

Representation of Fear of Marriage in Tiktok Social Media with #Marriageiscary

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines the phenomenon of fear of marriage expressed through TikTok content with the hashtag #MarriageIsScary, which reflects the changing views of the Indonesian young generation towards the institution of marriage. **Method:** Using Stuart Hall's qualitative approach and media representation theory, this study analyzes how narratives, visuals, and elements in TikTok videos shape representations of fear of marriage. **Results:** The results showed that creators, the majority of Gen Z and millennials, expressed concerns related to gender role inequality, socio-cultural pressures, the burden of expectations, fears of marital failure, changes in the couple's nature, and past bad experiences that affected their perception of long-term commitments. Social media, particularly TikTok, plays a significant role in reinforcing this view through algorithms that personalize content and provide a space for creative expression for younger generations. The audience's response to this content is diverse, ranging from full acceptance, a negotiated interpretation, to a rejection of the pessimistic narrative. **Novelty:** This study confirms that fear of marriage is not only influenced by external factors, but also by deep emotional and relational experiences, and marks a shift in the values and perceptions of younger generations who are more critical and skeptical of marriage as institution social at era digital.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage has long been considered an important part of social and cultural life in many societies [1]. The number of marriages in Indonesia decreased in 2023 compared to the previous year, namely 2022, with a difference of 128,093 marriages according to data quoted from the official website of the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) [2].

Perbandingan Pernikahan, Perceraian, dan Penurunan Pernikahan di Indonesia (2024)
Sumber: BPS



Figure 1. Comparison results.

As a social institution, marriage is expected to be a symbol of long-term commitment, stability, and family well-being [3]. In Indonesia, marriage is often considered an important achievement in life, which also carries a role in strengthening

social and family structures [4]. However, along with the times, various critical perspectives on marriage have emerged that reflect the changing values and views of the younger generation. Social media, particularly TikTok, has become a space for individuals to express their opinions and personal experiences on sensitive issues, including marriage [5]. With the advancement of the TikTok application and its advanced algorithms, users will be presented with content that is highly relevant to their interests, which makes them often spend a lot of time lingering inside the app [6].

In today's digital era, the internet has become one of the main needs that allows access to information from various parts of the world [7]. TikTok is a social media and music video-sharing platform from China that was introduced in September [8]. TikTok is one of the fastest-growing social media platforms in the world [9]. TikTok, with its ability to disseminate information quickly and widely, has played a huge role in shaping the younger generation's views on a wide range of social issues, including marriage. One of the things that is developing on the TikTok platform is the emergence of content with #MarriageIsScary hashtags, which raise conversations about fear, anxiety, and critical views on marriage as a social institution. More than just an entertainment platform, TikTok is also a space for informal learning, where users can explore new perspectives on topics that might have previously been considered taboo or difficult to talk about. The creative freedom owned by creators on TikTok encourages the development of unique and interesting content [9]. TikTok content with hashtags #MarriageIsScary has gone viral and attracted a lot of public attention, especially the younger generation.

This phenomenon indicates that even though the younger generation lives in a more open and modern era, they still experience anxiety and fear of marriage. This also affects their outlook on long-term relationships and commitments in life, which used to often be considered a natural step to take in the course of life. The trend #MarriageIsScary began to be known in August 2024 and quickly gained widespread attention on TikTok, with many users uploading videos containing personal stories, reflections, and their critical views on marriage. These videos are often wrapped in humor, but with a deeper message about the fear of marriage. On the other hand, this trend also provides space for individuals who feel they have similar experiences to share and form digital communities based on a common understanding of marriage. With the freedom and breadth of creative space on TikTok, content #MarriageIsScary received significant attention from the public because it is closely related to users' personal experiences and imaginations [10]. This trend is gaining more attention because it illustrates how marriage, which was once considered a natural part of life, is now viewed with more criticism and question

