



## Original Research

# Add to...Cart? Thematic and Discourse Analyses of LGBTQ+-Themed Ads' Impact on Filipino LGBTQ+ Audiences' Purchasing Decisions

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**Abstract:** This research report expands on the first author's examination of how Philippine LGBTQ+-themed advertisements featuring non-stereotypical portrayals influence the purchasing decisions of Filipino LGBTQ+ consumers. The initial findings, obtained through thematic analysis, are further enhanced by discourse analysis in this article. Six focus group interviews with twenty-five LGBTQ+ participants from various regions in the Philippines revealed four primary reasons for purchasing decisions: the advertisement's impact factor and company values, brand loyalty, personal reasons, and failure to connect with the advertisement's story or messages. In further expounding these findings, this current research report highlights the advantages of integrating both thematic and discourse analyses into the participants' responses to the advertisements, which uncovered new insights and complexities within the data. This mixed-method approach addresses significant gaps, such as the absence of participatory studies involving Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals, the lack of application of discourse analysis on LGBTQ+ media studies in the country, and the need for advocacy for these methodologies to enrich gender and media research in Philippine academia.

**Keywords:** *Philippines, Advertisement, Gender, LGBTQ+, Thematic Analysis, Discourse Analysis*

## The Pink Pound Economy

Studies show that LGBTQ+ consumers, especially gay males, are loyal to brands with genuine community connections (Angelini and Bradley 2010; Petrock 2021; Kang and Ro 2024). They are also known to research brands to ensure their "Pink Dollar" support for LGBTQ+-friendly companies (Tsai 2011; Oakenfull 2013). Additionally, LGBTQ+ consumers actively avoid anti-LGBTQ+ brands and companies (Angelini and Bradley 2010; Ginder and Byun 2015). Furthermore, research indicates that LGBTQ+ consumers can identify brands that authentically engage versus those exploiting the community's narrative for profit (Champlin and Li 2020; Petrock 2021; Ro and Khan 2022).

Historically, LGBTQ+ representation in advertising has often been limited and stereotypical, focusing primarily on gay males and neglecting diversity within the community. The male gay representation in American and European advertisements reflected the prevailing heterosexual portrayal: Caucasian, middle-class, young adult,

attractive, and solely interested in heteronormative activities like weightlifting (Nölke 2017). Conversely, lesbian women were often depicted as “lipsticks” or characterized according to the heteronormative and sexualized fantasy of being a lesbian (Tsai 2010; Nölke 2017). Meanwhile, other members, such as transmen and racialized individuals, were generally excluded from the marketed representations of the group (Sender 1999, 2003). Other reasons for the lack of sexual diversity in adverts were not to offend heterosexual consumers and to encourage sales (Tsai 2010; Sender 2003; Ginder and Byun 2015; Nölke 2017). Further reasons for exclusion are the outdated marketing strategy of treating the community as a homogeneous consumer group and the gender pay gap differences among LGBTQ+ consumers (Oakenfull 2013). The latter means that economic statistics at the time identified gay men as a highly marketable group compared to lesbian consumers. This led to advertising and marketing strategies focusing on gay men, while other LGBTQ+ members were overlooked. Additionally, advertisers and marketers had to ensure that their commercials were palatable to the public, particularly heterosexual consumers, which led to the absence of some LGBTQ+ members in ads, especially if social class and racial variables were included (Sender 1999, 2003; Nölke 2017).

Over time, the male gay community noticed that as they were portrayed more realistically and non-stereotypically in advertisements, they were also depicted as big spenders (Baxter 2010; Tsai 2011). This was due to the marketers’ efforts to shift their concentration to a distinct consumer group in the LGBTQ+ community that would guarantee significant sales: the “DINKS,” which stands for dual income, no kids (Baxter 2010; Tsai 2011). Despite recognizing that some LGBTQ+ ad representation was only for marketing purposes, the community still felt validated and empowered as their ad appearances became more frequent (Tsai 2011). This newfound media recognition has resulted in a boost in confidence to face real-life challenges like gay rights movements (Tsai 2011). Furthermore, the community also realized that the LGBTQ+ consumers, especially gay males, have a significant purchasing power that translates into billions of US dollars in returns (Ginder and Byun 2015; Costales and Arguelles 2015). As a result, American LGBTQ+ consumers, particularly gay men, took control and used their buying power to reject marginalization in society (Tsai 2011), to advocate for social and political causes related to the LGBTQ+ community (Ginder and Byun 2015), and to reward companies that support the group (Petrock 2021).

## The Pink Peso

Similarly to the US’ Pink Pound Economy, the LGBTQ+ community in the Philippines also demonstrated significant influence on purchasing decisions, especially for family or domestic needs. According to Sison’s (2014) study, 70% of Filipino transgender respondents and 70% of Filipino gay respondents make the ultimate decision on housing needs. Moreover, Filipino LGBTQ+ consumers were also discovered to be brand enthusiasts with higher brand awareness compared to other consumer groups (Sison 2014; Cigarral 2019; Costales and Arguelles 2015).

Sison (2014) argues that this consumer segment tends to avoid brands with anti-LGBTQ+ or discriminatory stances. They choose to support competing brands and companies, even if it means spending more money. Moreover, friends and allies of the community also tend to avoid these companies if their LGBTQ+ peers are discriminated against by being denied services or humiliated in physical stores (Sison 2014).

