

A Grounded Theory of ASEAN Common Denominator Cultures¹

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research was to establish a grounded theory of ASEAN common denominator cultures. The research used the inductive approach with mixed methods to collect data. The qualitative research part conducted a thematic analysis, including content analysis and research synthesis, while the quantitative part was based on a survey of 4,110 Asian people regarding media and content exposure behaviors. The survey results were certified by experts in each country before confirming the same dimension with confirmatory factor analysis. The research found that a grounded theory of ASEAN common denominator cultures consists of three dimensions with two opposite sub-divisions as follows: 1) behavior of information exposure (active/ passive); 2) content exposure (variety/ predominance); and 3) cultural exposure (diversity/adherence). The results also indicate that people in the same dimensions had similar exposure to behaviors, plot exposure and cultural content expectations when they decided to watch TV dramas. Therefore, a successful television series in one country would be successful in other countries having that common dimension. In other words, the successful TV dramas in Thailand are expected to satisfy people in other countries that share the same cultural dimensions with Thailand.

Keywords: grounded theory, cultural dimension, ASEAN, information, exposure, content, television drama, culture

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Introduction

Social mobility enables aspects of one culture to move to another. Such situations can create similarities among cultures. Similarities are found in the patterns of basic understanding of information in each of the countries. This type of pattern is called ‘denominator of cultures’ (Hall, 1976; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961). Meanwhile, the countries in each denominator can have common denominators of cultures. People in the same cultural dimension have similar attitudes and behaviors. They also tend to perceive the same thing more easily than do people from different cultures (Christie et al., 2003). It can be said that the countries that share Thailand’s cultural dimensions present common behavioral patterns. This implies that the likes or dislikes of Thai people are similar to those of people of the countries with the same cultural dimension. Therefore, favorite Thai TV dramas could be the favorites among people in the same cultural dimension.

As far as the concept of cultural dimension theory is concerned, the most widely-developed and used cultural dimensions are the following: Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961: 11ff); the concept of Confucian Dynamism² in Hofstede and Bond (1988); Hall (1976), Schwartz (1994); and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997:8). Most of these concepts are derived from studies of people in Western countries. Although there are some studies that describe the nature of Asians, most are limited to Chinese and Japanese people and conclude that their behavior was representative of Asian people as a whole. Such ideas contribute misleading concepts regarding ASEAN people. However, a concept developed by Hall (1976), uses both the flow and the context of information as categorical dimensions. The country dimension, with various variables from the above-mentioned concepts, especially those of Hall (1976), which used a communication framework to group people of the world, led to the conduct of this study, which is interested in people of ASEAN countries under the concept of communication. The results of the study will reveal a grounded theory of ASEAN common denominator cultures. This grounded theory will

² The concept of Confucian Dynamism was developed by Hofstede and Bond (1988).

be beneficial in increasing knowledge of communication as well as in utilization by the entertainment industry, especially the export of Thai culture through mass media.

Research Objectives

The main purpose of the research is to establish a grounded theory of ASEAN common denominator cultures. Research was based on Corbin's mixed-methods approach and it applied both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Corbin and Strauss 1990, Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998, cited in Charmaz, 2006: 8).

Hypotheses of the Relationship between Variables

H1: The behavior of television drama exposure is related to the exposure of a television drama plot.

H2: The behavior of television drama exposure is related to Thai cultural content in TV dramas.

H3: The exposure of a television drama plot is related to cultural content demands in a TV drama.

Definition of the Key Variables

In this research, the definitions of the key variables are as follows.

1. The common denominator of cultures refers to the behavior pattern of an ASEAN country in terms of exposure to television dramas, TV drama plot exposure and the demands for Thai cultural content in TV dramas. The term, 'common denominator cultures,' is synonymous with the term, 'cultural dimensions.'

2. Exposure to a television drama refers to the seeking of television dramas and the use of media access to TV dramas by people in ASEAN countries.

- 2.1 Characteristics of exposure to television dramas refer to the frequency and characteristics of the desired television drama and the use of channels to access television dramas to meet the demands of people in ASEAN countries.

2.2 Television news seeking refers to the search for TV series and news that relates to television dramas to meet the demands of people in ASEAN countries.

2.3 Plots refer to the outline of the story that is clearly seen as covering the whole story.

2.4 Tentative hypothesis refers to a hypothesis that has not yet been established. It is a theory that needs to be tested for development or accurately predicted or accepted as a grand theory.

The Research Process

The research used mixed research methods as the following tasks.

Qualitative research: The research was conducted with content analysis methods, research synthesis and thematic analysis. The ways of collecting data came from various sources, which are enumerated in the section that follows.

Quantitative research: 4,110 people in 10 ASEAN countries were surveyed and then grouped to study the relationship between variables to test the tentative hypothesis.

Qualitative research: The process would confirm the results from experts in 10 countries by analyzing with the IOC (Object of Congruence) method according to the following chart.

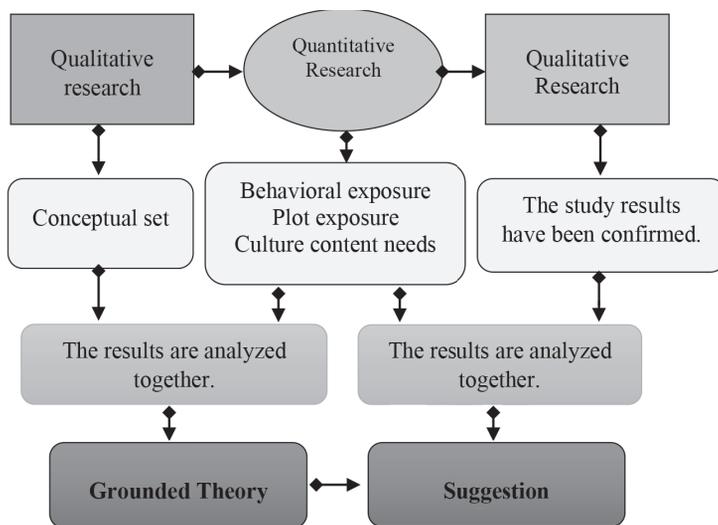


Figure 1 The research process framework used in this study

Population and Samples

Population and qualitative samples consisted of the following: 1) 50 research projects based on the conceptual frameworks of the cultural dimension theory of Hofstede (1991), Schwartz (1994), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Confucian Dynamism, as described in Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961); 2) 65 episodes of the radio program, 'ASEAN Insights'; 3) 13 TV episodes of 'Beyond ASEAN: Towards Future ASEAN'; 4) Six episodes of the TV entertainment series, 'Know ASEAN through the Entertainment World'; 5) four research studies in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and two African countries.

Population and quantitative groups included 4110 ASEAN people who watched television dramas in their countries, used for testing the grounded theory. To determine the samples, the formula of Cochran and Cox (1957) was used with a deviation of .05 or percent. The sample size was not less than 385 from each country. Selected samples were collected by accidental sampling, conducted via the

internet and surveyed by local research assistants. The sample consisted of 473 Cambodians, 398 Thais, 398 Brunei citizens, 399 Filipinos, 389 Malaysians, 397 Myanmar citizens, 408 Lao, 427 Vietnamese, 387 Singaporeans, and 449 Indonesians. Data were collected from July 2016 to July 2017.

Research Instruments

The research instruments consisted of conformity and qualitative analysis; questionnaire surveys were translated into the language of each country. The reliability was higher than 0.853.

Data Analysis

1. Finding consistency by the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC)
2. Analysis of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to see the relationship between variables
3. Analysis of group variables to verify the same dimension with confirmatory factor analysis
4. An analysis of group countries where people behave similarly by using cluster analysis and discriminant analysis of the ASEAN countries

Research Results

Part 1. Tentative hypothesis

Qualitative research was conducted in this part of the study. The tentative hypothesis was that ASEAN countries can be divided into three groups. Group 1 consists of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia; Group 2 consists of Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam; and Group 3 consists of Indonesia and the Philippines.³ TV plots consist of six themes, namely, religion, ghosts, teenagers, modern society, science and conflict.