Fear and anxiety about marriage with #MarriageIsScary, the creators TikTok that mayoritas be individual from generation Z and millennials, reveal feelings they about Various Aspects wedding like fear of long-term commitments, changes in life, financial burdens, heavy social expectations, as well as an imbalance in gender roles in the household. This content not only reflects the personal experiences of creators in disseminating content more widely [11], but also reflects the views of the younger generation who feel that marriage is not a definite or necessary step in life, and the younger generation will be picky in finding a life partner. Further, this phenomenon reflects a major shift in the way the younger generation views the institution of marriage, that was previously considered the main goal in life, is now portrayed with a more

skeptical tone. One of the reasons for this trend is that it includes economic uncertainty, long-term commitments, and fears of divorce or failure in relationships [12]. These challenges are what make the younger generation face great pressure from various sides that make them end up being cautious in making decisions and towards long-term commitments such as marriage.

This can create a gap of understanding between those who see marriage as a social obligation and those who are more skeptical of it. Indonesian society, which previously strongly upheld traditional values regarding marriage, is now increasingly accepting new perspectives on the commitment to live together. This fear of marriage is rooted in a variety of factors, including personal or traumatic experiences from previous relationships, the impact of media that portrays the negative side of marriage, and the growing shift in social values among younger generations. The influence of social media, especially TikTok, has become immense in shaping views and attitudes towards marriage, as TikTok offers a platform that allows younger generations to share experiences and perspectives with each other in a more open and diverse way. In this context, the formulation of this research problem is how do Tiktok users respond and interact to content that represents the fear of marriage with #MarriageIsScary?. This study aims to find out how fear of marriage is formed in narratives, visuals, and other elements in TikTok videos that carry these themes.

As a reference in this study, several previous studies were used as written by Firamadhina & Krisnani revealed that the media social most important TikTok, give room for Users to express personal views and opinions on various social issues, including marriage. TikTok is also a means to convey criticism of traditional social norms, including perceptions of marriage. The results of the research of Yusar et al in their research on the influence of social media on the young generation's view of marriage, and found that the younger generation tends to be more open in sharing personal experiences regarding their fears and anxieties related to marriage. In this context, social media serves as a platform for individuals to express their fears, either through humor, personal reflection, or stories based on social experiences.

From research, previous that already mentioned deep research this provides a deeper understanding of how the phenomenon of fear against marriage, which was put forward by TikTok creators. Based on previous findings, regarding the differences in views between younger generations and previous generations, highlighting uncertainty and anxiety in the face of long-term commitments, this study will further explore how TikTok, as a video-based social media, has become a space for individuals to voice their fears of marriage in a more personal and reflective way.

While there is a lot of research that discusses the role of social media in shaping younger generations' views on marriage, there is still significant gap research on how TikTok in particular plays a role in this phenomenon. Most previous research has focused more on the influence of social media in general or other platforms such as Instagram or Facebook in shaping views on marriage [13]. However, TikTok as a video-based platform that allows creative expression through visual and audio narratives has not been extensively analyzed in depth in the context of representations of fear of marriage.

This study uses the theory of media representation put forward by Stuart Hall in his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* 1997

explaining that media plays a role in shaping meaning and influencing the way audiences see and understand the social world around them. According to Stuart Hall, the media not only represents reality, but also plays a role in creating and shaping people's understanding of this reality. Representation theory is a theory that explains how meaning is formed and understood through media, language, symbols, or images. Stuart Hall divides the representation process into two main stages, namely encoding and decoding [14]. Encoding is the stage where media creators structure messages in a specific format based on certain ideologies, values, and perspectives. While decoding is the process by which the audience interprets and gives meaning to the message, which can be appropriate, negotiated, or even opposed, depending on their social, cultural, and personal experiences.

Using Media Representation Theory, this study aims to understand how #MarriageIsScary hashtags on TikTok form a representation of fear of marriage. In the context of this study, TikTok as a video-based social media platform provides a forum for individuals to express their fears about marriage through various forms of representation. This theory helps to understand how the narrative built into TikTok content, particularly with hashtags #MarriageIsScary, reflects changing values and perceptions of marriage among younger generations.

