# The Diffusion of Japanese Idol Concept Based on the Interpretation
# of Fan Clubs' Behaviors

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## Abstract

*T*he concept of Japanese female idol groups is now being applied more widely outside Japan. BNK48 is an idol group in Thailand that has applied this concept as a branch of the Japanese AKB48. At its start, it had a small number of fans; however, however they have risen since the release of their second single, "Koisuru Fortune Cookie". Basically, the concept of Japanese female idol groups reflects a culture different from the Thai context. For this reason, this study was initiated to better understand how a Thai individual becomes a fan of BNK48 through observation.

The research was conducted based on the phenomenological concept and observation generated through an individual's experience. The four elements of Diffusion of Innovations Theory (innovation, time, communication channels and a social system) and Bandura's Social Learning Theory were applied to clarify the findings collected through in-depth interviews and the observational research. For the in-depth interviews, all key informants who participated in this study admitted that they are BNK48 fans. The in-depth interview results show that social media and peers have an influence on key informants' adoption. However, in the long term, the Thai context also has an effect on key informants. Although BNK48 applies the Japanese concept, key informants adopt this concept because they understand it easily, which is actually conveyed through a Thai context. Through observation, it was found that apparent behaviors are both aggressive, but positive, and non-aggressive. These behaviors are clarified in this study. Further research can apply this study's findings to examine other cross-cultural relationships and how they are adopted.

**Keywords:** Cross-cultures, Behaviors, Events, Experiences, Idol Groups

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## 1.Introduction

There are a lot of female idol groups in Japan, and they follow similar i marketing strategies (Hiroshi, 2000; Galbraith & Karlin, 2012; Galbraith, 2018). As part of Japanese pop culture, these idol groups each have their own specific identity and differentiating idols, or celebrities. Galbraith (2018) explained that the idol business model is based on "intimacy business". The history of the Japanese idol concept basically started in the middle of the twentieth century, and the business model in each period was constructed based on a specific context of that time (Ashcraft & Ueda, 2014).

Moreover, fans, as supporters, enhance the idol business through the purchase of merchandising products and participating in events. Communication marketing tactics will include attaching invitation cards to events mentioned earlier as well as special gifts (Galbraith and Karlin, 2012; Chen, 2018).

The idol business belongs to the entertainment industry. To clarify this, both primary and secondary sources were analyzed. Sone (2017) explained about femininity in a Japanese context, saying it presents cute and innocent images. Fans are obsessed by female idols' voices that are high-pitched or nasal because they think these voices reflect cuteness and innocence (Sone, 2017). Ueda (2016) reported that from an idol study with Nogizaka46 set as a variable, the members of the girl band had a significant influence on both image and preference.

However, primary sources and earlier research do not mention about fans who are not Japanese. For this reason, the "Forty-Eight group" is examined in this research. AKB48, according to

Ashcraft and Ueda (2014), was formed in 2005, and the Forty-Eight group was constructed because AKB48's concept, it was hoped, would spread to other domestic and foreign markets. To study the cross-culture influence of this concept, BNK48, a member of the Forty-Eight Group from Indonesia, JKT48, was studied. Basically, JKT48 has its own characteristics which are different from AKB48 even though it applied the concept AKB48 uses. Indonesian fans prefer JKT48 to AKB48 for three reasons: geographical and linguistic, national identity, and modernity and familiarity (Soraya and Muktiono, 2013). Their interpretation matches significantly with the concept of place .

Due to a lack of research about idols, another aspect of Japanese pop culture, manga and anime, was reviewed to clarify the association between Japanese pop culture and fan behavior. Manga is the specific term for Japanese comics, and anime is is Japanese animation. Both manga and anime have a wide Japanese and foreign fan base that stretches around the globe. They have a power to express fan's hopes and fears. In addition, they both apply a synthesis of text and images like Western comics and Western visual culture. (MacWilliams, 2008). In other words, they are hybrid, cross-cultures innovations.

As mentioned above, the research concerning JKT48 provided findings about the interpretation of fans in Indonesia (Soraya & Muktiono, 2013). In Indonesia, there is also increased engagement in manga and anime. Although they do not consist in Indonesian culture, there are fans that follow this Japanese pop culture. Furthermore, their anime and manga experiences have affected their lives in clothing,

communication and hobbies (Gracia & Dimyati, 2016). In Malaysia, however, these fans are studied through surveys, differentiating this research from that conducted in Indonesia. It was found that fans can distinguish between the real world and anime as they think acting like anime characters is embarrassing (Hassan, Sallehuddin, & Aziz, 2016).

