% acknowledged perspectival influence in S1, only 22.8% reported meaningful attitudinal change toward non-heteronormative relationships (S4), and 68.4% perceived no significant contribution to societal tolerance (S5). This gap, spanning over fifty percentage points, demonstrates that media exposure and norm internalization are empirically separable stages, a distinction the Finnemore-Sikkink (1998) model theorizes but which has rarely been verified in popular media reception research. Acharya's (2004) localization framework accounts for this gap. Indonesian audiences engage with GMMTV's representational content through a localization process in which foreign normative ideas are selectively grafted onto existing frameworks — accepted at the affective and evaluative level but not fully reconstructed into the audience's normative understanding of LGBTQIA+ relationships (Acharya, 2004, p. 251). What results is surface-level acceptance rather than substantive attitudinal revision, challenging assumptions that sustained exposure to transnational queer media produces proportional normative change in conservative cultural contexts.

This study makes two theoretical contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence that the norm life cycle model (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998) applies to popular media reception, demonstrating that transmission, reception, and internalization operate as distinct and measurable stages within a single audience population. Second, it extends Acharya's (2004) localization concept beyond its origins in international relations into audience reception studies, offering a framework for understanding why Indonesian audiences

simultaneously acknowledge and contain the normative implications of GMMTV's BL representations. The study's limitations include a sample concentrated among young, female, urban respondents aged 18 to 25, a descriptive design that captures self-reported perceptions rather than verified attitudinal change, and the absence of cross-variable analysis between demographic characteristics and attitudinal outcomes. Future research employing regression analysis or longitudinal designs could examine whether the surface-level acceptance documented here deepens into substantive normative change over time, and whether findings generalize across demographic and geographic contexts beyond this study's urban Indonesian sample.

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