The “Pink Peso” is considered lucrative as the market profile of Filipino LGBTQ+ people is similar to DINKS: single, highly educated, employed with a profitable salary, and minimal to no child-related expenses (Costales and Arguelles 2015). Their spending habits include a preference for spending on services and products over daily essentials, being impulsive buyers, and spending more on personal care than heterosexual consumers (Sison 2014; Cigal 2019). Also, bisexual and transgender consumers spend more than other members of the LGBTQ+ community (Sison 2014; Cigal 2019). Despite the profit potential, local advertisers were hesitant to use LGBTQ+ advertisements due to fear of economic repercussions, criticisms, and potential backlash from the religious sector, conservatives, and traditional members of Philippine society (Marchadesch 2018; Cigal 2019). Some local businesses also deny their services once informed of their sexuality. For example, two luxury resorts refused to host a same-sex marriage ceremony in their establishments in 2014 (Sison 2014). This shows that despite the potential financial benefits that a same-sex marriage ceremony could bring, the Philippines was not yet prepared to embrace such events at that time (Sison 2014).

As such, it was not unexpected that the emergence of one of the first LGBTQ+-themed video advertisements in the Philippines was released only in the mid-2010s. In 2015, clothing brand Bench/ released a billboard for Valentine’s Day with the slogan “Love all kinds of love,” depicting a male couple holding hands. Shortly after its installation, the couple’s hands were painted black, sparking debate over society’s acceptance of same-sex romance in local media (Lanuzo 2015). This incident highlighted issues of censorship involving the Ads Standards Council and Bench/ itself (Dabu and Takumi 2015). Despite the controversy, LGBTQ+-themed advertisements remained divisive. Supporters rallied on social media with the #PaintTheirHandsBack hashtag. Three years later, Bench/ launched another LGBTQ+-themed video ad that received a positive response from the public (Marchadesch 2018).

## The Report’s Rationale

The overarching inquiry in the first author’s study (Ildefonso 2024b)<sup>1</sup> was to determine how Filipino people reacted to the emerging trend in Philippine advertisements, referred to as the potential *new normal* by Philippine advertisers (Marchadesch 2018). This trend involves portraying the LGBTQ+ community in a positive light and non-stereotypically. The study aimed to explore how the general public responded to these new and positive Filipino LGBTQ+ media portrayals, which were quite different from the negative and stereotypical

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<sup>1</sup> The data presented in this article is sourced from the first author’s PhD dissertation.

representations previously prevalent in the Philippine media from the 1970s to the early 2010s. During this period, LGBTQ+ individuals were often depicted in problematic ways, such as comic relief, sexual deviants, *parloristang bakla* or parlor gays (male gays working as parlor beauticians), porn-like scenes for characters, and abused/abandoned by people (Tolentino 2000; Tan 2001; Diaz 2012; David 2012; Payuyo 2012). For the longest time, the general Filipino public had been exposed to these types of LGBTQ+ portrayals on various media platforms—traditional television, radio (national and community), movies (mainstream and independent), and print (magazines and tabloid newspapers)—so that these became the normative perception and standardized characterization of a typical Filipino LGBTQ+ person or member in the country. Thus, the study discovered that the non-stereotypical portrayal of LGBTQ+ individuals in the adverts, or the *new normal* (Marchadesch 2018), is a significant social phenomenon. It has provided empirical evidence that many Filipino LGBTQ+ participants view this shift as a move away from being stereotyped to finally being recognized and represented positively in mainstream media and through millions of pesos worth of investments.

Moreover, in the first author's study, the "Filipino people" were categorized into two groups—heterosexual and LGBTQ+ audiences. One of the objectives was to understand the general public's perspectives, particularly the level of acceptance of current LGBTQ+-themed advertisements in mainstream media and the potential for more similar content in the future. Additionally, feedback was collected from LGBTQ+ participants to gauge their perception of how they have been represented in Philippine media over the past decades to the present, specifically in the advertisements under review, and the impact of these representations on their lives.

The study incidentally delved into the LGBTQ+ participants' consumer behavior. The first author's study identified four main factors that could influence this group's purchasing decisions when influenced by the LGBTQ+-themed advertisements in question. The ultimate purpose of this article is to present and discuss these factors. While this discovery is a new empirical contribution to the current gender-media academic field in the Philippines, this article also aims to provide additional information, offering alternative explanations of the purchasing decisions of Filipino LGBTQ+ consumers when the gathered data is examined through the lens of discourse analysis.

While the study's findings can enhance marketing strategies for LGBTQ+ consumers, its primary aim is to advance understanding in several key areas. First, it makes a significant academic contribution to gender and media studies through participatory research with Filipino LGBTQ+ respondents, who have been largely underrepresented. Second, it centers LGBTQ+ experiences in exploring societal issues like gender and media stereotyping, a perspective often lacking in Philippine media studies. Third, it applies a Western communication theory in the Philippine context, highlighting its potential for replication in other contexts in the country's academic settings. Fourth, the study identifies unique factors

influencing Filipino LGBTQ+ consumer purchasing decisions based on advertisement portrayals. Finally, one data set is analyzed through two different lenses, adding rigor to the exploration of this societal phenomenon.

## **LGBTQ+ Adverts' Societal Relevance**

The misrepresentation and underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ characters in Philippine media have been influenced by the country's sociocultural structure, notably shaped by heteronormativity since the Spanish colonization in the 1500s. This has led to entrenched beliefs around gender binaries and traditional sex roles tied to Catholicism (Atadero et al. 2014).

Many LGBTQ+ Filipinos still face societal pressure to conform to avoid disappointing their families, and so individuals hide their identities or enter heterosexual marriages to avoid judgment (Tang and Poudel 2018; Ceperiano et al. 2016). Family homophobia is prevalent, particularly among strict Catholics who view homosexuality as immoral (Nadal and Corpus 2013). This can partly explain the portrayals of gay men in media as closeted, rejected, or abused. Participants in Ceperiano et al. (2016) noted minimizing their identities to protect family reputations.

