

Acceptance of LGBT Comics and Animation among Public University Students in Malaysia

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Abstract

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) has always been a sensitive topic in Malaysia, especially among the Malays and Muslims. In terms of morals and religion, LGBT is prohibited and taboo to debate because it can be a sensitive issue to other races and religions. Japanese animation and comics have a specific theme or genre for the LGBT community and its fans. This paper attempts to understand the views of Japanese language students at five Public Universities (UA) who read or watch LGBT-genre Japanese comics and animations. The survey was distributed to the target respondents, and 280 respondents answered the survey. The results of this study are part of the author's research data. The study results showed that 22.5% of the respondents read Japanese comics or animations of the gay or lesbian genre, 19.3% have stopped reading or watching comics or animations of this genre and 58.2% have never read such a genre. The percentage indicates that almost half of the study respondents have been exposed to this negative phenomenon. The objective of this study is to identify lesbian and gay genre comics and animated titles as a community and parental guide. The second objective is to examine the respondents' views so that the public understands why they are involved in such a case.

Keywords: anime, boy's love, Japanese, LGBT, manga, public university

Introduction

It is common knowledge that Japanese is one of the most popular foreign language in Malaysia and worldwide. Japanese popular culture became popular in the 1990s with Japanese drama and animation on Malaysian television screens. Among the popular Japanese dramas in Malaysia were *Oshin* and *Great Teacher Onizuka (GTO)* in the 1990s.

Interestingly, these two dramas are still screened in several countries and are accepted by the society as they share a similar war background and schooling world in other countries. Among the popular Japanese animations are *Conan* and *Crayon Shinchan*. The popular Japanese language and culture are in demand today, especially among teenagers, whether university or high school students.

With the development of technology and the relatively rapid and widespread internet coverage in Malaysia, Japanese animation (anime) and comics (manga) began to 'enter' Malaysia on a large scale. Japanese manga can be downloaded through various websites, especially from outside Malaysia. The same goes for anime, where various fandoms run multiple websites to promote different types and genres of anime and comics and diverse other Japanese cultures such as cosplay and food. Fandom refers to fans interested in someone (especially an idol), a group or a particular drama or anime series. As an example of South Korean popular culture (KPop), the most popular for BTS is the 'army'. Someone interested in more than one person or one group are known as multi-fandom.

Japan is indeed known for its hard-working, punctual, clean and polite people. After the end of the Second World War, Japan became a developed country in a short time because of the discipline of its people and the heartbreaking experience of losing the war. The Japanese will always remember the date when the world powers bombed their country in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. To this day, they convey peace messages through various means, including sending surviving remnants of war victims abroad to share experiences and pray for global peace. However, as a society with no particular religion, they are not bound by any 'rules' or morals. For example, the culture of drinking alcohol and cohabitation is prevalent because a specific religion does not bind them. *Shinto*, which is often referred to as the religion of Japanese society, is a mere perception because *Shinto* is not a religion but a belief. And they do not even follow *Shinto* or Buddhism, except in marriage or death ceremonies.

Researchers who have studied and worked in Japan know that Japanese culture is not suitable for our society, such as excessive overtime practices, socialising with colleagues by drinking alcohol after office hours, or extreme pornography issues. Pornographic videos and manga have been sold openly in convenience stores in Japan for a long time.

With the rapidity of technology and the internet, anime and manga are sold openly in Japan and have entered foreign countries without restrictions and limits. We are in a world without borders, so we, the Islamic countries, find it difficult to prevent the entry of foreign cultures into our country. Animes, manga, forum content, and YouTube are uploaded and downloaded illegally, freely and widely, including the LGBT genre for anime, manga, forum, etc. LGBT is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Some people add this acronym to LGBTIQ, of which I is for intersex (intersex) and Q is for queer (*pondaninMalayLanguage*). In Malaysia, LGBT is a controversial issue and is considered taboo by Malaysian society because it violates Eastern culture's religious and ethical demands and is compounded by behaviour that violates human nature (Mahfudzah Mohamad, 2015). LGBT was declared an illegal act to be practised as a way of life by the 126th Conference of Rulers on December 13, 1989.