RESEARCH METHOD

A This study uses a qualitative approach. According to Sugiyono, qualitative methods are a type of research that focuses on understanding social phenomena in a natural context, with researchers as the main instrument. This method was chosen to reveal and present in-depth data on how fear of marriage is portrayed in TikTok content with #MarriageIsScary hashtag. From a total of 20 videos uploaded on TikTok, 6 videos were selected with #MarriageIsScary in the August-December 2024 period based on the number of viewers. To collect data, this research was carried out through observation directly to related TikTok videos, documentation of relevant content. Data analysis was carried out with a qualitative descriptive approach based on the analysis model of Miles and Huberman, which included three stages: video identification and video selection. This process aims to explore the themes that appear in #MarriageIsScary TikTok content, analyze how marriage-related fears are conveyed, and ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings obtained. Content analysis is a research method used to identify, classify, and evaluate certain elements in a text or medium. In this study, content analysis was used to examine elements in TikTok videos to dig up the content with #MarriageIsScary. In addition, this study also uses the encoding-decoding analysis approach developed by Stuart Hall. This approach is used to understand how meaning is formed and interpreted in the process of media communication. *Encoding* refers to how the content creator structures the message (narrative, visual, symbol), while *decoding* describes how the audience interprets the message.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The theory of representation put forward by Stuart Hall explains that the media does not only reflect reality, but also plays a role in shaping the audience's view of the

world. In this concept, there are two main processes, namely encoding and decoding (interpretation by the audience). Encoding is the process by which content creators insert meaning into the media they produce, while decoding occurs when the audience interprets the message based on their own experiences and perspectives.

Encoding (Coding by Content Creators)

In the process of encoding, content creators insert meaning in the media they create based on certain viewpoints, values, and beliefs. In #MarriageIsScary trend on TikTok, creators are building a narrative that marriage is something scary. This perspective comes not only from their personal experiences, but is also influenced by social norms, collective experiences, as well as media representations of marriage. They conveyed the message that marriage can be a source of emotional, social, and financial stress, especially for women who often experience injustices in gender roles. The message conveyed in this content illustrates various concerns related to marriage. One of the fears that often arises is gender inequality, where women tend to be burdened with greater domestic responsibilities than men. In addition, there is also anxiety about the possibility of changing the couple's attitude after marriage, which can lead to excessive control, emotional violence, or even physical violence. Another factor that is also emphasized is the social pressure to get married at a certain age, even though one may not feel ready or have not found a suitable partner. To ensure that their messages are effectively received, TikTok creators use a variety of delivery strategies. One is through verbal narration, where they speak directly in videos to convey their fears of marriage. In addition, they also make use of dramatic visualizations, such as showing a woman who is tired of taking care of the household alone meanwhile, her husband did not help, as a form of criticism of gender injustice in marriage. Background music is often used to reinforce the emotional atmosphere in videos, both with sad songs and cheerful songs that are contrasted with serious narratives as a form of irony. In addition, creators also often use humor and irony to grab the audience's attention and make their message more relatable, for example by creating comedy sketches that depict unpleasant experiences in marriage.

Decoding (Meaning by Audience)

Decoding is the process of how audiences understand and give meaning to the message conveyed by the media or the sender of the message. This process is not passive, but rather involves the active participation of the audience, which affects the way they understand the information received. Stuart Hall identifies three main positions in the meaning of messages:

- a. **Preferred Reading (Dominant-Hegemonic Position)** Preferred reading occurs when the audience accepts the message as intended by the content creator without questioning or rejecting the meaning given. In #MarriageIsScary trend, preferred reading occurs when the audience fully agrees that marriage is indeed scary. Examples of comments from the audience that indicate preferred reading are:

"I've felt it all before, and now I'm feeling it."

"I'm going through all of that now."

"That's why marry that don't hurry, fear wrong partner, not fear her marriage."

These comments show that the audience feels connected to the narrative encoded by the creator, as if the content reflects their own personal experiences.

