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Female Fandom in The Digital Era: 'Alternative Universe' for Promoting Thai Boys Love Drama

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Abstract

Digital era has changed human's life, including in the practice of fandom. It results in a much broader dissemination of fans-related products produced by the fans, such as alternative universe (AU) as part of fan fiction. In addition, nowadays, Thailand popular culture is rising, especially with the boys' love drama series (Thai BL drama) which caught foreign viewers' interest, including Indonesians. This study explores how AU can be considered as a tool for promoting Thai BL drama which goes to fandom actively involvement in the promotion of a foreign country's cultural product with taboo value. It is a qualitative content analysis of online texts which focuses on three female AU author accounts on X with more than 5,000 followers. It is found that AU does not directly impact on the promotion of Thai BL drama, considering the massive modification on the character, setting, plot, and language due to the creativity of AU authors. It is a unique finding that makes it possible to promote Thai BL actors. Finally, it will promote Thai BL drama which the actors are part of, which can be understood from the replies and quotes of X users as AU readers.

Keywords

Female fandom, Digital fandom,
Alternative universe, BL drama;
Promotion

Introduction

In a dynamic world, changes are common. Currently we are in the digital era. One of the characteristics of the digital era is the increasing technology which impacts the speed and breadth of knowledge turnover within the economy and society (Shepherd, 2004). At some points, this turnover is even extremely high and beyond human control which in the end it is possible for humans to face the obstacles when it comes to managing life itself. Moreover, this era is also associated with information and communications technology or ICT where there is a possibility to improve the

mobilization of knowledge in higher speed and in ways that the function is increasingly capable of mobilizing knowledge at greater speed, and in ways that can cause dependency (e.g. chat rooms) or something that is hard to be contained (e.g. computer viruses), also productive (for example across distances).

In the context of the entertainment industry, the digital age started in the 1980s where the first digital entertainment in the form of audio CDs was first produced. Then, in the 1990s the DVDs started to follow the trend as well as the direct-to home satellite TV services. This made a big chance among the audiences, where they could have full control to replay the media content, even to pause, rewind, and fast forward. Then, by the start of the second decade in the 21st century, the digital era was in full swing which is characterized by the establishment of user-generated content (UGC) sharing sites such as Youtube (Ng, 2012). Later on, it resulted in a new form of content consumption, which is social viewing, or social TV. UGC represents the conversations among social groups while watching content. Without the content, the conversations lack context.

It shows that audiences have more possibility to consume the media content based on their preferences, including the activities related to idolizing some celebrities who starred in media productions. Fan culture has been there alongside with the media from the beginning. It grows bigger and follows the trends which create more creative forms of fan activities. With the ability to not only consume the media content but also to produce something, the variety forms of fan activities are also improving. One of the trends is the development of alternate universe or alternative universe (AU) published via social media, one of which is X (formerly Twitter).

Currently, Thailand's popular culture with its entertainment media content has started to bloom. Inspired by the Hallyu in Korea, Thailand is now spurring its cultural global popularity by following South Korea's path. Although several pessimistic opinions related to this phenomenon have also been raised by several people, Thailand's entertainment industry has been more popular abroad recently. Arapaporn Winijulchai, a senior program officer at the Asia Foundation in Bangkok, said Thailand has the potential to become a soft power country with the entertainment, based on The Global Soft Power Index by Brand Finance 2022 which put Thailand at the 35th out of 120 countries (Kang, 2023).

In Indonesia, the popularity of Thai dramas continues to increase, resulting in an improvement of fans in recent years. This provides its own benefits for Thai tourism, to the point where the term 'Thai drama tourists' appears. Many Indonesian fans visit Thailand to meet Thai drama actors and enjoy Thai tourism. The enthusiasm of Indonesian citizens for Thai culture can be seen from a large number of visitors at the Thai tourism promotion event in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 'Amazing Thailand' in early 2023 (Nissa, 2023). The popularity of Thai dramas among Indonesian audiences occurs due to several factors, including the background of life, which is not much different from Indonesia setting, so there is a proximity. Apart from that, Thai dramas display diverse values. Also, access to Thai actors is considered more possible than Korean actors, considering that Thailand is geographically closer to Indonesia. Fan meetings and concert activities of Thai actors are also starting to increase (CNN Indonesia, 2020).

