

# IMPACT OF TIKTOK'S "MARRIAGE IS SCARY" CONTENT ON GENERATION Z'S PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE

Vien Angela Okta Szyarlana <sup>1,\*</sup>, Agus Triyono<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universitas Dian Nuswantoro

Email : vien.angela20.va@gmail.com<sup>1\*</sup>; agustriyono7@dsn.dinus.ac.id<sup>2</sup>

\* corresponding author

## ABSTRACT

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The rapid expansion of information technology has positioned TikTok as a dominant and influential social media platform in Indonesia, it potentially shaping mindsets and drive social attitude and cultural change, particularly among Generation Z. As digital natives born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z has extensive access to information and critically engages with social media narratives that challenge traditional norms. This research focus analyzing the impact of TikTok's "Marriage is Scary" trend exposure on Generation Z's perceptions of marriage. Adopting a qualitative approach grounded in Cultivation Theory. Data were collected through interviews, observations with Generation Z respondents, and complemented comment analysis. The findings reveal that repeated exposure trend fosters negative perceptions of marriage, leading to delays or avoidance of early marriage due to financial concerns, fear of choosing the wrong partner, and mental health awareness. However, Generation Z is not entirely anti-marriage; rather, they adopt a more cautious and selective orientation, emphasizing equality, emotional maturity, and career development. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the correlation between social media representation and social demographic change through the formation of perceptions.

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## 1. Introduction

The presence of social media today has an impact that can influence social change, including individuals' ways of thinking and behavior, through the discovery of new knowledge via social media (Nadifah Nur Fauziah & Anggraeni Dewi, 2021). Social media platforms are able to provide and facilitate the exchange of information quickly and easily (Nathania & Hartanti, 2025). As a communication medium, social media also generates trends, which are popular topics widely discussed within society (Pulung Bagaskoro & Agus Triyono, 2024). Social media is positioned as the application most widely used, with 73.5% user (Fatika, 2024). Statistical data show the number of active social media users in Indonesia

in 2024 reached 64.3% of the total population (Panggabean, 2024). Based on GoodStats data, TikTok in particular places Indonesia at the top among the ten countries with the largest number of TikTok users, amounting to 157.6 million (Fatika, 2024).

In social media, users are actively engaged in both consuming and creates diverse of content to express users perspectives, experiences, opinions, and creativity (Sherlyanita & Rakhmawati, 2016). This illustrates how the evolution of social media can significantly influence perceptions and behavior young generation. TikTok has become the most influential social media platform due to its accessibility, interactive features, and diverse content categories, ranging from entertainment and education to socio-political topics (Mutiar Apriliani Nur Zahra et al., 2023). The popularity of TikTok across age groups and backgrounds makes it an important subject for analyze user perceptions, trending content, and societal impact.

The widespread phenomenon of “Marriage is Scary” on TikTok has emerged as a trend that significant attention particularly among Generation Z users. The content potraying negative narratives of marital experiences, debates over commitment, concerns risk of divorce and its thereby influencing Generation Z’s perceptions and attitudes toward marriage (Novanza & Afrizal, 2025). Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, are digital natives shaped technological developments, enabling them to adapt to digital environments, critically evaluate various aspects of life, including marriag (Ginting et al., 2025). Data from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, 2024) show that the number of marriages in Indonesia has consistently decreased over the past five years, from 1.968.978 in 2019 to 1,577,255 in 2023 (Arieza, 2024). This decline raises concerns about demographic sustainability and the eroding of traditional values.

This research focuses on analyzing the “Marriage is Scary” trend on TikTok and its impact on Generation Z’s perceptions of marriage. The novelty of this research its in depth analysis of social media specifically TikTok can reshapes perceptions Generation Z. Adopt George Gerbner’s Cultivation Theory using Three central concepts of Cultivation: mainstreaming, resonance, heavy and light media content consumptions. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for subsequent studies seeking to understand the interaction between digital trends and social change, while also making a tangible contribution to the development of communication and education strategies related to marriage issues in the digital era.

## 2. Method

This research adopts a qualitative research is a methodological framework to investigate and comprehend behavior of individual or group, including social phenomena in their natural settings, producing descriptive data in verbal or written form then analyzed in descriptive interpretation (Safrudin et al., 2023). Qualitative research emphasizes observation, interviews, and document analysis as its primary methods (Triyono, 2021)

The research subjects consisted of 5 Generation Z respondents (aged 18–25), selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. Respondents were active TikTok users who had engaged with or commented on “Marriage is Scary” content. Data are collected through in-depth interviews with questions focused on perceptions of marriage, reactions to TikTok content, and personal reflections on commitment and relationships. Comment analysis categorized responses into thematic clusters such as financial concerns, fear of divorce, development career and mental health awareness.

