

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

The current research draws from various scholarly areas, which are detailed in this chapter. It begins with the examination of media audiences behaviour in the digital age and the emergence of online fan communities as the new voices of cultural discourse. Subsequently, the study situates TikTok as the key agent of this change, highlighting its engaging features and emphasising that it is becoming a major media culture of Malaysia. Apart from this, the chapter also reviews the literature by way of example, a novel-to-screen adaptation, particularly when a situation of significant increase in the practice of adaptation in Malaysia is presented. Finally, the chapter features the theoretical perspectives that have been a compass for this research, Reception Theory and Participatory Culture Theory which, when integrated, provide an instrument to look at how TikTok users interpret the content and express their shared understanding of drama adaptations like *Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure* and *Hilang Dalam Rindu*. These interactions constitute the conceptual basis for the succeeding chapter's methodological and analytical decisions.

#### 2.1 Media Audiences

The analysis of media audiences has changed drastically during the past few decades, from very simplistic models considering audiences as passive recipients to the current ones recognising them as active participants in the construction of meaning (Schröder, 2018). In the beginning, media theories assumed audiences as passive and alike in their reception of the messages, thus they were very close to the "Hypodermic Needle" model which suggested that

media effects were direct and of the same strength for everyone (Bineham, 1988). Nonetheless, further research on audiences, particularly cultural and reception studies, have placed in doubt this unidirectional model. Academics have claimed that people get the meaning of media texts through their individual experiences, cultural background, and social environment, hence the same content may have different and even complex interpretations (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980).

The role of audiences has also increased in the modern digital media environment. The participatory nature of digital platforms has also created audiences as active participants in shaping, altering, and distributing media content, so that communities of practice form around the achievement of a common goal as well as collaborative meaning-making (Döveling et al., 2018). According to Jenkins et al. (2013), nowadays media users can no longer be viewed as the mere consumers but as individuals that constantly reconfigure, distribute, redefine, and rearrange media content in ways that have never been thought possible before, which only continues to blur the lines between producers and audiences. This shift has spawned the emergence of ideas like active audiences, producers, and prosumers that summarize the dualistic nature of the position occupied by audiences as interpreters and co-creators (Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2008).

Audience behaviour in Malaysia has essentially followed the same pattern as globally and moved towards more interactive and involved types of participation. Studies on local television and digital media consumption reveal that Malaysian audiences often engage in a discourse of interpretation based on ethical, cultural, and community-oriented concepts (Aminudin, 2018; Fann, 2012; Shamshudeen, 2024). These researchers point out that the viewers in Malaysia are extremely sensitive to the aspects of representation, religious suitability, and moral values, and they make a heavy use of online platforms to express their support, criticism, or resumption of the statements made.

## 2.2 Online Fan Communities

Fandom has changed significantly over time and is now seen as an active space where different interpretations of the same film, book, or series are continuously discussed among users (Busse, 2017). Academics point out fans as the first major participatory communities which digitally adopted sharing, interaction, and building relationships online (Gray et al., 2007; Pearson, 2010). The rise of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube has made these habits even more powerful, giving users more room to engage, talk, and produce content together (Malthouse et al., 2013; Vale & Fernandes, 2018). Most of the research, however, that has been done in the areas of consumer and sports engagement, supports the same dynamics in fandom i.e. digital platforms are a means for fans to engage with media texts, mingle with other fans, and jointly create new meanings through their continuous participatory practices (Gummerus et al., 2012; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012).

In these online communities, fans contribute to the formation of shared meanings by interacting and collaborating in relation to their objects of interest. Online communities discussing fiction, in most cases, are similar to the previous fan groups in the way they build identity, establish relationships, and share experiences through the group (Baym, 2000). These activities take place in the form of comments, controversies, source comparisons, and the distribution of fan works, whereas fans also interact through the uploading of the videos or images and by writing the comments to stimulate the other members (Fiedler & Sarstedt, 2014). These kinds of interactions correspond to what Döveling et al. (2018) call "communities of practice," where common knowledge arises through involvement. Here, the audiences are not just consumers, but they are the ones who have the power to influence, change, and combine the media content (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Online fan communities in Malaysia are very active across different platforms. Fans in Malaysia, especially those who are interested in drama adaptations, use the internet to show

their emotional connection, review the changes in the production, praise the characters, and gather the fanbase for support (Berita Harian, 2025). These internet fan communities are very significant culturally: they become promoters, critics, and creators of new meanings. The discussion initiated by the fans is the most visible factor that guides people's opinion, changes the habits of the audience, and eventually determines the fate of drama productions to be successful or rejected.

