

A Linguistic Study Of Image And Language Of Self-Presentation Of Men On Grindr, A Gay Networking App

*Kajian Linguistik Pengimejan dan Penggunaan Bahasa dalam Penampilan Diri oleh Para
Lelaki di Grindr, Aplikasi Rangkaian Gay*

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ABSTRACT

People have been posting personal advertisements in newspapers to find romantic partners and pen pals ever since the mid-seventeenth century. The ubiquity of today's systems such as online location-aware dating applications for meeting nearby partners provide novel social opportunities as well as a variety of ways people chose to portray themselves—especially in the LGBTQIA+ community as well as the men who have sex with men community here in Malaysia. Such is the case of Grindr. This paper explores the way Malaysian men in the gay community portray themselves through critical image analysis and discourse analysis based on the users' profile pictures as well as their 'About Me' section on Grindr. 30 Grindr profiles were analysed. The analysis of profiles reveal two categories of men who are members of the gay community on Grindr; one who is looking for a long-term companionship and the other, those who are looking for casual sexual activities i.e., for short-term companionships. This paper sheds light not only on the language of self-presentation of MSM in Malaysia visually and linguistically but it also sheds light on the linguistic behaviour of men in this particular community so that we can understand their needs and reach out to this particularly marginalised community, despite the society's negative perceptions towards it.

Keyword: gay, self-presentation, Grindr, LGBTQIA+, critical image analysis

ABSTRAK

Pengiklanan peribadi telah sekian lama diamalkan oleh orang ramai sejak pertengahan kurun ketujuh belas lagi dalam mencari pasangan romantik. Lambakan aplikasi mencari jodoh yang berasaskan geolokasi telah menyebabkan tumbuhnya pelbagai peluang bagi individu untuk mencari pasangan seterusnya kepelbagaian dalam cara mereka menampilkan diri terutama sekali di dalam komuniti LGBTQIA+ dan MSM di Malaysia. Seperti apa yang berlaku di aplikasi Grindr. Kajian ini meneroka cara para jejaka di dalam komuniti gay di Malaysia menampilkan diri mereka melalui analisis imej kritikal dan analisis wacana berdasarkan profil Grindr mereka. 30 profil Grindr telah dianalisa dan menunjukkan dua kategori di dalam aplikasi tersebut iaitu profil yang mencari hubungan romantik jangka masa lama dan juga sebaliknya yang hanya mencari aktiviti seks kasual. Kajian ini bukan sahaja telah mengkaji tentang aspek keterampilan diri dan tingkah laku linguistik komuniti ini malah dapat membuka ruangan perbincangan baharu tentang komuniti yang marginal ini meskipun adanya tanggapan persepsi negatif oleh masyarakat.

Kata kunci: gay, self-presentation, Grindr, LGBTQIA+, critical image analysis

1. Introduction

The practice of “advertising” oneself for relational purposes is nothing new. Gudelunas (2012) claims that people have been posting personal advertisements in newspapers to find romantic partners ever since the mid-seventeenth century. Reige-Laner and Kamel (1977) conducted one of the earliest studies on personal advertisements posted by gay men. The researchers conducted a content analysis of 359 gay personal advertisements in the *Advocate* and found that these advertisements focused on physical features, used explicit statements about relational goals such as sex, and almost all of the advertisements displayed hyper-masculinity. In comparison to these personal advertisements on the newspaper of gay men, lesbians’ personal advertisements were more likely to provide both physical and personality information (Reige-Laner & Kamel, 1977). Hatala and Prehodka (1996) later conducted a study on 396 personal advertisements in gay and lesbian magazines—which also confirms that the gay men were more likely to mention their sexual interests and to look for sex compared to lesbian women. Gay men tend to mention more about their body shape similar as heterosexual men, but a reverse pattern was observed in women. Epel et.al (1996) argued that this was due to a gay subculture that promoted muscular and lean body physiques.

The LGBT community have been making friends, looking for romance, and seeking sex online since the beginning of the Internet—via dating websites on Internet browsers. As time progressed, with the advancements in mobile technologies, there are plenty of apps running on smartphones developed to provide even more convenient platforms for GBMs to connect (or seek what they desire) with one another. These apps run by applying the Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers built into many smartphones today with the help of location-based applications. Grindr for instance is one of the first mobile dating app for gay and bisexual men, as well as for men who have sex with men (MSM), was released in 2009 (Grindr Privacy and Policy, n.d.). This mobile apps enables users to discover potential partners be it gay, bisexual, MSM and/or queer who are in close proximity, changing the networking scene of the LGBTQ community because it turns “invisible” members visible (Gudelunas, 2012).

There are currently an abundance of location-based dating apps that share a similar user interface for gay, bisexual and MSM (henceforth GBM). They all work in similar ways -once a user logs onto the app, they will see an array of photos- each representing a different user nearby. These photos are arranged according to the distance between the users (via GPS). A text-based profile description of each user, the so-called “bio,” is available by clicking the photo. User’s profile usually includes their age, weight, height, and ethnicity, and also a short self-introduction or description. Grindr enables users to exchange text messages, photos, and geo-information via the app.

Location-aware mobile devices or smartphones and gadgets have become ubiquitous in recent years through the advancements of technology and are a common mechanism for initiating social interactions with both known contacts and nearby strangers with similar interests (Lindqvist et. al. , Sutko, et. al. 2011) or who are involved in shared activities (Licoppe & Inada, 2011). One type of mobile application that has gained recent traction is what Handel and Shklovski (2012) refer to as the **Location-Based Real-Time Dating** (LBRTD) app. These apps are used to locate and interact with nearby strangers who are interested in meeting, often soon, for a date or sexual encounter.