More specifically, the Thai drama which caught much attention recently is boys love or BL drama. Poowin Bunyavejchewin, researcher at the Institute of East Asian Studies at Thammasat University in Bangkok found that Thai BL drama was able to attract foreign audiences which would be a high potential revenue generator. The first Thai BL drama was actually produced in 2014 with the title *'Love Sick: The Series'* but became more popular after the COVID-19 pandemic. With the physical distancing policy, Thai BL drama was one of content choices to be streamed by stay-at-home

viewers. One of the most popular Thai BL dramas that got global recognition is '2gether' with Bright Vachirawit and Win Metawin as the main couple who also gained more popularity after this series was broadcasted in 2020. Both actors got a dramatic increase in followers on their Instagram. The drama had 100 million views on Thai streaming platform LINE TV. Most of the fans come from socially conservative nations like China and Indonesia, and Latin America (DeGuzman, 2022)

With the increasing popularity of Thai BL dramas in Indonesia, more and more Indonesian fans also develop, which also has an impact on the development of fandom and fan activities. One of them is the emergence of AU that relates to Thailand's entertainment industry, where previously Indonesian readers enjoy AU with Hollywood or Korean entertainment industry background. As part of fan fiction, AU covers a variety of fan fiction with some changes in one or more parts of the source. Therefore, it also involves the crossover stories, a trope in which two source texts are combined in some way. AU also comprises the change of key elements of the character itself, including the change of gender, race, or ethnicity (Sauro, 2020). In the context of Thai BL Drama, there are many AUs published via X (formerly Twitter) inspired by the character, dramas, as well as the actors.

With this phenomenon, this research aims to explore how the AU could be a tool to contribute to promote the Thai BL Drama. The X accounts examined in this study is the AU inspired by a Thai BL Drama, 'Dark Blue Kiss' produced by GMMTV in 2019. GMMTV is a subsidiary of GMM which was launched in 2014. GMM itself is one of the largest entertainment companies in Thailand which monopolizes the production of popular culture there with an estimated market share of 70 percent. GMM later became part of the growing popularity of BL series among young Thai women and gay men by including the genre in their media empire. This is partly due to the recognition that young women are potential consumers. Penetration of this market is further enhanced by partnerships with Netflix, YouTube and LINE TV to stream their programs (Baudinette, 2024).

Even though 'Dark Blue Kiss' had ended four years ago, this drama is still quite popular to this day considering the actors are a shipped couple that has been shipped since their first BL drama in 2016. 'Shipping' is a fan practice of imagining idols to pair them romantically or sexually in a homoerotic context. In Japan BL culture, this practice is generally done to manga and anime characters, whereas in Korea BL culture, it is more commonly done to two people in real life. Started by the fans, this practice somehow benefits the company that it takes part in managing it (Baudinette, 2024). In GMMTV, there are three shipped couples who are considered as playing an important part for improving the economic benefit for GMMTV, which are 'KristSingto', 'OffGun', and 'TayNew' that are also known as the holy trinity of GMMTV. Later, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 'BrightWin' also be considered as pivotal for GMMTV which later many people call these four couples as four pillars of GMMTV (Kartiko & Salim, 2022).

'Dark Blue Kiss' is starred by Tawan Vihokratana and New Thitipoom or 'TayNew' and directed by Noppaharnach Chaiyahwimhon who often receives awards for the dramas he directs. Like most Thai BL dramas, 'Dark Blue Kiss' was also inspired by a novel written by Hideko Sunshine, whose English version was published in 2020 (My DramaList, 2019). Along with other series starring GMMTV four pillars, 'Dark Blue Kiss' also got high viewers on GMMTV Youtube Channel. A video released by the Thai BL Youtube account in 2022 showed that 'Dark Blue Kiss' was watched by around 230 million viewers on Youtube GMMTV. Meanwhile, 'Theory of Love' starring "OffGun" was watched by around 285 million viewers. BrightWin's acting in '2gether' was able to captivate the audience to almost 714 million viewers (Thai BL, 2022). Furthermore, due to its popularity abroad, 'Dark Blue Kiss' can also be enjoyed on

several local platforms in certain countries, such as in Japan. Asia Republic Entertainment has purchased the exclusive rights to distribute this drama through the CS channel (Dugong, 2020). In the Philippines, *'Dark Blue Kiss'* is also dubbed in Tagalog and could be streamed as announced by Dreamscape Entertainment (Salonga, 2020). It can be enjoyed via iWant TFC platforms starting October 26, 2020 (DreamscapePH, 2020).

