
An Analysis of YouTube Commenters' Sentiments toward Transgender Individuals Using NLP

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Received: 21 Sep, 2023

Revised: 16 Nov, 2023

Accepted: 8 Dec, 2023

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between gender and media by examining the sentiments of YouTube commenters toward transgender characters. This investigation provides a unique insight into a contemporary audience's perspective on gender equality. Employing natural language processing (NLP), public comments on YouTube related to broader discussions on gender and media were examined. Over 20,000 publicly typed comments and interactions concerning transgender characters in the Thai drama series *Bai Mai Thi Plit Pliw* (Falling Leaves) were analysed. The findings reveal that the majority of comments conveyed neutral sentiments, followed by negative and then positive sentiments. The audience experienced the highs and lows of the lives of the lead transwoman protagonist and the supporting transgender cast, negotiating emotions such as sympathy, depression, resentment, and happiness and expressing them in the comments. Furthermore, the audience demonstrated acceptance of transgender characters, including behaviours often deemed immoral, and for sentiments of self-love and vitality, while displays of domestic violence and class segregation received diminishing tolerance.

Keywords: audience research, transgender, sentiments, natural language processing, YouTube

Introduction

A recent survey conducted by the Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS) spanning from 2000 to 2020 revealed a significant evolution in the portrayal of transgender characters in Thai drama series, both on traditional television and streaming platforms. Over this period, transgender characters have transitioned from supporting roles to assuming protagonist positions. Sixteen series, featuring a total of 22 transgender characters, have emerged since 2000, marking an unprecedented shift. These representations reflect the growing acknowledgement of gender diversity and transgender individuals in Thai society.¹ Despite the social acceptance of the term "ladyboy" as a gender identity in Thailand, there has been minimal quantitative analysis

¹ Source: <https://thevisual.thaipbs.or.th/gender-on-screen/>

accompanied by qualitative explanations regarding audience perceptions of gender (Winter, 2011). Similarly, the progress of transgender rights and the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Thailand, as discussed by Chonwilai (2019), has encountered some challenges.

The impact of media portrayals on public perceptions of transgender individuals is well-documented (McInroy & Craig, 2015). Ekins and King (2006) contend that the internet has spearheaded a transformative shift in the storytelling of transgender experiences. Online media assumes a pivotal role in the lives of transgender individuals, fostering a deeper understanding of their gender identities and relationships (Kosenko et al., 2018). Additionally, social media platforms serve as hubs for transgender adolescents, enabling the exchange of healthcare information and contributing to enhanced feelings of well-being (Selkie et al., 2020).

While previous audience studies have typically relied on surveys, content analysis, discourse analysis, and interviews with a limited number of viewers (e.g., Smith, 2019), this study seeks to advance the existing discourse on gender, media, and online debates by employing NLP to harness the potential of big data. Several other studies have applied NLP to online comments. For example, Bhuiyan et al. (2017) utilized YouTube comments and NLP to identify popular and high-quality videos, while Cunha et al. (2019) employed deep learning for sentiment analysis of YouTube comments. Jelodar et al. (2021) utilized NLP and fuzzy lattice reasoning to analyse YouTube comments about Oscar-nominated movie trailers. In their 2021 study, Chakravarthi and Muralidaran analysed over 28,451 English comments (59,354 in total) sourced from YouTube. Their primary objective was to identify instances of hope speech, and to achieve this, they employed a combination of machine learning and deep learning methodologies. To the best of my knowledge, this study is among the early if not the first to explore the relationship between transgender portrayals and audience perceptions through comments, utilizing NLP. Specifically, this paper aims to examine the underlying sentiments within YouTube comments pertaining to the portrayals of transwomen in the Thai drama series *Falling Leaves*² by using NLP.

The portrayal of transgender individuals in media serves as a reflection of socio-cultural patterns and beliefs, influencing the opinions and behaviours of the audience. This study underscores the influential role played by portrayals of the central transwoman protagonist and supporting transgender characters in shaping sentiments and reinforcing stereotypes among YouTube commenters. Analysing patterns through multinomial logistic regression within the NLP framework revealed alignments with

² *Bai Mai Thi Plit Pliw* (ใบไม้ที่ปลิวปลิว)/Falling Leaves, a popular and award-winning Thai melodrama, first aired in 2019. The storyline was adapted from a Thai novel reflecting the societal landscape in 1988, a time when acceptance of transpeople was elusive in Thailand. During this period, they were often viewed as eccentric and deemed mentally ill. Some transgender individuals even committed suicide. The series follows the journey of Nira, a transwoman protagonist, as she attempts to assert her gender identity and human rights. Key themes include forgiveness and living in the present (letting go of the past). A subplot delves into the relationship between a father and a son, with the latter eventually embracing a transwoman identity. Notably, the show is popular in China, evidenced by 64 million posts and comments on the Weibo application. The series was broadcast on Japan's Lala TV channel on 14 July 2021, titled *ニラの復讐* (*Nira's Revenge*) and received high ratings.

the representation. The results revealed that the sentiments expressed in comments were predominantly neutral, followed by negative and then positive sentiments. Additionally, there was a notable fluctuation in the average sentiment tone, mirroring the progression of the show's storyline.

This study is structured as follows: Section 2 explores related studies, Section 3 provides insights into the methodology, Section 4 presents the study's results and a discussion of the findings, and the concluding section summarizes the study.

Literature Review

To gain a comprehensive understanding of audience opinions and emotions through typed comments, the literature is explored across four key areas: (1) international representations of transgender individuals in television series, (2) YouTube as an alternative media platform representing the transgender community, (3) sentiment analysis within audience studies, and (4) the encoding-decoding approach. The examination of YouTube comments indicated that a majority expressed neutral sentiments regarding the portrayal of transgender characters. This research contributes to the understanding of audience responses to transgender drama series characters, incorporating machine-learning algorithms for comment analysis.

Transgender Representation in Television Series Internationally

Television drama series worldwide often fall short in addressing and accurately representing transgender issues. A mere two transgender characters were featured in Australian TV dramas between 2011 and 2016 (McIntyre, 2017), and there is a scarcity of transgender characters in US television dramas (Capuzza & Spencer, 2017). Furthermore, the portrayal of transwomen on screen in South Korea and elsewhere fails to authentically depict their lived experiences (Kim, 2021). Negative media representation perpetuates stereotypes, depicting transgender individuals as criminals (Shelley, 2008), comedic figures (Jobe, 2013) or "sex workers, mentally ill ... and ... unlovable" (Davis, 2009, pp. 16-17). Pakistani TV dramas from 2010 to 2018 portrayed transgender characters as "struggling for [their] basic human rights and respect," stigmatizing them as blue-collar workers in the "wrong body" (Abbas, 2019). While representations of the gay community and the issue of marriage equality has begun to emerge on Irish television (Kerrigan, 2021), transgender characters in Thai television dramas are often portrayed as clowns or villains who add colour to the storylines and explicitly express sexual interest in men (Chonwilai, 2019). Similarly, Prasannam's (2008) study revealed that transgender identity, fear of stigmatization and discrimination are reconstructed in the narrative of the Thai novel *The Third Pathway* through characterization and plotting, aiming to "demythologise heterosexual normativity, gender-oriented society, and patriarchal hegemony" (p. 240).

Contrary to earlier findings, recent studies using content analysis and critical discourse analysis have identified more positive representations of transgender characters in US drama series for streaming platforms, such as *Orange is The New Black*

(Netflix) and *The Fosters* (ABC Family). This improvement suggests an evolving understanding of gender equality and the acceptance of transness (McLaren et al., 2021). Additionally, a recent survey revealed that 391 television viewers held positive, hopeful attitudes and emotions toward narratives about transgender individuals in US entertainment programs (Gillig et al., 2018). US viewers also exhibited more support for transgender couples than overt sexism (Doan et al., 2014). Similarly, viewers of *Transparent* (Amazon Prime Video) were found to have strong connections to transgender characters and a belief in their authenticity (Sharma, 2022).

YouTube as an Alternative Medium Representing the Transgender Community

YouTube stands out as one of the most popular platforms for young individuals to express their personal brand and convey their gender identity (Blanco Ruiz & Sainz de Baranda Andújar, 2018; Raun, 2016). Numerous studies have highlighted that online communications through YouTube can be anonymous, textual, permanent, and public (Herring, 2002), enabling users to challenge social norms (Friedman et al., 2000). Despite cultural reservations, issues related to transgender experiences, including physical transitions from male to female, are actively addressed on YouTube channels in Indonesia (Kusumawardani et al., 2020). Similarly, in Malaysia, where discussions about the sexual orientation of transgender individuals are socially sensitive and taboo, conversations surrounding gender identity discrimination have found a platform on YouTube and other social media channels (Muhammad Ali & Mothar, 2020). YouTube provides a powerful space for transgender individuals to express their sexual identity, especially when facing discrimination in more mainstream media (Åkerlund, 2019; Barker-Plummer, 2013).

Sentiment Analysis in Audience Studies

Quirk et al. (1985) defined *sentiment* as a private state that can be examined and verified by observation. This encompasses emotions, opinions, and speculations (Mejova, 2009). I suggest that sentiment expressed via text can be understood as individuals communicating their views through opinionated sentences and phrases. For example, Fountaine et al. (2019) utilized Twitter data to discern the tone of the audience during the UK and New Zealand general election campaigns. In the realm of research, sentiment analysis, often tied to NLP, data/text mining, and computational linguistics, is also known as opinion mining (Pang & Lee, 2008; Wiebe et al., 2004). While sentiment analysis is commonly associated with English texts, it is widely applied to analyse texts in various languages (Liu, 2011), including Thai. The primary objective of sentiment analysis is to unveil an audience's emotions and opinions conveyed through their writing (Pasupa et al., 2016).

Opinions extracted from reviews and social network data have become integral in marketing research. Texts from diverse domains, including digital customer and product reviews (Gräbner et al., 2012), movie reviews (Govindarajan, 2013), Twitter data (Gautam & Yadav, 2014), campaign videos (Chung, 2015), stock markets (Mittal & Goel, 2012), news debates and blogs (Godbole et al., 2007), political debates

(Proksch et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2012), and YouTube videos related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics channels (Alhujaili & Yafooz, 2021) serve as valuable sources for sentiment analysis.

Historically, audience studies have employed methodologies such as surveys, interviews, focus groups (Morley, 1989; Smith, 2019) and ethnography (Cavalcante, 2017). Over the past decade, particularly in film studies, international surveys, archived stories, and a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including the analysis of film texts, have been utilized for works such as *The Hobbit* film series (Barker et al., 2016) and *Alien* (Barker et al., 2016). Despite these advances, sentiment analysis methods remain underrepresented in academic audience studies, particularly in debates about transgender characters in drama series. The current study seeks to address this research gap by incorporating sentiment analysis via NLP into audience research.

The Encoding-Decoding Approach

This study adopts Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding-decoding model, providing a suitable framework to illustrate how YouTube commenters interpret the significance of transgender texts in their lives. According to Hall (1980), audiences decode or interpret media texts in three distinct ways: a dominant reading, also known as the preferred reading, occurs when audiences respond to the message as the sender intends; a negotiated reading occurs when audiences both agree and disagree with the message based on their values and socio-cultural experiences; and an oppositional reading occurs when the audience rejects or resists the dominant meaning.

This sender-message-receiver communication process entails an audience reception analysis, conceptualized as a socio-cultural space (Ang, 1991). Embracing a cultural approach to audience research, reception analysis focuses on individual attention in the mass communication process, delving into the process of meaning-making and a deep understanding of media texts, and how individuals interpret media issues (Nightingale, 2003). The study explores the relationship between gender and media texts on YouTube, delving into how the audience, specifically YouTube commenters, decode or interpret transgender characters in drama series storylines based on their personal sentiments. This decoding of transgender characters' attitudes and behaviours can manifest on three levels: acceptance, negotiation, and rejection, and may be influenced by various social and cultural factors (La Pastina, 2005). The present study contributes to the literature on decoding texts and algorithms (Lomborg & Kapsch, 2020).

Methodology

This section provides an in-depth overview of the data and methodology employed in this study. The primary aim was to analyse the underlying sentiments of YouTube comments regarding the portrayal of transgender characters using NLP. Employing PyThaiNLP and multinomial logistic regression, the method generated sentiments for each comment. The investigation focused on public YouTube comments

related to the Thai television drama series *Falling Leaves*. This show features a Thai transwoman protagonist disappointed in love, but who continues to live life to the full. It enjoys widespread popularity on offline and online platforms, boasting a 5.0 rating (AC Nielsen Thailand, 2019, as cited on ONE channel). The series held the top position on YouTube trends and secured the second position on Twitter. Furthermore, it garnered 300 million views on LINE TV and received over 15 million searches (AC Nielsen Thailand, 2019, as cited on ONE channel).

To enhance specificity, the study focused on short highlight clips rather than entire episodes. The analysis included a total of 55 clips provided by CHANGE2561, the production company behind the TV drama. The titles of the reference clips for each highlight can be found in the appendix. Data collection continued until March 2020, with exclusions applied to comments that were solely composed of emoticons, non-Thai content, or containing less than 50% Thai language. Thus, 24,735 comments satisfying the inclusion criteria underwent multinomial logistic regression for sentiment prediction, classified as neutral (neu), positive (pos), or negative (neg). The nine comments identified as questions (q) were excluded. Ultimately, there were 24,726 comments for the results and discussion.

The machine-learning approach served as a tool to translate Thai YouTube comments into sentiments. The Thai language poses distinctive challenges for machine learning in NLP, characterized by unique sentence structures. For example, sentences may lack spaces between words, presenting a particular difficulty for analysis. Therefore, the initial step entailed segmenting sentences into words using the widely adopted PyThaiNLP method (Phatthiyaphaibun et al., 2016). Subsequently, predictions were made, following the algorithm outlined by Suriyawongkul et al. (2019), to categorize each YouTube comment as negative, positive, neutral, or a question.

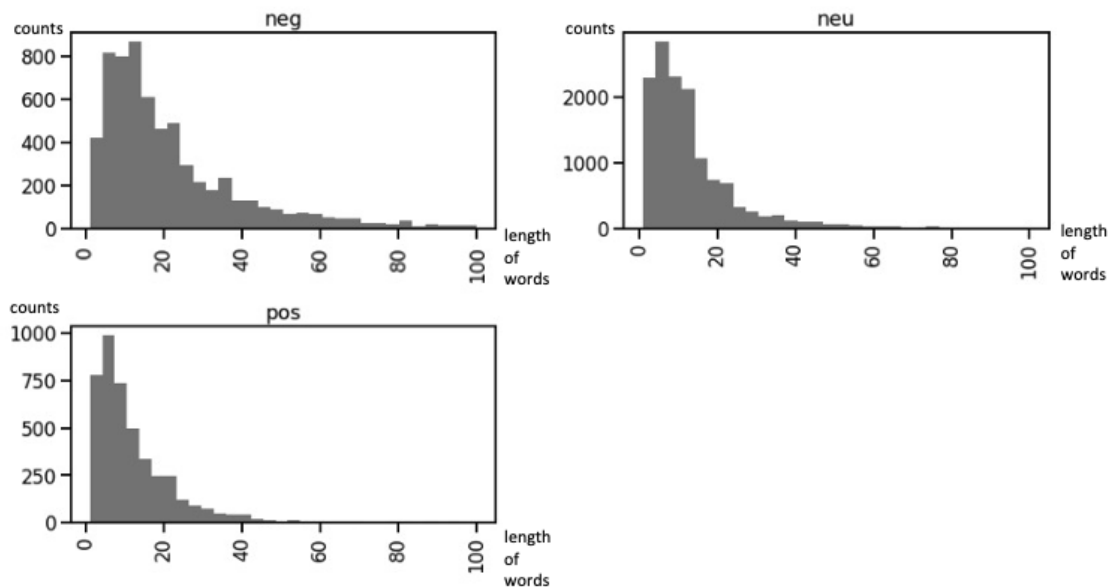
The training samples utilized for machine learning, teaching the model to discern sentiments as neutral, positive, negative, and questions, are detailed in Suriyawongkul et al. (2019).³ This database comprises comments paired with labels denoting negative, positive, neutral, and question sentiments, totalling 24,063 training samples. Examples include, “ไม่เห็นมีค่ะ” (I can’t find it) for negative, “ว่าไงจ๊ะ” (Hey, what’s up!) for neutral, and “น่ารักจังเลยค่าา” (You are so cute) for positive labels. Employing PyThaiNLP, the algorithm tokenizes these comments into word vectors for each comment. The selected machine-learning approach is multinomial logistic regression due to the presence of more than two categories in the dependant variable. To ensure model accuracy, the data is randomly split, allocating 85% for training data and 15% for validation. After constructing the model, it is deployed to predict sentiments for each YouTube comment regarding the Thai drama series *Falling Leaves*. The primary focus centers on interpreting negative, positive, and neutral sentiments expressed in YouTube audience comments. The subsequent section provides a detailed presentation of the results derived from the analysis.

³ Source: <https://github.com/PyThaiNLP/wisesight-sentiment>

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 illustrates the distributions of comments into three sentiment types as a result of NLP sentiment analysis. The x-axis depicts the word length in each comment, while the y-axis represents the frequency of counts for each specific sentiment. Notably, negative comments tended to be longer compared to neutral or positive comments. This distribution is evident in the histogram, clearly indicating that neutral and positive comments generally had shorter lengths compared to negative comments.

Figure 1
Distribution of Comments for Each Type



Note: This histogram depicts the distribution of the comments based on word length for each comment type, labelled as negative (neg), neutral (neu), and positive (pos).

Table 1 provides the total count of neutral, positive, and negative comments for each clip. For example, the first clip contains 433 comments, comprising 231 neutral, 103 positive, and 99 negative comments. In contrast, the last clip contains 3,332 comments, with 1,782 being neutral, 639 positive and 911 negative. Overall, across all clips, the total comments amount to 24,726, including 13,867 neutral, 4,355 positive and 6,504 negative comments. These results underscore the prevalence of neutral comments, with negative comments surpassing positive ones. I did not employ the ANOVA test for these count data due to their skewness, and the fact that ANOVA is a parametric analysis requiring continuous data. Instead, I opt for the χ^2 test to assess whether sentiment dimensions differ across different clips in actual versus expected values. The degree of freedom for this test is calculated as $(55-1) \times (3-1) = 108$. The obtained p-value, 1.93×10^{-259} , is considerably below the 0.01 threshold, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis suggesting independence of sentiments across different clips. Consequently, further exploration and explanation of how sentiments vary across different clips are warranted.

Table 1
Sentiment Results for Each Category

| Highlight Clips | Total | Neutral | Positive | Negative |
|------------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 433 | 231 | 103 | 99 |
| 2 | 995 | 545 | 129 | 321 |
| 3 | 359 | 276 | 29 | 54 |
| 4 | 278 | 136 | 74 | 68 |
| 5 | 272 | 157 | 29 | 86 |
| 6 | 453 | 227 | 123 | 103 |
| 7 | 863 | 518 | 224 | 121 |
| 8 | 212 | 124 | 20 | 68 |
| 9 | 72 | 40 | 6 | 26 |
| 10 | 1,032 | 521 | 366 | 145 |
| 11 | 309 | 172 | 47 | 90 |
| 12 | 430 | 215 | 141 | 74 |
| 13 | 214 | 132 | 42 | 40 |
| 14 | 63 | 33 | 9 | 21 |
| 15 | 265 | 137 | 49 | 79 |
| 16 | 837 | 497 | 153 | 187 |
| 17 | 1,213 | 509 | 243 | 461 |
| 18 | 74 | 49 | 2 | 23 |
| 19 | 440 | 269 | 92 | 79 |
| 20 | 154 | 87 | 31 | 36 |
| 21 | 331 | 195 | 74 | 62 |
| 22 | 169 | 70 | 78 | 21 |
| 23 | 131 | 104 | 11 | 16 |
| 24 | 137 | 105 | 15 | 17 |
| 25 | 334 | 179 | 52 | 103 |
| 26 | 497 | 321 | 86 | 90 |
| 27 | 91 | 63 | 23 | 5 |
| 28 | 60 | 33 | 11 | 16 |
| 29 | 533 | 262 | 34 | 237 |
| 30 | 393 | 232 | 48 | 113 |
| 31 | 557 | 263 | 168 | 126 |
| 32 | 456 | 232 | 112 | 112 |
| 33 | 340 | 200 | 28 | 112 |
| 34 | 92 | 57 | 13 | 22 |
| 35 | 284 | 154 | 77 | 53 |
| 36 | 151 | 77 | 19 | 55 |

| Highlight Clips | Total | Neutral | Positive | Negative |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 37 | 742 | 320 | 103 | 319 |
| 38 | 291 | 184 | 38 | 69 |
| 39 | 97 | 58 | 31 | 8 |
| 40 | 579 | 360 | 44 | 175 |
| 41 | 379 | 224 | 60 | 95 |
| 42 | 938 | 541 | 145 | 252 |
| 43 | 279 | 175 | 21 | 83 |
| 44 | 57 | 32 | 10 | 15 |
| 45 | 75 | 43 | 18 | 14 |
| 46 | 460 | 291 | 39 | 130 |
| 47 | 40 | 24 | 4 | 12 |
| 48 | 315 | 175 | 53 | 87 |
| 49 | 435 | 251 | 58 | 126 |
| 50 | 432 | 248 | 58 | 126 |
| 51 | 1,884 | 1166 | 186 | 532 |
| 52 | 97 | 65 | 8 | 24 |
| 53 | 323 | 219 | 21 | 83 |
| 54 | 447 | 287 | 58 | 102 |
| 55 | 3,332 | 1782 | 639 | 911 |
| Total | 24,726 | 13,867 | 4,355 | 6,504 |

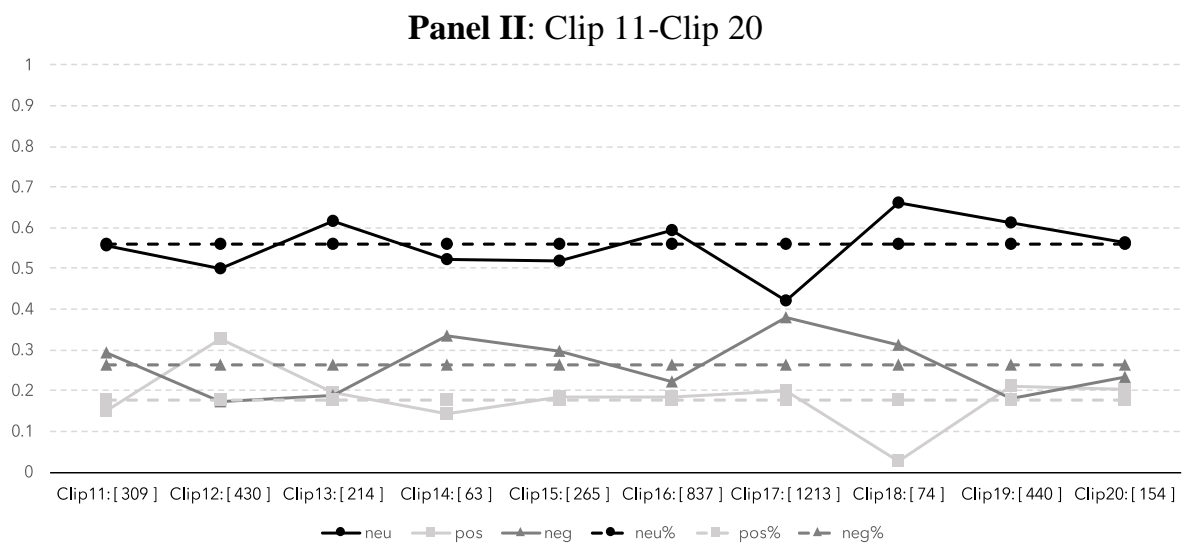
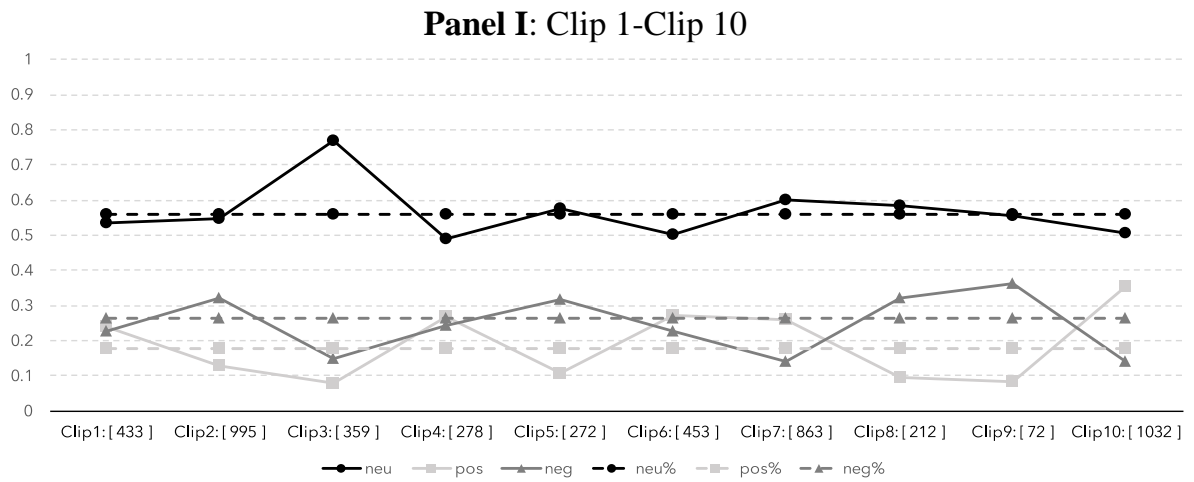
Note: This table illustrates the sentiments expressed in audience comments, providing the total number of comments as well as the breakdown into neutral, positive, and negative sentiments for each clip.

Figure 2 presents the trends in audience sentiment relative to various clips. Panel I pertains to Clips 1-10. Across these clips, the prevailing sentiment is neutral, while the proportion of positive and negative sentiments fluctuates. Notably, there are instances where the number of negative comments surpasses positive ones, and vice versa. Moving to Panel II (Clips 13-19), the prevalence of negative comments persists, although the levels of negative and positive comments are fairly comparable. Panels III and IV mirror this pattern. However, Panels V and VI reveal a significant prevalence of negative comments over positive ones.

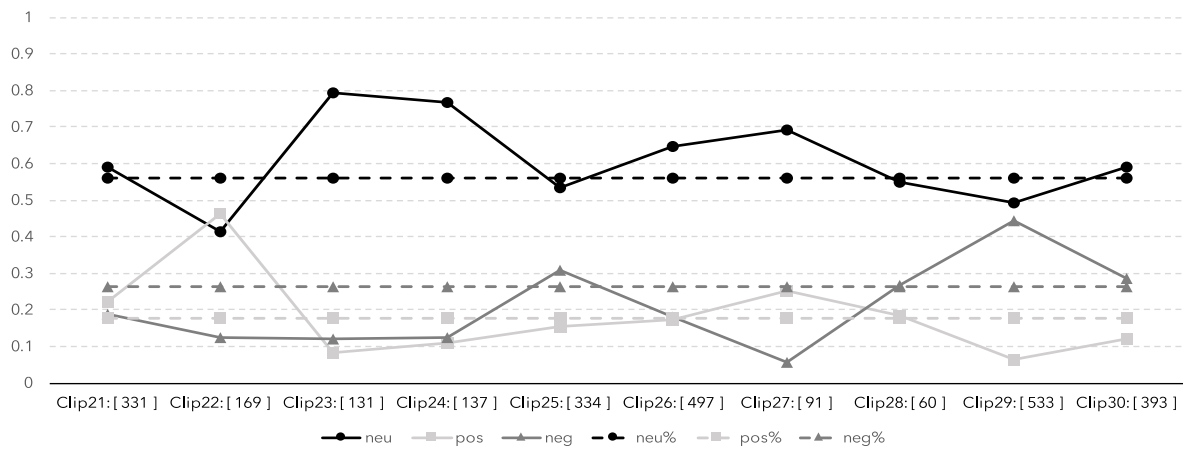
A closer look at Panel I, specifically for Clips 1-10, reveals a fluctuating ratio of negative to positive comments. Notably, Clip 3 stands out as eliciting predominantly neutral audience sentiments. This is attributed to the audience's resonance with the transwoman protagonist Nira's experiences, particularly her use of a vaginal dilator post-sex reassignment surgery. The study suggests that YouTube audiences understand and support Nira's actions, fostering an information exchange about transgender issues related to male-to-female gender reassignments. It is evident that YouTube has evolved

into an online platform where the transgender community in Thailand freely expresses their sexual orientation and gender identity. This phenomenon aligns with findings in Europe (Blanco Ruiz, & Sainz de Baranda Andújar, 2018; Raun, 2016) and Indonesia (Kusumawardani et al., 2020).

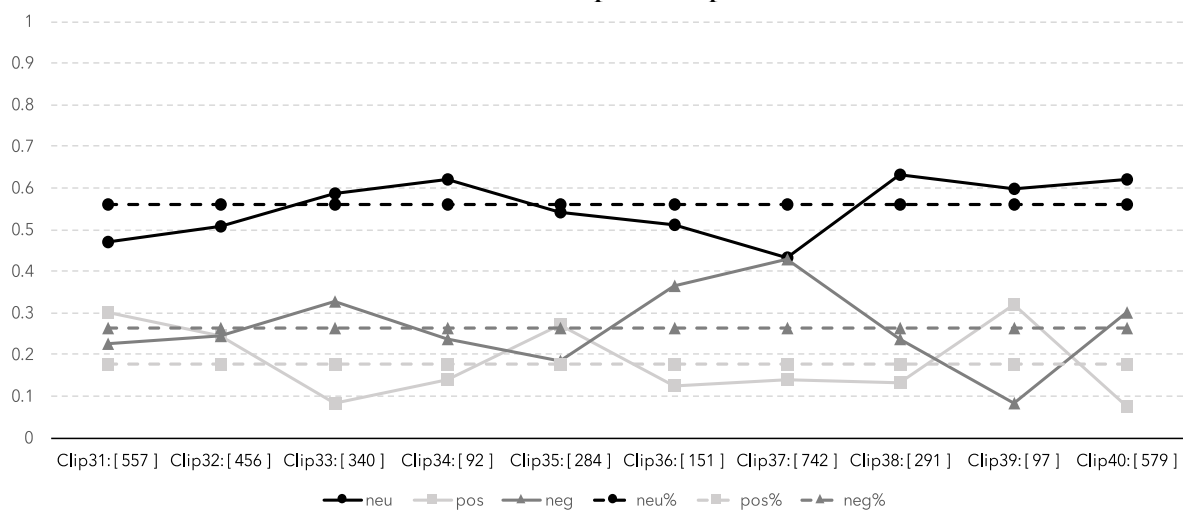
Figure 2
Audience Sentiment



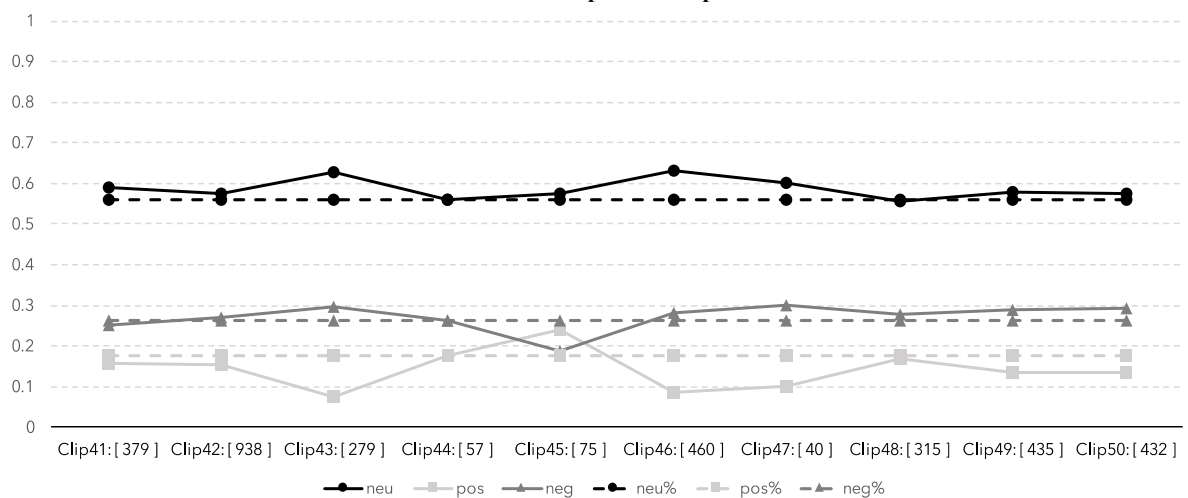
Panel III: Clip 21-Clip 30



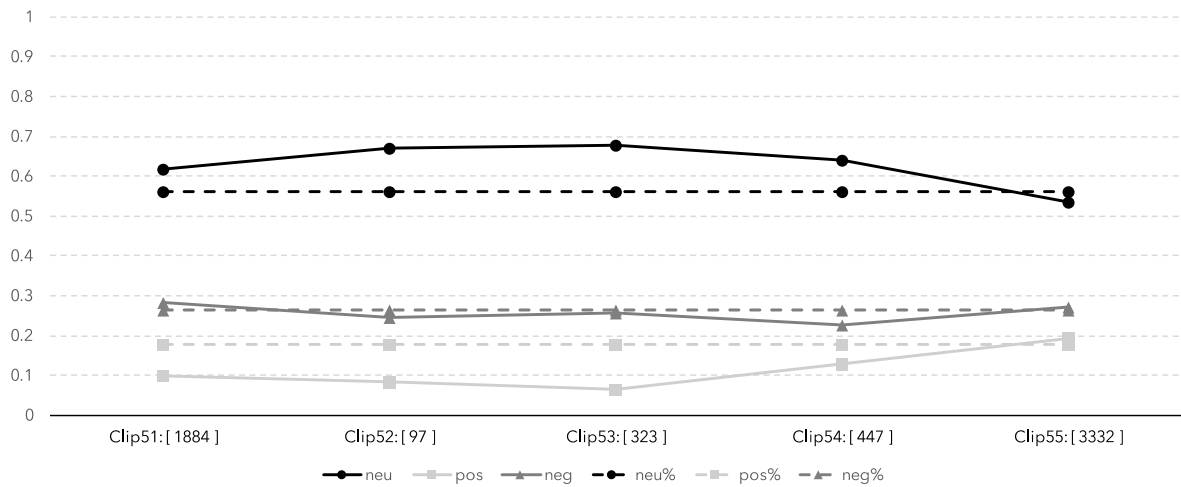
Panel IV: Clip 31-Clip 40



Panel V: Clip 41-Clip 50



Panel VI: Clip 51-Clip 55



Note: This figure provides an overview of YouTube commenters’ sentiments, with neutral, positive, and negative percentages represented by dots, squares, and triangles, respectively. The square bracket for each clip denotes the comment count, while the dashed line illustrates the overall levels of comments.

Panel I: Clips 1-10

Panel I depicts a surge in negative sentiment for Clips 8 and 9, with this reaction closely tied to the content featured in these clips. In Clip 8, tensions rise during an argument between Nira’s aunt, a domineering and wealthy married woman, and her handsome husband. His despair about their marriage is compounded by Nira’s unrequited love for him. The wife’s actions, fuelled by jealousy after discovering her husband’s encounter with Nira, are perceived as disrespectful and irrational. YouTube commenters expressed strong disapproval of the aunt’s behaviour, leading to a backlash that extended beyond the character to the actress in real life.

Clip 9 triggers resentment among prominent YouTube commenters, primarily stemming from its portrayal of a transgender boy (known in Thai as *katoey* or *toot*, meaning gay). This disapproval is reflected in a corresponding surge in negative comments. The storyline, presented in flashbacks, unfolds as Nira’s father questions his son’s masculinity. As a boy named Chanantawat, young Nira rebels against conventional male stereotypes, including refraining from typical male behaviours such as playing football, evoking disapproval from his father. Commenters express their disagreement with the father’s gender bias, challenging societal norms.

Panel II: Clips 11-20

In Panel II, a surge in negative sentiments in response to Clip 17 may be attributed to the portrayal of transgender characters rebelling against workplace class segregation. The character Ma-now, a renowned actress and model, confronts Nira,

an emerging make-up artist, demanding submission and resignation. The audience supports Nira's insistence on human dignity, viewing her as a fighter for justice.

Clip 18 elicits YouTube comments praising brilliant minds, good hearts, and the beauty of women and transwomen, exemplified by a conversation between Yod Doi and Bai Tong, as follows:

Nowadays, many people are transformed by cosmetic surgery, so we must measure the value of humanity based on intelligence and compassion. If celebrities look down on others, their true colours will eventually be exposed and condemned.

YouTube commenters align with this perspective, reflecting sentiments of love and acceptance in response to portrayals of mentally and physically beautiful transwomen.

Panel III: Clips 21-30

In Clip 22, positive sentiment reached its peak as YouTube commenters expressed their admiration for the transgender characters' styles and use of language. The clip features two transgender characters conversing at work, with one a serious and protective boss, and the other a witty and lovable worker, wearing fashionable clothing. The audience appreciates the representation of transgender characters through their stylish attire, approachability, and humorous behaviour. Clothing emerges as a potent symbol through which transgender characters distinguish themselves from cisgender individuals. Furthermore, this study identifies humour as a key element in the portrayal of transgender characters, aligning with the findings of Jobe's 2013 research.

Conversely, negative sentiments escalated in response to Clip 29, as YouTube audiences expressed disdain for two female antagonists who tarnished Nira's reputation. The audience rejects the aggressive behaviours and indignities perpetrated by the antagonists, illustrating a negative reaction to Nira's experience of gender discrimination. This underscores the challenges faced by transgender or LGBTQ characters in Thai drama series, despite Nira's educational and occupational background.

Panel IV: Clips 31-40

An intriguing sentiment pattern is revealed in Clip 37, marked by a surge in negative sentiment within YouTube comments. In this clip, a confrontation unfolds between Nira and Ma-now, highlighting issues of physical bullying and the assault of a social inferior. Commenters express outrage at the offensive language directed by Ma-now toward Nira. This upsurge in negative sentiments highlights the audience's disapproval of class segregation and gender inequality, persistent challenges in Thai society. This sentiment aligns with the findings of Barker-Plummer (2013) and Åkerlund (2019), who argue that media portrayals of transgender individuals

contribute to an imbalance in gender issues, particularly in Southeast Asia (Kusumawardani et al., 2020; Muhammad Ali & Mothar, 2020).

Panel V: Clips 41-50

In these clips, audience sentiments were predominantly neutral, with a notable increase in positive sentiments in response to Clip 45. The portrayal of Nira, a prominent transwoman character, challenges conventional notions of endearment. This aligns with previous research that found transgender individuals were often depicted as unlovable (Davis, 2009). The audience expresses sympathy for Nira's challenging life, revealed through flashbacks depicting her experiences as an unloved son, a gay individual facing condemnation, and someone deemed less beautiful or talented than the female antagonist Ma-now. The audience concurs that, like anyone else, Nira deserves happiness.

This study suggests a shift in the portrayal of transwomen in media, moving away from traditional moral attitudes. While earlier studies found that transgender individuals were frequently portrayed as sex workers (Davis, 2009), *Falling Leaves* depicts Nira as "the other woman," romantically involved with her uncle-in-law and accused of adultery. Many commenters disapprove of her behaviour, expressing sentiments of disappointment. The consistent negative sentiments of the audience correspond with Clips 47-50.

Panel VI: Clips 51-55

The prevailing pattern remains consistent in this panel, with the majority of comments being neutral, followed by negative and positive comments, in that order. However, a notable deviation occurs with Clips 53 and 54. In these clips, Nira grapples with mental health challenges, receiving treatment for depression and post-traumatic stress disorder following experiences of domestic violence and her mother's demise. Doctor Ben, a male psychiatrist plays a crucial role in her healing journey. The audience resonates with Dr. Ben's counsel, exemplified by comments such as, "The world destroys only you, doesn't it? Do not use your deep scars to get revenge on others." The prevailing sentiment from the audience overwhelmingly expressed support and encouragement for Nira, as reflected in positive sentiments. This aligns with the findings of Gillig et al. (2018), where the surveyed audience exhibited hopefulness for transgender characters in US television programs.

Ultimately, YouTube commenters perceive Nira as a survivor. In the final episode, Clip 55, she attempts to take her own life after her biological sex is revealed. Her uncle-in-law (and lover) knows that Nira is biologically male, as does her father. Nira's aunt, whom Nira believes has never been unkind to her, is privy to all of Nira's secrets. Nira apologizes for being transgender and deceitful. The audience empathises with her tragic situation, acknowledging that, despite facing challenges in love and relationships, Nira, as a transwoman character, perseveres.

Overall, this series portrays LGBTQ individuals embracing freedom and self-love. The YouTube commenters echoed this sentiment, expressing gratitude for a series that highlights resilient transwomen. Furthermore, the audience commended the cast for their outstanding performance. YouTube commenters shared a spectrum of sentiments – positive, neutral, and negative – toward the transgender characters in the series *Falling Leaves* for several reasons. Emotions ran high among the audience, potentially as a result of rejecting certain storylines or experiencing feelings of anger and depression when Nira was perceived as unlovable, unwanted, and immoral. Conversely, the audience resonated with the narrative or felt hopeful about the diminishing tolerance for social issues such as domestic violence, class segregation, and gender discrimination in the workplace. They also admired Nira's inner and outer beauty. Most importantly, the audience acknowledged that Nira confronted numerous challenges but persevered.

Conclusions

This study aimed to evaluate the emotions and opinions of the general public, as expressed in YouTube comments, regarding transgender characters in the Thai drama series *Falling Leaves*. Employing sentiment analysis through NLP, the study analysed 24,726 typed comments. Overall, the predominant sentiment was neutral. The findings indicate that the majority of viewers or commenters agreed with or appreciated the show's portrayal of transgender characters. The second-highest average sentiment was negative. The study's evidence suggests that the transwoman character's vulnerabilities were perceived as human shortcomings. Furthermore, negative sentiments about toxic masculinity, such as societal expectations regarding boys playing football and men having mistresses, indicate a rejection of these norms, with a desire for the development of healthier expressions of masculinity to combat domestic violence.

One noteworthy discovery from this study is the popularity among YouTube commenters of the portrayal of the leading transwoman protagonist who, despite attempting suicide, does not meet a tragic end. This finding reflects the audiences' recognition of transgender individuals as human beings deserving of sympathy. The comments affirm the importance of fostering greater self-love and enhancing self-worth among transgender individuals. These instances contribute to a decline in neutral sentiments and an increase in positive sentiments in the latter part of the study.

The transgender characters in the series *Falling Leaves* were intentionally created to advocate for gender equality. Furthermore, the study's method of quantitatively measuring sentiment adds objectivity to the analysis. The methodology, leveraging NLP, proved time-efficient in handling a substantial number of comments. Such an approach could serve as a valuable tool for gauging audience engagement and interpreting meaning. Television producers could use sentiment analysis to gauge anticipation for a show. Overall, these results suggest a promising trend in the understanding of transgender issues and the acceptance of transgender identity within Thai society.

Author

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APPENDIX

Name of Each Highlight Clip

| Highlight Clips | Name of the Clips |
|-----------------|---|
| 1 | Falling Leaves - Do you really want to be a transgender boy? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - อยากเป็นกะเทยมากนักรอ??? [Highlight]) |
| 2 | Falling Leaves - Peanut/Fat chin to breasts/Saggy breasts to knees [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - อีบบวบ เหนียงขานถึงนม นมขานถึงเข่า [Highlight]) |
| 3 | Falling Leaves - The use of a vaginal dilator post-sex reassignment surgery [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - แยมโม่ [Highlight]) |
| 4 | Falling Leaves - Having a good mom, I do not need anything else. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - มีแม่แบบนี้ก็ไม่ต้องทำอะไรอีกแล้ว [Highlight]) |
| 5 | Falling Leaves - You can be anything, just don't be a transgender boy. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ลูกจะเป็นอะไรก็ได้ ขอแค่อย่าเป็นกะเทย [Highlight]) |
| 6 | Falling Leaves - Whose scarf is on my husband? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ผ้าพันคอของใคร ติดตัวฉันมา [Highlight]) |
| 7 | Falling Leaves - My son wants to transform perfectly into a woman. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ลูกชายของฉันต้องการเป็นผู้หญิงที่สมบูรณ์แบบ [Highlight]) |
| 8 | Falling Leaves - My husband, why can't I be worried about him? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ตัวของฉัน ทำไมจะห่วงไม่ได้! [Highlight]) |
| 9 | Falling Leaves - I don't like playing football. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - หนูไม่ชอบเตะบอลครับ [Highlight]) |
| 10 | Falling Leaves - If we meet again, what should I do? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ถ้าเราจะเจอกันอีก ผมต้องทำยังไงครับ [Highlight]) |
| 11 | Falling Leaves - If you act like this, your husband will definitely leave you! [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ทำตัวแบบนี้ผ้าทิ้งแน่ๆ! [Highlight]) |
| 12 | Falling Leaves - Do you know who I am, bitch? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เธอรู้หรือเปล่าว່ว่าฉันเป็นใคร อีคางคก [Highlight]) |
| 13 | Falling Leaves - Looks like a high society celebrity. In fact, just bring a make-up artist. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - มองเผินๆเหมือนเซเลบไฮโซ ที่แท้ก็แค่พกร่างแต่งหน้า [Highlight]) |
| 14 | Falling Leaves - Why did you let this tootsie out? Introducing my daughter [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ปล่อยอี่คู้คออกมาทำไม เปิดตัวลูกสาว [Highlight]) |
| 15 | Falling Leaves - I'm not your brother who can have sex with anyone without consideration. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ผมไม่ใช่พี่ชายคุณนะที่จะไ้เอาใครไม่เลือก [Highlight]) |
| 16 | Falling Leaves - Reasons why makeup doesn't cover your skin. Hurt without swearing. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เหตุผลที่แต่งหน้าไม่คิด เจ็บแบบไม่มีคำหยาบ [Highlight]) |

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| 17 | Falling Leaves - Bow down to my feet now! Are you the owner? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - กราบดินฉันเดี๋ยวนี! เป็นเจ้าที่หรือ [Highlight]) |
| 18 | Falling Leaves - Make merit for the next life. I can do surgery in this life for myself. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ทำบุญได้ชาติหน้า ทำหน้าได้ชาตินี้ [Highlight]) |
| 19 | Falling Leaves - My friends are all transgender. Can you accept it? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เพื่อนมีแต่สาวประเภทสอง รับได้หรือ [Highlight]) |
| 20 | Falling Leaves - How to flirt with girls directly. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - วิธีจีบสาวแบบตรงๆ [Highlight]) |
| 21 | Falling Leaves - Your wife is fierce. I can't handle it. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เมียที่ดุ หนูไม่ไหว [Highlight]) |
| 22 | Falling Leaves - When you do something, and your friends trick you /Be very intimidating [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เวลาทำอะไรแล้วโดนเพื่อนดัก /เล็กเล็ก [Highlight]) |
| 23 | Falling Leaves - I am pathetic, be a crazy child, right? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ฉันมันน่าสมเพช เป็นเด็กบ้าใจคอวิปริต หรือ [Highlight]) |
| 24 | Falling Leaves - A man who wants women to listen to the songs they want to listen to is romantic. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - (ผู้ชายที่อยากให้ผู้หญิงได้ฟังเพลงที่อยากฟัง โรแมนติกนะ [Highlight]) |
| 25 | Falling Leaves - You are just a daily labour, a lackey. /How do you breathe? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เป็นแค่ลูกจ้างแรงงานรายวัน อีจู้ซ่า /หายใจยังไง [Highlight]) |
| 26 | Falling Leaves - Our relationship is impossible. /Kiss [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เรื่องของเรามันเป็นไปไม่ได้หรอกค่ะ /คบด้วยปาก [Highlight]) |
| 27 | Falling Leaves - I'm not a child. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ผมไม่เด็กนะครับ [Highlight]) |
| 28 | Falling Leaves - If you don't change yourself, your husband will definitely leave you. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ถ้าไม่เปลี่ยนสันดาน คู่ทิ้งแน่นอน [Highlight]) |
| 29 | Falling Leaves - The model who handed flowers to your husband purposely missed the turn. #RungrongTeam [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - นางแบบที่ยื่นดอกไม้ให้สามีคุณ จงใจผิดคิว #ทีมรุ่งรอง [Highlight]) |
| 30 | Falling Leaves - It's our first year anniversary of knowing each other. Rolex isn't expensive. It's not pricy [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ครบรอบ 1 ปีที่เรารู้จักกัน Rolex มันไม่แพงเลยอะ เมาๆ [Highlight]) |
| 31 | Falling Leaves - Listen to the heart of the person who is being discriminated against. /End of the bully era [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ฟังหัวใจคนโดนเหยียด /หมดยุคบูลลี่ [Highlight]) |
| 32 | Falling Leaves - Starting a battle for the young aunt's man /Bitch [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เปิดศึกแย่งผู้ชายของน้าสาว /อีคางคก [Highlight]) |
| 33 | Falling Leaves - I don't care about my husband's fame. The makeup artist jumped up from the hole behind the stage. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ตัวก็ไม่ไว้หน้า อีช่างแต่งหน้าก็กระโดดขึ้นไปจากรูหลังเวที [Highlight]) |
| 34 | Falling Leaves - Really like a man, I got goosebump. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เหมือนผู้ชายจริงๆ ขนลุกไปหมดเลย [Highlight]) |

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|----|---|
| 35 | Falling Leaves - The man can do anything to make women fall in love with him /Remember girls! [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ผู้ชายถ้ามันจะเอา มันทำได้ทุกอย่าง /จำไว้สาว ๆ [Highlight]) |
| 36 | Falling Leaves – Insulting directly, it’s like this. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - แซะกันซึ่งๆ หน้ามันเป็นแบบนี้แหละ [Highlight]) |
| 37 | Falling Leaves - Is your thousand-dollar bill as big as a house wall? /This dog barks disdainfully. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - แบงค์พันเธอมันใหญ่เท่าฝาบ้านหรือ /หมาตัวนี้เห่าแบบเหยียด [Highlight]) |
| 38 | Falling Leaves - I want to take care of you as a lover. /I stopped, have you stopped yet? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ผมอยากดูแลคุณในฐานะคนรัก /เราหยุดแล้วคุณล่ะหยุดหรือยัง [Highlight]) |
| 39 | Falling Leaves - Genuine concern from the polite doctor is like this. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ความห่วงใยที่แท้จริงมันเป็นแบบนี้ หมอละมุนบอกต่อด้วย [Highlight]) |
| 40 | Falling Leaves - Reconcile with a husband who lies because of jealousy or sincere because of love. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ข้อสามที่ต่อแหละเพราะหวง หรือ จริงใจเพราะรักมาก [Highlight]) |
| 41 | Falling Leaves - Some women can’t just be bought using money /Going to Hong Kong? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ผู้หญิงบางคนมีเงินอย่างเดียวก็ซื้อ ไม่ได้ันะคะ /ฮ่องกงมัย [Highlight]) |
| 42 | Falling Leaves - A person who despises everyone in the world as inferior is lowest person /Whore [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - คนที่เหยียดทุกคนบนโลกว่าด้อยกว่าคือ คนที่ต่ำที่สุด /อึกะหรือเมีย [Highlight]) |
| 43 | Falling Leaves – People who don’t care anymore. You are trying to temp, they won’t take it. /Where is your heart with? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - คนหมดใจยั่วให้ตายก็ไม่เอา /ใจของคุณอยู่กับใคร [Highlight]) |
| 44 | Falling Leaves - Flirting like this, whoever finds it is done. /Make me accept it. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - อ่อยแบบนี้ใครเจอก็เสร็จ /ทำให้ยอมสิคะ [Highlight]) |
| 45 | Falling Leaves - No matter how often you are born, you are not half of other people. /Psychotic psychopath [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - เกิดมากี่ทีก็ได้ครึ่งนึงของคนอื่นหรือ /อีโรคจิตวิปริต [Highlight]) |
| 46 | Falling Leaves - It must be woeful, falling behind, sinking into the ground /The wife demands her husband back. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - มันจะต้องฉิบหาย ตกอับ จมดิน /เมียหลวงทวงตัว [Highlight]) |
| 47 | Falling Leaves - I’m going to fight. /Human or wooden stick? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ฉันจะเอาเธอไปฟาดมัน! /คนหรือไม้หน้าสาม [Highlight]) |
| 48 | Falling Leaves - If you want to sell yourself to anyone, sell it, except the men from my family. /Always complain! [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - จะขายตัวกับใครก็ขายไป ยกเว้นผู้ชายตระกูลฉัน /จีฟ้องแบบแะบ่ม [Highlight]) |
| 49 | Falling Leaves - Sleep in the room next to me or want me to sleep next to you. /Have a sweet dream and kiss. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - นอนห้องข้างๆ หรือ อยากให้นอนข้างๆ /ฝันดีพอๆ [Highlight]) |
| 50 | Falling Leaves - There are few people in my life that I love. And you are the person I love the most. /So sweet! [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - มีไม่กี่คนในชีวิตที่ฉันรัก และคุณคือคนที่ฉันรักมากที่สุด /หวานมากแม่ [Highlight]) |

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| 51 | Falling Leaves - Please...Can I do it? [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ขอนะ...ผมทำได้มั้ย? [Highlight]) |
| 52 | Falling Leaves - Tricking a man into thinking she's pregnant in order to get married. But he knows it's not true [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - หลอกผู้ชายว่าท้องเพื่อแต่งงาน แต่โงะท้องลม [Highlight]) |
| 53 | Falling Leaves - The doctor offered it himself. I didn't ask! /People who are quiet when getting angry are terryfying. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - หมอเป็นคนเสนอตัวเองนะ ฉันไม่ได้ขอ! /คนนิ่งๆตอนโกรธโคตรน่ากลัว [Highlight]) |
| 54 | Falling Leaves - Are you a couple pretending to be siblings? False conversation. /They are the evil Avengers. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - พี่น้องท้องติดกันหรือเปล่า บทสนทนาต่อแหล /แท้กทีมอเวเจอร์คนร้ายๆ [Highlight]) |
| 55 | Falling Leaves - I will enjoy my life as much as possible, Nira Kongsawat. /Nira's conclusion. [Highlight] (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว - ฉันจะมีความสุขกับชีวิตให้มากที่สุด นิรา คงสวัสดิ์ /บทสรุปนิรา [Highlight]) |

Note: This table matches between each clip number and its title name. I translate the title of each clip to English. The original title name is in the parenthesis for each clip.