Rejection extends outside when the socio-demographic aspect contributes to a person's homonegativity (Reyes et al. 2019). The lack of national legal rights for LGBTQ+ individuals exacerbates societal intolerance, as the long-pending Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) bill, first filed in 2000, faces delays due to congressional opposition rooted in conservative beliefs (Ildefonso 2024a). The definitions of marriage and family remain heteronormative, complicating recognition of such rights as universal human rights (Chiarella 2012). This is one of the many instances illustrating this group's societal rejection as a deep-rooted and systemic issue.

The origins of media portrayal are also deep-rooted. In the 1970s, erotic films emerged to divert people's attention from the political issues at the time due to martial law (Cañete 2011). Sensationalized homoerotic movies also emerged to attract audiences (David 2012). Its common storyline includes gay men picking up male prostitutes, with homophobic dialogue, violence, and disgust (David 2012; Diaz 2019). These homoerotic elements, once intended to attract moviegoers, have unfortunately been the ground for gay men's media representation moving forward, such as perverts of male flesh. The image of *parloristang bakla* emerged in the 1970s, depicting them as loud, lower-class beauticians. During the Marcos regime, first lady Imelda Marcos formed a gay fashion crew as her stylist (Tan 2001). This has created an illusion that only certain gay members are allowed in high society, while the *parloristang bakla* continue to be marginalized and remain within their own social class. Unfortunately, these harmful stereotypes became normalized, driven by profit motives in filmmaking (Soler 1988, cited in Payuyo 2012).

The arguments highlight the various interests that have impeded improvements in media representation of the LGBTQ+ community in the Philippines. Common themes in media

portrayals include family rejection, ridicule, gay men stereotype as crossdressers or *parlorista*, and the absence of trans individuals. Bisexuality is often misunderstood as plain homosexuality due to binary thinking. However, the LGBTQ+ community has celebrated recent shifts in media, particularly in adverts, which have begun to portray them in a more positive and humanizing light since the late 2010s. This phenomenon was explored by the first author in the original study.

## Theoretical Framework

The first author's study adopts a theory-driven approach, avoiding ontological or epistemological foundations to reduce bias. The researcher, not belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, was influenced by an era of negative media representations of LGBTQ+ individuals in the Philippines. Thus, the original study's entire design is grounded in theoretical concepts.

The theoretical framework used was David Morley's Relevance Theory (1980), enhanced by John Fiske (1988). Relevance Theory posits that audiences place meaning on texts based on shared experiences with people in the same socioeconomic situations (Morley 1980). In other words, people with certain similarities are grouped to discuss media content; their interpretations of meanings and symbolisms become the group's interpretation of the media.

Relevance Theory has layers. After grouping audiences to watch a certain media content, personal interpretations, termed "moments of semiosis" (Fiske 1988, 247), arise from individual experiences. These interpretations go through a "cultural process," where group discussions foster connections, leading to broader societal discussions, termed "social allegiance" (Fiske 1988, 247). This allegiance emerges when agreement is reached during discussion, influenced by similarities within the group like social class and ethnic backgrounds. For example, the film *Do the Right Thing*, which depicts racism and discrimination, gathered various interpretations due to varied social realities (Cooper 1998). The Black audience group focused more on themes of racism, violence, and discrimination. Meanwhile, the White audience's primary concern was that the antagonist was a White character.

Research under this theory has offered deeper insights into societal issues by interpreting and discussing media content (Cohen 1991; Lind 2001; Cooper 1998). In the Philippine context, a gender-media issue that remains underexplored can benefit from a theory that emphasizes activating social allegiance to better understand underlying problems. The first author's findings indicate that Filipino LGBTQ+ audiences are active receivers of LGBTQ+ media, discussing not only content but also applying it to societal issues. Their discussions lead to multiple interpretations, revealing nuances in advertisements that may be overlooked by heterosexual viewers. Utilizing this theory provided empirical contributions to the field, while also addressing the original research questions. In this article, we aim to enhance the purchasing decisions section of the original study by employing discourse analysis, continuing our commitment to advancing research in this area.

## Methodology

The need for thematic and discourse analyses stemmed from the first author's findings that most LGBTQ+ media and audience studies in the Philippine academia focused mainly on scholarly opinions, content analysis, reviews, or commentaries on media content, and investigations on foreign LGBTQ+ media (Beller 2001; Cañete 2011; Diaz 2019; Martin et al. 2022; Dogcol and Villanueva 2024). The study also discovered a significant lack of participatory research on LGBTQ+ media and audience studies, which involves seeking the voices of LGBTQ+ individuals about their portrayal in the media and its effects.

To address this research gap, the original study organized a series of focus groups (FG) nationwide, with Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals as the main participants. The primary data collected were their personal opinions and insights on the LGBTQ+ local media representation and its impact on their lived experiences. The author aims to provide an updated discourse on the topic, encouraging future studies to use this methodology on LGBTQ+ media inquiry.