- b. **Negotiated Reading** Negotiated reading occurs when an audience receives a portion of the message but also interprets it based on their personal experiences and values. In this trend, some audiences agree that marriage has challenges, but they don't entirely agree that marriage should be avoided or feared. Examples of comments that reflect negotiated reading are:

"Marriage is difficult, but if we find the right partner, it will be can be lived well."

"It's normal to be afraid of marriage, but don't let fear stop us from finding happiness."

Audiences with negotiated reading don't completely reject the message from the creator, but they add their own more balanced perspective.

- c. **Oppositional** reading occurs when the audience rejects the message encoded by the content creator and gives it a new, contradictory meaning. In #MarriageIsScary trend, there are audiences who feel that this content is too pessimistic and only highlights the negative side of marriage without looking at the broader reality. Examples of comments that reflect oppositional reading are:

"Why are you afraid of marriage? If you are ready and choose the right partner, there will be no problem."

"Marriage that don't as creepy as possible that cook, hang how we run."

"Too much drama on social media makes people afraid of marriage. The reality is that if communication and mutual support will not be so bad."

Audiences with oppositional reading see that the fear of marriage displayed on TikTok may be exaggerated or not entirely accurate, and they reject the narrative encoded by the creators.

Fear of Role Inequality in the Household

In some videos, informants clearly express their fear that after marriage, one party (often a woman) will be burdened with household chores, while the other partner (often a man) will only focus on making a living. These videos illustrate anxiety about how unfair division of duties can lead to dissatisfaction in the marital relationship. One of the most prominent videos, for example, shows a woman who imagines herself working all day outside the home, then coming home to take care of the household alone, while her husband is only in charge of making a living.

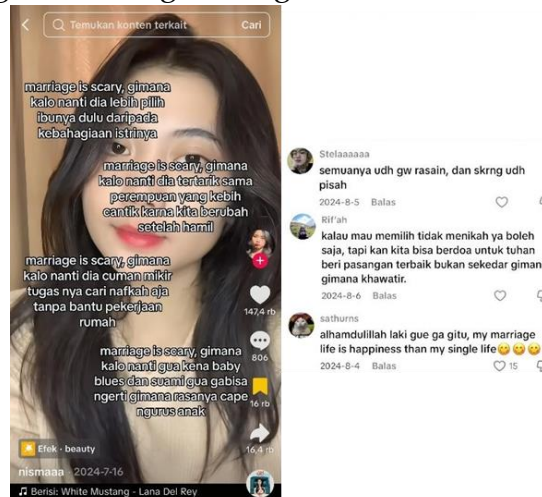


Figure 2. @nismaaa.

TikTok video with 811 thousand views, 147 thousand likes, 832 comments, and 16 thousand shares. This narrative highlights the imbalance that often occurs in the division of household responsibilities, which is one of the great fears of the younger generation towards marriage. They worry that marriage could exacerbate existing gender inequality in society, where women are often burdened with domestic work, while men are only expected to make a living.

Perceptions of Marriage Failure

Marriage in the shadow of the informant is something that is not only fragile but also full of risks that threaten the stability of emotional and financial life. The informant expressed deep concern over the potential for divorce, betrayal, and an inability to achieve financial stability that ultimately disrupted the long-term relationship. This concern is based on the validity of BPS data (2024) which shows that disputes and economic factors are the main causes of divorce in Indonesia. The data is a reference for informants in interpreting that marriage does not always provide the guarantee of happiness or life certainty they desire. From the perspective of the informant, the fear of marital failure is not only a rational response to statistical data, but also a reflection of a deeply emotional experience. They describe a dysfunctional state of relationships where infidelity, lack of emotional support, and the negative impact of internal conflict are a nightmare that should be avoided. This confirms that the perception of marital failure is formed not only from empirical facts, but also from the shadow of the possible suffering that may occur if the relationship fails to meet the expectations of mutual happiness.