A key challenge in using mobile apps for meeting others is self-presentation. In contrast to traditional dating applications, where users can craft a richer presentation of self through their profiles and online interactions Ellison, N. B. (2012), mobile LBRTD apps rely heavily on images and comparatively simple profiles with limited opportunities for expression and self-presentation i.e. their profiles’ ‘bio’ (Blackwell, n.d., Gudelunas, 2012). These attributes,

moreover, can be important in the formative stages of developing identity, exploring sexuality and “coming out” (Savin-Williams, 2005). These issues are also important for people engaged in behaviour, such as seeking casual sex, that might be normatively acceptable among MSM LBRTD app users (e.g., Mowlabocus, 2010) but stigmatised by others as stated by Conley (2011) especially in Asian and other conservative countries where homosexuality is viewed as a practice against human nature and thus deemed sinful in the eyes of God. While religion may be influential in discriminating homosexuality as attested by rising religious conservatism (not necessarily Islamic conservatism only), we must also be cognisant to the fact that laws of the country do promote rampant discrimination of homosexuality. These laws are vestiges of British colonial era laws that criminalise unnatural sex acts such as sodomy and gross indecency between same sex relationships as well as practices that offend religious sensitivities, specifically Islamic laws that prohibit cross-dressing. In Malaysia, Muslim GBMs are discriminated against under parallel secular civil legal system, for instance sodomy between consenting adults is a crime that is meted out by caning and a maximum of 20 years imprisonment. Malaysian Muslim GBMs when caught also go through periods of correction or rehabilitation to amend their ways and to conform to normalized gender and sexual identities.

This study cogitates profiles on mobile dating apps as a type of self-presentation— in this trailblazing technological era, discourse is not only used and expressed in and through language alone but it goes beyond that (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). As Miller (2015) points out, little is known about how GBM present themselves on these dating apps. Most of the studies on dating apps for GBM have been conducted in the U.S. and other western countries where prevailing sentiments about homosexuality and other non-normative gender and sexual identities are more positive especially with regards to individual rights and social justice. There is indeed very few studies paying attention to Self and Other presentations in and through language mediated by apps from the perspectives of local users like those who use Grindr in conservative countries which are more likely to be homophobic like Malaysia. Besides this very few studies analyse language semiotically, i.e., take into consideration the definition of language that goes further than just written language. This study looks at language as social practice within not just written means but also within images presented in photos. Thus, this preliminary study aims to fill in the much needed gap to examine how through language (visual-analysis of default profile photo and written- analysis of the “About Me” section) GBMs present their personal and social identities on Grindr which when combined make up strategies used for affiliation and belongingness in the community of practice.

2. Literature Review

Goedel and Duncan (2015) stated that geospatial gay social networking mobile application – LBRTD play a significant role in the lives of many GBMs. Grindr is a mobile LBRTD app released in 2009 that has over millions of active users in more than 192 countries. Individuals use Grindr and similar location- aware applications for a variety of purposes—to meet new friends, to establish relationships and, in many cases, to arrange casual sexual encounters. Location- aware applications allow users to identify other GBM (often an “invisible” identity) in their geographical vicinity. Moreover, sexual minority men (and particularly those who are less open about their sexual identities) may prefer to utilize location-aware applications to connect with other men discreetly. This can also present challenges for managing online and offline identities. Studies by Grov et al. (2014) have explored the social impact of the Internet for GBM’s lives. However, there has been only limited work on location- aware applications, some of which has examined the relationship between their use among MSM and sexual health/HIV susceptibility (Lehmiller & Ioeinger , 2014, Young et al., 2013). Some studies have

also explored the nature of application usage, i.e. its purposes (Dodge 2014) and interpersonal dynamics between users (Blackwell & Birnholtz, 2015). However, this work did not examine the dynamic processes of constructing and managing identity on location-aware applications. The construction of a positive identity may be regarded as a component of sexual health, which itself has been defined as “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality” (WHO, 2006).

Exploring Gay Sexuality on the Internet

Prior to the advent of the Internet, GBM used particular social and physical contexts to meet other men, such as saunas/bathhouses, and bars/clubs (Bérubé, 2003). In the 1970s, for instance, according to Snyder (1989), many GBM employed subtle signifiers (e.g. “hankie code”; coloured handkerchiefs worn in back pockets) to communicate their sexual preferences. When the Internet became widely available in the 1990s, it revolutionised the ways in which GBM could connect with one another. The Internet has enabled users *inter alia* according to Grov et al. (2014) to: (1) to identify other men much more easily than in many offline social settings where GBM constitute an invisible minority, and (2) to derive a sense of community and to meet potential sexual partners in a manner that safeguards anonymity according (Shaw 1997).

This community can be accessed online in the privacy of one’s own home (Weinrich 1997). Moreover, as stated by Hennelly (2010) some GBM feel safer meeting others online, rather than in cruising grounds for instance, where there may be an elevated risk of being mugged or assaulted. However, it is important to acknowledge that online spaces may not necessarily be safer in real terms, since some Grindr users have reportedly been targeted by violent criminals (e.g. BBC 2015). Undoubtedly, the Internet has impacted sexual behaviour and identity among GBM. For example, in their empirical study of online/offline partner-seeking among GBM, Grov et al. (2014) found that those individuals who sought partners offline generally had fewer sexual partners than those seeking partners online, largely due to ease of access. In short, the Internet has facilitated new modes of self-identification and self-presentation among GBM, but it may also present challenges for how online and offline identities are managed.

Researching GBM’s Use of Grindr

The proliferation of location-aware applications has facilitated social and sexual contact between GBM, with implications for self-identity. In an important study of Grindr users, Blackwell and Birnholtz (2015) noted that Grindr enables people to connect with one another in ways that transcend geographic boundaries, itself “often blurring the boundaries around physical places and communities defined by shared interests in particular activities”. This transcendence of physical space and “communities” can offer new ways of constructing identity. For instance, a sexual preference that is habitually concealed due to social stigma can be manifested more openly when one feels affiliated to a community of like-minded others. Yet, herein lies a potential problem—modes of self-definition and self-presentation are visible to other users whose responses may not be affirmative. Blackwell and Birnholtz (2015) describe Grindr users’ competing desires to appear attractive to other users, on the one hand, and to maintain an appropriate level of “identifiability” on the application, on the other. Crucially, online identities can become “visible” in offline settings.

In his small-scale interview study of gay college men, Dodge (2014) argues that Grindr and other location-aware applications enable young gay men to construct and develop a gay identity, partly because it allows them to establish relations with other gay men in a “safe”

space. Similarly, Castañeda's (2015) study of Grindr use among young Filipino gay men demonstrates that they utilize Grindr in order to develop and explore gay sexual identity by sharing their own personal narratives with other gay men. Castañeda refers to this socialization process as "learn[ing] how to be gay". Furthermore, focusing on the interpersonal aspects of using Grindr, Birnholtz et al. (2014) explored the language of self-presentation on Grindr focusing particularly on the linguistic strategies people employ for managing stigmatized identities (e.g. being a seeker of casual sex). They found that users used euphemisms for engaging in socially stigmatized behaviours (e.g., seeking casual sex). These included "fun," "NSA" and "friends". In a recent study, Brubaker et al. (2016) focused on the reasons underpinning gay men's decisions to leave Grindr. In in-depth interviews, several participants cited the focus on casual sex and their perceived inability to establish more meaningful relationships as key reasons for leaving. These studies collectively illustrate the importance of examining self-identity processes in relation to Grindr use, since users strive to gain acceptance and inclusion from others on the application and they present themselves in ways that may enhance these fundamental psychological processes. Even as some individuals leave the application, they acknowledge the consequences of their departure for self-identity.

Visual Framing Theory

As the name suggests, framing is the core for the visual framing theory that in accordance with Goffman (1974) refers to how the organisation of a message influences perceptions on what is happening which also draws some certainty of reality whilst concealing others, that is very applicable to the culture and intentions behind the act of taking a selfie or pictures (Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) attested that frames are able to draw certain facets of reality whilst obliterating other elements, which might trigger different reaction from the audiences. Whether a shirtless mirror selfie, or completely blurred out and ¼ looking selfie—the advertisers have the ability to frame their pictures to cause viewers to exhibit various reactions—of both positive and negative. Moreover, the control and independence that these advertisers have when taking and posting their pictures delineates that these people can alter the what is the actual reality, whilst also concealing their true identities.

Germane to visual framing, Edelman (1993) emphasised the way how framing can wield the ability through the selective description of the features of a certain situation. Characters, and causes of any phenomenon—like photos—become radically different as changes are made in what is primarily displayed, what is subjugated, especially on how the audience perceived it. The social media world—is a medley of potential realities, any of which can be readily evoked by altering the ways in which the views are framed and categorised.

In line with Holiday et.al (2014), selfies and pictures are recognised as visual forms of communication, framed to highlight very selective content by the individuals taking them, they can convince viewers that they are witnessing truth in the form of the photographers' mediated realities and point of view although it might be the fabricated truth.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) considers the use of language as social practice. Proponents of CDA believe that social practices have vestiges of historical contexts imbued in them and forms the means by which existing social relations are produced or contested for different interests (Janks 2006). Fairclough (1989) stresses that language is socially and ideologically driven. The term "discourse" can be used variously and according to Fairclough (1992) discourses are manifested in particular ways of language use and other symbolic forms such as visual images. He continues that discourses do not just represent social entities and relations,

they construct or ‘constitute’ them; different discourses constitute key entities (in the case of this study, non-normative relationships) in different ways. People are positioned in different ways as social subjects; in this paper as (homosexual) advertisers and the desired Other. Fairclough maintains that it is these social effects of discourse that are focused upon in analysing discourse.

As a tool for research, Fairclough’s (1989, 1995) CDA model consists of three interrelated processes of analysis tied to three interrelated levels of discourse. The three levels of discourse are: 1. The object of analysis (including verbal, visual or a mix of verbal and visual); 2. The processes by which the object is produced and received (writing/written form, speaking and reading-speech/verbal form, listening-auditory, and viewing/seeing-visual forms) by subjects and 3. The social-historical conditions that govern these process.

Fairclough maintains that to adequately analyse discourse, each of the levels described above demands different kinds of analysis: 1. Text analysis through description, 2. Processing analysis through interpretation and lastly, 3. social analysis by way of explanation. Janks (2006) discusses the advantage of such an approach in that it assists the researcher to focus on the signifiers that make up the text, the attention not only to specific linguistic features but also their juxtapositioning, their sequencing and their overall layout. Janks reminds researchers that the historical determinants of these selections are required so that we can understand that these choices are tied to the conditions of possibility. Why Fairclough’s approach to CDA is so useful is that it provides multiple points of analytic entry...It is in interconnections that the analyst finds interesting patterns and disjunctions that need to be described, interpreted and explained.” (2006:329).

3. Methodology

3.1 Platform and Sampling

This paper focuses on the analysis of 30 profiles from GBM, in the social networking mobile application, Grindr. Grindr is chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, Grindr is a widely known application, used by GBM from across the world, and is not targeted specifically to one demographic of men, as is the case with some other social networking mobile applications like GROWLr, PlanetRomeo etc. Grindr now has more than twenty-seven million users in over 234 countries— and 37.9% of GBM in Malaysia use Grindr on a daily basis, (MOH, 2018). Moreover, Grindr was chosen over other popular similar social networking applications— namely Jack’d, Scruff, Hornet etc. because of the randomised global feature. Jack’d (and many other applications) offers a global feature that shows who is online around the world at any given moment. It also lets men search by specific location, opening up the boundaries that Grindr puts upon the online space. Using Jack’d allowed for the use of a random sampling technique— whilst Grindr only allows men to see who is located near the users in close physical proximity, which is well suited with the research objectives and research questions of this study.

All included Grindr profiles were randomly selected from the list of online profiles at the time of the data collection. Data collection occurred at six time points over the course of weekends (every 4 hours, starting at 4 a.m. on Saturday and ending at 12 a.m. Sunday) in order to achieve a variety of profiles. Weekends were chosen because of the possibility of high traffic on weekends when users are typically more social in comparison to normal weekdays. In each instance, the first 50 online profiles were selected and later filtered out. Collected profiles were filtered to include only of those that contained a photo, as well as profile description or the ‘About Me’ section of the profile and/or the ‘Stats’, and ‘Expectations’

provided by Grindr. Repeated profiles that showed up at multiple time points will be excluded on their second occurrence, whilst total blank profiles—that is without both photos and writings in their profile will be omitted completely. Collected profile were then categorised further into 3 categories; profiles looking for short-term, long-term and both short and long-term relationships (although in this paper, we did not make clear cut comparisons between types of relationships because of space limitations). Profiles with clear photos of individuals are blurred out to keep the advertisers' confidentiality.