This research applies George Gerbner’s Cultivation Theory as the analytical framework, which assumes that continuous exposure to the “Marriage Is Scary” trend conveys representations and form perceptions that functioning as the basis for choices made by its

audience. Cultivation Theory according to George Gebner is posits that continuous engagement with media gradually shapes individuals' worldviews and attitudes, aligning them with dominant narratives (Shrum, 2017). The theory is operationalized through three key concepts: mainstreaming (convergence of negative perceptions across respondents), resonance (alignment of TikTok narratives with lived experiences), and cultivation differential (differences between heavy and light users). These constructs are directly connected to empirical indicators from interviews, observations, and comment analysis.

This research employs two types of data, primary data and secondary data. Primary data are the main data collected directly from the research subjects Generation Z, through methods such as interviews, observations, and documentation. Secondary data function as reinforce information the primary data, obtained from indirect sources such as journals and article (Zaini et al., 2021). In this research, secondary data consist of journals, articles, and comments related the "Marriage is Scary" trend. The collected data were processed using triangulation to ensure validity. Triangulation refers to a method of comparing, reducing, categorizing, and synthesizing data, and compiling by analytical interpretation (Triyono, 2021).

### 3. Results and Discussion

The "Marriage is Scary" trend represents fears and rejections of marriage that emerge from both lived experiences and critical reflections of young people. These concerns range from financial risks, uncommitted partners, psychological wounds caused by gender role inequalities within families, to trauma derived from direct observations of dysfunctional household dynamics. The content serves as a social commentary of structural problems in marriage and family, providing a foundation for further discussion in the research findings. In order to further explore the impact of the "Marriage is Scary" trend on Generation Z's perceptions of marriage, examples of content are displayed as initial interpretations before the results and discussion.



Figure 1.

Marriage is scary's content

source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSA9XtVX6/>



**Figure 2.**

Marriage is scary's content

source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSA9XV1Ab/>

The content presented above illustrates the primary drivers and root causes behind Generation Z's tendency to postpone or avoid early marriage, impacted by such content. Additional perspectives were identified through in-depth interviews and analysis with subjects and systematic observation of comments related to the content.

The findings of this research are organized into four categories: financial concerns, fear of divorce, career development priorities, and mental health awareness. Each category is analyzed how TikTok content cultivates particular perceptions of marriage among Generation Z, consistent with the theoretical framework of Cultivation Theory.

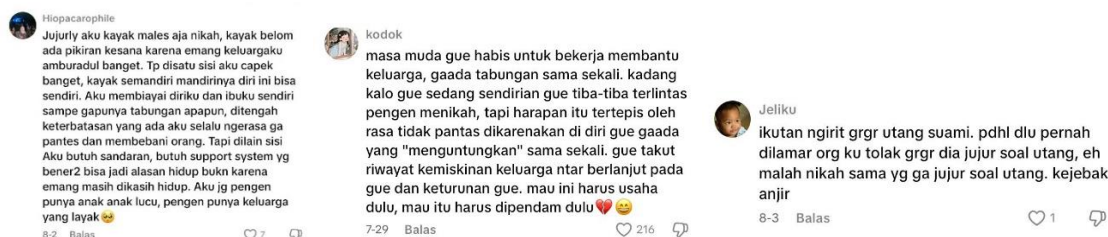
### 1. Financial Concerns

Financial anxieties emerged as the most dominant theme across interviews, observations, and comment analysis. Respondents consistently expressed apprehensions about the high costs of weddings, rising living expenses, and the challenges of establishing financial stability in family life. Many noted that the increasing prices of housing, food, and education contribute to a sense of unpreparedness for marriage. Observations of marital breakdowns linked to economic hardship as difficulties in meeting basic needs reinforced the perception that marriage is financially risky.

Respondents emphasized that financial readiness is a prerequisite for marriage. Several stated that they prefer to delay marriage until they achieve professional stability and long-term financial planning. TikTok content amplifies these concerns by repeatedly showcasing stories of couples struggling with debt, unemployment, or financial incompatibility. As one respondent explained,

*"Lebih pentingnya jika menikah harus siap secara finansial, karena menikah banyak kebutuhan. Menikah itu untuk sekali saja seumur hidup, dan nantinya tidak bisa bebas seperti sekarang, jadi harus disiapkan secara matang"*

*"Saya agak takut untuk menikah, kan biayanya banyak sekali ya. Saya kan kepala keluarga. Ya kalau dapat istri yang mau menerima suami apa adanya, tapi kalau ketemu yang matre kan susah jadinya."*



From the perspective of Cultivation Theory, mainstreaming is evident in the convergence of financial concerns across respondents, regardless of socio-economic background. Resonance occurs when TikTok narratives about financial hardship align with respondents lived experiences or observations of family struggles. The cultivation differential is visible in the stronger reluctance among heavy TikTok users, who repeatedly encounter content portraying marriage as financially burdensome, compared to lighter users who are less exposed to such narratives.