This statement is based on the author's previous research on Japanese anime and manga among adolescents, especially university students. The authors began researching LGBT and its relationship with anime and manga fans. After completing studying, students started reading and watching Japanese anime and manga of the LGBT genre. What's more, the LGBT issue has never subsided in Malaysia and there are now transgender celebrities who have a large following and have begun to cause polemics in society. Are fans of Japanese anime and manga also stuck with LGBT issues, and what is their stance? Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify LGBT genre anime and manga titles as a guide for the community and parents. The study's second objective is to examine the views of the respondent's perceptions of LGBT anime and manga.

Background

Previous research has proven how Japanese anime and manga have a negative impact on youngsters, especially school students, if not controlled by adults or authorities. The use of Japanese anime and manga as a medium of

learning the Japanese language has also been shown to be effective as in the study by Roslina et al. (2018) and Chan, Wong and Ng (2017). Therefore, not all anime and manga have a negative impact. There are Japanese comics and animations that help their fans become fluent in Japanese and then there are fans of Japanese culture who get jobs because of the interest, knowledge and skills they have while becoming involved in the culture.

One LGBT anime and manga genre is Boy's Love (BL). BL is a sub-genre of gay (will be referred to as *yaoi* for further writing) and is specifically for Japanese anime or manga fans. The BL feature can be found in adult anime and manga, shonen or seinen. BL depicts male-male relationships in Japanese adult anime and manga. But terms like Girl's Love are not found in any Wikipedia and were never mentioned by the study respondents. However, there are also animated series or comics of the lesbian genre (referred to as *yuri* for further writing) or display the characteristics of lesbian relationships.

Galbraith (2009) reviewed that BL "...are not always pornographic, and they focus on the romance between male characters". Overseas fans use another term such as *yaoi* or *shonen-ai* because BL sounds so much like boy-love, a type of pornography for male paedophiles.

Andre Barnabas Dwi Kristanto and Azizah Alie (2018) also conducted a study on watching and reading BL among adolescent boys in Surabaya, Indonesia. The study examined what factors influenced these adolescents to watch and read one of the LGBT genre categories—the *yaoi* genre. Participatory observation methods and in-depth interviews were used to gain the data. They identified the media factors of sexual desire, as the momentum of gaining affection, as entertainment and discovering the true love were underlying the respondents' watching and reading of this genre of BL.

Research on gender and sexuality has become an integral part of the study of anime and manga (Ting, 2019). One example of recent

research on gender and sexuality is by Firth Ayu Rachmasari (2020). It is the starting point of the study of *shojo* (girl) in the 1990s, which then turned to the study of male love or BL.

Firth Ayu Rachmasari's (2020) study examines the factors that cause Muslim women fanfiction writers in Indonesia to be interested in the genre of homoeroticism and adult stories that feature explicit sex scenes in their work. Using the personal myth theory by McAdams (1997) and the queer theory by Butler (1999), research on R-rated fanfiction of Muslim women and in-depth interviews were conducted. R-rated means the content is restricted, therefore children under 17 years old will require an accompanying parent or adult guardian. This rating means the film contains adult material such as adult activity, harsh language, intense graphic violence, drug abuse and nudity. The findings of this study have identified some of the attraction factors of writing works in this genre category, among them is the admiration for gay characters in fanfiction that express themselves in LGBT works, which ultimately enjoy homosexual relationships and as a way for these women writers to escape from real life.

Nevertheless, in the last five years, the voice of the LGBT community has become increasingly heard (Ting et al., 2021). A study conducted on media coverage found that LGBT issues were not portrayed entirely negatively. The news is written more towards providing warnings, lessons and expressing the government's stance, intellectuals and NGOs on the issue of this group (Mohamad Yusof Helmy Ramli et al., 2017). Ting et al. (2021) have analysed 60 LGB-related articles that have been published in four online newspapers, namely The Star Online, Free Malaysia Today, MalaysiaKini, and Astro Awani Online, using a text analytics approach. Although most of the articles involving LGBT were reported negatively in Astro Awani Online, the other three newspapers were seen to balance negative and positive reporting.

Anime Underground (2021), a website dedicated to anime fans, has updated the 30 best *yaoi anime* viz. Given, Yuri on Ice, No. 6, Dakaichi, Super Lovers, Junjo Romantica,

Sekai Ichi Hatsukoi, Doukyuusei, Saezuru Tori Wa Habatakanai, Twittering Birds Never Fly and Hybrid Child. Apart from that, Mark (2020) also lists 30 *yaoi anime*. The content on the list overlaps with titles given to Underground Anime (2021), such as Given and Super Lovers. The anime titles on this website are Twittering Birds Never Fly: One for the Ages, Boku no Sexual Harassment, Togainu no Nochi and Fake.