Fan is an abbreviated form of the word 'fanatic', which has its roots in the Latin word '*fanaticus*'. The simple definition of this word relates to religion and worship, which is 'of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee'. However, the meaning then shifted in a negative context, which became 'Of persons inspired by orgiastic rites and enthusiastic frenzy' based on Oxford Latin Dictionary (Jenkins, 1992). However, the abbreviated form, 'fan', firstly mentioned in the late 19th century in the field of journalistic to explain the followers of professional sports teams (especially in baseball), but then it had a greater interpretation to the faithful 'devotee' of sports or commercial entertainment. However, the fan in the context of sport is quite different from the fan related to entertainment. Sports fandom is inherently tribal and based on a controlled competitive mentality. This gives rise to arousal instincts that are very different in meaning and intensity from the instincts associated with enjoying television, music or cinema (Duffett, 2013).

In addition, trying to define the word 'fandom' is not simple work, considering that the fan itself becomes part of daily life, which makes 'fandom' also tends to have the aspect of 'everydayness'. Fans find their identities wrapped up in the pleasures associated with popular culture. They occupy a social role characterized as fandom. Therefore, fandom can be seen as a form of cultural creativity, as play. The 'work' of fandom includes the ways in which it can increase our sense of joy, encourage our self-reflexivity, encourage us to discuss shared values and ethics, and provide us with important sources of meaning that spill over into our everyday lives (Duffett, 2013).

The importance of identity in the fandom practice somehow gives more explanations that whatever activities of fandom are, they will relate either to personal identity or communal understanding of shared identity. Collective identity can be created if fans interact with the celebrity persona which at some points will continue to maintain the interaction to contribute to the construction of collective identity. Then, on the individual level, celebrities can be a model to support the feelings of teenagers. From the study towards One Direction, Justin Bieber, and Magcon fans, music is not only generating general values but also similar experiences. Both celebrities and fans need to solve the obstacles of their personal lives (Lacasa et al., 2017). More specifically, in relation to fandom and identity, fandom activities also have an impact on the formation of gender identity. In the current internet era, there is wider network interaction in fandom activities so that idol behavior can be increasingly accepted by fans without geographic limitations. This could lead to a consolidation of identification standards. The emergence of fans and their development is not only a phenomenon in the world of entertainment, but also a symbol of a new identity and a new order of life. And because in the online era fans tend to be more proactive, fan interaction can be wider which also allows space for gender minorities to build their identity, including the LGBTQ+ community (He et al., 2022).

Moreover, transnational fandom has become a phenomenon since the mass media industry developed, which then has an impact on the increasing number of studies on English as a global language to be able to translate all cultural products across countries. This raises questions related to the ability of transnational fandom to understand historical, cultural, and social contexts, as well as transnational consciousness itself. Problems also arise in the context of the ability of cross-border

media to capture the imagination of fans, and how fans incorporate cross-border media into their popular cultural contexts and consume them. In these conditions, one effort that can be made is to strengthen the fundamental transnational and socio-political orientation of transcultural fandom studies. Furthermore, fans become fans not solely because of similarities or differences in culture or nationality but because of a moment of affinity between the fan and the transcultural object. Matt Hills' notion of 'transcultural homology' seems appropriate in this context. Hills uses this idea of symbolic compatibility to analyze the cross-border cultural similarities of Western and Japanese otaku who share the same devaluation as fans in the context of their popular culture operating to transcend the intentions of the media industry and the state (Chin & Morimoto, 2013).

Fandom activities itself consists of several levels of activity, starting from fandoms that involve reception modes, critical practices that involve interpretation, base for consumer activism, to fandom that apply forms of cultural production and traditional practices that are full of aesthetics (Jenkins, 1992). In the context of this research, the fandom activity that will be the focus is the type of fan activity related to forms of cultural production. Regarding it, the fan productivity will be established which contains intellectual aspects as the main actors in the creative industry (Peng, 2023).

In the current digital era, fandom practices are also experiencing many changes and updates. Specifically in the context of fan fiction, one of the things that is currently increasingly popular is alternate universe (AU). In the field of literature, this alternate universe is known as an effort to restore narrative, by bending the texts using social media. AU is a participatory textual practice in which young people use new media tools to inscribe themselves into existence (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). One of the most common forms of restoration involves the reader changing the location of the narrative to an alternate time and place. Taking characters and situations to new locations is common in fiction and fanfiction. The genre of speculative fiction known as alternative history features stories that have an identifiable point of divergence from the history of our current reality, although some alternative histories also feature anachronism, magic, or advanced technology. Likewise, AU fan works include fan works, fan fiction, fan videos, and meta fan essays exploring differences from the source text.