To study the Japanese Idol concept outside Japan, BNK48 in Thailand was selected as a case study to better understand how fans in Thailand accept BNK48 through observation. Fan first become attracted to BNK48 for various reasons, or it could occur accidentally. Furthermore, this study wanted to identify the cause, process, and current fan behaviors influenced by their experiences.

## 2. Theories, Concepts and Related Research

The history of some specific arts has been studied for a long time. These arts convey significant meanings of culture constructed by native peoples. The interpretation of these arts starts with observational learning. Like a child who learns about the world from birth, especially communication, imitation is considered as an important tool in the learning process (Foley & Thomson, 2017). For verbal communication, a baby starts learning by imitating what they hear, i.e., observed in daily experience (Bandura, 1977).

### 2.1 Social Leaning Theory

To understand Thai fans' experience of female idol group concepts as a kind of new pop culture, this research employed the Social Learning Theory. As a phenomenon in Thai society, people are aware and learn about BNK48 though the media

and their environment. The Social Learning Theory focuses on social study and an individual's cognition to understand behavior (Ryckman, 2013). In an early study of aggressive behaviors in children, Bandura came up with his social learning theory (1977) which comprises four processes: 1) attention, 2) retention, 3) motor reproduction and 4) motivation.

At first, during the attention process, people perceive things through observation, each person differently. After this, two representational systems, which are part of the retention process, activate during the observation: imaginal and verbal, and generate memories (Thomas et al., 2016) which accumulate over time, forming experience. In the motor reproduction process, a similar event may encourage a person to take action as a response. The combination between representational systems and availability of component skills produce new behavior patterns. After taking action in the motivation process, positive reinforcement will support the new behaviors while negative consequences will be rejected.

To adopt a new behavior, an observation is placed in the first process, or attention process. This will occur if children are pleased with something and then may want to do the same thing they observed, for example, they may want to be like their role models. Scheibe (2007) discussed how when characters appear on television or in a film, there may be certain role models children will imitate. In his study, Scheibe (2007) reviewed Piaget Power Rangers and found that role models have an influence on children. In a similar way, actors and actresses can be their role models in the real world as well. Moreover, perception can change through time. Younger ages have different perceptions of

what they see compared to adults and the elderly. This is why some content that receives negative feedback for children and adolescents will appear on different media (Vickers, 2007).

The early trend in studies of the Social Learning Theory focused on aggressive behaviors. Initial aggressive behavior appears to be the result of violent experiences, especially in childhood (Bottos, 2007). These can then lead to crime (Fox et al., 2011; Slotsve, et al., 2008). Nevertheless, aggressive behaviors can be expressed in positive ways, like playing extreme sports (Slotsve et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, fan behavior based on the Social Learning Theory was discussed by Stever (2010). After a fan presents a behavior, the motivation could have been in the form of attention getting or other behavior expressed by a certain celebrity they follow (Basil, 1996; Stever, 2010). This can also be true for the idol business which can motivate a fan's behavior. However, there is a lack of a clear explanation behaviors associated between a fan and idol.

### 2.2 Cross Culture Concept

In the arts, culture and art have a significant relationship that has been shaped since the past. The intercultural functions of art have improved due to economic and political internationalization. In each community, core values are influenced by "a sense of place", or feeling of belonging. This sense can be generated through literature, art, religion, social life and views of nature (Leuthold, 2011). This is the reason why Indonesian fans follow JKT48 more than the original Japanese group (Soraya & Muktiono, 2013). To clarify this concept, Fan (2014) discussed in the work, "Exchanging Influence between American and Chinese Culture and Music", that Chinese modern music is affected by western contemporary music. Nevertheless, different backgrounds, like school experiences and families, also influence a person's thinking. Despite sharing the same ethnicity, they are not the same (Tong, 2005).

### 2.3 Diffusion of Innovations Theory

In this research, four main elements of diffusion of innovations have been considered. After observing BNK48, accidentally or intentionally, there is a process that turns an individual to an early adopter or over time. Everett Roger's Diffusion of Innovations (1962) consists of the elements: 1) an innovation, 2) communication channels, 3) time and 4) social system.