³ During the study period, no research was found related to Brunei and Myanmar, which could not be classified into any group.

The Thai cultural content in the television drama consists of 10 aspects of Thai culture including: beliefs, decorative art/weaving, ethno-botany, cooking/food, performance, astrology, folklore, education, weddings and medicine/therapy.

Part 2. Developed grounded theory

The quantitative analysis of behavioral patterns is as follows:

2.1 The variables were analyzed to determine the same dimension, divided into two groups.

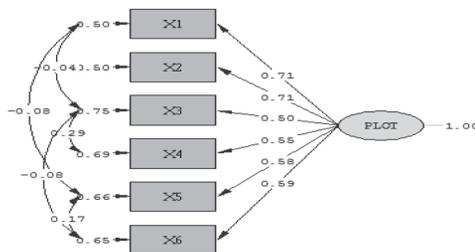
2.1.1 Variable groups of 6 TVPs (types of plots).

- X₁) religious
- X₂) ghosts
- X₁) teenage
- X₂) modern society
- X₃) science
- X₄) conflict

Table 1 Loading and squared multiple correlation of the variety of TV drama plots

Variables	loading	SMC
X ₁	0.706**	0.498
X ₂	0.708**	0.502
X ₃	0.499**	0.249
X ₄	0.554**	0.307
X ₅	0.584**	0.341
X ₆	0.588**	0.346

$\rho_v = 0.374, \rho_c = 0.779$	RMSEA=0.011, CFI=1.000, AGFI=0.997
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**significance level of .01

According to table 1, the analysis of the quality assurance of the model for TV drama plots with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) found that the factor loading (λ) is between 0.499 and 0.708, which was statistically significant at .01 level (t -value $> \pm 2.58$). The construct reliability (ρ_c) is 0.779 (> 0.6) meaning that all six variables were

involved with measuring the TV drama plot exposure. The variance extraction (ρ_v) is 0.374 which is acceptable.

2.1.2 Variable groups of 10 Thai types of cultural content in TV dramas.

X ₁) beliefs	X ₂) decorative art/weaving
X ₁) ethno-botany	X ₂) cooking/food
X ₃) performances ⁴	X ₄) astrology
X ₅) folklore	X ₆) education
X ₇) weddings	X ₁₀) medicine/therapy

Table 2 Loading and squared multiple correlation of the group variety of Thai cultural content in TV dramas

Variables	loading	R ²
X ₁	0.569**	0.324
X ₂	0.707**	0.500
X ₃	0.725**	0.526
X ₄	0.772**	0.596
X ₅	0.794**	0.630
X ₆	0.796**	0.634
X ₇	0.867**	0.752
X ₈	0.675**	0.456
X ₉	0.763**	0.582
X ₁₀	0.850**	0.723

$\rho_v=0.572$, $\rho_c=0.930$	RMSEA=0.072, CFI=0.990, AGFI=0.941
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**significance level of .01

According to table 2, the analysis of the quality assurance of the model for Thai cultural content in TV dramas with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) found that the factor loading (λ) is between 0.569 and 0.867, which was statistically significant at .01 level (t -value $> \pm 2.58$). The construct reliability (ρ_c) is 0.930 (> 0.6), meaning that all

⁴ Thai traditional performances, such as Thai dance or *Khon*.

10 variables were involved with measuring the Thai TVC. Considering the variance extraction (ρ_v) is 0.572 (>0.5), this analysis confirmed that the two groups were structured together or arranged in the same composition. The variables of six TVP and 10 Thai types of cultural content in TV dramas are grouped in the same structure or arranged in the same composition. It is considered as a qualified measurement and quite high variance extraction.

2.2 Analysis of similar patterns

2.2.1 Exposure to television dramas

The survey results from the people in ASEAN countries can be classified into two groups of television exposure behaviors: 1) those with high levels of exposure to television dramas,⁵ including Thailand, Brunei, the Philippines, Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia, and 2) those with low level of exposure to television dramas, including Cambodia and Laos.

2.2.2 Group exposure to TV drama plots

The results of the survey can be classified into two groups. 1) The countries that have been exposed to almost every television drama plot consist of Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia. 2) Cambodia, Brunei, Myanmar, and Singapore are exposed to some television drama plots.

2.2.3 Groups that desire Thai cultural contents in TV dramas⁶

The survey found that the nations where the people demand the same type of television drama content can be separated into two groups. One group consists of the countries in which viewers desire a variety of television drama content, which are Thailand, Brunei, Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia. The other group consists of countries with specific content requirements, including Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore.

⁵ Television drama exposure refers to the seeking of news about TV dramas and the use of media access to TV dramas (Westerwick, 2015)

⁶ The demand for Thai culture content in television dramas is a personal affection for the impression or impression of Thailand. This affects the level of content exposure demand for Thailand.

2.3 The test of the relationship between variables (Pallant, 2005: 118)

2.3.1 Exposure to TV dramas and TV drama plots

Statistic test	Value	Sig.
Pearson Correlation	0.586	.000

The results of the test revealed that the exposure behavior regarding TV dramas was correlated with exposure to TV drama plots. The correlation coefficient was 0.586. This means that people who have a high level of exposure to television dramas will also be exposed to a wide variety of TV plots. The relationship between variables is consistent with hypothesis 1.

2.3.2 Exposure to television drama and the desire for Thai cultural contents in TV drama

Statistic test	Value	Sig.
Pearson Correlation	0.521	.000

The results of the test revealed that the exposure behavior to TV drama was correlated with the desire for Thai cultural content in TV dramas. The correlation coefficient was 0.521. This means that people who have a high level of exposure to television dramas will have a variety of cultural content needs in the television dramas. The relationship between variables is consistent with hypothesis 2.

2.3.3 Exposure to TV drama plots and the needs for Thai cultural contents in TV drama

Statistic test	Value	Sig.
Pearson Correlation	0.500	.000

The results of the test revealed that the exposure to TV drama plots is related to the desire for Thai cultural content in TV drama. The correlation coefficient is 0.500. This means that a variety of TV dramas is also related to the demand for cultural content in various television dramas. The relationship between variables is consistent with hypothesis 3.

Part 3. A Grounded Theory of ASEAN Common Denominator Cultures

3.1 The concept of a grounded theory of ASEAN common denominator cultures

The result of the study created a grounded theory which consists of three dimensions and each dimension has the following description:

Dimension 1: Behavior of information exposure

Active/passive

Description of dimension (Fact)

This dimension presents the concept of information exposure, which is the nature of information seeking and the use of media for access to information to meet their own needs.

Countries that have active behavior in information exposure are those countries where people have exposure to specific information that they are interested in supporting or supplementing their existing information. It is from both domestic and international sources. Exposure to various media sources, both traditional and new media, such as exposure to television media and the use of Internet at the same time. It is exposed to foreign-language news and advertising publicity. People in such countries like to get news that is easy to understand, and like to read many popular stories, as well as popular news.

Countries with passive behavior in information exposure refer to countries where people have access to information in a way that has been defined or selected by others. Traditional media⁷ is the main source of information. It should be a dialect rather than a foreign language.

Dimension 2: Content exposure

Variety/ predominance

Description of dimension (Fact)

This dimension is the concept of variety of exposure to substance content to meet their own needs. The appearance of the exposure is different.

⁷ Meaning radio, television and newspapers.

The variety of exposure is the nature of the people who often pay attention to news or stories that have variety, novelty, modernity and appear different from their own cultures.

The predominant content of TV drama refers to countries where people are exposed to specific stories that are similar or consistent with those in their own cultures. People in this group decide to receive news and stories based on legal frameworks or social customs. The favorite content is one that creates peace, harmony of society. They dislike science and conflict.

Dimension 3: Cultural exposure

Diversity/adherence

Description of dimension (fact)

This dimension is the nature of openness to cultural diversity. It refers to countries where people are open to accepting different cultures. People in this group opined that receiving a variety of cultures is a symbol of innovation and modernization. They are ready to receive and change according to their favorite culture.

Adherence to traditional culture refers to countries where people are not open to accept cultural differences. People are very stable with their own culture and also have the idea that the arrival of foreign culture is ruining the culture of their nation.

In addition, the correlation between exposure to television dramas, exposure to TV drama plots, and cultural content demands in television dramas shows that the three dimensions are interrelated. At the same time, the results also show that each dimension consists of two sub-dimensions, positive and negative.

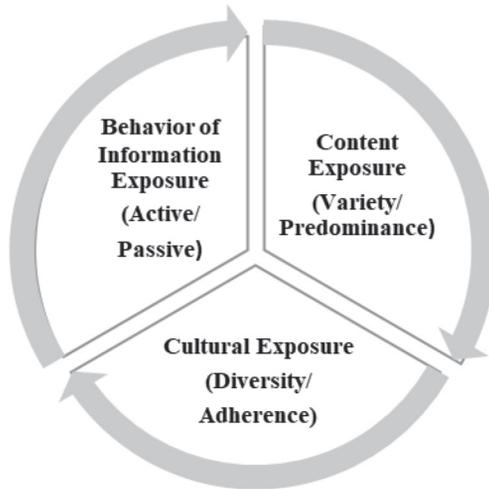


Figure 2 A Model of ASEAN Common Denominator Cultures

3.2 The behaviors of members in each dimension

The study found that countries with the same dimension and had exposure to television dramas, TV drama plots, and cultural content demands in television dramas behaved similarly. It can be said that a television series which is successful in one country can be equally successful in other countries with the same dimension. In other words, successful TV dramas in Thailand are expected to be successful in other member countries which share common dimensions with Thailand.

The concept of ASEAN Common Denominator Cultures, as found in this study, describes phenomena in the limited scope of ASEAN countries. Dimension takes place under the concept of communication which emphasizes exposure to television drama, TV drama plots and Thai cultural content demands in television dramas.

Discussion

The results can be discussed as follows.

1. Grouping countries are typically organized by demographic or geographic features. For example, the Island Group includes

Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines. It can also be categorized by religions such as the majority of Buddhists in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar and the majority of people in Islamic countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. Moreover, they can also be grouped by using topographic features. In this study, the synthesis of the research found that the concept of ASEAN countries consists of three groups, divided into cultural dimensions according to the concepts of the scholars who studied by using cultural concept as a grouping. The synthesis showed that ASEAN countries can be classified into three groups, Group 1 consists of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Group 2 consists of Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam and Group 3 consists of Indonesia and the Philippines. Considering all three groups, Group 1 consists of countries with the same religion. Group 2 consists of countries with mixed religious and geographic features. The third group consists of countries with the same geographic features but different religions. The classification of countries depends on the classification of the group. The factors to group the countries can be anything, depending on the purpose.

This study was used to classify groups related to television drama, communication behavior, plot exposure, and TV drama, including the demand for Thai cultural content for television dramas. This grouping is different from the other common cultural theories, especially Hall's concept (1976), which emphasizes the context of communication. Thus, it can be said that the cultural dimension of the countries in ASEAN is an innovative discovery in the field of communication and culture education.

2. The Grounded Theory of ASEAN Common Denominator Cultures which is the result of the grounded theory framework approach, consists of three dimensions, within which are two sub-dimensions of opposite behavior.

Dimension 1: Exposure behavior consists of two sub-dimensions of opposite behavior: active and passive.

Dimension 2: Consists of two sub-dimensions of opposite behavior: variety and predominance behavior.

Dimension 3: Cultural exposure consists of two sub-dimensions of opposite behavior: diversity and adherence.

The Grounded Theory is classified as the theory which used to describe the phenomenon of media exposure and cultural content of people in 10 ASEAN countries. This theory is similar to the theoretical concept of Hofstede (1991), Schwartz (1994), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Hall (1976) and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961). However, this study discovered the knowledge that is unique of the ASEAN people's exposure to information.

3. Television drama exposure was correlated with TV drama plot exposure at significant of 01. The TV drama plot exposure was correlated with the demand for Thai cultural content in television dramas at a significance of .01. The TV drama plot exposure significantly correlated with the cultural demand for television drama at the .01 level. The relationship was in line with theories and research findings in communication (Garrett, 2009; Kobayashi and Ikeda, 2009; Chokriensukchai, 2014). The study also found that the relationship between the three variables was related in a circular manner.

Recommendations for Applying the Research Results in Practice

Guidelines for using the grounded theory of ASEAN Common Denominator Cultures

Dimension 1: Behavior of Information Exposure

Active Behavior of Information Exposure

Most ASEAN people in this group have characteristics of exposure to specific information that they are interested in or the information that can support or further their existing information. ASEAN people in this group tend to receive news both from their own countries and outside their countries and from both traditional media and new media. For example, they receive news from TV and the Internet simultaneously. Moreover, they like to receive news that can be easily understood and they tend to read news that they like many times.

This group is the target for creating awareness of Thai TV dramas by using new media such as the internet and presenting teaser-trailers via YouTube. Furthermore, other ways to attract people's interest include presenting synopsis, pictures of the actors in social media and positive reviews of the TV shows via twitter or Facebook.

Passive Behavior of Information Exposure

ASEAN people in this group tend to access information in a way that has been selected by others. The ways to promote Thai TV dramas to people in this group are by contacting main local TV stations, translating into local languages and advertising via main media such as television, radio, newspaper and billboards. To attract the people's interest, the plot of Thai dramas should be compatible with the social and culture of the ASEAN countries in which the movie will be broadcasted.

To communicate with the people in this group, there should be a focus on traditional media that is official and translated into local languages. Moreover, meet-and-greet events allowing fan clubs to meet their favorite actors and the production of movies through the cooperation of Thailand and other ASEAN countries are suitable ways to promote Thai TV dramas.

Dimension 2: Content Exposure

ASEAN countries that open for TV dramas in various contents.

The research found that the ASEAN countries that are open to TV drama in various contents are Thailand and the Philippines. These countries are ready to open for a variety of TV drama contents. It can be said that any successful television drama in Thailand can be equally successful in the Philippines.

ASEAN countries that are open to TV dramas in predominant contents.

The research found that Laos and Cambodia are in this category. Therefore, TV dramas for these two countries should be similar or consistent with their own cultures. Their favorite contents are those that create peace and harmony in society.

Dimension 3: Cultural Exposure

The research found that Thai, Bruneian, Filipino, Vietnamese and Indonesian people are ready to receive cultural diversity. It means that they are open to different cultures and believe that cultural diversity is a symbol of innovation and modernism. Cambodian, Laotian, Malaysian, Burmese and Singaporean people, however, tend to be less open to different cultures. They adhere to their traditional culture. They think that foreign cultures will ruin their national cultures.

To export products, especially Thai TV dramas, to ASEAN countries, it might be easier to market Thai TV dramas in the countries that are open to different cultures than to those that adhere strictly to their traditional cultures.

Suggestions for Future Research

The results from this study might be used by researchers on television drama aiming to produce Thai television dramas to export to ASEAN countries. In addition, researchers would be able to apply the theory of ASEAN common denominator cultures to explore ways of generating perceptions and designing TV plots and cultural content for other countries with similar cultures, such as India, Japan or some African countries.

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