## 2. Fear of Divorce

Another recurring theme is the fear of divorce and marital failure. Respondents frequently cited concerns about unfaithfulness, incompatibility, abusive behavior, and conflict as reasons for their hesitation toward marriage. These fears are often reinforced by negative experiences observed in parents, relatives, or close friends. TikTok content amplifies these anxieties by repeatedly showcasing stories of broken marriages, debates over commitment, and narratives of emotional suffering.

*"Saya takut mendapat pasangan yang tidak sesuai. Saya takut KDRT seperti yang diceritakan di TikTok itu, saya jadi maju-mundur menikah."*

*"Saya ragu untuk menikah, khawatir kalau ketemu dengan yang tidak sesuai. Saya takut sekali setelah sering mengikuti ulasan-ulasan dari TikTokers yang sering menceritakan pengalaman mereka tentang masalah pribadi dalam pernikahan. Memang tidak semua orang begitu, tadi setelah melihat tayangannya, saya lebih cenderung takut."*



The normalization of divorce-related fears is a clear cultivation effect. Respondents reported that after repeatedly encountering such content, they began to perceive divorce not as an exceptional case but as a common outcome of marriage. This perception contributes to their cautious approach, with many preferring to delay marriage until they feel emotionally secure and confident in their choice of partner.

Within Cultivation Theory, mainstreaming explains the homogenization of divorce-related fears across diverse respondents. Resonance intensifies these fears when TikTok narratives mirror personal experiences of family conflict or parental divorce. The cultivation differential highlights that heavy users of TikTok expressed stronger reluctance toward marriage, as continuous exposure reinforced the belief that divorce is a likely consequence of marital commitment.

## 3. Self and Career Development

Generation Z respondents consistently emphasized the importance of education and career development before marriage. Many expressed the view that marriage should not be

rushed, as it could potentially hinder personal growth and professional achievement. Instead, they prioritize completing higher education, building careers, and achieving financial independence before considering marriage.

This perspective reflects a generational shift from traditional expectations of marrying young to modern values of self-development and independence. Respondents noted that marriage is often perceived as a constraint on freedom, particularly when financial and professional goals have not yet been achieved. TikTok content contributes to this perception by repeatedly portraying marriage as a source of financial and emotional burden, thereby reinforcing the idea that career development should take precedence.

*“Saya lebih mengedepankan karier terlebih dahulu, mapan. Mengenai untuk menikah masih ada kekhawatiran kak, saya takut mendapat pasangan yang tidak sesuai.”*



From a cultivation perspective, mainstreaming is evident in the widespread prioritization of career development among respondents. Resonance occurs when TikTok narratives about the challenges of balancing marriage and career align with respondents' personal aspirations. The cultivation differential shows that heavy TikTok users are more likely to delay marriage in favor of career advancement, as repeated exposure cultivates the perception that marriage is incompatible with professional growth.

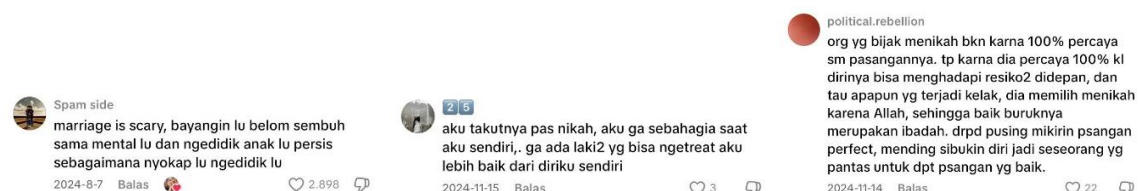
#### 4. Mental Health Awareness

Generation Z's perceptions of marriage. Respondents expressed concerns about emotional readiness, psychological well-being, and the importance of finding partners who support their mental health. Many reported that they would prefer to delay or avoid marriage if they felt emotionally unprepared or if their partner did not understand their mental health needs.

*“Saya belum siap untuk menikah, saya lebih suka mengenal wanita tanpa danya pernikahan, kita bisa bersama walau tanpa adanya beban tanggung jawab untuk menafkahi satu sama lain, Pernikahan hal yang sakral, jadi harus komitmen untuk membahagiakan istri, tidak boleh kasar dan harus bisa jadi contoh.”*

*“Saya tidak mau pasangan saya cenderung memonopoli, ingi dalam pernikahan happy, bisa bercanda, mengutarakan pendapat, dan tidak ada terkekang oleh aturan suami.”*

*“Menikah nanti usia 27 saja, sekarang lagi menyiapkan mental dan pasangan yang sesuai.”*



TikTok content plays a crucial role in shaping these perceptions by frequently highlighting issues such as domestic conflict, emotional abuse, and the psychological toll of dysfunctional marriages. Repeated exposure to such narratives cultivates the belief that

marriage can pose risks to mental health if entered into prematurely or without adequate preparation.