The difference in fan reactions between *Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure* and *Hilang Dalam Rindu* point out the impact that the power of fans has on these two dramas. In short, followers of the first drama brought the director to the hot seat in which fans using TikTok reacted with criticism, boycott sentiments, and oppositional readings (mStar, 2025). On the other hand, fans of the latter made it flourish by creating positive reviews, reaction videos, and emotional edits to increase the drama's reach on TikTok (Berita Harian, 2025). The different responses present online fan communities as agents who engage with media reception by using discourse, affecting trends, and inviting collective interpretation.

Online fan communities similarly function through affective processes where fans become emotionally involved, take characters to heart, and care about story developments. Such emotional manifestations help in establishing a feeling of community among the members and also in consolidating the shared readings (Jenkins, 2013; Crawford, 2021). By means of hashtags, duets, stitches, and fan edits, the communities express their emotions and viewpoints, thus, fan discourse being visible and having a great influence on the platform.

### **2.3 TikTok**

TikTok can be considered as one of the major changes introduced by the digital era in the contemporary social media environment, thus changing the behavior of audience consumption and interaction (Khadijah et al., 2025). Originally released worldwide in 2018, the platform

has seen a swift increase in user numbers due to its algorithm-driven “For You Page” (FYP), which provides highly personalized content based on interactions and viewing behaviours of its users (Cervi, 2021; Firth, 2025; Herrman, 2019). On TikTok, content reach is not based on the institutional scheduling as it is in the case of traditional broadcast media. Instead, it is dependent on the aggregate engagement, thus, users play an active role in media flow.

By focusing on user-generated content and offering simple creative tools, TikTok has also turned into a cultural sensation (Firth, 2025). The users get attracted to not only watching videos but also creating, remixing, commenting, stitching, and duetting content. This makes the audiences become producers and consumers simultaneously, which makes one wonder where the traditional creators and viewers boundary is.

Recent research discusses TikTok communities as imitation publics. Zulli and Zulli (2022) argue that the process of forming TikTok publics is not based on the interpersonal or affectionate relationships but by the pointless repetitions with the similar content created under the influence of the algorithmic factors. Such imitation publics are formed around recognizable sides of TikTok, such as BookTok, CleanTok, or Alt TikTok, where people are united by common themes, practices, and the use of platform features rather than on personal relationships.

The BookTok Malaysia community is an excellent example of an imitative public gained within the Malaysian context. As of May 2025, the hashtag BookTokMalaysia has over 173.4 million followers, which indicates a longer-term interest of the audience in the literary and narrative content (#BookTokMalaysia Reignites Reading Culture, 2025). Besides book promotion, BookTok Malaysia is a platform that serves as the participatory space to make casual reviews, share their feelings, and group discussion (#BookTokMalaysia Reignites Reading Culture, 2025). This community gathers readers, fans, and TikTok customers who

interact based on common textual interpretations and that way represents the ongoing importance of narrative engagement in the digital environment (#BookTokMalaysia Reignites Reading Culture, 2025). BookTok has had a strong impact on the adaptation of drama, especially by giving a clear understanding of how the audience can compare, evaluate, and reinterpret stories from different media forms.

The feeling of a community is similar to that of old TV viewing cultures, when audiences met around a common programme, but on TikTok, involvement is based on groups of videos that share a narrative, theme or a vibe rather than being broadcast at specific times (Firth, 2025). The impact of TikTok facilitating drama-related discourse can be witnessed in the current Malaysian television shows that attained visibility due to a viral discussion. For instance, the newly released drama *Bidaah* (Broken Heaven) received a lot of publicity on TikTok due to its provocative plot and debate, drawing the attention of many viewers to commentary, recreation, and discussion (Hidayat et al., 2025). This case represents a prime example of how that TikTok is a collaborative space where audiences engage, discuss and argue over drama content that has been simply consumed previously.