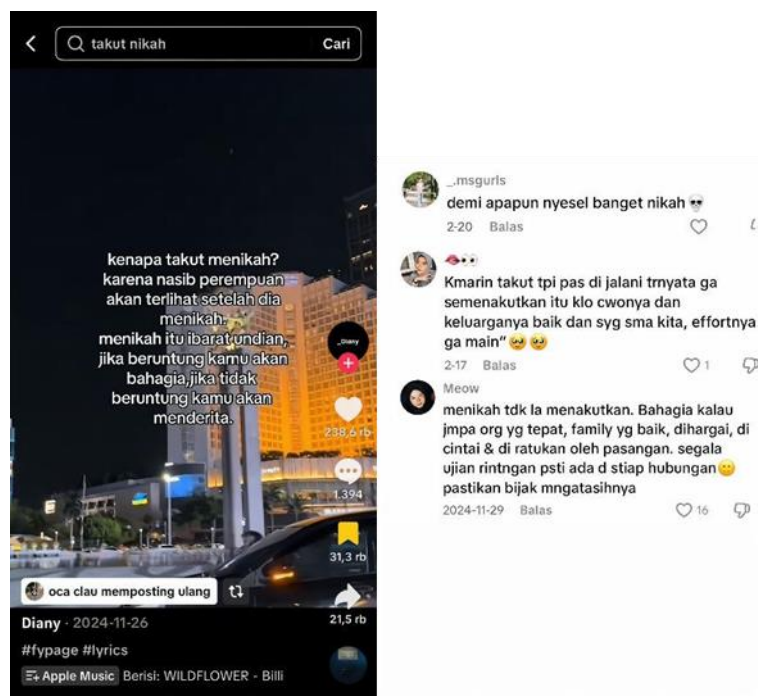


Figure 3. @Diany.

These videos are often accompanied by humorous or ironic narratives to reveal how unpredictable the fate that women will face after marriage. This video is delivered with the background of the city of Jakarta at night and has been watched more than 1 million, 214.8k likes, 1,286 comments, 18.2k shared. There are several comments that attract attention, one of which is with 4,061 likes the most comments written by @panggilhae

"afraid to have a husband like you because I'm not as strong as a mother", this comment shows that similar feelings and fears are also felt by many others about how past experiences, especially in the context of the family, can affect an individual's view of marriage and their role in the relationship. These expressions are of course based on personal experiences expressed in the comments on the page, of course there are factors that make them able to express complaints about their anxiety in marriage.

Socio-Cultural Pressures and the Burden of Gender Expectations

The fear of marriage is also inseparable from the social structures that place women in subordinate positions. Most of the informants revealed that they felt pressured by the social expectations of marrying at a young age, becoming a wife in a domestic role, and giving in to relationships. This social construction reflects the dominance of patriarchal values that are still strong in Indonesian society. As revealed by Murniati and Faki, women often experience five forms of gender injustice: marginalization, subordination, stereotypes, violence, and double burden. The pressure to get married often does not come from personal desires, but rather from the demands of a large family, social environment, and even comments that appear on social media. Some informants admitted to getting asked repeatedly about "when to get married," before they even felt emotionally or financially ready. This shows that marriage is still considered a benchmark of women's success and happiness, more than educational or professional achievements. In the narrative shared by the informants, there is a fear of losing personal identity after marriage. They envision marriage not as a space for self-expansion, but as a space that limits freedom, forces adjustments, and obscures individual voices. When marriage is perceived as self-elimination, then resistance arises in the form of postponement or rejection of it.



Figure 4. @oclaudia.

The video posted by @oclaudia has 8999.9k views, 166.2k likes, 3,307 comments, 9,842 shared, Many women feel anxious that marriage will force them to live a socio-cultural role that is still considered outdated, too high expectations of husbands make women feel pressured towards marriage, which should be fair division of husband and wife duties, but in the informant's video clip is far from the expected expectations when

married. This creates the fear that marriage will sacrifice the balance between work, personal time, and a couple's relationship. In the video clip, the husband only understands that the husband's role is only to make a living, so when the wife wants to do personal things in her activities, it is very difficult. Of course, this is a wrong social construction, which causes socio-cultural pressure and gives birth to the burden of gender expectations of each other.