Within Cultivation Theory, mainstreaming is evident in the shared emphasis on mental health across respondents. Resonance amplifies these concerns when TikTok narratives reflect personal or familial experiences of emotional distress. The cultivation differential highlights that heavy TikTok users are more likely to prioritize mental health awareness in their decision-making, as repeated exposure reinforces the perception that marriage requires emotional maturity and psychological stability.

Across these four categories, the findings demonstrate that Generation Z's perspectives on marriage are dynamic, shaped by cultural shifts, personal experiences, and social media influenced by various factors, including social and cultural changes, personal experiences, and the impact of social media. Addressing these fears is essential to prevent them from hindering individuals from building healthy and fulfilling relationships. Despite such concerns, Generation Z does not outright reject marriage. Rather, they are more cautious and selective in making decisions, placing greater emphasis on mental, financial, and educational readiness before entering into marriage.

*“Untuk menikah pasti tetap, Bismillah nanti ketemu pasangan yang sesuai. Harus benar-benar dipersiapkan dengan baik, dan dengan pasangan yang baik juga. Harus memenuhi kriteria sebagai imam yang baik.”*

*“Tapi untuk menikah pastilah, karena kita harus menikah, tapi saya harus lebih selektif dalam memilih pasangan. Yang bisa membimbing saya, yang baik kepada istri dan bertanggung jawab. Karena menikah untuk selamanya.”*

*“Ya saya tetap menikah seperti orang lain, penting cari istri yang setia, baik dan dapat menjadi makmum yang baik, ketika imam salah dapat mengingatkan dan dapat mengikuti imam. Saya insyaallah akan memperlakukan istri saya nanti dengan baik, tidak seperti yang diceritakan di medsos yang laki-laki sering KDRT.”*

Despite the benefits of social media, including wider access to information and opportunities for networking, Generation Z should understand that much of what is presented online is partial and not fully representative of reality. Generation Z needs to develop critical thinking skills and avoid allowing social media to negatively influence their decisions, particularly regarding marriage. Counseling or therapy, open discussions and support from the social environment can help Generation Z overcome the roots of their fears and concerns related to marriage to develop strategies to overcome them.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The TikTok trend “Marriage is Scary” reflects Generation Z's cautious and critical perspective on marriage. Generation Z tends to delay or even avoid early marriage due to concerns about expensive wedding costs, rising living expenses, and financial difficulties in building a family. Fears of unfaithful, abusive, or incompatible partners are among their primary worries. They are also concerned about potential conflicts and marital failure, particularly when influenced by the negative experiences of parents or close relatives. Despite cultural and traditional pressures to marry, Generation Z remains wary of social expectations, especially regarding age. They want to make their own choices and avoid rushing into marriage. Generation Z holds a more modern and individualistic view of marriage, focusing on self-development, education, and career before considering it. They also tend to resist traditional norms surrounding marriage. Many members of Generation Z worry about changes in personal life, freedom, and autonomy after marriage, as well as issues of gender roles and household responsibilities. Social media further amplifies these fears by presenting the darker

side of marriage, such as divorce, domestic conflict, and financial problems, which makes Generation Z increasingly hesitant to marry.

This study demonstrates that Generation Z is not anti-marriage but rather deliberate and selective, prioritizing readiness in financial, emotional, and professional domains. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how digital culture shapes social attitudes, offering insights into the interplay between online trends and generational change.

Nonetheless, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. The study relied on a relatively small sample size and purposive sampling, which restricts the generalizability of its findings. The focus on TikTok as the primary platform may also overlook other digital spaces where marriage-related discourses circulate. In-depth interviews and comment analysis provided rich qualitative data, but they cannot fully capture the diversity of Generation Z's experiences across different socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Future research should expand the scope by employing mixed methods, incorporating larger and more diverse samples, and comparing perspectives across multiple social media platforms. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable to examine how sustained exposure to digital narratives influences attitudes toward marriage over time. Cross-cultural comparisons could also highlight how local traditions interact with global digital trends in shaping generational views.

By acknowledging its limitations and pointing toward future directions, this study strengthens its scholarly contribution. It serves as a reference for subsequent research on the relationship between digital culture and social change, while informing communication and education strategies about marriage in the digital era

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