The perceptions of algorithmic processes by the users also influence the audience engagement on TikTok. For instance, Karizat et al. (2021) demonstrate the impact of user knowledge about the algorithm on their experience on the platform. They tend to actively engage by liking, commenting, and even creating content to ensure that their preferences are reflected on their For-You Page (FYP). So, TikTok serves as a platform where audience reception is constantly re-shaped through the mix of algorithmic responses, social interaction, and cooperative interpretation.

## 2.4 Media Adaptation: From Novel to Screen

Adaptation is a practice that has been essential for the creative work of the media industries for a long time. It has been serving as a bridge between the literature and the screen. Fundamentally, adaptation is a change of the story one finds in a novel and telling it through film, television, or digital drama. Hutcheon (2013) describes adaptation as both a process and a product, meaning that it is the re-examination of an existing story in a different medium which is then accompanied by the resulting text that invites new audiences. Adaptations are not copies; they are the re-interpretations which are influenced by the cultural, social, and industrial surroundings of their production. Every version of the adaptation is a new creative reinterpretation keeping the original work's core intact and thus providing the possibilities of both the continuation and the innovative aspects of the art of storytelling.

In Malaysia, the adaptation of novels into TV dramas has become a norm, which is a way of showing respect to both the strong culture of reading and the entertainment industry's need for familiar and marketable stories. Content adaptation has been the favourite mode of entertainment among Malaysian audiences and a local industry trend where increasingly more adaptation is being produced (Mohd Hasri et al., 2022). As per the data, nearly 80% of the TV dramas have succeeded in garnering many viewers (Radi, 2015), pointing out the market potential of narrative-driven productions. Based on the statistics provided by the National Library of Malaysia (2023) more than a hundred television dramas in Malaysia were made by turning novels into the screen stories in the period 2013-2023, which is a clear indication that this narrative way has been kept fresh for a very long time.

Moreover, institutional support has been a major factor in deepening this trend. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) in 2014 organized a seminar titled "Copyright: From Novel to Screen" (Jarum, 2014) and thus showed that government endorsement of adaptation practices is not only for the artistic benefit but also for the cultural and economic factors (Mohd Hasri et

al., 2022). This institutional support is an encouragement to the production of adaptations as new products in the market that not only are able to enliven the creative ecosystem of Malaysia but also open up a whole new business world in the local creative industry. Success of such adaptations is documented in the example of *7 Hari Mencintaiku* (7 Days Loving Me), which garnered the award of Drama Pilihan (Chosen Drama) at the Kuala Lumpur Film Festival in 2017 (Gun, 2017). Besides the critical success, the adaptation's fan base has led to a substantial increase in the sales of its original novel version (Rahman, 2016), thus showing a mutual relationship between the literary and television industries. So far, the pleasure of watching the characters that are dear to them in the real world has been drawing Malaysian audiences, so many of them are followers of both the literary and screen versions of the same story.

In this context, the current study is concerned with two Malaysian novel-to-screen adaptations, *Hilang Dalam Rindu* and *Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure* as the main units of analysis. Both dramas are based on popular novels and attracted a lot of attention at the time of its release, especially on Tik Tok where people actively discussed, critiqued, and reacted to its plot and appearance. Through a consideration of the two adaptations, the study places the audience reception in the bigger picture of Malaysia's adaptation culture, as well as explaining the differences in narrative treatment, style of production and reception by the audience. The subsections below hence introduce the individual dramas as their respective source text thus giving the essential input for analysing audience reception and participatory practices in the next chapters.

#### **2.4.1 Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure**

The first case, *Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure*, is adapted from Huda Najwa's novel *Thariq Ridzuwan Commando's: His Treasure*. Huda Najwa is a Malaysian author who writes emotionally romantic and has gained a large digital presence. She has a total of 65.5K followers and 2.3 million likes on TikTok, which shows her influence in the online literary community

of Malaysia. Goodreads reports that she has nine novels to her name, and one of the most popular is *Thariq Ridzuwan Commando's: His Treasure*, which has 10 million reads on Wattpad and a rating of 4.14/5.00 on Goodreads. The novel was published in 2023 and was very quickly turned into a drama series because of the large fanbase.

*Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure* is a 2025 Malaysian television drama produced by MIG Production Sdn. Bhd. and directed by Eyra Rahman. The series features Meerqeen and Qasrina Karim as the main characters and was aired on Astro Ria through the Drama Vaganza slot from 23 July to 11 September 2025. Initially, the drama adaptation was highly anticipated by the fans of the novel. However, it soon became a subject of controversy due to the issues involving the director and some production decisions. The controversies surrounding the drama led to audience opinions being divided, which in turn generated a lot of discussions on TikTok. Fans of the novel complained about the characterization of certain characters, while others discussed the issue of the adaptation's fidelity to the source material. Various hashtags associated with the drama started to become popular, frequently representing the opposite perspectives such as boycotts and criticisms on one side, and cast and storyline supports on the other. The present dispute serves as an instance of how online fan communities perform interpretive activities and, at the same time, have a say in the general reception and popularity of a media product.

#### **2.4.2 Hilang Dalam Rindu**

On the other hand, *Hilang Dalam Rindu*, which is an adaptation of Mia Azwari's novel *Hilang*, has a more positive reception that is largely influenced by the fans' excitement and the supportive conversations happening online. Mia Azwari is one of the most prolific romance novel writers in Malaysia, having written more than 60 books and creating the fanbase which she has through different social platforms. On TikTok, she has 23.4K followers and 694.9K likes, which is a strong indication of the fan engagement. Her novel *Hilang*, published in 2024,

was rated as high as 4.51/5.00 on Goodreads, which is a reflection of the readers' delight in her storytelling.

*Hilang Dalam Rindu* is a 2025 Malaysian TV drama series, produced by Suhan Movies & Trading Sdn. Bhd. and directed by Along Kamaludin. The serial cast Jazmy Juma, Tracie Sinidol, Qistina Rania, and Zarif Ghazzi and made its debut on TV3 in the Samarinda time slot from 17 July to 20 August 2025. The novel-to-drama adaptation was able to gain the support of the existing readers of Mia Azwari, and the release of the drama was greeted with fanfare. Fans who actively promoted the drama through TikTok got a lot of support in making review clips, reaction videos, and creative fan edits. In contrast to *Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure*, which was plagued with controversy, *Hilang Dalam Rindu* was a fan-driven affair that emotionally engaged the fans and the performances. These fan-led narratives' prominence significantly contributed to their success, which is a clear indication of how online communities can be instrumental in the cultural reception of Malaysian drama adaptations.

## 2.5 Theoretical Framework

The study relies on two closely linked theoretical frameworks: Reception Theory and Participatory Culture Theory. The two frames are main factors in comprehending the behaviour of online users, especially TikTok users, in which they interact with and make sense of Malaysian drama adaptations. The two theories thus form the basis for studying the intricate connection between audience discussion, participation online and the creation of reception in the case of *Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure* and *Hilang Dalam Rindu*.

This study uses Reception Theory as the main analytical framework to understand how the online Malaysian audiences interpret drama adaptations on TikTok. Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model locates the audience as one of the four main agents of the meaning of a text. They are active ones who can choose among dominant, negotiated, or oppositional

readings of that same media text, depending on their cultural background, values, and social experience. When this model is applied to TikTok comments, captions, fan edits, stitches, and hashtag discourse, the research can classify the different kinds of interpretive positions of the audience that are shared and circulated by them. This is highly significant for the Malaysian setting, where viewers are known to depend mainly on culture, morality, and community to judge media content.

Studies on the Malaysian audience conduct by Aminudin (2018), Fann (2012), and Shamshudeen (2024) provide evidence that local audiences are not passive recipients of the media, rather, they actively negotiate the meaning of the media, especially in relation to issues of morality, representation, and cultural value. These results point to the appropriateness of Reception Theory in understanding the way Malaysian TikTok audiences interpret the content of *Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure* and *Hilang Dalam Rindu*, given the existence of the discourses of boycott, controversy, and fan celebration surrounding these two dramas.