3.2 Analysis of Data

Information on Grindr profiles could occur in a number of different places (e.g. the headline or the username of the profiles, in the 'About Me' section or in the pre-provided section innate to the app) and because both text and images were examined semiotically, analysis was carried out at the profile level of both the visual and written discourses. A profile on Grindr includes the headline (or the username of the profiles), pre-provided descriptive statistics (e.g. age, ethnicity, body type etc.), and an open-ended and optional 'About me' section for users to write about: themselves, location, activities, interests, music, movies, books etc. All these various variables were analysed based on whether they relate to basic characteristics, photographic profile elements, textual self-description, or textual partner preference description. Because, age is a required component of Grindr profile (when the users signed up for an account) much information of age is not forthcoming in the written narratives. This is due to the permissible age for Grindr according to the its policy as stated below:

The Grindr Services are intended only for users eighteen (18) years of age and older (or twenty-one (21) years of age in places where eighteen (18) years is not the age of majority). Grindr Privacy and Policy, n.d.

Where euphemisms, abbreviations and gay terms used in the analysis of data were problematic to translate (whether in English or in Malay), we sought assistance and verification from a group of informants from the community in practice. Their involvement was primarily for the cross-checking process as some of the terms used here in Malaysia, are quite different from those used overseas; as some of the terms are actually localised terms which are only used exclusively among the GBM community here in Malaysia (see Appendix C for informants' demographics).

3.3 Photographic Content

The photographic content are overwhelmingly that of selfies in the profiles. They went through a visual content analysis based on variables related to the profiles' visual components, i.e., whether the main profile photo showed full, partial, or no face; and whether the default profile photo showed a shirtless man or not (shirtless in this context is considered anything showing pectorals or nipples, abs or stomach, or all of the above). A visual content analysis was the appropriate methodology because as proposed by van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001), it is a systematic, observational method used for testing hypotheses about the ways in which the media represent people, circumstances, what is happening etc.

The coding scheme for the analysis adapted from Elinzano (2018). The coding sheet was tweaked and tailored to the needs of this study. It had six different categories: Clothing and Nudity, Social Distance, Visual Modality (Cropping), Visual Modality (Lighting and Filters), Posing (Standing), and Posing (Sexually Suggestive) that were each divided into subcategories. The independent variables were the collected Grindr profiles analysed in the

study and the dependent variables were the six categories and their subcategories (See Appendix A for the coding sheet used).

For the first part, Clothing and Nudity- was based on the study by Hatton and Trautner (2011) that referred it to the sexual nature of the selfies in terms of amount of clothing—or lack thereof—in the picture. This part of the coding was divided into three subcategories: a) Highly-revealing or shirtless picture, b) Somewhat revealing (exposed body parts), c) Wearing minimal clothing (wearing only one item if clothing and nothing else).

The second category of the coding, i.e., Social Distance was in accordance with Hall's (1966) discussion of proxemics as well as the psychology on how people uses space by van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) that referred to the social distance of participants in an image. This category was divided into four subcategories: a) intimate (face and head only, close-up), b) close personal distance (head and shoulders), c) far personal distance (from the waist up), and d) far social distance (whole figure with or without a mirror).

The third and fourth categories of the coding were the Visual Modality (cropping) and Visual Modality (lightings and filters) that referred to the framing device convention by Bell (2001) during the second level of visual framing of stylistic-semiotic systems by Rodrigues and Dimitrova (2011). There are 3 subcategories of this part of the coding ; a) cropping out the picture on purpose; b) blurring out pictures on purpose as well as c) well-lit image (and whether or not it utilises filters).

The fifth and sixth categories, Posing (Standing) and Posing (Sexually Suggestive), referred to the poses that were done in a selfie that may connote sexuality, and are based on an analysis on body posture and studies of sexualization by Goffman (1979). The subcategories for Posing are: a) Standing upright for Standing, and b) Sexually suggestive poses (lifting one's arms overhead, any kind of leaning or sitting, head-tilt), and c) Overtly posed for sexual activity (lying down, overtly posed for sexual activity as in wearing or highlighting sexual suggestive behaviour) for Sexually Suggestive.

3.4 Written Content

The analysis of written content focused on analysing the linguistic features and meaning structures that ensue as BGM construct Self identities and the identities of desired Others in mediated by Grindr, a LBRTD app for gay users. The analysis of "About Me" narratives were analysed guided by Fairclough's 3 dimension model as discussed previously in section 2.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Visual Analysis

The findings of the visual analysis are discussed according to 3 salient findings related to: Clothing and nudity, Social distance and Visual modality.

1. Clothing and Nudity

Clothing and nudity allude to the sexual nature of the profile pictures in terms of the amount of clothing—or lack thereof—in their profile pictures. After the categorisation of all 30 Grindr profiles, 50% of the profile pictures from all three sub-categories showed a sexual nature in terms of the amount of clothing in their pictures—mostly involving a shirtless-torso revealing pictures. Out of these 15 shirtless profile pictures, 6 of them focused entirely on showcasing the torso as it portrays hegemonic masculinity and the advertisers' fitness level (as in the perfect athletic body cut). Subject number 5 (see Appendix B, example 1) from the long-term category for example showcased a mirror-selfie with his mobile phone covering his face, whilst only

wearing a pair of shorts—it was deliberately captured that way to bring the focus onto his torso and the whole moody tone of the picture adds up for him exhibiting masculinity and vigour.

2. *Social Distance*

Social distance refers to the psychology of people's use of space in taking pictures, Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001). Based on all 30 subjects, the most salient way of posting profile pictures on Grindr was the intimate social distance, that is a close up pictures of face and head only, but considering the nature of Grindr advertisers this study also includes the close up of other body parts too. For instance, subject number 3 (see Appendix B, example 2) from the category of looking for both short and long-term relationship—the advertiser posted a close up picture of his toned torso. The advertiser's selection of picture adhered to the prevalent nature of the Grindr scene here in Malaysia that is, GBM looking for partners who seem to be athletic-looking and most of all, their preference to those who exude masculinity.