The five advertisements chosen, out of the limited selection, released from 2016 to 2019:

- Uber Philippines (2017): "Kilig #UberStories"—A young male passenger finds himself on an Uber ride with his crush and simultaneously posts his thoughts on social media as events unfolded during the ride.
- Bench/ (2018): "How long can you keep a secret?"—A story of the acceptance of a young closeted gay man's sexuality by his father through gifting him the Bench/ So in Love perfume. Bench/ is a local clothing and apparel company.
- Smart Communications (2016): "Break down barriers and welcome change!"—A story of a father's acceptance of his gay son's sexuality and the son's reluctance to include his father in his social media space. Smart Communications is a local mobile, telephone, and internet service provider.
- Pantene Philippines (2018): "Strength knows no gender. #StrongerNow"—The first advertisement in the Philippines featuring a transwoman, beauty queen Kevin Balot, empowering the LGBTQ+ community through the showcase of the journey to discovery from childhood to adulthood.
- Close Up Philippines (2019): "#MakeYourMove Films—P.S. I Love You, Bro"—A cute and funny love story between two males in a milk tea shop. Close Up is a brand of toothpaste produced by Unilever.

The study involved twenty-five Filipino LGBTQ+ participants aged 18 to 41 from various regions of the Philippines: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Data collection occurred in the first two months of 2022, with participants divided into six FGs (two per region) to ensure diverse regional representation. This approach considers various cultural influences, such as the prevalence of Catholicism in Luzon and Visayas and Islam in Mindanao. The use of

Relevance Theory as a framework emphasizes recruiting participants with socioeconomic similarities to enrich the data gathered.

Table 1: Focus Group Participants' Profile

<i>Region of Residence</i>	<i>Pseudonyms<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity<sup>3</sup></i>
Luzon	Lavender	27	Bisexual woman
	Pink	23	Bisexual ciswoman
	Purple	21	Pansexual ciswoman
	Blue	19	Bisexual cisman
	Scotch	33	Gay man
	Bunny	33	A gay man who also identifies as nonbinary
	Bona	29	A gay man who also identifies as nonbinary
	Pinky	41	Identifies as a femme in same-sex relationships but does not explicitly call herself a lesbian
Visayas	Smith	24	Bisexual man
	Octus	22	Gay man
	Scorpion	21	Gay man
	Vanx	18	A gay man who later identifies as a transwoman throughout the interview
	Ryl	21	Gay man
	Vinny	25	Lesbian woman
Mindanao	Jung	24	Did not disclose
	Jovina	24	Did not disclose
	Bert	22	Transwoman
	Ba	21	A bisexual man who also identifies as a straight male
	Maddy	Did not disclose	Transwoman who also identifies as straight
	JC	18	Did not disclose
	Klint	18	Gay man
	John	25	Gay man
	Rhandy	37	Transwoman who also identifies as gay
	Janna	31	Transwoman who also identifies as gay
	Jagger	33	A gay man who also identifies as bisexual

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all the participants to protect their anonymity.

<sup>3</sup> The profile information is based on participants' input during the FG interviews. The distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity was sometimes unclear, with some participants using these labels interchangeably or contradictorily. Not all participants identified their sexual orientation or gender identity.

When conducting participatory research, especially by non-members of the group studied, it is crucial to encourage participation and communicate that participants are integral to the research process (Hudley et al. 2022). This study draws from participatory methods to empower participants, highlight their perspectives, and activate their meaning-making via FG. The researcher mediated them, similarly to Morley's approach (1980). The first author included diverse opinions and experiences, leading to the identification of four key purchasing decisions influenced by the five advertisements analyzed.

In applying the theory, the participants were asked to watch the five advertisements and then discuss their opinions on them. The questions were semi-structured, focusing on allowing the participants to discuss among themselves freely. Drawing on the theory's concepts, several similarities between the participants affect how they interpreted the advertisements. The main similarity is belonging to the LGBTQ+ community; the secondary is their regional residence. These similarities have provided the participants with avenues for relevance and social allegiance to work. Hence, it was important to gather participants from all Philippine regions as social realities, and experiences vary from one region to another. If relevance and social allegiance are activated, richer interpretations of the media text and transcending the content into societal issues, among others, will be observed.

In this report, thematic (Braun and Clarke 2006; Bazeley 2009) and discourse (Machin and Mayr 2023) analyses were combined to explore both the explicit and latent meanings expressed by FG participants. This dual lens was used to identify both *what* the participants said about the advertisements they watched and *how* they justified their views. Further examination through discourse analysis is essential to deepen our insight into how Filipino LGBTQ+ individuals perceive LGBTQ+ media content and to explain the factors influencing their purchasing decisions, which are often shaped by their personal experiences. Ultimately, the authors, together with the participants, hope to foster a more relevant, accurate, and respectful representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in media in the Philippines.

The first author initially conducted thematic analysis and coding in the original Tagalog language using NVivo, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Bazeley (2009). Although there were occasional varied answers, the coding process used for thematic analysis ensured that all reactions and opinions from the participants were captured and included. First, data from the FGs were grouped under the following (non-mutually exclusive) categories: "brand loyalty," "might buy because of ads," "will buy because of ads," and "will not buy." The analysis of all data thus categorized helped identify four themes. These themes were considered the main reasons for their purchasing decisions based on the five LGBTQ+-themed advertisements: the advertisement's impact factor and company values, brand loyalty, personal reasons, and failure to connect with the advertisement's story or messages.

Once the thematic analysis was completed, the first author selected parts of the data dealing with purchasing strategies and translated these into English for both authors to engage with the data on a more discursive level. Authors 1 and 2 looked at the data with the

themes identified and Relevance Theory in mind. The authors used discourse analysis tools to unearth how the participants justified their purchasing strategies in connection with existing discourses. Paying particular attention to word choices, overlexicalization, word connotations, and structural oppositions (Machin and Mayr 2023) helped the authors identify how the discourses deployed by the participants echoed and/or challenged existing narratives, cultural resonance, and discursive strategies. Results from thematic and discourse analyses are combined in the following sections, as the four themes from thematic analysis are presented and supported by elements from the discourse analysis. The first author played a central role throughout the analysis, given her in-depth knowledge of the local Filipino context and role as a mediator during the FGs.