The phenomenon of bending is not limited to visual depictions of characters in popular stories. Some of the clearest examples of restoration work can be found in online fan fiction, when people take existing stories and characters and breathe new life into them by expanding storylines, creating new narrative threads, developing romances relationships between characters, and a focus on the lives of undeveloped characters from various media (Black, 2009). More and more fanfiction authors are choosing to play with the backstories of their characters, who often come from groups marginalized in canon and source texts.

There are several important and interesting aspects of AU, because this is part of informal language learning (Sauro, 2020). Some of these aspects are related to reading practice. This means that writing AU needs to start with reading or watching media content. By reading this, one will be able to find alternatives that can eventually produce AU. Then, AU and writing practice are also important aspects, because by reading, someone will be able to write AU more skilfully. Next is AU and the practice of studying grammar which of course supports making AU. If someone doesn't have grammar skills, they won't be able to produce a good AU. This will result in the AU not being interesting and not many people wanting to read it. This causes the agenda promoted by writing the AU to not be achieved. Lastly, AU and critical digital literacy practices which in this context are related to understanding and negotiating culturally situated differences.

Alternate universe (AU) is also considered a genre that, on the surface, radically alters the source text, but is actually intended to illustrate the source text's flexibility and adaptability to different contexts. There are two broad categories of AU stories and an endless variety of subgenres within them (Finn & McCall, 2016). The first, which Douglas Lanier calls a 'revision narrative', starts with the source characters and situations but changes the plot. This type of story usually takes a point of divergence and explores what might have happened had the storyline taken a different direction. Another major category of AU fanfiction maintains the characters and storyline of the source text while shifting the action sequences to a different time period and/or location.

In AU, it is also possible for the fan writer's literary talent to construct functional characters in the text and use them to convey personal interpretations of the canon (Fang, 2021). Character behavior known as a method for resolving instability in a fan fiction narrative and completing its narrative progress, authors writing alternate universe fanfiction suggest that this kind of "amateur" writing is worthy of closer examination. It is hoped that the literary benefits of fan communities can be better recognized, and fan fiction can be treated more as a genre rather than a cultural phenomenon in the future.

The love of boys emerged in the late 1960s when women in Japan began creating commercial manga about young men in homoerotic relationships and self-publishing similarly themed fan comics called *dōjinshi* featuring young male characters taken from popular *shōnen* manga (male). This genre has gained popularity all over the world. Currently it consists not only of manga and *dōjinshi* but also anime, fanfiction, artwork, fan and commercial videos, cosplay, video games, audio CDs, posters, films, and other forms (McHarry, 2011).

The increasing popularity of stories centering on male homosexual encounters contributed to the independence of this new genre, which was later divided into two subgenres (Welker, 2015). *Shōnen-ai*, which literally means "male love", depicts romantic love between two men by focusing on the emotional aspect, while *yaoi* displays male homoeroticism in an explicitly sexual form.

Stories with the theme of romantic love between two men are always popular, especially among young women. The global boy love phenomenon consists of three components: professional and amateur creators, consumers, and boy love material. Parallel to the global expansion of the boy's love manga industry and fan activity, further subgenres emerged due to the increasing interest in male homoerotic stories. The global accessibility of the Internet played a significant role in the international popularity of the boy love genre and the formation of online boy love fan communities in the mid-2000s, when boy love anime and manga were introduced to Western audiences (Thorn, 2004). Since then, interest in scanned and translated boys' love manga has increased among young women. As a result, a large community of female fans developed.

Boys love has inspired the creativity of many fans, motivating them to create expressive works that combine their desires with works of art. Additionally, the genre has contributed to the formation of active fan communities, leading to international collaboration between fans. Lastly, boy love media has created a supportive space for girls, who can share their fantasies without the pressure of social restrictions, and who want to achieve the same for gays. It has been proven by qualitative research that shows pro-gay attitudes are driven by the love of boys. The media is one of the main motives for women to become fans of this genre (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017).

In the last two decades, BL has gained a lot of popularity. In the early 2000s, Japanese BL manga became popular in Thailand. Following the popularity of Japanese BL manga, Thailand BL literature, in the form of short stories or novels,

was written and shared both online and offline. Then, television companies began to follow this trend by producing BL or *lakorn-y* television series (the letter “y” is taken from the word *yaoi*, pronounced *lakorn wai* or *serial-wai*), often based on previously released novels. Fostered by a community of enthusiastic fans working to provide BL media dubbed content in various language communities, BL series from Thailand are increasingly popular throughout Asia, especially in Vietnam, Indonesia, and China (Jirattikorn, 2018).