3. *Visual Modality (Cropping, lighting and filters)*

In accordance with Bell (2001), visual modality interpolates to the degree to which certain means of pictorial expression such like colours, representational details, filters usage etc. are used to enhance realism. Putting up a profile picture on Grindr using a certain filter, cropping and blurring things out are some aspects of visual modality. More than half of the pictures from all three subcategories conformed to either cropping, lighting and even the usage of heavy filters.

As for cropping out pictures out of the frames, it occurred the most in profiles that were in the short-term subcategories. The main reason these profiles were set up the way they were may be due to the reason why the advertisers go on Grindr in the first place; looking for a no-strings attached relationship with no commitment; one-night stand. These profiles denote goals that were purely for the sake of looking for sex and not into getting to know anyone any more than they should hence a proper picture was not deemed necessary, which correlates with their written profile which were; brief, concise and straight to the point. Therewithal, the out-of-frame cropping also adds more dimension for the profiles to be more enticing and inviting to other users so that the advertiser could get other users to initiate a conversation.

Take for instance subject number 2 (see Appendix B, example 3) from the short-term category. Although the photo was cropped off-frame, the pose in the picture was rather candid and casual which signifies that the advertiser is a laid-back person. However, the athletic attire as well as the flexing of his biceps exudes that he is dominant and fit, Cardoso et.al (2019) which conjugates to the seductiveness of the profiles, where finding partners who are fit has been the dominant pattern within these profiles.

The act of blurring out pictures has a lot to do with the aspect of security and verification and it is highly crucial for advertisers on Grindr. Being gay or involved in homosexuality and non-normative sexual activities put the GBM community as vulnerable to hate crimes as well as criminals according to the laws of the country, so blurring out pictures is not surprising so that confidentiality can be guarded. Along with that, the Grindr scenes here in Malaysia is said to be filled with behaviours of fraudulent and unscrupulous users that make it necessary for advertisers to be precautious and very aware of when and who they are sharing their pictures and personal information with. On top of that, this act also has to do with the advertisers being discreet, i.e. closeted gay men, and even in some cases married straight men who had sex with men for pleasure—hence the importance in protecting their identity.

Subject number 6 (see Appendix B, example 4) from the long-term category for example portrayed a shirtless advertiser in front of a mirror with his face blurred out on purpose. As erstwhile mentioned, there are a few feasibilities on the reason why the advertiser has

deliberately blurred out his picture. However even with the face blurred out, the advertiser still managed to conform in posting a picture that is enticing (by posting a shirtless picture with bulge that could draw other users' attention to) of what is also called as "thirst trap" which according to the dictionary.com is a gay slang term that is used in social media especially for selfies or other photos, intended to elicit sexual attention and sexual arousal.

Whilst the adapted coding sheet has 6 categories in total, in this paper because of space concerns, we have decided to only focus on the three most salient aspects namely; clothing and nudity, social distance as well as visual modality that includes cropping, lighting and filters. As attested by Goffman, framing can be identified at a vertical level as patterns of public discourse (Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Gamson,1992) in regard to the public and inter-media discourse.

After thorough cogitation upon all 30 profiles, it is quite evident that there is an apparent trend and style of posting pictures and curating Grindr profiles amongst the GBM community here in Malaysia. Attitude, sex appeal, mannerisms, body language and poses are conveyed in all of the profiles that adhered to a certain style—that relies upon what the advertisers are looking for from the app.

In this study, the photographs juxtaposed and correlated with ease accordingly to the adapted coding sheet. Social media has definitely become an important part in today's world. With that said, social media users, or in this case the advertisers on Grindr use their profiles as means to let others into their lives considering numerous of aspects—calculated and edited as a part of their self-branding. Social construction theory observes that one portrays themselves based on what society will perceive. The visual messages the Grindr default pictures display are the users self-branding to personify whom they encompass as a human in order to attract whomever their intended audience is.

Through the clothing and nudity aspect, all of the profiles' pictures of torsos were the main focus of the picture. This is seen to be the pattern on Grindr with regards to the data we analysed as more than half of the profiles in the data sets adhered to this. With visual modality, the act of deliberately blurring out pictures and cropping out pictures out of frame has also been the pattern. However, such act is not surprising in the Malaysian context considering the nature of the wider context that GBM as part of within the community of practice.

4.2 *Written Analysis*

The CDA analysis of the "About Me" narratives in the Profile yielded 4 patterns- Discourse of Relationships Mediated by Desire and Sexuality, (Re)production of Heterosexual Masculinity, Discourse of Divisiveness and Discourse of Security and Well-being.

4.2.1. *Discourse of relationships mediated by desire and sexuality*

We found the narratives analysed devoting much explicit focus on goals, preferences of sexual roles, preferences of desired and dispreferred sex activities that we do not find in normative romantic relationship personal advertising. The focus on these topics are emblematic of relationships mediated by desire and sexuality specifically those of homosexual relationships where sexual desires are brought to reality through hookups and are then acted upon through consent. Unlike normative romantic relationship personal advertising, other descriptors such as personal characteristics, descriptions of personality, physical appearance and race/ethnicity are not very much focused upon. Perhaps because the profile pictures of the advertisers are included, the inadvertent notion that a picture is better ,i.e., as a more accurate substitution for words as in the adage "A picture paints a thousand words".

1a.Goal

The 'About Me' section usually begins with direct to the point indication of the goal for putting up the advertisement. Lexical items used by the advertisers are minimum with the use of abbreviations such as 'fnf' used by the advertiser, ST3 Midnight and 'fwb' used by the advertiser SNL1 T as well as the use of short forms much found in texting language. Here we find texting language in Bahasa Malaysia through the use of the short form, 'kwn' – 'kawan' (friend) in Example _ below:

Example 4 ST3 Midnight – fnf (abbreviation- Friend and Fun (euphemism-sex))

Example 5 SNL 1 T- cari kwn, fb, Fwb –be nice

looking for a friend, fb, fwb (abbreviation- Friends with Benefit)– be nice

At times, this goal stands alone without any description of self-and/or descriptions of the desired Other such as in the case of Gary below:

Example 6 SNL8 Garry- Friend and Fun (euphemism-sex)

A more subtle indication of goal in the form of first revealing the advertiser's physiological state, i.e., sexual arousal through the use of the Malay language gay slang term 'gersang' followed by the subtle invitation, 'Sape cepat dia dapat' is seen as in the case of PM below:

Example 7 ST 2. PM- *Gersang mlam ni.. Sape cepat dia dapat*

(I feel) sexually aroused tonight. Whoever comes fast, he will get

It is interesting to note that the lexical item 'gersang' in the Malay language means 'dry, arid' and the appropriation of this slang by gays in Malaysia to what it means now is very much exclusively used in Malaysia. See Birnholtz et. al (2104) for discussion on the use of uphemisms for engaging in socially stigmatized behaviours such as seeking casual sex.