To begin with, an innovation is a new idea that an individual perceives. This innovation may or may not be adopted. According to Everett Roger's (1962) Diffusion of Innovations, "innovation" refers to "technology". However, in this research, innovation is a concept of art. In other words, the Japanese female idol group concept is defined as an innovation. Moreover, the word "diffusion" is communication that sends messages concerned with a new idea. Adoption will take place through the exchange of messages. In this research, fan clubs are units for adoption while an individual receives BNK48 communication through media. Thus, contents does not come from fan clubs only; other media which present related news can also trigger an individual to adopt BNK48. Time dimension is concerned with three things. Firstly, the innovation-decision process is concerned with whether an individual adopts or rejects an innovation. Secondly, the phase of adoption is divided into two periods: early and late adoption.

Thirdly, concern focuses on the number of people who adopt an innovation in a certain period. Lastly, a social system can be individual, informal groups, organizations or subsystems, which support a common objective related to an innovation.

## 3. Conceptual Frameworks

According to the research objectives, the researcher generated the process of becoming fans based on Social Learning Theory and Diffusion of Innovation. This process comprises three phases: pre-fan, taking action, and becoming a fan (see figure 1).

### 3.1 Pre-fan

The pre-fan phase focuses on the period before being a fan of BNK48. In the first period of adoption, an individual begins to observe what captures their attention. Bandura's (1977) attention and retention processes illustrate this early period. Roger's (1962) components, are focused on in this phase, the innovation (BNK48) and channel (Media and Environment). According to figure 2, an individual, as an early adopter, observed BNK48 through any channel, including environment. Before becoming a BNK48 fan, an individual will experience something through observation. Once BNK48 has been observed, that individual keeps what impressed them in their mind, songs, BNK48 members or any attributes.

### 3.2 Taking Actions

After observing BNK48 during the pre-fan phase, the next phase is when the individual decides to join BNK48 community. As presented in figure 1, the motor reproduction process (Bandura, 1977) has been included in this study. Nevertheless,

the other components of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Roger, 1962) are explained to support the understanding between the pre-phase and taking action phase. Figure 2 show presents the time, i.e., duration of observation. During the motor reproduction process, an individual may wait for an appropriate time to express a behavior. In contrast, situations, related to time dimension, may support the thought an individual wants to adapt this innovation. The study of these two phases could answer the first research question: How does a fan in Thailand accept BNK48 through experience gained through observation?

### 3.3 Being a Fan

The being a fan phase focuses on what reinforces fans to follow BNK48 and what their actions are. Basically, positive reinforcement can motivate an individual to repeat actions (Bandura, 1977; Basil, 1996; Stever, 2010). Roger's (1962) social system considers peer influence and social trends. Figure 2 illustrates the pathway of becoming an adopter. In this study, this means becoming a BNK fan. After this, a fan may want to invite others to participate in this circle. This phase could answer the second research question: How are the cause, process, and current fan's behaviors influenced by their experience?

### 3.4 Moderator Variables

To understand cross-culture, this research focused on the AKB48 concept and distinguished differences between the original cultural concept of AKB48 and Thai context of BNK48. Thus, this differentiation was examined as a moderator variable.