## Results and Discussion

### "The Allies:" The Ads' Impact Factor and the Brand's Company Values

The discussions after watching Uber, Pantene, and Bench/ advertisements shed light on this first reasoning. Many of the participants have interpreted Uber's feel-good romance story as a deviation from the established male gay stereotypical representation in Philippine media: perverts and hungry for male flesh. Participants were well aware of the dominant stereotypical representations of LGBTQ+ people, which often formed the basis for reading and evaluating the ads shown during the FGs. As a result, the participants would discuss among themselves which advert elements they perceived to break away from or reproduce dominant discourses. For Uber, some participants found the storyline applies to anyone who would unexpectedly find themselves in the presence of their crush, regardless of gender and sexual orientation. The advert was perceived as reversing who encapsulates the norm by showcasing a same-sex encounter as the basis for generalizable romantic behavior. The storyline and visual elements generally resonated well with the participants, as several found the lead character's behavior realistic and aligned with how they would react in an analogous situation. For example, Scorpion shared that he did not feel violated as a gay male person when watching the advertisement, as, in his view, it solely showed an innocent crush on a same-sex person. Some participants also praised the advertisement for showcasing clothing and physical appearances remarkably close to their realities. This observation further supports Uber ads' attempt to digress from the stereotyped, normalized male gay media representation in the Philippines (i.e., drag attire and excessive make-up). These main elements that the participants raised indicate that most of them responded positively to using Uber in the future. However, their responses were hypothetical, as they were informed at the beginning of the discussion that Uber ceased operations in the Philippines in 2018.

As for Pantene, Jung affirms that its storyline and product endorser convinced them to switch to Pantene. Scorpion is also most likely to use the product, as he was inspired by the endorser's long, shiny hair. However, from a bisexual woman's viewpoint, Lavender shared

a statement supporting studies (Angelini and Bradley 2010; Petrock 2021; Kang and Ro 2024) wherein LGBTQ+ consumers reward companies that support them. This Pantene ad is the first in the Philippines to showcase a transwoman endorser. The #StrongerNow campaign series features inspiring women in various adverts who have overcome different struggles. The inclusion of the endorser Kevin Balot is an indication of inclusivity, wherein transwomen are being recognized as part of the roster of women in the said campaign.

Lavender: If that's the company's beliefs as a whole, you would support the company that supports (the message) transwomen are women.

Bisexual ciswoman Purple shares a similar opinion, stating that she will support a company that respects her as a human being. This perspective aligns with observations from several respondents who perceive the Uber driver as an ally. For instance, gay men participants Jagger and Klint view the Uber driver as an ally because he is depicted as supporting the innocent same-sex flirtation occurring in his cab. Likewise, Purple's group interprets the portrayal of an ally driver as a representation of the company's stance on LGBTQ+ issues, such as public same-sex romance. The group agrees that seeing a respectful heterosexual driver in the advertisement suggests they could have a similarly safe experience in real life, believing that Uber implements inclusive practices for its customers. They also see the depiction of a heterosexual ally as a significant shift away from the typical portrayal of heterosexual individuals' reactions to same-sex romance in media, moving from rejection to acceptance. Additionally, several participants indicated that if advertisements genuinely reflect the company's position on LGBTQ+ issues within the country, then the community would be receptive to them. Vinny, a lesbian woman, while acknowledging the advertisement as a marketing strategy, expresses that she would still choose to use Uber because the ad portrays a positive image of both LGBTQ+ individuals and their drivers, most of whom are assumed to be non-homophobic. Furthermore, some participants noted that if brands explicitly indicated that a portion of their revenue would support LGBTQ+ advocacy, like AIDS awareness, they would be more likely to support those brands.

Many participants explained they would go out of their way to avoid companies with anti-LGBTQ+ stances. During the discussion between Bunny, Bona, Pinky, and Scotch (gay man), seeing a father in the Bench/ ad is perceived as breaking the socially uncomfortable situation in the country of a male person going to a female-oriented store<sup>4</sup> to shop. According to these participants, one of the key factors to have this fully normalized on the ground is employing staff within the community and staff who would allow transgender customers to try on female clothing and vice versa. While the ad helps break such a stereotype, these

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<sup>4</sup> The perfume is being sold in HerBench/ shops, which is the female counterpart of Bench/.

participants considered the actions performed in a company's shops or their staff's behavior toward LGBTQ+ shoppers more detrimental to supporting a brand.

Bona: For example, if a particular H&M branch discriminates against transgender customers, I would no longer go to that specific branch. Because if they could discriminate against transgender customers, how do you think they would treat me? Although the company already apologized that they shouldn't have behaved that way, my personal choice would remain.

As illustrated by the previous quote, the participants reflected on the adverts shown during the FGs in connection with existing discourses and social realities. This meant that the participants did not evaluate adverts as isolated products but in relation to the time when they were released, experiences in shops, national discourses about the LGBTQ+ community, previous adverts from the company, and general discussions about what the role of adverts is. Indeed, as participants justified their purchasing decisions, they collectively worked to make sense of the role of adverts (i.e., are ads about the story they tell or about the product they sell?). Overall, the advertisements that resonated with the participants and seemed to influence their decision to support certain products were those they could relate to, connect with, or empathize with LGBTQ+ individuals. The participants found that the ads they empathized with the most portrayed the LGBTQ+ community non-stereotypically and showcased the companies' values in supporting the community. This indicates that the participants are more likely to buy products when they could relate to the ads, if the ads appealed to their emotions through storylines or portrayals of their community, perceived to be genuine, and deviated from dominant stereotypical representations. Additionally, the participants' insights revealed two purchasing behaviors: they support and/or reward companies that are pro-LGBTQ+ and are also willing to avoid supporting companies that discriminate against the community actively.