Ib. Self -Identity and Description of Desired Other -Sexual Role Preference

The use of slang 'top' (pleasure giver sexual partner) and 'bottom' (receptive sexual partner) or vers (abbreviation for versatile-one who enjoys both sexual roles and may alternate between one or the other role) are used in the data gathered. See the examples for self-identification. In the data analysed, only top and bottom were found to fit Self-identity. See the examples below:

Example 8 ST8 ANP-Top

Example 9 SNL 2 Aidin Bottom – I am Bottom

A more explicit message about the preference of sex role of the desired Other is found in the case of Prince who uses the gay slang terms such as bottom (here he uses the short form of the slang), slave playing (play acting activity during sex where gays who are 'slaves' like to be bossed around in bed) and the abbreviation 'bdsm' (bondage discipline sadism and masochism):

Example 10 ST7-Prince- seeking bot (bottom) or slave playing lite bdsm, want to know more??
Have pleasure to chat me

Prince's use of the question technique in 'want to know more??' is aimed at arousing the curiosity of any interested desired Other and this technique serves to act as a seductive strategy.

In the data analysed, we found the use of the gay slang 'vers' in the description for desired Other as in the cases below.

Example 11 LT 10-Visitor-vers (short form for versatile) depends on mood

Example 12 SNL 7 -Marcus- versatile depends

1c. Self- Identity Sexual Act Preferences

Sexual act preferences are presented as part of self -identity of the advertiser in the advertisements analysed. Self- Identification with regards to sexual act preferences are described unabashedly by the advertisers. Two patterns occur; those that are positive, i.e, those that turn the advertiser on and those that are negative, i.e., those that turn the advertiser off. Below are some examples of positive sexual act preferences derived for the advertiser's self-identification:

In the example below, the preferred sexual acts are not just described in the English language but also in the Malay language through code-switching. While the English description is performed in the declarative, the Malay switch 'Nak nenen' is performed in the imperative in the form of a command, as if the advertiser is directly speaking to the interested Other.

Example 13 ST 1.READ – (I am) Really into sucking n eating your chest hard. *Nak nenen* (Want chest -breasts, nipples). *lite je pun boleh* (lite sex also all right) /toilet fun (sex).

The use of the lexical items 'mutual + fun (gay slang- sex) by ST in the advertisement below assures the interested Other that both parties will find satisfaction in the event the desires described are acted upon. This serves as a strategy for sexual seduction as well as signalling equality. Much of the language used here is reminiscent of Eurocentric gay pornography such as the use of the adjective 'raging' to describe the male appendage in the state of sexual arousal.

Example 14 ST3-Midnight- love to be rimmed & nips get played, suck your raging hardon & we will go with the flow, mutual fun (sex)

With regards to negative sexual act preferences derived for the advertiser's self-identification, see the examples below:

Example 15 ST6- i DON'T SUCK, *kecuali ko hot gile..* (unless you are really hot)

Note that in the above example, the advertiser uses capitalization as a strategy for putting stress visually in writing on the sexual activity that turns him off. This is akin to shouting in texting language as the capitalization enhances the degree of differences between the two sections for readers to take note of. The use of the Malay lexical item 'kecuali' within the code-switched clause from English to Malay shows the advertiser's statement of exception to his earlier assertion.

Example 16 ST9- Sucker-X anal

The advertiser's use of the emoji X which denotes 'No' is a form of negation to signal that the advertiser is adverse to the type of sexual activity noted. The message comes up short and very clear as to what sexual act is dispreferred by the advertiser.

1d. Other category descriptions

Compared to the aforementioned categories discussed already, data analysed yielded to a lesser extent the focus of advertisers towards category descriptions of personality, physical appearance and race/ethnicity. In the self-identification of character, cfriendly guy, uses a list of appropriate adjectives that are also found to be used in heterosexual relationship personal advertisements although it is interesting to note that 'discreet' is seldom used as much and in

a more subtle sense as it is in this application. The adjectives used here are also used by other advertisers in Grindr (see those in bold).

Example 17 SNL8- cfriendly guy- Chinese discreet, **sincere**. **Open minded**, keen for looking on stuff

Within descriptions of the desired Other, we note the same kinds of descriptions found in normative heterosexual romantic relationship advertisements are also found in this application (see those in bold).

Example 18 LT5 TMK- My Type: **Sense of humour**, **Educated**, **Good attitude**, **Attractive**

In the “About Me” narratives we have analysed, we have found that advertisers dispense divulging claimed and desired recreational and leisure activity (although some profile pictures may allude to this) as well as status information related to education, occupation and finance as found in any generic heterosexual personal advertisements.

4.2.2 *(Re)production of Hegemonic Masculinity*

We have found that many of the Malaysian GBM in Grindr gravitate to presenting themselves as possessing masculine traits (see also this issue via images in the Visual Analysis section). The ideology of hegemonic masculinity with its baggage of traits that are deemed requisite for a heterosexual man to be described as ‘normal’ (Milani 2013) is venerated as can be seen from the examples below. Consequently, masculinity is stressed as very desirable in the description of the desired Other.

One of the important observations that we get from the narratives analysed is the stark revelation that straight-acting, i.e., acting like a heterosexual is very much revered not only in the heteronormative culture at large but also within the gay community in Grindr. The Grindr community of practice can be seen as a microcosm of the context in which hegemonic masculinity in the larger community instead of being resisted is being (re)produced.

Example 19 SNL 1 T- mly, **str8 act** (heterosexual)

Besides the above, there is also a blatant dismissal of femininity (see also Bogetic 2009 and Milani 2013 for more discussion), particularly articulated by the lexical item, ‘sissy’. In the example below, negation in the form of the use of ‘no’ + ‘sissy’ attest to this aversion of the effeminate. The value laden vocabulary choice affirms the identity of the advertiser as someone who is in sync not only with the wider community but is also familiar with the meaning that accompanies the vocabulary item within the community of practice.

Example 20 ST7-Prince- No Indian, No chubby, **no sissy**

Other normative signifiers of masculinity were found through the use of aggressive language. The use of abusive language features such as ‘fucking’ and name calling such as ‘uglyass’ and ‘psycho’ as used here aim to signal masculinity, specifically to evoke the stereotype of the macho man as in the example below:

Example 21 ST10- **Fucking** send your pic before text **psycho**. If you really got a high standard, you will not be here at the first place **uglyass**.

4.2.3. *Discourse of divisiveness*

In a heteronormative society where queerness, whether outrightly exhibited or hidden is discriminated against and queers marginalized, in gay apps like Grindr which is meant as a safe space for identity negotiation and inclusivity for this community of practice, we found in many cases, that this space actually proves to be divisive. Much of the identity categorizations written by the advertisers lead to prejudice and further marginalization of the gay community from within its own community. There is no escape of the judgmental reality of our heteronormative society within this space as identity categorization of the advertiser and their descriptions of the desired Other mirror what is out there in society. See for further discussion on this issue (Gardner 2016, Barkus 2017).

In the self-identification section of “About Me” we have found many blatant disclaimers such as ‘Strictly no X’ those that disdain partnering a certain race/ethnicity. In our study, Indians are discriminated against exclusively. Backus (2017) states that there is negative reception of gay Indians in Grindr largely based on skin colour.

Example 22 SNL4 Visitor- **strictly no Indian**

Example 23 ST5- **Big NO to chubby**. Sorry just my preference

There is also disdain of gay men towards certain body types, in this case, those who are chubby or big size (see the above example). Negation, through the lexical item “no” is used as a way of distancing those who do not fit into the preferences of the advertisers. This preference confirms the stereotypical ideal related to body types, i.e, those that stem from Eurocentric gay pornography of the jock, masculine gym-fit (Backus 2017).

4.2.4 *Discourse of Security and well-being*

Issues of security and well-being of gay men in the data we analysed are various. Three issues are discussed here- Discreetness, Health Matters, Picture verification as prerequisite for contact continuation

4a. *Discreetness*

The lexical item ‘discreet’ is used in the context of the advertiser (when used as Self-identification) as one who is in the closet and does not want information of their sexuality (as one not adhering to the norm of heterosexuality) in the description of the desired Other to be sensitive to not divulge personal information with regards to the sexuality of the advertiser.

Example 24 SNL8 cfriendly guy- Chinese **discreet**, sincere. Open minded, keen for looking on stuff

Living in a context that largely disapproves homosexuality, Malaysian gay men must negotiate rampant discrimination for fear of not only disturbing the delicate balance of normalized heterosexuality within the immediate family but also to be cautious that they do not overtly invite recognition of their non-normative gender and sexual identities as there are severe repercussions.

4b. *Health Matters*

The discourse of health through the use of the lexical item ‘hygiene’ shows that cleanliness is at the forefront specifically related to the desired Other. The issue of cleanliness and hygiene for Malaysian men relates not only to sexual acts but also to the cleanliness of the physical body. The assertion made of ‘*yang sunat* only’ relates to the preference for those who are

circumsised. In Malaysia, circumcision for men is now not an exclusive signifier that the advertiser is of the Islamic faith. Islam and many in the scientific community believe that circumcision is a preventive measure against infection and diseases. Non- Muslim men have also subscribed to this believe and have practiced circumcision at free will.

Example 25 ST3- good hygiene

Example 26 ST6- *yang sunat* only (those who are circumcised)

Further to the above discussion of cleanliness and hygiene is the awareness of AIDS/STIs amongst gay men. This can be seen to be activated in the following examples below which negatively by the use of negation ‘no’ points to the lexical item, ‘Moneyboy’, a gay slang term to mean gigolos, i.e., those young men who actively sell their sexual services in exchange for money as dispreferred partners.

Example 27 LT1 Merlin- no moneyboy

Example 28 LT7 Kenal 2- *tidak untuk* (not for those) money boy

4c. Dispreferred Others

The use of negation “not” in the example below points to those who generally should not be using Grindr for the purpose of hookups, long term or short term relationships as they may pose problems for the advertisers who do not want complications in their non-normative relationships (sexual or otherwise).

Example 29 LT 7 Kenal 2- *tidak cari fun* (not looking for fun)...*tidak untuk yang berkahwin* (not those who are married), *tidak untuk yang bercouple* (not those who already are a couple), *tidak untuk yang bertunang* (not those who are engaged), *tidak untuk money boy* (not for gigolos) *hanya untuk yang single* (only for singles)

The data we analysed also pointed to the disdain of advertisers to ‘weirdos’, i.e., those with weird fetishes who come onto chats with their weird demands. In the case of ST4, the negation is marked by the emoji ‘X’ that signifies “no”.

Example 30 ST4- X weirdos

4d. Picture verification as prerequisite for contact continuation

Lack of a photograph when contacting the advertiser is understood as a negative behaviour within the context of Grindr. This brings to the fore the issue of fake profiles, dishonest Others who lie about their self-identities even to hide t health matters – HIV /STIs status.

In the wake of the issues discussed above, we find numerous advertisers demanding pictures for verification so that they can make the choice of continuing contact if they feel secure that they are not coming into contact with malicious Others who bear ill will.

Example 31 LT1- Merlin- I will not reply without showing your pic.

Example 32 LT2-HMU-NPNC (Abbreviation No pic no chat)

Example 33 SNL 10- Bean Bag-Show me your photo when initiate chat ! Will block fake photo profile!

In the case of Bean Bag above, a stern warning is put forward that fake photo profiles will be blocked.

Example 34 LT10 Visitor - *Jgn mintk pic aq klu ko sdri xde pic...ade fhm ke semua?*

-Don't ask for my pic if you yourself don't have your pic...Do you all understand?