**Figure 1**: Process of becoming fans (adoption process) through social learning theory
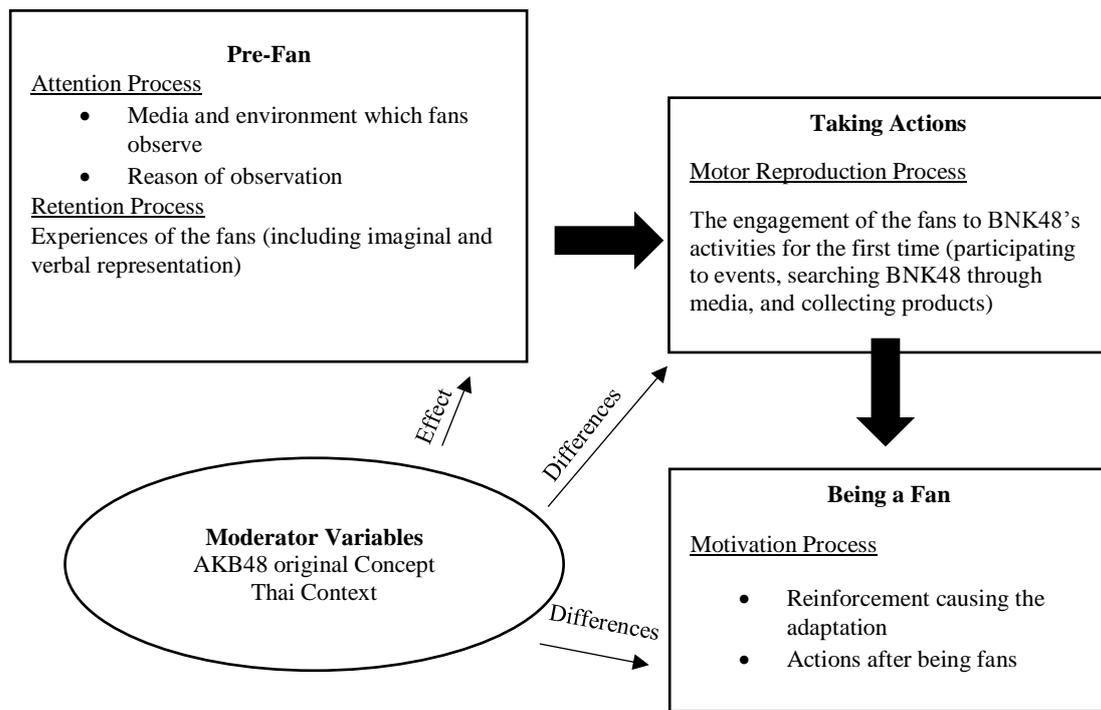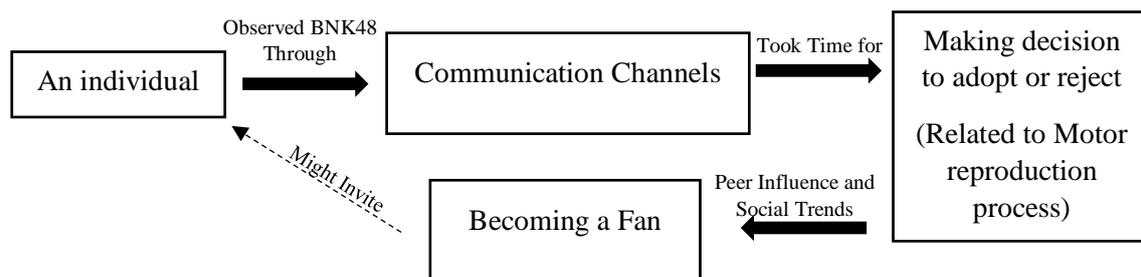


**Figure 2:** Additional Diffusion of Innovation elements which clarify the adoption process



## 4. Research Objectives

- To understand how a fan in Thailand accepts BNK48 trough observational experiences

- To identify the cause, the process and current fan's behaviors influenced by these experiences

## 5. Research Questions

- How does a fan in Thailand accept BNK48 through experiences of observation?

- How are the cause, process and current fan's behaviors influenced by those experiences?

## 6. Methodologies

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach, comprising two methods: in-depth interviews and observational research.

**6.1 Key Informants' Set of Qualifications for the In-Depth Interview**

Soraya and Muktiono (2013) chose their key informants based on age, activities or events of depth interview. The interview was conducted at comfortable venue. These five key informants had to meet this set of qualifications:

*6.1.1 Duration of being a Fan*

All key informant had been following BNK48 for six months or over during which there are numerous BNK48 events and activities.

*6.1.2 Geographic and Demographic Factors*

Due to cross-culture and the possibility of event participation, geographic and demographic factors were concerned in the study. To study cross-culture, Thai fans could share their experiences in a Thai context. Therefore, only Thai fans were recruited for this study. Furthermore, Soraya and Muktiono (2013) also chose key informants who owned JKT48 merchandise. Thus, in this study, university students and graduates were chosen because they had enough capital to purchase such products.

**6.2 In-depth interview Questions**

Interview questions were designed based on a conceptual framework. Because of a lack of research about the idol business and fans in the terms of adoption of innovation and learning behavior, interview questions were design to find clarification. The idea of cross-culture was added to clarify the data gathered from each key informant. Interview questions were divided into three parts: pre-fan, taking action, and being a fan.

key informants and demographic factors. Their study was conducted in Indonesia, and JKT48 is an Indonesian female idol group . Five BNK48 fans were recruited individually to participate in an in-Interview questions were generated based on the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Diffusion of Innovation (1962) and previous articles (Soraya & Muktiono, 2013; Fox et al., 2011; Slotsve, et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the concept of motivation that Stever (2010) discussed is a core concept that was considered. Unstructured interviews were then conducted based on the following template in a comfortable environment and atmosphere.

*6.2.1 Pre-fans Questions*

- How do you know about BNK48?
- Why did you decide to watch or participate in BNK48's activities?

*6.2.2 Taking Actions*

- What do you like about BNK48 (songs, members, concepts or anything else)?
- Is there anything you do not like about the Japanese Female Idol Concept? Why?

*6.2.3 Being a Fan*

- What BNK48 activities do you like?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

As the reasons for actions were not always clear from interviews alone, observational research was also required.

**6.3 Observation of BNK48 activities**

To study behavior, Bandura et al. (1961) conducted a study called the "Bobo Doll"

experiment. Aggressive behaviors were presented by imitation of a role model. However, the fan behavior aimed at for this research was to be natural without a set of situation as it was felt this was more appropriate for this observational research. The physical and verbal behaviors that Bandura et al. (1961) mentioned were considered as factors in this research. So, for this study, activities of BNK48 that were observed included: live studio, 2-shot event and fans group social media. Basically, due to the limited time, the researcher served as the observer. BNK48 has a studio at The EmQuartier, Bangkok. Members of BNK48 meet their fans in the studio via Facebook live, and the fans can see members at the studio during a live time. Fans' actions and apparent looks were observed at the live studio. This observation was conducted September 26, 2018. In addition all other live activities were observed via Facebook Live in September and October. During this time, fans could take a photo with BNK48 members whom they choose. The researcher was a complete participant in this observational research. The difference between the 2-shot event and live studio was that fans had direct interaction with group members in the 2-shot event, but they could only watch members in the live studio. The difference of appearances and interactions between the live studio and the 2-shot event were clear.

## 7. Research Findings

### 7.1 Data Collection

*7.1.1 Data Collected from the In-Depth Interview*

As mentioned previously, there were five key informants participating in the in-depth interview. In this research, their names do not appear; they were identified by using code names: Key Informant 1, Key Informant 2, Key Informant 3, Key Informant 4, and Key Informant 5. Because the in-depth interview was unstructured, some data were collected concerning the general images of the Japanese female idol concept. These data have been included in the assumptions.

**Table 1** Data received from Key Informants related to the adoption process

| Phases | KI1 | KI2 | KI3 | KI4 | KI5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre Fans | - Accidentally listening to BNK48 National Song (Bangkok 48)<br>- Invited to join by his girlfriend | - Seeing news of BNK48 and interview of a member on the Facebook Fan Page<br>- Influenced by friends | - Being aware of BNK48 from the Facebook Fan Page<br>- Seeing an interview article and Facebook Live of members through Facebook | - Being aware of BNK48 from the BNK48's television program | - Hearing about BNK48 from her friend.<br>- Searching information about BNK48 from the internet<br>- Following a specific member |

| Phases | KI1 | KI2 | KI3 | KI4 | KI5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Taking Actions | - Like listen to songs<br>- Following a specific member | - Like concept of Japanese female idol group<br>- Following specific members | - Watching BNK48s' television program<br>- Downloading game application<br>-Following specific members | - Watching video clips of BNK48's members on Facebook and YouTube<br>- Watching BNK48's game show broadcast on television<br>Participating in events<br>- Following specific members<br>- Going to see the live studio at The EmQuartier. | - Watching Live Studio via BNK48 Official Fan Page via Facebook<br>- Participating in the Handshake Event for the first time<br>- Joining a fan club group |
| Being a Fan | - Participating in handshake events<br>- Going to see BNK48 performance at a concert and theater | - Participating in handshake events.<br>- Collecting photo set of BNK48's members | - Participating in handshake events<br>- Going to see BNK48 performance at a concert<br>- Collecting BNK48 products | - Participating in handshake events<br>- Going to see BNK48 performance at a concert<br>- Collecting BNK48 products | - Participating in special rounds of handshake events<br>- Donating money to the World Senbutsu Election<br>- Seriously spending money on BNK48 products<br>- Being followed by a member on Instagram<br>- Sharing that specific member's news, and create fan products. |

**Table 2** Data received from Key Informants related to factors that led to adoption

| Elements | KI1 | KI2 | KI3 | KI4 | KI5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Communication Channel | - Social Media<br>- Television programs<br>- Girlfriend | - Social media<br>- Television programs<br>- Peer Influencers | -Social media<br>-Television programs | - Social media<br>- Television programs<br>-Events | - Social media<br>- Face-to-face<br>- Events |
| Duration of being a Fan | - Has observed for a month<br>- Has followed for nine months | - Has observed for three months<br>- Has followed for eight months | - Has observed for two months<br>- Has followed for nine months | - Has observed for a month<br>- Has followed for eight months | - Has observed for four months<br>- Has followed for ten months |
| Social System | -Friends<br>- Girlfriends | - Friends | - Friends<br>- Facebook fan page | - Fan club Group | - Fan club Group<br>- A member<br>- A friend |

### 7.1.2 Data interpreted from the Live Studio

As a complete observer, the researcher observed BNK48 fans' actions and clothes while standing and walking around the studio. Some fans came to take photos. This matched with what Key Informant 3 said in the in-depth interview. He explained that admins from various Facebook Fan Pages follow BNK48 and join events or the live studio to take photos of members. As the researcher observeved, fans who take photos brought their own portable steps and stood behind other fans. BNK48 members were hailed when they did something attractive to fans.

On the day the researcher observed the live studio, there was a surprise. Normally, names of members who come to the live studio are announced on BNK48 Facebook Fan Page. The surprise was that the captain of BNK48 came to the live studio as she had not been mentioned in the posting of who would appear in the studio that day. The fans reacted with a loud greeting.

**Table 3** Data gathered from observation of BNK48 Live Studio

| BNK48 Live Studio (Observing as a Complete Observer) | 26 September 2018 BNK48 fans came to The EmQuartier to watch BNK48 members broadcasting live on Facebook |
|---|---|
| Interpretation | <u>Actions</u><br>&bull; Hailing BNK48 Members' names<br>&bull; Taking Photos<br>&bull; Shouting loudly (Due to a surprise)<br><u>Apparent Clothes</u><br>&bull; Normal Casual Clothes |
| Conceptual Framework | Overt fan behavior (Based on Social Learning Theory) |

### 7.1.3 Data interpreted from the 2-Shot Event

As a complete participant, the researcher participated in the 2-shot event using a 2-Shot invitation card. Inside the hall, people lined up in front of lanes where chosen members would come. Once members came to the end of each lane, fans greeted them by clapping and cheering. After taking a photo with members, some fans provided gave gifts. As mentioned earlier, Key Informant 5 participated in a handshake event. In the 2-shot event, the researcher saw Key Informant 5 provide a gift she made.

Outside the hall, BNK48 fans traded BNK48 products and those representing other idol groups from Thailand and Japan. Although the company did not provide a trading area, fans conducted trading in the food court. Besides casual clothes, some fans dressed formally, wearing a tuxedo or formal suit. Fantasy costumes were also observed. Key Informant 2 and Key Informant 3 said that some fans dress in fantasy costumes for handshake events. To clarify the meaning of fantasy costumes, these are cosplay dresses or clothes based on a fantasy theme. Furthermore, some fan clubs have their own designed clothes, especially t-shirts and jackets, which they sell these to fans. As mentioned above, Key Informant 5, as a fan staff member, gave t-shirts and jackets to fans who were interested.

**Table 4** Data gathered from the 2-Shot Event

| 2-Shot Event | 30 September 2018 |
|---|---|
| (Observing as a Complete Participant) | The 2-Shot Event was staged at BITEC Bangna, inviting BNK48 fans to participate in this event. |
| Interpretation | Actions<br><br>• Greeting Members<br><br>• Taking Photos<br><br>• Trading BNK48 Products, as well as products representing other idol groups<br><br>• Giving gifts (between fans)<br><br>Apparent Clothes<br><br>• Normal Casual Clothes<br><br>• Formal Clothes<br><br>• Fantasy Costumes<br><br>• Specially designed clothes for fans who follow specific members |
| Conceptual Framework | Overt fan behavior (Based on Social Learning Theory) |

**7.2 Data Analysis**

The Thai context, or the adapted concept of BNK48, triggers Thai fans to participate in activities related to the group easily; nevertheless, fans basically connect with other aspects of Japanese pop culture as well.

Four of five key informants started observing BNK48 because they were interested in specific members. To clarify, they were asked to think about BNK48 and other idol groups in Japan. The common finding, answered by Key Informant 2, Key Informant 3, Key Informant 4 and Key Informant 5, is that they can access BNK48 more easily than Japanese idol groups. They can meet and understand BNK48 more easily than AKB48 because of location. However, Key Informant 1, the only member who started observing BNK because of songs' lyrics, claimed that the Japanese female idol concept is not really his thing. Normally, he likes rock music. However, what triggered him were the lyrics. As a Thai person who knows Japanese language, he was impressed with the Thai lyrics translated from the original Japanese. While he liked the songs, he began to follow a specific member after observing the group for a while.

These findings do show that the Thai context has a role in observation. All key informants became fans by the trigger of elements which have a Thai context. Thus, these findings answer the first research question; How does a fan in Thailand accept BNK48 through experiences of observations?

According to the data collected, media and peer influence paly a major role not only

during the early period, but also long term as sources providing content of BNK48.

Actions performed by fans were analyzed and categorized. Displaying identity, in other words, fans act or behave in a manner to show they are BNK48 fans or follow a specific member. Some activities are not aggressive. According to Slotsve, Carmen, Sarver and Villareal-Watkin's (2008) study, aggressive behavior can be positive if it does not cause violence. In this case, some activities are aggressive in a positive way. Thus, this answers the second research question concerning media and peer influence affecting fans behavior: How are the cause, process and current fan behavior influenced by their experiences?

## 8. Discussion

From this research, the findings show that an individual can become a fan of an idol group following the process of Diffusion of Innovation (Roger, 1962). BNK48, as an innovation, was observed through different communication channels during specific certain periods of time. Social system is a factor that has an influence on people to adopt an innovation (Roger, 1962). In this case, social system is defined as peers and fan groups. Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory was applied to support the adoption learning process. What Stever (2010) and Basil (1996) discussed about how motivation has an impact on a fan's behavior is consistent with this study's findings. According to the conceptual framework, the adoption process of becoming a fans was divided into three phases. The diffusion of an idol concept is also defined through these

three phases. Once the collected data had been analyzed, the results were applied to the three phases.

### 8.1 Phases of Becoming Fans
### 8.1.1 Pre Fan

T study the Social Learning Theory, an individual observes something their surrounding environment (1977), after these findings are analyzed. In this case, communication channels were found to have an influence on key informants, social media and peers. Based on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, not only communication channels, but also time is an influencing factor in the adoption process (Roger, 1962). Key informants of this study spent from one to four months observing BNK48 with the duration commencing at the first time they became aware of BNK48. During this period, they received content through media and their peers. What they observed was then transmitted to two representational systems, which are illustrated in the retention process (Bandura, 1977) and stored as experiences in the mind (Bandura, 1977; Bottos, 2007).

### 8.1.2 Taking Actions

After storing experiences through the representational systems, key informants in this study tended to take action differently based on what they received in the first phase. To begin with, they would mostly participate in events mostly friends, including girlfriends as explained by Key Informant 1. Furthermore, Key Informant 1, the only informant who was attracted to the Thai lyrics of BNK48's songs, would want to participate in concerts.

### 8.1.3 Being a Fan

According the conceptual framework, this phase requires reinforcement that leads to adoption and actions as a fan. As mentioned earlier, reinforcement can motivate a behavior (Bandura, 1977; Stever, 2010). Basically, reinforcement does not have to be felt physically. All Key informants expressed the same meaning of reinforcement, i.e., emotional factors as a fan, or how fans feel about participating in activities related to BNK48. While these can be both aggressive and non-aggressive (Bandura, 1961) their actions are supported by positive reinforcement (Slotsve et al., 2008).

### 8.2 The Influence of Thai Context

Thai context, as found in this research, is an element that gives key informants easy access to BNK48. When compared to the original Japanese female idol concept, female idol groups in Japan use a different language and their background are different than Thai members. Key informants prefer BNK48 to Japanese female idol groups. These findings match those of Soraya and Muktiono (2013) who studied JKT48. They are also consistent with the sense of place concept mentioned by Leuthold (2011).

## 9. Conclusion

This research's findings show that the adoption process begins with observation. If the phenomenon of BNK48 is interpreted through representational systems, understanding can be achieved. This understanding is synonymous with experience as an individual's feelings are triggered by the same or different factors. Not only rational, but peripheral will be interpreted. Figure 3 presents the process that generated the findings. The core of this model is the four components of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Roger, 1962). Contents of BNK48 are represented as innovation in the model. Communication channels form the component that transmit content. Social system is also supported by the sources of content. The observation process comprises observing the source of content and then the transformation to experience over time. As stated earlier, timing is one of Roger's (1962) components. Moreover, Slotsve et al. (2008) mentioned that positive aggressive behavior will be displayed after the process of formation and experience. If this behavior is reinforced positively, it will be repeated. This is consistent with the motor reproduction and motivation processes in the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). The results of this research in the future can serve as guidelines for research examining idol businesses and fandom. They can also be helpful to business owners in the development of their business plans.

**Figure 3** Process of how an individual becomes a fan: study of BNK48 phenomenon (the adoption process)
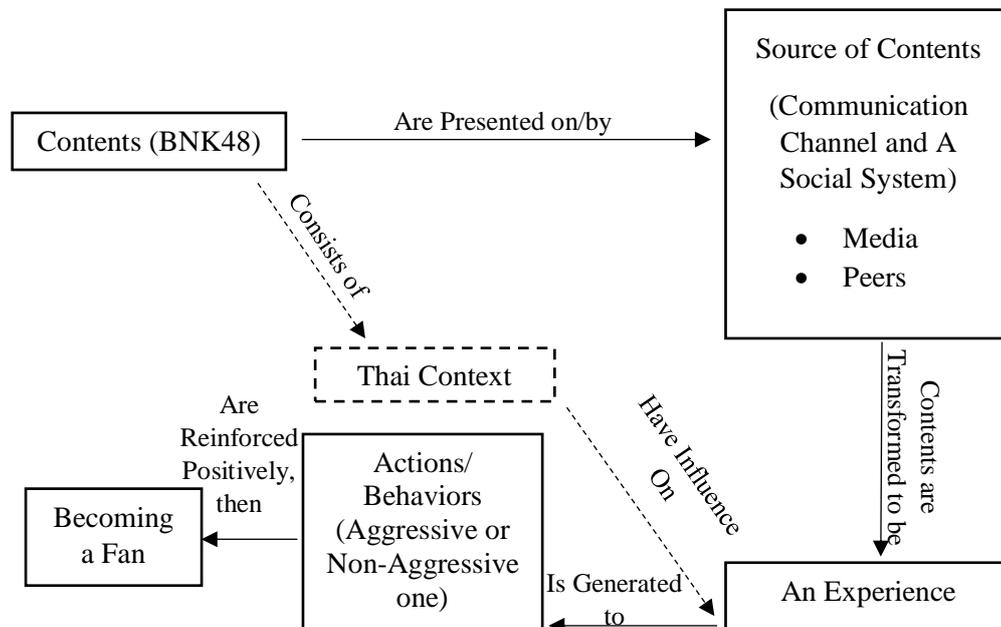


## 10. Limitations

Limitation of time had three main effects. Firstly, with more time, data collected in the in-depth interviews could  have been more detailed and clearer. Secondly, as the research took place when BNK48's 2-Shot Event was held, this was the only big event that could be observed. Lastly, the lack of idol studies is another limitation. Similar results or findings from other research do not cover the entire scope  of this study. Moreover, in Thailand, there are other female idol groups which apply the Japanese concept; however, this concept has diffused widely after the founding of

BNK48. So, the phenomenon of Japanese female idol group concept is much larger than BNK48.

## 11. Recommendations

Due to the research limitations, findings of this study could be improved and expanded through further studies. Recommendations include firstly, in the researcher's point of view, future studies should be conducted to determine a pattern of actions. The process applied for this research could analyzed in the field again. Furthermore, it be good to include more events. Secondly, to clarify and verify these findings, other female idol groups in Thailand could be studied.

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