Aimah Mopashari (2019) has studied Indonesian *fujoshi*, or women who love *yaoi*. She concluded that her respondents watch *yaoi anime* because of sex scenes and addiction; the story was different from the familiar love story. The conflicts in *yaoi* drama is more accurate than ordinary anime with comedy elements, free time, and handsome characters.

Through this website, several social sites are actively used by the LGBT community to expand the network, including Grindr, Planet Romeo, Gay.com, Lesbian Malaysia, Manjam.com, Blued app, Delta app, Gaydar, Manhut.net and more. These LGBT people will use these wireless networks as a place to gather with each other and also to find a partner. Thus, this mastery of social media can influence anyone to venture into something new in their lives. At the same time, the Malaysian government explained that the authorities are serious in their efforts and want to address LGBT issues following efforts to demand that homosexuals or transgender people be recognised in 2012.

Methodology

Five public universities were involved in this study. Questions were distributed to all Japanese language students at these five public

universities in the second semester of 2020/2021, and 280 respondents answered the survey questions. Of that number, 44.7% of respondents are involved in anime and manga genres that focus on adult or LGBT content, which is the type of anime and manga that focus on LGBT only. The study respondents consisted of 51.8% Malays, 37.9% Chinese, and 10.3% Indians and Sarawak ethnics such as Iban, Kadazan and Melanau.

The respondents consisted of students studying Japanese at the university comprised various races, males and females. The questionnaire using Google Form consists of three sections, namely the background of the respondents, LGBT elements in anime and manga as well as the use of LGBT anime and manga genre consisting of *yaoi* (BL or gay), *yuri* (romantic love or physical desire between women or lesbian), and adult. After the survey was collected and analysed, the researchers interviewed six respondents and focused on LGBT issues among the fans. In this paper, only some anime and manga with LGBT content will be discussed.

Findings and Discussion

Chart 1 and Chart 2 are based on 280 respondents. Chart 1 shows the type of *anime* and *manga* favoured by the respondents. The most favoured *anime* is *seinen* (69.3%), followed by *shonen* (56.4%), *shojo* (53.6%), *kodomo* (24.3%), adult or *moe* (22.5%) and *josei* (20.7%). The percentage for age, which is 22.5%, is pretty high for primary respondents of 20–23 years old. Adult or *moe anime* and *manga* generally contain pornographic elements or sex scenes or images in a 'straight' or same-gender relationship.

3. What type of manga / anime do you like? * You can choose more than one.

280 responses

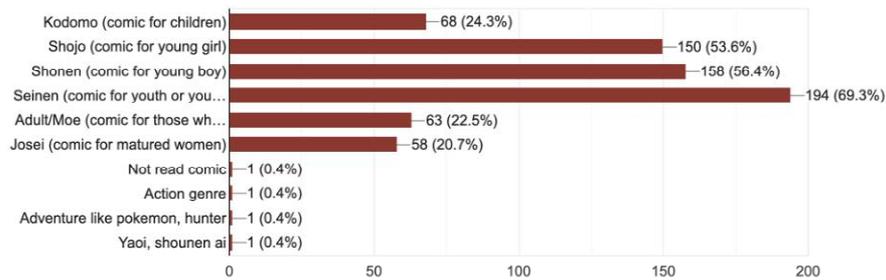


Chart 1: Type of anime and manga favoured by the respondents

Chart 2 shows that 22.5% of respondents actively watch and read the *yaoi* and *yuri* genres of anime and manga, while 19.3% have stopped watching such genres. Although

58.2% do not watch the LGBT genre, the percentage of respondents who have watched and are still active is high at 41.8%.