Fear of a change in the couple's nature

One of the TikTok videos that uses the hashtag #MarriageIsScary depicts the fear of a woman who feels trapped in a marriage with a partner who initially seems patient and fine, but after getting married, shows an alarming change in attitude. In this video, the creator explains that he is worried that his marriage will turn into a relationship full of emotional and physical violence, where his partner becomes angry, abusive, and even physically violent when angry and has a raised tone of voice. In addition, fear also arises because of the nature of the partner who is too influenced by his mother, as well as the patriarchal pattern that is still dominant in the relationship.



Figure 5. @yourspecialpoem.

This video was taken with the background of a young child sitting and the account owner expressing #Marriageis scary and writing that he was stuck in a relationship that turned bad after the promise of commitment was made. This video has 1.5 million views, 205 thousand likes, 2,864 comments, 41 thousand shared. Initially, the couple may seem patient, understanding, and loving, but after marriage, their more rude and uncontrollable true nature begins to show. This fear reflects a change in the couple's once good attitude, which can develop into manipulative, emotional, or even domestic violence behavior. This fear includes not only the potential for physical violence, but also a change in the way of communicating, where the partner begins to speak in a high, harsh, and condescending tone.

Attachment Insecurity and Fear of Commitment Relationships

The fear of marriage expressed by most of the informants from Tiktok in this study originated from past relational experiences that were negative and emotionally imprinted. Both the experiences they themselves have had in previous romantic relationships and those absorbed through the observation of the dynamics of the nuclear family, become the initial construction for their interpretation of the institution of marriage. In in-depth interviews, several informants said that since childhood they have been witnesses to parental domestic conflicts that continue to occur, in the form of verbal arguments, mutual neglect, to a stressful and emotionally uncondusive home atmosphere. From these experiences, they form the perception that marriage is not a safe space to grow together, but rather a place that has the potential to hurt, curb, and even destroy inner stability. In addition, past romantic relationships also play a big role in building fear. Some informants have been involved in relationships full of manipulation, jealousy, emotional neglect, or even betrayal. When the experience is not finished processing psychologically, the image of marriage as a permanent version of a wounded relationship becomes particularly chilling. This suggests that unresolved relational trauma can transform into resistance to long-term commitments, including marriage.

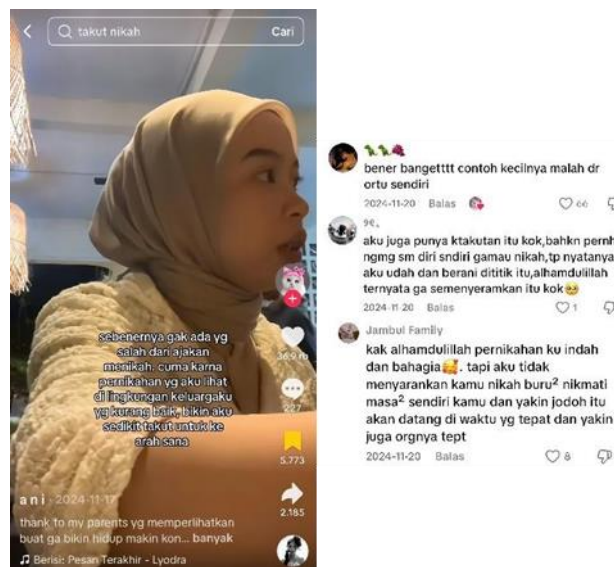


Figure 6. @callmeaniiiiii.

In one of the TikTok videos that raised the theme of #MarriageIsScary, a woman spoke candidly about her fear of marriage. This video has been viewed up to 403.8 thousand, 36.9 thousand likes, 227 comments, 2,185 shared. Although she admits that there is nothing wrong with the invitation to marry, she reveals that her fear arose because of the bad experiences she saw in the sphere of her immediate family. The marriage that he witnessed in the family had a bad dynamic, which led to fear and doubt about getting married.

Fear of marriage due to bad experiences

Through this TikTok video, it appears that the fear of marriage does not only come from external factors such as gender imbalance, social burden, or financial expectations, but also from the strong influence of experience or direct observation in family life. This shows that family and the surrounding environment are important factors in shaping an

individual's view of marriage, even to the point of influencing the decision or readiness to get married.