In the Thai BL drama industry, ‘*Love Sick*’ which aired in 2012 is considered the first BL series, used to familiarize the eyes of Thai audiences. In other words, *Love Sick* is a transitional spectacle from male-female romance to romance between men. Then, after *Love Sick*, from year to year, the Thai BL series experienced quite significant development, until finally during the COVID-19 pandemic, a Thai BL drama was produced by GMMTV, a television network which is currently known as the production company most active in producing BL series in Thailand produced ‘*2gether The Series*’ which is very popular not only among Thai audiences, but also international audiences.

Seeing potential opportunities, GMMTV is increasingly aggressive in creating content that can increase their profits, for example by creating sequels or special episodes of existing series, talk shows, fan meetings and variety shows for BL artists. Apart from that, for each series produced by GMMTV, merchandise is available in the form of objects related to the main characters of the drama, namely a pair of actors who are often referred to as the official couple, who will be paired together even though their drama has finished its broadcast (Masrina & Chairil, 2021). For example, Sarawat-Tine bracelet from ‘*2gether The Series*’, the Pete-Kao tumbler from ‘*Dark Blue Kiss*’ series, or Friends T-shirt of Pat-Pran from ‘*Bad Buddy the Series*’. Apart from preserving fans’ memories and being a medium of connection between fans and BL partners, these objects are also the result of GMMTV’s practice of memory commodification to make a profit.

In this digital era, all of the fields connected with the internet, even some of them are depending on the internet for its cover and features. The Internet can be a tool for promoting something, including in the tourism business. Youtube, for example, can be considered as one of the tools to promote the discourses on local wisdom which are embedded in the traditional ceremony of *Sedekah Gunung*. It is a tourism potential from the local wisdoms of the community of Lencoh Village, Boyolali Regency, Indonesia (Rachmawati et al., 2020). Moreover, in the field of business, the internet also plays a crucial role, more specifically in the entertainment industry. As part of the digital product, social media offers new platforms for companies to sell their product through advertising. To advertise something, a company needs to have an attachment with the potential target, so the communication aspect is also important. Sales promotion has been advocated as an essential communication method with customers on social media (Straker & Wrigley, 2016).

Digital promotion can be defined as any promotional activities done by the company on social media (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). From this explanation, it can be understood that X can be utilized as a tool for digital promotion. Using social media, especially X, for marketing purposes currently is quite normal. So, in some studies back then, using only social media to do the promotional activities for the products of a company was not the best choice (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). Back then, it was highly recommended to mix it with other tools that were considered more effective. Currently it is different, considering X improves a lot regarding the features for the users.

The popularity of social media and the increasing social media users along the time was one of the reasons why promoting using social media is considered as an important strategy. Moreover, in their marketing management textbook, Kotler and

Keller (2000) mentioned that modern marketing needs more than products that are of good quality and useful, but also products that are reasonably priced and easily accessible to consumers. These three things meet the requirements of the 4Ps in the Promotional Mix, namely product, price, and place. The fourth P element, promotion, is also important. So, there needs to be communication about a particular brand to potential consumers. Then, when it intersects with the fans culture, it is highly possible that fans also can be the strong agent to be involved in it. Social media supports the evolution in fan culture which gives rise to a participatory fan culture. With fans' active involvement in their idols and their work, this indirectly makes fans information disseminators who are able to increase the popularity of their idols (Yang, 2022). This indirectly takes over the work of entertainment agencies and or companies in promoting their artists. Nowadays, that promotion is no longer the sole task of entertainment companies but can also be done by fans, without the need for entertainment companies to allocate funds for the work of these fans. In the context of this research, GMMTV as the producer of the Thai BL drama '*Dark Blue Kiss*' is no longer the only institution that promotes the series and its actors. Fans also play an important role based on the social media content they produce about the series.

Research Methods

This qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena deeper. The main focus of qualitative research is the social meaning attached to experiences, circumstances, situations, including texts, images and other objects (Hesse-Biber, 2017). This study was carried out by analyzing media content, namely social media X. This media content analysis involves the process of revealing an understanding from the data which is performed in texts (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2017). The X accounts examined in this study are AU accounts inspired by the Thai BL Drama, '*Dark Blue Kiss*' produced by GMMTV in 2019, which are @bbrightmewin with 12K followers, @morenefarious with 7.5K followers, and @taynewwife with 5.7 K followers. The observation towards the X accounts in this research was done in October 2023. By the end of July 2024, account @bbrightmewin has changed the username to @writerwin.

The research was carried out by conducting a study of the three X accounts which were the objects of this research, by analyzing AU based on several aspects, including character, language, setting and plot. There are many modifications due to the creativity of AU authors. By researching those AU aspects, it can be revealed to what extent the AUs take a part in the promotion of the Thai BL drama '*Dark Blue Kiss*'. Besides, this research also uses document study techniques involving references related to topics that are useful for use as comparisons in analyzing the content of X.

Results and Discussion

In general, the three AU authors' X accounts, the objects of this research wrote several AUs, some even wrote AUs that were not inspired by the drama '*Dark Blue Kiss*'. The @bbrightmewin account, for example, which has used X as a medium to publish her AU since July 2020, also wrote an AU inspired by another drama, which is an AU about Bright-Win, the main character of the BL Thai drama '*2gether the Series*'. Meanwhile, the account @morenefarious which has been writing AU on platform X since September 2019 also wrote some AU about Off-Gun, main actor of BL Thai Drama '*Theory of Love*', Krist-Singto, man actors of Thai BL drama '*SOTUS*', Bright-Win, main actors in the Thai BL drama '*2gether The Series*', Ohm-Nanon, the main actors in the Thai BL drama '*Bad Buddy the Series*', and Mile-Apo, the main actor in the Thai BL Drama '*Kinn Porsche the Series*'. Only the @taynewwife account that has been writing AU inspired by Tay-New, the main actor of Thai BL drama '*Dark Blue Kiss*'.

It was hard to analyze the viewers, considering that X just provided this feature by the end of 2022. However, from the @taynewwife account, it can be seen that from Table 1, both of the AU have more than 12K viewers. It is a high number considering that the story was less than a year. The number of views indicates how 'live' a tweet is rather than just looking at replies and likes. This feature makes it possible to know how many times someone has looked at a tweet (Clark, 2022). However, unlike the number of viewers, the number of likes and bookmarks is not always equivalent to the length of time an AU has been created. This can be seen from the AU 'As-Dos Universe' which was made in 2022. It has more likes than the AU 'The Art of Ordinary spin-off TayNew' and the AU 'Adagio' which were made in the previous one and two years. Likes on Twitter are necessary for communication at first. Its main function, which is important for bloggers, is to show approval and appreciation for the tweet. That's why this feature is called "like" on almost all social media (Bennett, 2020).

Table 1. Recap of AU inspired by Thai BL drama 'Dark Blue Kiss' by @bbrightmewin, @morenefarious, and @taynewwife

No	X account	AU Title	Date created	View, Likes, Bookmarks	Short description
1	@bbrightmewin	Forever	19 May 2021	2.3K likes 1.5K bookmarks	New is a single parent student, and Tay is a lecturer. They fall in love and finally married to each other
2	@bbrightmewin	Adagio	13 Dec 2021	1K likes 652 bookmarks	Tawan is an actor and New is a singer. They fall in love with each other.
3	@morenefarious	The Art of Ordinary	16 June 2020	5K likes 5.4K bookmarks	Tay and New work in a magazine company. Tay as creative director and New as the brand ambassador. It is a main story that not only focus on Tay and New, but some other characters that is inspired from the company GMMTV
4	@morenefarious	The Art of Ordinary Spin-off TayNew	20 Jan 2021	1.3K likes 932 bookmarks	The focus of the story is the daily life of Tay and New with work and relationship issue as the main storyline
5	@taynewwife	As-Dos Universe	14 June 2022	12.6 K views 1.9K likes	Tay is a lecturer and New is his

No	X account	AU Title	Date created	View, Likes, Bookmarks	Short description
		[The World of Lecture Assistant]		1,1K bookmarks	teaching assistant. They are married to each other
6	@taynewwife	Housemate	7 Nov 2022	12K views 1.4K likes 627 bookmarks	Tay and New are college students. They live in a shared-house as their parents are friends. Someday there is a baby girl abandoned in front of their house. Tay and New co-parenting the baby girls and fall for each other during the time

Source: arranged by researcher from X

The more specific analysis is divided into several parts: character, plot/storyline, language, and setting. These aspects are an important part of AU which shows the bending and improvement from the original story or character.

Characters in the AU vs characters in the Drama

All of the AU in this study do not use the character of the drama. *'Dark Blue Kiss'* main characters are Pete Phubodin and Kao Phanawat who are secretly dating. The Thai BL drama *'Dark Blue Kiss'* itself is a sequel of Thai BL drama *'Kiss the Series'* that aired in 2016 and *'Kiss Me Again'* that was aired in 2018. During these two dramas, Pete and Kao already went through their love journey. Pete is the only son of a rich and successful businessman who is struggling on his college mark. He doesn't like to study and only joins classes because Kao also joins the class. In the early episodes of the drama, Pete was struggling to find a place to do the internship because he has low marks. By being Kao's boyfriend, he spends more time being mentored by Kao and often study together whether in his house or Kao's house. Kao is the first son of a single mother who works as a teacher. He has a sister who studies abroad with a scholarship. But since the scholarship does not cover everything, he also has to work as a tutor for some of the high school students to gain some money for his mother to support his sister. Regarding their relationship, Pete wanted to come out and share to others about him dating Kao. However, Kao did not feel comfortable, considering the response of people, not to mention that his mother is a teacher. Because of this, Pete is more possessive than Kao. However, Kao is more attentive and pays more attention to some simple things about Pete.

Moreover, instead of using the *'Dark Blue Kiss'* main character's name, which are Pete and Kao, all of the AU in this study use the actual name of the actors, which are Tawan Vihokratana or often called by Tay Tawan and Thitipoom Techaapaikhun or often called by New Thitipoom. Some of them even mix the name with the local Indonesian name, such as in the AU *'Forever'*. In this AU, the character's names are Tawan Direndra and New Arya. Involving local context based on transcultural fandom

activities in creating AU based on Thai BL drama is an embodiment of the disjuncture of Global Cultural Economy by Appadurai (1990). One of the important aspects in this matter is the mediascape, where content and information from several media can help people in shaping the way people understand the world. The mediascape concept proposed by Appadurai brings us to imagination as a collective practice influenced by global media flows and based on everyday life in local contexts. This is an appropriate lens through which one can view the creative, literacy, and social activities of many young people in the online world. This perspective highlights the cross-border movement of cultural, symbolic, and ideological materials (Black, 2009).

In addition, the traits of the characters in the AU mostly similar to Pete-Kao character in the *'Dark Blue Kiss'* drama. Pete, played by Tay Tawan in the drama, is a college student who is grumpy, short-tempered, negligent to the surroundings, likes to fight and tends to use violence to solve the problem. He loves Kao so much that makes him eager to help Kao when he was in serious trouble although at that time their relationship was not in a good state. The way Pete helped Kao was involving an accident where the recording of the love expression from Pete to New was published during Pete's live on his social media. On the other side, Kao, played by New Thitipoom, is a kind person who is so diligent, smart, and obedient. He has a big responsibility to support his family because he does not have a father. His heart is so soft, that makes people take advantage of him.

In the AU, Tay Tawan's character shares the similar traits as Pete. However, in the AU the load of love affirmation is way more expressive than the drama. It can be seen in the AU *'The Art of Ordinary spin-off TayNew'* where there is an epic line made by Tay to New that says *'lu akan selalu jadi perjuangan favorit gua'* which means 'you will always be my favorite fight'. The storyline of this AU focuses on the story before they were in a romantic relationship. This famous line was mentioned when they encounter a big problem after they become lovers and about to decide to go to the engagement phase. In The Housemate AU, Tay also has the courage to jeopardize his life to defend New and the baby girl that they co-parent when someone kidnaps her. Another extreme action by Tay happened in the AU *'Forever'* where Tay risked his life to save New and his surrogate son when New's ex-husband kidnaped them. This bending trait has the potential to show that as a human being, LGBTQ+ also acted the same as heterosexual couples, when it comes to someone they love, especially in terms of strong emotional attachments (Kurdek, 2006).