7. Do you read/watch YAOI(Boys Love/gay) and/or YURI (lesbian) anime/manga ?

280 responses

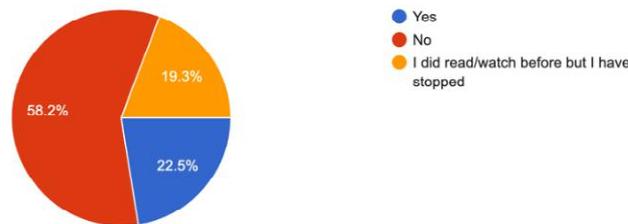


Chart 2: LGBT anime and mangawatched and read by the respondents

For the 70 respondents involved with the LGBT genre, Chart 3 shows that respondents preferred the *yaoi* genre with 68.6% over the *yuri* genre at 12.9%. Respondents who read manga or watched anime with both *yaoi* and *yuri elements* were 21.4%. The interview with six respondents proved that fans, regardless of gender, love *gay anime* and *manga* more than the *yuri* manga. Two female respondents said that some female fans love the *gay* or *BL*

shows. Then they want to fantasise about imagining a love relationship because they are single and have no experience in a love relationship. When asked why they prefer *gay relationships* instead of *lesbian relationships*, they said that watching and reading *lesbian anime* and *manga* make them 'geli' (disgusted) and 'rasa nak muntah' (want to throw up). The other factor is that the storyline in the *yaoi* genre is exciting compared to the *yuri* genre.

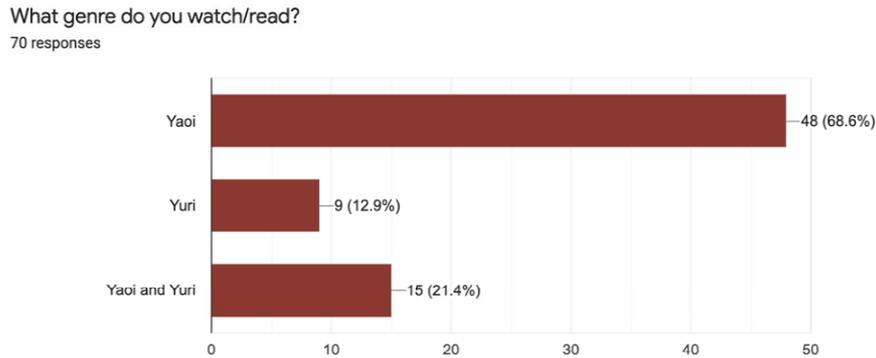


Chart 3: Types of LGBT comics read by respondents

Chart 4 shows why 62 respondents (out of 280) do not like LGBT *anime* and *manga*. The number includes respondents who have read such *anime* and *manga* but stopped. Religion and moral values were two crucial factors why respondents did not engage or stop reading LGBT *anime* and *manga*, 56.5% and 53.2%, respectively. The rest were cultural factors with 32.3%, parental education

with 29% and background with 16.1%. Other factors are due to time constraints, unfamiliarity and lack of interest. Some respondents support and condemn the LGBT genre regardless of religion and race. Still, these 62 respondents have stopped watching anime after a specific time because they feel guilty about their religion, culture, morals and family.

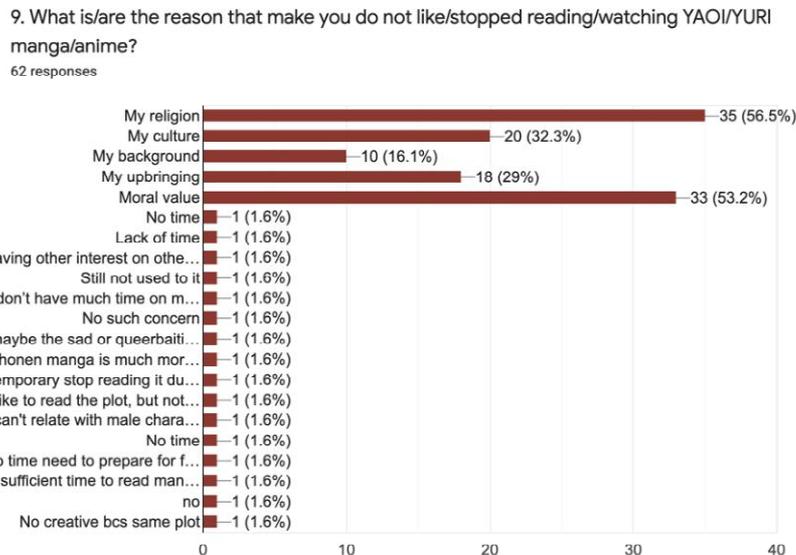


Chart 4: Reasons respondents do not like LGBT anime and manga

Title of LGBT Anime and Manga

The first objective of this study is to identify LGBT genre *anime* and *manga* titles for community and parental guides. The following is a list of LGBT genre *anime* and *manga* titles listed by respondents. Among the popular

titles were Given, Yuri On Ice, and Sekai Ichi Hatsukoi mentioned by more than five respondents. All three titles are *yaoi* genre. There are 94 titles listed, and the majority are *yaoi* themed. Sakura Trick is an *anime* with a *yuri* genre.