Overall, the participants express that Uber is the advert that presents them realistically and accurately through physical appearance, clothing, and mannerisms, and Bench/ as the advert that is capable of perfectly fitting the LGBTQ+ stories to the product. The Bench/ ad appeals to them the most as the narratives of hiding their sexualities and desire to be accepted by their parents, commonly experienced within the community, are executed in the ad impressively. Conversely to Smart's missed usage of the term "accept" (this will be further explained in the fourth reasoning), Bench/ successfully connected the term "smell" between the product and the participants. In the Philippines, the phrase "I can smell you" is slang for "I know you're gay." The participants considered the idea of connecting the famous local colloquial phrase to a perfume ingenious and not disrespectful to the community. Hence, the advert has effectively gathered the participants' support, inspiring them to consider purchasing or repurchasing the product.

"Brand Loyalty + Well-Executed Advertisement = Pink Peso"

The Pantene advertisement has moved many participants, and some, like Jung and Vanx, are convinced to purchase the product. However, most of the participants are already loyal users of Pantene due to its quality and scent, such as transwomen Janna, Rhandy, and gay man John. The advertisement, its message, and the endorser only strengthened their loyalty to the brand and the decision to repurchase it.

Scotch, Pinky, Lavender, and Blue (bisexual cisman) were frequent users of Uber when the service was still available in the country. Similarly to Pantene, the Uber ad only enhances these participants' affinity for the brand. The reasons for their loyalty included affordability for students, cleanliness and pleasant fragrance of Uber cars, positive past experiences, and the welcoming attitude of the driver in the ad, which resonated with Scotch's experience.

Regarding the Bench/ advertisement, some respondents have given positive feedback on repurchasing the advertised product, as they have used it in the past. The advertisement strengthens their intention to repurchase due to the brand's success in reinforcing their values as LGBTQ+ supporters through the advertisement. Bisexual ciswoman Pink even states that she would purchase two bottles because of the ad. Additionally, Blue expresses support for the locally produced product by making a purchase.

In the first author's study, brand loyalty was the primary reason customers would purchase the products featured in the commercials they watched. However, while writing this article, the authors discovered a vital key finding: the main factors influencing purchasing decisions vary when examined thematically rather than through discourse analysis.

Initially, the first author analyzed the interviews using NVivo to identify themes, resulting in nine distinct themes. The "purchasing decision" emerged as the third theme with four sub-themes under it (Table 2). These sub-themes were developed after coding all the participants' responses regarding their likelihood of buying the advertised products *because* of the advertisements.

Table 2: Purchasing Decision: Thematic Analysis

<i>Purchasing Decision Sub-Themes</i>	<i>Uber</i>	<i>Bench</i>	<i>Smart</i>	<i>Pantene</i>	<i>Close Up</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. Brand loyalty	5	8	7	7	4	31
2. Will buy because of the ads	3	7	2	2	2	16
3. Might buy because of the ads	2	4	6	1	1	14
4. Will not buy	3	5	7	11	7	33

Subsequently, sub-themes two to four were re-coded because participants provided various factors influencing their purchasing decisions. This process led to identifying the four main purchasing rationales currently being discussed in this article. The most consistent and

confident responses during the thematic analysis regarding positive purchasing decisions, particularly for brands like Bench/, Smart, and Pantene, were attributed to brand loyalty. Based on their answers, brand loyalty is built due to satisfaction with the products' quality, noting past usage and positive experiences, confirming current use, and finding them to be more affordable compared to competitors. However, applying discourse analysis revealed insights that go beyond mere coding and categorization. Discourse analysis helped to understand how the participants evaluated the advertisements they watched during the FGs and how they justified their purchasing decisions. Discourse analysis added a layer to the results by locating the participants' answers in relation to existing discourses about the purpose of advertisements, expectations regarding media discourse, or national stereotypes about the LGBTQ+ community.

By examining the situation through this lens, the researchers assert that Filipino LGBTQ+ audiences actively engage with LGBTQ+ media content. This means they can effectively distinguish between authentic and inauthentic advertising efforts aimed at connecting with their community. Consequently, if an advertisement is perceived as insincere or as merely using their narratives for marketing purposes, it is likely that the LGBTQ+ audience will not support it, leading to negative purchasing decisions regarding the advertised product.

#### "It Depends:" Various Personal Reasons and Circumstances

In the thematic analysis, some of the participants' reasoning under "brand loyalty" and "personal reasons" were sometimes aligned, making it difficult to differentiate between them. However, the main factor distinguishing personal reasons is when, despite liking the advertisements' messages to and about the LGBTQ+ community, participants are unlikely to buy the products due to compelling reasons.

Jovina will not purchase the Bench/ perfume because it triggers migraines due to a sinus infection. Janna is a regular Close Up user and will not switch to other brands due to her relatives' medical conditions. They cannot use other brands that may cause allergic reactions. Maddy (transwoman), Vinny, Ryl (gay man), and Pink need anti-dandruff shampoo and will not switch to Pantene. Pink, however, mentions that she might consider switching if Pantene produces an anti-dandruff product. Jovina will not use Uber or similar services due to a past traumatic experience in a cab. John appreciates the Bench/ ad but will only purchase the product if he likes the scent.

In Relevance Theory, an activated or inactivated social allegiance is insignificant. The theory is a sociological inquiry that approaches media content as a tool for investigation to emphasize the sociological implications hidden in media materials. Regardless of whether social allegiance is achieved, the findings serve as a foundation for further examination into the underlying reasons for its occurrence or lack thereof. Due to the participants' discussion,

we have identified a key factor influencing several purchasing decisions under this specific category: the capacity to critically analyze and deconstruct advertisements.

Jagger: I think the advertisement itself...who wants a negative impact? They always want to showcase the positive side (all agreed) and that is positive...Whoever is the writer or the creative team, it's a wise decision. And now, Bench/ is a big conglomerate as a company of brands. It's like, "You should buy our products because we love gays, and you belong with us" (all agreed). It's like that at the end of the day.

Jagger's opinion gathered a similar response from the participants. During the interview, transwoman Bert demonstrated her marketing knowledge when asked if she would be likely to make a purchase based on the advertisements. Her consistent response is that she may not buy all the products, even if she likes some ads. Her knowledge of marketing significantly influences her buying choices. Scotch, who is allergic to perfumes, recognizes that the Bench ad is primarily a marketing tool, which does not persuade him to buy the product. From these insights, we can conclude that factors under "personal reasons" include marketing knowledge and a discernment of marketing strategies in the advertisements.

One outlier located in the gray area between "brand loyalty," "personal reasons," and "failure to connect with the ad" (the fourth reason explained further in the next subsection) is observed. While there are mixed reactions to the Smart adverts, most participants in the Visayas and Mindanao regions will remain Smart subscribers (and sister company, Talk 'N Text) due to its strong network coverage, which participants explain is better than its competitors in their areas. Smart's prices in the two regions are also cheaper than those of the competitors. However, participants in Luzon will not switch to Smart as they are established users of Smart's competitor, Globe. Globe's prices are also much cheaper in Luzon, and its coverage in the area is better than Smart's.

In the past, switching mobile providers meant changing one's phone number and losing access and ownership to the old one. Hence, participants were hesitant to switch mobile providers. It is arguable that if switching to a different brand will affect important aspects of their lives, such as professional and social sides, it will be hard to convince LGBTQ+ consumers to support it despite favoring the adverts. However, it is important to note that the Republic Act 11202, or the Mobile Number Portability Act, was implemented in the last quarter of 2021. The FG discussions were conducted in the first two months of 2022. Hence, it can be concluded that the participants' purchasing mindset toward mobile networks still relied on the practice they were accustomed to at the time of data collection. Thus, this article recommends that future researchers conduct a similar study to inquire about the LGBTQ+ community's purchasing decisions based on the Smart advertisement, now that mobile number portability has been introduced in the country.

Overall, the common factors observed for personal reasons to influence purchasing decisions are socioeconomic and health reasons. If participants can afford the products in the advertisements they like, they may switch or continue using them. However, if for health reasons, educational knowledge, or anything that will disrupt their social or professional situations, their preference for the ads will not matter as they will continue using the brand that complements their health, medical, or personal needs. This points to the importance of considering practical reasons (individual and geographical), as these may overrule participants' purchasing decisions, even despite brands being perceived as allies to the LGBTQ+ community through their advertisements.

#### "A Breakdown in Communication:" Failure to Connect with the Ads' Messages

While the Pantene, Smart, and Close Up advertisements have received positive feedback from participants, some elements are misunderstood, making the products unattractive to the participants.

For Pantene, some participants have found a mismatch between the advertisement and the product being sold. Bisexual man Smith expresses the need to see the product packaging to be convinced by the advertisement to make a purchase.

Smith: I didn't know what Pantene was. I didn't really get the advertisement. Like what is it for? Because they're only showing the people and what they're doing, what we got were the messages they wanted to address. So, for me, they should have shown the products that they were advertising more.

Scotch is also unconvinced and suggests that featuring the product's ingredients, such as Pro-Vitamin B, would be more persuasive. Octus shares a similar viewpoint, highlighting the importance of considering viewers who may not have access to mobile phones, gadgets, or the internet to quickly research the product after watching the ad. This situation makes it particularly challenging for individuals unfamiliar with the Pantene brand to understand the advertisement.

Octus (gay man): For example, Pantene, you didn't know the product, so you would ask. You would get puzzled. "What are these things they are showing us for?" Is it the hair? Is it the clothing? Or it can be the necklace because it was also focused. So, it could be the necklace that they are selling.

These reactions raised discussions of what the five advertisements are about. Some participants find that advertisements can play an important role in debunking stereotypical representations and, therefore, appreciate brands that explicitly position themselves as allies of the LGBTQ+ community. In contrast, some participants provided less political readings of

advertisements that they explained and mainly judged in terms of selling–buying logic. Participants who draw on such a commercial lens to read advertisements, therefore, express confusion when insufficient information about the product itself is included.

Regarding mismatched messages, Close Up has faced criticism from all participants for its exaggerated scripts and forced LGBTQ+ narratives. The advertisement heavily emphasizes milk tea, with all events taking place in a milk tea shop and the characters frequently ordering it. The toothpaste is only shown very briefly once, leaving participants craving milk tea and confused about its relevance to LGBTQ+ stories. Some participants, including Blue, Vinny, and Ryl, find humor in the advertisement. They jokingly stated that they brush their teeth regularly or have visited similar shops but have never encountered experiences shown in the ad. Thus, these participants posit that they would not purchase Close Up due to the lack of relevance to their experiences and those of the characters. The participants' impression of the Close Up ad is the failure to sell a product, while forcing the LGBTQ+ narrative into the story. Jovina argues that the ad felt like it was saying the couple met because of milk tea, prompting Bert to deem the ad a double promotion of toothpaste and a milk tea brand.

