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The Influence of the "Marriage is Scary" TikTok Trend on Adolescents' Marriage Decision-Making

Jingga Naura Yasmin

Department of Communication Science, State University of Surabaya, Indonesia
Email: jingga.23466@mhs.unesa.ac.id
**Corresponding author: jingga.23466@mhs.unesa.ac.id*

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the impact of the viral "Marriage is Scary" TikTok trend on the marriage decision-making of adolescents in Surabaya. Framed by Agenda Setting and Standpoint Theories, short-form video exposure depicting domestic conflict, financial insecurity, and burnout was analyzed regarding youth commitment expectations. Empirical data were collected via structured questionnaires administered to active adolescent TikTok users in Surabaya ($n = 30$). Statistical testing confirmed a strong positive relationship between trend exposure and marriage decision-making ($R = 0.789, p = 0.000$), with regression analysis showing that engagement with the trend explains 62.3% ($R^2 = 0.623$) of the variance in adolescent marital decisions. Repeated exposure to risk-heavy narratives fosters acute anxiety, prompting youth to re-evaluate traditional milestones or delay marriage. Practically, these findings emphasize the need for targeted digital literacy and pre-marital counseling programs to equip adolescents with realistic relationship skills and financial planning tools, empowering them to make informed choices rather than algorithmically driven decisions.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menguji pengaruh kuantitatif tren viral "Marriage is Scary" di platform TikTok terhadap proses pengambilan keputusan menikah remaja di Surabaya. Berlandaskan Teori Agenda Setting dan Teori Standpoint, paparan konten video pendek yang menyoroti konflik domestik, kelelahan emosional, serta ketidakstabilan finansial dianalisis hubungannya dengan persepsi komitmen jangka panjang. Data empiris dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur kepada remaja pengguna aktif TikTok di Surabaya ($n = 30$). Pengujian statistik mengonfirmasi adanya hubungan positif yang kuat antara paparan tren dan keputusan menikah ($R = 0{,}789, p = 0{,}000$), dengan analisis regresi menunjukkan bahwa keterikatan pada tren ini menjelaskan 62,3% ($R^2 = 0{,}623$) varians keputusan menikah remaja. Paparan narasi berbasis risiko yang berulang memicu kecemasan psikologis, sehingga mendorong remaja menunda pernikahan. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya literasi digital kritis dan edukasi pra-nikah terstruktur untuk membekali remaja dengan keterampilan resolusi konflik yang realistis.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media platforms have witnessed the rapid proliferation of the "Marriage is Scary" trend. Originating on TikTok before spreading across other platforms like X in mid-August 2024, this trend centers on short-form video content where users articulate hypothetical marital anxieties using the narrative framing "marriage is scary, what if..." (Kompas.com, 2024).

Popularized viral posts—such as user @ceritacete raising concerns about financial restrictions imposed by a spouse, or @varmintze depicting fears of post-partum depression and spousal abandonment—illustrate the specific domestic anxieties embedded in this narrative. These short-form digital communications accumulate millions of views, likes, and comments, serving as interactive public forums that actively shape audience perceptions regarding long-term romantic commitments.

The viral resonance of this trend is driven by TikTok's unique technological features. TikTok relies on short-form video formats, intuitive visual effects, and advanced algorithmic curation that effectively captures short attention spans to deliver highly personalized content (Demmy Deriyanto, 2018). This digital phenomenon coincides with a measurable demographic shift in Indonesia, where national marriage rates dropped from 1,705,348 in 2022 to 1,577,255 in 2023 across all provinces according to official Statistics Indonesia (BPS) reports (Kompas.com, 2024). Among adolescents in Surabaya, constant exposure to risk-centric marital narratives on TikTok prompts heightened caution, encouraging youth to re-evaluate the potential risks and sacrifices associated with entering a marriage.

This growing apprehension among adolescents, particularly young women in Surabaya, is deeply intertwined with broader socio-cultural issues. Many young women express anxiety over persistent patriarchal norms, gender inequality, and widespread domestic violence (KDRT) reported in news media (Atika, 2023). Domestic violence against women in Indonesia remains frequently normalized as an inevitable aspect of domestic life (Elfrida Kumala, 2022). High-profile KDRT cases in mainstream media—such as the Lesti and Rizky Billar incident in October 2022 and the Cut Intan Nabila case in August 2023—further reinforce negative perceptions of marriage. This societal strain is underscored by national data from GoodStats (2023), showing that 76% of total divorce cases in 2023 (352,403 cases) were female-initiated divorces (gugat cerai), signaling widespread domestic dissatisfaction that exacerbates youth skepticism toward traditional marital milestones.

Left unaddressed, acute marital anxiety can alter demographic behaviors, leading to prolonged marriage delays or alternative relationship arrangements. Unregulated shifts toward cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing present distinct social risks that disproportionately impact women and children (VOI.id). Addressing these concerns among adolescents in Surabaya requires targeted educational interventions (Laggam.id). Key solutions include pre-marital education focusing on conflict communication and financial literacy, cognitive reframing to promote positive marital expectations, and active participation in pre-marital preparation seminars to alleviate fear and support informed decision-making (Laggam.id). Therefore, based on the outlined background, this study addresses the following research questions, first, does the "Marriage is Scary" trend on TikTok significantly influence marriage decision-making among adolescents in Surabaya. Second, how do adolescents in Surabaya perceive and interpret the "Marriage is Scary" trend on TikTok. Third, what is the extent of the impact of the "Marriage is Scary" trend on the marital readiness and decisions of adolescents in Surabaya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptualization of Variable X (The Influence of the "Marriage is Scary" Trend on TikTok) is grounded in Agenda Setting Theory. First introduced in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, Agenda Setting Theory posits that mass media exerts a strong influence on public cognition by choosing which issues to emphasize, thereby dictating what audiences perceive as important. In contemporary digital contexts, short-form video platforms such as TikTok function as powerful agenda setters. Through advanced algorithmic curation, TikTok

repeatedly delivers "Marriage is Scary" narratives to users, generating high engagement via likes, comments, and shares. By elevating fears of financial strain, infidelity, and domestic conflict, the platform shapes the cognitive priorities of adolescents in Surabaya, encouraging them to view domestic failure as an immediate and critical risk.

The conceptualization of Variable Y (Marriage Decision-Making Among Adolescents in Surabaya) relies on Standpoint Theory. Formulated by Nancy Hartsock in 1987, Standpoint Theory asserts that an individual's worldview, knowledge, and life choices are fundamentally structured by their social position, gendered experiences, and relational contexts. As Alya (2023) observed, decision-making regarding marriage is influenced by pre-existing perceptions constructed through environmental interactions and information channels. Within a feminist framework, