Hong Kong Public and LGB People’s Attitudes towards LGB-friendly Business Organizations

Dr. Yiu Tung Suen
Eliz Miu Yin Wong
Randolph Chun Ho Chan
Geoffrey Ka Wai Yeung
An increasing number of business organizations in the US and Europe are making a clear stance against discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation. Some businesses provide benefits for their employees’ same-sex partner and set up lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) networks within their companies, and some provide financial support for LGB-related activities in the wider society, such as gay pride parades.

In Hong Kong, more and more business organizations are also supporting LGB equality by taking various actions, including providing benefits to same-sex partners, sponsoring gay pride parades or other LGB-friendly activities. However, some other businesses remain reluctant to take these steps. Some business organizations claim that Asian and Chinese ‘cultures’ are different, and worry that if they speak up too strongly on LGB issues, there may be ‘backlash’ against them because they may be perceived negatively by the general public who are somehow assumed to be necessarily more conservative.

Against this background, Prof. Suen Yiu Tung, Assistant Professor of the Gender Studies Programme, Associate Director of the Gender Research Centre and Founding Director of the Sexualities Research Programme at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), conducted two surveys to investigate the attitudes of the Hong Kong public (n=1,013), as well as LGB people (n=1,026), towards business organizations that show an LGB-friendly stance.

It was found that the claim that an LGB-friendly organization would receive overwhelming opposition from the Hong Kong general public is empirically ungrounded. About 50% of the public surveyed said a business organization’s supportive stance on LGB issues would not affect their view of it, whereas another 25% of the Hong Kong public surveyed see an LGB-friendly business organization positively. Only about 25% of the Hong Kong public surveyed see an LGB-friendly business organization negatively.

Moreover, more than 90% of the LGB people surveyed see an LGB-friendly business organization positively. More than 80% of the LGB people surveyed say they are more likely to work in an LGB-friendly business organization. More than 70% of the LGB people surveyed say they are more likely to shop in an LGB-friendly business organization.

The remainder of this policy brief will describe the research methodology and findings, as well as explore the implications of the findings in greater detail.
The Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey at The School of Journalism and Communication at the CUHK, was commissioned to conduct a territory-wide representative telephone survey from 3rd August to 15th August, 2016. A random sample of 1,013 people who are Chinese-speaking and aged 18 and above was successfully contacted. Data collected from the survey was weighted according to gender, age and educational level to align with the distribution of the Hong Kong population. The overall response rate for the survey was 38%, with a sampling error of ± 3.1% at 95% confidence level.

About three-quarters of the Hong Kong public surveyed hold neutral or positive attitudes towards an LGB-friendly business organization; only about one-quarter of the Hong Kong public surveyed see an LGB-friendly business organization negatively.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An online survey was conducted in August 2016 which targeted individuals who self-identified as non-heterosexual. A total of 1,026 participants who are aged 18 and above completed the anonymous online questionnaire. The online survey was distributed through social networks such as non-governmental organizations working with and for LGB people, and the participants were asked to forward the survey to their contacts (i.e. snowball sampling was adopted). The data was anonymized to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

This study follows the procedures of ‘Survey and Behavioral Research Ethics’ of the CUHK and has received the approval from the committee before the fieldwork.
More than 90% of the LGB people surveyed say they see an LGB-friendly business organization more positively.

More than 80% of the LGB people surveyed say they are more likely to work in an LGB-friendly business organization.

More than 70% of the LGB people surveyed say they are more likely to shop in an LGB-friendly business organization.
About three-quarters of the Hong Kong public surveyed hold neutral or positive attitudes towards an LGB-friendly business organization; only about one-quarter of the Hong Kong public surveyed see an LGB-friendly business organization negatively.

If a business organization provides benefits to same-sex partners:

- very positive: 12.9%
- positive: 15%
- neutral: 54.4%
- negative: 9.7%
- very negative: 6.8%
It was found that if a business organization provides benefits to same-sex partners, a majority of the public (54%) would have a neutral attitude towards the organization, and 27.9% of the public respondents would have a positive or very positive attitude towards the organization that provides benefits to same-sex partners. Only 16.5% of them would hold a negative or very negative view of it.

A business organization that openly supports legislation against discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation would gain a sizable proportion of public support, with 31.6% of respondents viewing it in a positive way. Only 29.1% of the public would perceive the organization negatively.

**Public views on a business organization who supports or oppose LGB equal rights**

If a business organization openly supports anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation:

- very positive: 13.5%
- positive: 18.1%
- neutral: 38.5%
- negative: 16.6%
- very negative: 12.5%

Note that in all the tables in this policy paper, the percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding-off and a small percentage of respondents who refuse to answer the questions.
if a business organization sponsors pride parade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very positive</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very negative</td>
<td>12%</td>
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</table>
In addition, we found that if a business organization sponsors pride parade, nearly half of the public (49.9%) would stay neutral, 21.5% of the respondents would see the organization positively and 26.7% would see it negatively.

However, the Hong Kong public surveyed seems to react strongly against businesses that take a clear anti-LGB stance. It was found that if a business organization openly opposes anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation, nearly half of the respondents (48.7%) would have a negative or very negative view on it, while only 15.5% of them would have a positive or very positive attitude.

Overall speaking, when a business organization takes the aforementioned steps to support LGB equality, about half of the public would stay neutral and only about one quarter of the public would perceive it negatively. However, another quarter of the public view a business organization more positively if it is willing to take some LGB-friendly actions. A net gain of public positive image can be observed for a business organization that provides benefits to same-sex partners and openly supports anti-discrimination ordinance on the ground of sexual orientation. Business organizations that would like to support LGB equality openly in Hong Kong might not need to fear the backlash as it may have been imagined.

In the following section, a demographic sub-group analysis on people who view an LGB-friendly business organization positively will be provided.

**if a business organization openly opposes anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation:**

- very positive: 6.1%
- positive: 9.4%
- neutral: 34.1%
- negative: 31.2%
- very negative: 17.5%

Note that in all the tables in this policy paper, the percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding-off and a small percentage of respondents who refuse to answer the questions.
As being an LGB-friendly business organization would receive differential responses from some members of the public, it is important to understand from whom the support would be gained and from whom the support would be lost. The subgroup analysis found that among the Hong Kong public surveyed, those aged 18-34 were more likely to have a positive or very positive view towards a business organization that provides benefits to same-sex partners (46.6%), sponsors pride parade (33.6%), or openly supports anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation (46.9%).
Public views, by age groups, on a business organization who supports LGB equal rights

**if a business organization sponsors pride parade:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Support (%)</th>
<th>Against (%)</th>
<th>Oppose (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 18 - 34</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 35 - 54</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 55 or above</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**if a business organization openly supports anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Support (%)</th>
<th>Against (%)</th>
<th>Oppose (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 18 - 34</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 35 - 54</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 55 or above</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, people with tertiary education were more positive towards an LGB-friendly organization, with 39.3% supporting an organization that provides benefits to same-sex partners, 28.5% being positive towards an organization that sponsors pride parade, and 41.7% holding favorable attitudes towards an organization that openly supports anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation.
Public views, by education level, on a business organization who supports LGB equal rights

if a business organization sponsors pride parade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Primary or below</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

if a business organization openly supports anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Primary or below</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More than 90% of the LGB people see an LGB-friendly business organization more positively.

if a business organization provides benefits to same-sex partners:

- very positive: 59.9%
- positive: 31.6%
- neutral: 6.2%
- negative: 0.5%
- very negative: 0.4%

if a business organization openly supports anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation:

- very positive: 61.3%
- positive: 29.1%
- neutral: 6.5%
- negative: 0.8%
- very negative: 0.6%
Other than the general public, the LGB community is another market that LGB-friendly business organizations can target. It was found that 91.5% of the LGB respondents surveyed showed a positive or very positive attitude towards business organizations that provide benefits to same-sex partners. A vast majority of the LGB respondents had favorable views towards business organizations that sponsor LGB-related events such as pride parade (83.8%) and openly support anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation (90.4%). If a business organization was perceived as having a pro-LGB stance, 91.1% of the LGB individuals surveyed would view the organization positively.

**LGB respondents' views on a business organization who supports LGB equal rights**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very positive</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very negative</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**if a business organization sponsors LGB-related events e.g. pride parade:**

**if a business organization is perceived as having a pro-LGB stance in general:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very positive</td>
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<td>negative</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very negative</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More than 80% of the LGB people surveyed say they are more likely to work in an LGB-friendly business organization.
Being an LGB-friendly business organization can also attract and retain LGB employees to work at the organization. The findings showed that 85.1% and 79.2% of the LGB respondents surveyed were more willing to work at business organizations that provide benefits to same-sex partners and sponsor LGB-related events respectively. If an organization openly supports anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation, 86.5% of them would express more interest to work at the organization. Also, 86.3% of them would like to work in organizations that were perceived as having a pro-LGB stance in general.
**FINDINGS**

LGB respondents

More than 70% of the LGB people surveyed say they are more likely to shop in an LGB-friendly business organization.

If a business organization provides benefits to same-sex partners:

- **very positive**: 35.1%
- **positive**: 35.3%
- **neutral**: 27.4%
- **negative**: 0.1%
- **very negative**: 0.2%

If a business organization openly supports anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation:

- **very positive**: 39.9%
- **positive**: 37.6%
- **neutral**: 20.1%
- **negative**: 0.3%
- **very negative**: 0.3%
The LGB-friendliness of the business organization also influences LGB peoples’ consumer behavior. It was found that more than 70% of the LGB respondents would be interested to consume in the businesses that provide benefits to same-sex partners (70.4%) and sponsor LGB-related events (73.5%). 77.5% of the surveyed LGB respondents also said they were more likely to shop in businesses that openly support anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation, while 77.3% of them said they were more likely to shop in businesses that are perceived as having a pro-LGB stance in general.

**if a business organization sponsors LGB-related events e.g. pride parade:**

- very positive: 35.8%
- positive: 37.7%
- neutral: 24.6%
- negative: 0.1%
- very negative: 0.1%

**if a business organization is perceived as having a pro-LGB stance in general:**

- very positive: 38.8%
- positive: 38.5%
- neutral: 20.2%
- negative: 0.4%
- very negative: 0.3%
In Hong Kong, more and more business organizations are supporting LGB equality by taking various actions, including providing benefits to same-sex partners, sponsoring gay pride parade or other LGB-friendly activities. However, some other businesses remain reluctant to take these steps. Some business organizations claim that Asian and Chinese ‘cultures’ are different, and worry that if they speak up too strongly on LGB issues, there may be ‘backlash’ against them because they may be perceived negatively by the general public who are somehow assumed to be necessarily more conservative. Some companies therefore may have reservation about taking measures in support of LGB rights.

However, the findings suggest that the claim that an LGB-friendly organization would receive overwhelming opposition from the Hong Kong general public is empirically ungrounded. About 50% of the public

The study suggests that in Hong Kong, business organizations which support LGB rights might gain a vast support from LGB people, without losing as much support from the general public as it might be imagined.
surveyed said a business organization’s stance on LGB issues would not affect their view of it, whereas another quarter of the Hong Kong public surveyed see an LGB-friendly business organization positively. Only about one-quarter of the Hong Kong public surveyed see an LGB-friendly business organization negatively. Also, a net gain of public positive image can even be observed for a business organization that provides benefits to same-sex partners and openly supports anti-discrimination ordinance on the ground of sexual orientation. Companies might not need to fear such a strong public backlash as they may have imaged for supporting equal rights for LGB people.

Moreover, as being an LGB-friendly business organization would receive differential responses from some members of the public, it is important to understand from whom the support would be gained and from whom the support would be lost. It was found that the younger and higher educated people among the public, i.e. also those who are more likely to hold more spending power, are more supportive of LGB-friendly business organizations.

The findings also indicate that an overwhelming support can be gained from the LGB communities if a business organization takes positive measures to support LGB equal rights. More than 90% of the LGB people surveyed would have a positive image of a business organization that is LGB-friendly. More than 80% and 70% of the LGB respondents are more likely to work and shop in LGB-friendly companies.

In summary, the study suggests that in Hong Kong, business organizations which support LGB rights might gain a vast support from LGB people, without losing as much support from the general public as it might be imagined.
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Dr. Suen is the first author, and the other authors are equal authors.

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Sexualities Research Programme is the first research programme in Hong Kong dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexuality issues, with a particular focus on sexual orientation, gender identity, law and social policy.

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