Figure 7. @winawinot.

A woman who was with her child talked about her experience of feeling aggrieved by her decision to marry too soon, with a partner who may not be emotionally mature, unable to be the leader of the household, as a result of which the marriage that was supposed to be a safe place became a source of regret, inner wounds, and long-term trauma. The message conveyed through videos like this can be a form of symbolic warning to other women to be more selective in choosing a partner and be more critical of the romanticization of marriage.

Discussion

In a study on #MarriageIsScary trends on TikTok, content creators encode by portraying marriage as something full of fears, such as gender injustice, cultural pressure, and traumatic experiences, through narrative, visuals, music, and humor. On the other hand, the audience decodes with a variety of responses, some accept the narrative in full (preferred reading), some combine it with more moderate personal views (negotiated reading), and some reject it (oppositional reading). This difference in interpretation confirms that the audience actively forms meanings based on their respective backgrounds and experiences. In addition, concerns about gender injustice, social pressure, and the shadow of domestic failure show that the representation of marriage on TikTok is closely related to the social reality in Indonesia, where patriarchal norms and the demands of marrying at a young age are still dominant. This fact is in line with BPS data in 2024 which shows that divorce is often triggered by economic problems and domestic conflicts, this discourse feels relevant to many users.

The content that often appears on social media often captures special moments such as wedding anniversary celebrations, romantic activities, and innovations in showing affection. This creates high expectations in the minds of the audience. With filter features, attractive video editing, and background music that supports a romantic atmosphere, the

perception that marriage should always be beautiful and seamless is formed. This can trigger social comparisons, where couples who face challenges in daily life feel inadequate or anxious because they can't meet the expectations built by these ideal contents [15]. These findings are in line with the research of Henry and Parthasarathy who showed that dissatisfaction in marriage can arise if the expectations of one of the partners are not met. This creates a kind of cognitive bias, where Gen Z tends to believe that marriage is a big risk that is better avoided. Social media has formed a powerful narrative about fear and doubt about marriage among Generation Z [16].

Generation Z is greatly influenced by the social validation they get through social media. They often seek approval from online friends before making a major decision, such as the decision to get married. If most of their friends have a negative view of marriage, they are likely to follow that view and choose to postpone or avoid marriage. This creates unrealistic pressure and makes them feel that the marriage should always be perfect without problems [17]. When reality does not match the expectations formed by social media, anxiety and fear of failure in marriage arise [18]. This study revealed a number of findings related to fear of marriage that appeared in TikTok content with the hashtag #marriageisscary.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The conclusion of this study is that the phenomenon of fear of marriage raised in TikTok content with the hashtag #MarriageIsScary reflects a significant change in the young generation's view of marriage institutions in Indonesia. Through qualitative analysis and Stuart Hall's Media Representation Theory, it was found that TikTok creators, the majority of Generation Z and millennials, express various concerns related to marriage, such as gender role inequality in the household, socio-cultural pressures, the burden of expectations, fear of marital failure, changes in the couple's nature, as well as past bad experiences that form insecurity in commitment relationships. Social media, particularly TikTok, plays a huge role in shaping and reinforcing this view by providing a space for young people to express their fears and personal experiences openly and creatively. **Implication :** TikTok's algorithm that personalizes content makes users increasingly exposed to negative narratives about marriage, which can reinforce anxiety and doubts about long-term commitments. The audience's response to this content varies, ranging from full acceptance (preferred reading), interpretation that negotiates the message (negotiated reading), to rejection of the pessimistic narrative (oppositional reading). **Limitation :** Overall, the study shows that fear of marriage comes not only from external factors such as social pressure and gender inequality, but is also influenced by deep emotional and relational experiences. **Future Research :** The #MarriageIsScary phenomenon marks a shift in the values and perceptions of the younger generation who are more critical and skeptical of marriage as a social institution, while affirming the role of social media as an important arena in the formation of social meaning and views in the digital era.

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