Along with Reception Theory, Participatory Culture Theory (Jenkins, 2006) is the second theoretical framework for the present study. Jenkins' idea of participatory culture highlights the fact that digital audiences are not to be seen as mere consumers of media but rather as active "prosumers" who generate, remix, reply to, and share media texts. In a platform such as TikTok, this involvement is enabled by the practices of duets, stitches, reaction videos, fan edits, collaborative hashtag use, and comment-thread discussions.

Evidence-based research such as Chapman (2022) and Latt (2024) demonstrate that TikTok's features not only facilitate but also influence narrativization online and the collective establishment of the new media text's meanings, whereby users co-create in the process, thus, keeping the ongoing conversation around the media text alive. Online fandom studies in Malaysia have also uncovered that the fan engagement activities could become a source of

communal identity, shared emotional experience, and even moral negotiation within fan groups where phenomena that are directly applicable to the case of fan-driven promotion of *Hilang Dalam Rindu* or collective critique of *Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure*.

The combination of these two theories provides a strong theoretical base for the study. Reception Theory deals with how the audience can understand a dramatic adaptation of a real situation where they are able to accept, negotiate or resist the meanings that the producers intend. Whereas Participatory Culture Theory explains how those understandings become the people's visible activities through the participation of TikTok users like commenting, creating edits, or endorsing certain narratives through hashtags. Through the adoption of these theories, the research is able to focus on the audience's interpretive processes as well as on their participatory acts which, when combined, offer a holistic understanding of the role of TikTok discourse in the reception of drama adaptations from Malaysia.

Essentially, the different levels of this model portray TikTok as a space where the audience not only reacts, but can also take part in creating the shared understanding, challenging, praising by fans, and so on, which are to a large extent the processes of fan-mediated reception of drama adaptations in Malaysia.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework showing the interaction of two theories in a study of Malaysian audiences' social media behaviour to interpret drama adaptations on TikTok. Reception Theory is used to describe how audiences make sense of drama narratives, and Participatory Culture Theory is used to describe how the users' expressions of these

understandings by means of participatory activities like comments, hashtags, fan edits, stitches, and duets reach wider circulation. Overall, these processes constitute the overall reception of drama adaptations which can be positive, negative, or negotiated.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

This literature review has discussed the major ideas, controversies, and theoretical frames that are necessary to comprehend the role of online discourse in influencing the audience perception of drama adaptation in digital space. The research reviewed illustrates that contemporary audiences are no longer just passive consumers but rather they are active participants who involve themselves in the negotiation and contestation of meaning in social and cultural contexts. The fan communities over the internet also take part in this process of interpretation because they produce communal narratives, emotive displays, and practices of participation that spread widely across the digital worlds.

TikTok gradually turns out to be the most powerful place for these kinds of interactions thanks to its algorithm-based visibility, remix culture, and simplicity of content production. Users of the platform in Malaysia, through the available features, can show their approval, criticism, and emotional involvement to local drama adaptations which, in effect, have a great impact on the perception of the public. Furthermore, research concerning Malaysian media adaptations points out that dramatizations of novels have been widely popular for a long time, and the reaction of the audience is crucial in deciding whether these will be successful or cause a stir.

Additionally, this chapter put forward Reception Theory as well as Participatory Culture Theory which served as the main theoretical lenses for the present research. Taken together, these theoretical approaches explain how viewers extract meaning within media texts and are given active roles in the process of constructing meaning practices within digital

society. The firm establishment of the investigation on these theoretical and conceptual premises provides the chapter with a strict basis of the next stage of the research.

The next chapter, Chapter 3: Methodology, is going to detail the research design, data collection procedures, sampling methods, and analytical strategies used to study TikTok discourse about *Thariq Ridzuwan: His Treasure* and *Hilang Dalam Rindu*. This methodological framework will reveal the ways in which the research is able to systematically record and understand the engagement of the online audience to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives set forth earlier.