The following are 21 LGBT genre *anime* and *manga* titles watched by respondents along with the number of frequencies stated by

Given (10)	Sekai-Ichi Hatsukoi (7)	Hybrid Child (4)	Killing Stalking (3)
Yuri on Ice (9)	Cherry Magic (2)	Caste Heaven (4)	No.6 (2)
Super Lovers (4)	Junjo Romantica (4)	Ten Count (3)	Doukyusei /
classmate (3)			
Love Is an Illusion (2)	Hanano Mizoshiru (2)	Kiraide Isasete (2)	Official Blessing (2)
Banana Fish (2)	Painter of The Night (2)	Twittering Birds Never Fly (2)	
Saezuru Tori wa Habatakanai / The Clouds Gather (4)			

respondents and included in the 30 most popular LGBT genre titles:

The following are 73 *anime* and *manga* titles watched by one respondent only that no other respondents watched:

Man in The Mirror	BJ Alex	Ai to Makoto	My Titan Bride
Kashikomarimashita	Just Right There	The World's Greatest	Zettai BL Ni Naru
Ameiro Paradox	Hanani arashi	Sekai Vs Zettai	Dakaretai Otoko
Jujutsu Kaisen	Yoru To Asa No Uta	Umibe No Étranger	Black Butler
Megumi And Tsugumi	First Love	Unromantic	Kiss Him Not Me
Attack On Titan	Citrus	Hatsukoi Encounter	Sakura Trick
Moonlight Garden	Free	Tadaima Okaeiri	Painter of The
Night,			
Dream Away	Shouko Kageki	Revue Starlight	Crimson Spell
Sadistic Beauty	Amedemo Haredemo	Yuki Shimizu-Ze	BL Ni Naritakunai
Otoko			
Cherry Blossoms	Adam No Rokko	Kiraide Isasete	Sayonara
[goodbye] Alpha			
After Winter	Yuri Yuri	Yatamomo	Yurikuma Arashi
Sasaki To Miyano	Love Stage	Honto Yajuu	The Tyrant Falls In Love
Sick	Gravitation	Strawberry Panic	Dakaichi / My
number one]			
Prince Caius	One Piece	I Hear The Sunspot	Yarichin Bxxxh Club
Kimiwa natsu no naka	koisuru boukun	Royal Fiance	The Wolf In Flower Sh
Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid		The Betrayal Know My Name	
MoDaoZuShi /The Grandmaster Of Demon Cultivator		Nigatsu No Eden / Eden of the Eastfree	
Kono Ore ga Omae Nanka Suki na Wakenai		shiosaino futari	
Hina Wa Mitsuiro No Koi Ni Torawareru		10 Years Where I Loved You The	
Most			
Shirouto Yankee Kikiipatsu!!		Seikikoibito	
Koi Wo Suru Tsumori Wa Nakatta / I did not mean to fall in love			
Isekai No Sata Wa Shachiku Shidai (Isekainowa smartphone to tomoni)			

One female respondent said that she always watches BL *anime* in the interview, and she knew that her sister in high school also watched that. She has no intention to stop watching or stop her sister because according to her, she knows her sister just enjoys the story like her. Two male respondents informed that sometimes their fathers come to their bedroom to check what they are doing. When they saw that their sons were watching *anime*,

they left. According to the respondents, their parents approved them watching *anime* because they assumed *anime* and *manga* are safe without knowing there is an LGBT genre in the products.

Respondents' view on LGBT *Anime* and *Manga*

The study's second objective is to examine the respondents' views so that the community

understood why they were stuck in such a case. The following are among the LGBT genre *anime* and *manga* titles watched by the respondents and their views on the stated series.