In the case of Visitor above, he begins his "About Me" section mainly in Malay texting language, a stern reminder with the use of '*jangan*' (don't) in Malay as if directly addressing fac-to-face the interested Others reading his "About Me" descriptions. The question at the end seeks to garner understanding of readers about his stern reminder given.

With regards to the profile picture of the advertisers, the preoccupation of advertisers to verify authenticity can be seen through assertions such as below. The assertions serve to verify that the advertiser is real, not fake. This is also a strategy of assurance to give the interested Other confidence with regards to their being honest and open (see this issue discussed previously in section 4 Visual Analysis).

Example 35 SNL3 Indian- Dp (default picture) is my real body

Example 36 ST5-#DpIsMine (default picture is mine)

Example 37 LT 4 SHAH- **THOSE "DISCREET@HIDING" "LADIES", PLEASE KEEP AWAY..**

Example 38 ST6- *kadang2* (sometimes) **str8** (straight)... *diam2* sudah (stay quiet/don't disturb)

5. Conclusion

This is preliminary study and hence findings of this study must be used with caution. However, as research into the intersection between users and contemporary technologies specifically those mediated by mobile technologies have not gained much momentum especially in the local scenario of Malaysia and in the Southeast Asian region, through our study, we have uncovered a few less firmly established findings about the behavior of Malaysian GBM's self-presentation in Grindr. Investigations into the language use specifically in and through the language of the self-narratives of the users as they express the advertisers' Self and their sexuality as well as their expressions of descriptors of the Desired Other including the investigation of images via photographs in the profiles amongst the Malaysian Grindr community have made understanding of the following more lucid that previous researchers may not have uncovered.

With regards to the analysis of photographs in this study, selfies and their prominence is attributed to social media, but it can also be attributed to its users. Although the selfie has been made famous and noteworthy by celebrities, a selfie is an aspect of social media that is just as popular and important to non-celebrities. Unlike self-portraiture, which was usually reserved for the wealthy and well-respected figures in society, the selfie bridges that class divide, and anybody in any part of the world who has a smartphone, can take and post a selfie, regardless of its level of art, class, or other standards or demographics. Selfies then evolves into something more than just a picture—it has now become a part of self-branding especially for advertisers on dating app, which in this case is Grindr. With the help of proper framing via the POV of the advertisers—it is capable of giving control and independence to these advertisers that they can alter what is the actual reality, whilst also concealing and fabricating real truths. This brings us to the findings of analysis from the written narratives that have revealed an almost unanimous preoccupation of advertisers with the issue of security and well-being. The findings reveal that in Malaysia, advertisers put priority on security and validation factors. The GBM scene in Malaysia is precautious, insecure and closeted. This is hardly surprising as laws criminalize those who do not conform to normalized heterosexual practices.

The present findings of this study has helped to elucidate on existing race based sexual dynamics to a certain extent within the Malaysian GBM community which have not been

much studied in Malaysia. As we write this paper, we are analyzing whether there is truth in what Backus (2017) maintains that there are negative reception of dark skinned gay Indians among Malaysian gay men who use gay apps and that systemic racism in Asian gay communities is real; affecting prejudice and hence discrimination because of skin color.

With regards to the (re)production of heterosexual masculinity that we have observed from our findings, while many advertisers do venerate the ideology of heterosexual masculinity, we have uncovered sentiments such as those below that some GBM on Grindr are emboldened to. Through the descriptions of the desired Other, these advertisers show resistance to this ideology within the confines of Grindr. In the examples below, advertisers point to a dispreference to those who put on being straight and those who are discreet. With this said, we may well see new forms of identity formation and presentation in Grindr in the future as gender and sexuality are fluid and are conditioned by culture and historical determinants.

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Appendix A
Coding Sheet Adapted from Elinzano (2018)

Profiles #:

Category:

Items	Present	Absent
1. Clothing and Nudity		
a. Highly-revealing or shirtless picture		
b. Somewhat revealing- exposed body parts		
c. Wearing minimal clothing (wearing only one item of clothing and nothing else)		
2. Social Distance		
a. Intimate (face and head only; close-up)		
b. Close personal distance (head and shoulders)		
c. Far personal distance (from the waist up)		
d. Far social distance (whole figure with or without a mirror)		
3. Visual Modality (cropping)		
a. Cropping out pictures on purpose		
b. Blurring out pictures on purpose		
4. Visual Modality (lighting and filters)		
c. well-lit image (utilising filters or not)		
5. Posing (standing)		
a. Standing upright		
6. Posing (sexually suggestive)		
b. Sexually suggestive poses (lifting one's arms overhead, any kind of leaning or sitting, head-tilt)		
c. Overtly posed for sexual activity (wearing/highlighting sexual suggestive behaviour)		

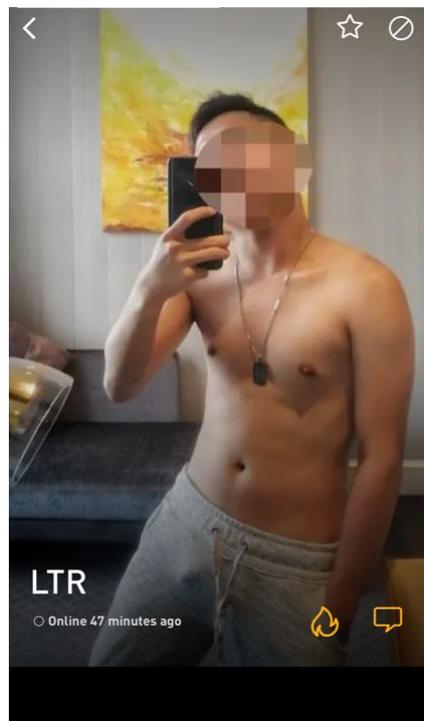
Appendix B

Example 1



Subject 5 – Long-term

Example 2



Subject 3 - SNL

Example 3



Subject 2 – Short-term

Example 4



Subject 6 – Long-term

Appendix C

Informants' Demographics

No.	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Years of using Grindr
1	Non-binary	Bi-sexual	3
2	Male	Bi-sexual	2
3	Female; transgender	Gay	5
4	Genderqueer	Gay	2