Smart has also garnered criticism from the participants for forcing the LGBTQ+ narrative in the adverts, convincing them that the ad is not selling anything. According to Bunny, they should have included any information or ongoing promotion at the time on how their products would improve the lives of their LGBTQ+ customers. Moreover, several participants noted that the ad's emphasis on the father–son relationship made the product being advertised seem incongruent with the story. Additionally, the participants felt like the word “accept” from the father's Facebook request sent to the son was a forced attempt to connect to the LGBTQ+ consumer through the message of the parent's acceptance of their sexuality. The participants also feel this ad does not reflect the reality of LGBTQ+ Filipinos. For example, Bunny said that typical Filipino families and fathers do not express their love for their children openly as the father in the ad did. Scotch asks if he will also experience his parents' acceptance if he switches to Smart. More importantly, Filipino fathers or any male figure in the family who is part of the military are deemed by the participants as not accepting of their LGBTQ+ relatives. In this instance, non-relatability to the adverts still produced social allegiance, paving the way to understand on a deeper level why these advertisements failed to relate to the participants.

Overall, the participants' failure to connect with the story of an advertisement revealed different understandings of the missions of advertisements. From a marketing perspective, participants evaluated the advertisements that did not have a straightforward selling narrative as inefficient. The participants who read advertisements in connection with their positionalities within the LGBTQ+ community critically addressed LGBTQ+ narratives used by advertisements produced solely for commercial purposes, lacking genuine intentions. In such cases, the participants felt advertisements created a forced connection between the brand and LGBTQ+ consumers through insincere or unrealistic usage of LGBTQ+ narratives.

## Conclusion

One of the main arguments in first author's study is that Filipino LGBTQ+ members have been stereotyped and presented negatively in Philippine media for decades. The empirical data gathered has been proven to have a direct impact on various public members in the country regarding how they perceive or form opinions about the LGBTQ+ community. The effects of this collective societal perception are often negative, whether inadvertently or intentionally, and have also affected several of the study's participants adversely. One significant consequence of this societal perception is the dominant stereotypical media depictions, lack of positive portrayals of the LGBTQ+ community in Philippine media, the absence of such representation in Philippine advertising, and insufficient academic inquiry into this gender and media issue. Hence, the first author initiated research to contribute to bridging this gap through participatory research, focusing on LGBTQ+ individuals in all major regions of the country, and centralizing the inquiry on the limited number of advertisements available portraying the community in a humanized manner.

This current article's purpose is to report the original study's findings on the LGBTQ+ participants' purchasing decision based on the five advertisements and expound it discursively, while also identifying opportunities for further research guided by the findings in this study. More specifically, regarding appropriate media portrayals of the community that can influence public perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals.

The first key finding discovered is that the purchasing decisions of Filipino LGBTQ+ consumers differ depending on whether the discussions are analyzed through thematic or discourse analysis. Among the four identified rationales, the thematic analysis pinpointed brand loyalty as the primary reason for purchasing products. However, discourse analysis revealed that whether brand loyalty is present or not, their purchasing decision is most likely to be influenced by their felt connection with the advertisement's narratives and its company's values.

In the original study, the first author discovered that Filipino LGBTQ+ consumers are active readers of LGBTQ+ media content. For example, if a company is perceived as an ally through its ad, the participants will be willing to reward it by actively supporting its products and services and will eagerly avoid companies that are discriminatory against the community. To reiterate, applying discourse analysis has revealed that in-depth analyses also took place in determining their purchasing decisions.

Hence, the second key finding is that consolidated efforts to analyze the roles of advertisements while taking into account other variables attached to them—such as issues, controversies, current events, the time they were released, or even personal empirical observations of their social realities—shows that purposeless, valueless, and inauthentic uses of LGBTQ+ narratives are more likely not to be welcomed.

In developing a marketing strategy targeting this consumer group, companies in the Philippines must always meticulously consider their uniqueness. Based on the data gathered, Filipino LGBTQ+ audiences can and will focus on details, especially if the purpose is to appeal to their emotions. At times, some participants have seen the potential of using this platform politically, such as advancing sociocultural gender inequality awareness and advocacy to the public; others may remain within the bounds of seller–buyer logic. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the common mistake made by poorly received ads is using LGBTQ+ narratives in their advertisements in a superficial and inauthentic manner.

The implications of this research suggest that disseminating this knowledge can promote a more authentic representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in Philippine advertisements, helping to normalize the humanized characteristics and challenge long-standing stereotypes. It also demonstrates the value of participatory approaches that involve the LGBTQ+ community in gender-media studies, aiming to fill existing research gaps in this field in the Philippines. Hence, this study recommends that future LGBTQ+ media studies employ research approaches that have rarely or never been applied in the field before.

Some limitations can guide future studies, such as the introduction of the Mobile Number Portability Act, which may influence purchasing decisions and consumer opinions on the Smart advertisement. Additionally, conducting discourse analysis in the vernacular could yield richer findings, as a native speaker has familiarity with local language and nuances. Furthermore, this study re-emphasizes its nature as academic research rather than as market research aimed at addressing gaps in academic literature and supporting initiatives against LGBTQ+ discrimination in Philippine media (UNDP and USAID 2014), such as stereotyping. Overall, the study is a significant contribution to gender and media research in the Philippines and lays the groundwork for similar inquiries in future.

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## Informed Consent

The authors have obtained informed consent from all participants.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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