1. Ameiro paradox- I like the dynamics of the characters together. It is adorable how their relationship transitioned from enemies to lovers. One of the main characters has a candid and straightforward personality and its funny.
2. Twittering birds never fly- I kinda like the heartbreaking storyline. The main characters of this manga are so well set that they reflect the true colour of reality. That's how reality is. Tough, and sometimes suffering. I really hope Yashiro and Domeki can have a good ending □
3. SAEZURU TORI WA HABATAKANAI- This manga had not to end yet but I really hope that they have a happy birthday ending. The love stories between saezuru and yoneda sensei had a beautiful love but because of their complicated past they cannot continue with their love.
4. Given- is a BL manga and anime about a boy with a tragic past love life and learns to love again through his bandmates and his music. I like the chemistry of the main couple and side characters.
5. Free!- Its a good series showing sportsmanship and friendship.
6. Sick- Because the plot is arrange very good and not rush.
7. Ai to makoto(morito)- I like omegaverse story with great storyline
8. Kiraide Isasete- I like the omegaverse plot and in this manga, the alpha is not like any other alpha in omegaverse plots, where he protective and see the omega as someone that needs to be protected, not to be used for sexual desires

From the statements submitted, it is clear that fans love such *anime* mainly because of the exciting storyline. In addition, they also love the characters and love the stories contained,

in addition to expressions and emotions that are more real than regular *anime*. None of the respondents stated that they watch because they are interested in the LGBT genre, particularly as in the study of Aimah Mopashari (2019) and other researchers from Indonesia.

The content of LGBT *anime* and *manga* used by the respondents can be divided into three main parts. A few respondents were confused between theme 1 and theme 2, LGBT in *anime* and *manga*, and LGBT. Theme three is the respondents' view on particular characters. They 'ship' certain characters and hope both characters are interested in each other. The terminology 'the ship is sailing' is used when their fantasy become 'true'.

- 1) The theme is not based on LGBT relationships. However, it has LGBT elements like Attack on Titan and One Piece, each with two homosexual characters. These two *anime* are stories of a fight and a treasure hunt mission.
- 2) LGBT themes show images or characters that contain gay and lesbian elements such as hugging, kissing and so on, such as Yuri On Ice, Sekai Ichi Hatsukoi and Given.
- 3) A kind of relationship that is vague or obvious between friends or family members. However, a third party in the story is imagined or expects such a gay relationship to occur because both characters are handsome and 'sweet'.

Apart from the themes, fans also have their ship and hope their favourite characters fall in love. It is just like Kpop fans who 'ship' their idol to have sweet moments with each other and fantasise as their homosexual idol. In the Kpop industry, hugging and kissing among idols in the same group is expected behaviour as they practise and stay in the same dorm and room since they are very young. Fans also expect their idol to be gay and like to 'ship' them on social media. Additionally, a few idols also confess on their social media that they are gay or lesbian.

Respondents' views on the content of the story in LGBT show that they like this kind of *anime* because:

- 1) Interesting storyline, including a tragic story.
- 2) Music in *anime*.
- 3) Character and character development.
- 4) Stunning graphics.
- 5) Emotions described by the character in a deep and honest way.
- 6) The story is more about relationships, not just sex.
- 7) The character exhibits loyalty, the effects of war, appreciate friendship and moral values.

These statements prove that there are teenagers in Malaysia such as the Japanese language students that watch LGBT *anime* and read LGBT manga regularly and actively. The respondents stated that they were attracted to LGBT genres because of other factors and not the addiction of watching bed scenes. However, watching and reading LGBT content is grave, let alone when involving Muslim teenagers. The story and plot are well written, including exciting elements such as unique and handsome characters, and exciting music and graphics. Each character's emotions invite respondents to continue watching despite realising this genre is unsuitable for morals and religion.

Conclusion

Overall, this study shows that there is an acceptance of LGBT *anime* and *manga* among university students in Malaysia. However, the analysed data identified that their tendencies to watch and read such genres were not because of their interest in LGBT relationships but their interest in pop culture art. However, serious attention must be given and controlled so that the negative influence of LGBT does not affect the lives of these students. Moreover, their young minds cannot distinguish between good things and things that can bring negative consequences.

Further research may be extended to exploring this LGBT genre of *anime* and *manga* among the general public or parents. This is not just as an academic research on the level of society but as awareness to parents on the existence of *anime* and *manga* of LGBT genres in the virtual

lives of their children. This is a superficial and not in-depth study. Therefore, further research needs to be done for researchers to clearly know the thoughts of young fans of the LGBT genre, especially fans among the Muslims.

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