Setting and Storyline, Bringing Thailand Setting from the Drama to More Local Location and Plot in the AU

Regarding the setting and storyline, there are some similarities, but some of them are also different. The drama setting of *'Dark Blue Kiss'* is set in a university in Thailand. Meanwhile, the similarity with the AU is mostly their setting also in university, but they are fiction universities which are located in Indonesia, such as in the *'Forever'*, *'As-Dos Universe [The World of Lecture Assistant]'* and *'Housemate'* AU. However, others AU have different settings, which are *'Adagio'*, *'The Art of Ordinary'* and *'The Art of Ordinary spin-off TayNew'* that have the setting in the workplaces that can be considered in the entertainment industry. This setting is somehow not an extreme change. Although set in a university, since Pete and Kao are students of engineering faculty in a university, Pete also has an activity about modeling contests. So, he is also involved in this kind of activity in the entertainment industry.

Usually, in creating new narratives, fanfiction uses the settings, plotlines, and characters from a source, such as a movie, TV show, or book (Coppa, 2006). However, even though AU is part of fan fiction, on average, there are also many AUs that only adopt a small part of the source, for example only using the characters or figures and

the other part is fictional, written by the AU author.

Another thing that is regarding the storyline is how Tay and New's relationship is portrayed as something common and normal in the AU. In the drama, Pete and Kao have to hide their romantic relationship from their family and friends, although Pete's father is the only person who knows about them, and openly accept it. In the 'Housemate' AU even Tay had a girlfriend before he realized that he has been falling in love with his male housemate for a long time. And when it happens, it seems that it is a normal thing. It implies that sexual orientation must not makes someone be considered as a weird person. This narration is hard to be found in Indonesian media content, more specifically the contents that are produced by Indonesian.

The Local Language in the AU

In terms of the language, most of the AU is in Indonesian language. However, one of them is bilingual and uses more English which is AU 'The Art of Ordinary' and 'The Art of Ordinary spin-off TayNew' by @morenefarious. It happens possibly because the setting of the story is a multinational company that has more international context. To get a more international vibe, some of the narration and dialogue in the AU is in English. The adjustment in using Indonesian language makes it possible for the AU authors to cover Indonesian readers.

In AU 'Forever' even there are some Javanese words, such as the message chat between Tawan and his mother. Calling his son 'le cah bagus' which is Javanese language that means 'hi, handsome son' somehow makes this AU closer to the Indonesian reader. According to the Head of the Language Agency, Aminudin Aziz, in Indonesia, Javanese is the most widely used compared to other local languages. Thus, Javanese is the largest local language that contributes to the Indonesian language (Tim Badan Bahasa, 2023).

In addition, all of the AU in this research never mentioned anything related to the Thai drama BL 'Dark Blue Kiss' implicitly or explicitly either in terms of the name of the character, or the similar conflict and main storyline of the drama. With this, it can be understood that these AU cannot be considered as a direct tool for promoting the drama. However, it is way more beyond the drama actually considering that the name of the actors who play in the drama are used in all of the AU. It will give a greater impact, because not only the drama that can be promoted but also other aspects of the actors itself, such as other projects, other series, other events, which at some points will also give more benefit for the company.

The replies and quotes from the tweet of the AU are mostly shown as if Tay and New in the AU is the real Tay and New, which as some points drag the reader to their actual lives. It makes them eager to find more information about the actors which will benefit the actors because it can boost their social media engagement with the fans. In an interview with The Secret Sauce Youtube channel, GMMTV CEO, Sataporn Panichraksapong mentions that in his company, drama series are not the only thing that they use to improve the profit. Other aspects such as events and merchandise are also having potential for the company. That's why nowadays the more important thing is engagement, not rating (Dangrankeyi, 2023).

Conclusion

As a practice of fandom activity, AU, which can be considered as part of the fanfiction, involves the active process of fans not only as consumers of their idol products but also as producer or creator. The digital era, which involves internet technology, fandom activities can also be supported by social media, including AU that is inspired by Thai BL drama. All of the AU in this study do not specifically have the role as promotional tool for the drama. However, it goes beyond to promote the main

actors of the Thai BL drama 'Dark Blue Kiss' because the AU uses the actor's characteristic but modified by the drama's characteristic traits.

This study can be elaborated more deeply from the perspective of the readers by conducting interviews with them to clarify their replies and quotes toward the AU with the same focus, which is promotion. Another future study that can also be considered is regarding the depth of the impact of the AU. Since it comes from the fans, not the artist management, it will be interesting to explore to what extent does AU give impact to the popularity of the artists or the commercial benefit of the company.

Participatory culture in fandom not only leads to fans productivity, but also can contribute to the benefit of the entertainment company or agency. Creating AU, part of fan fiction that can be consumed by other fans as well as can be considered as a promotion tool to enhance the popularity of the actors, series, and other projects is beneficial for the company.

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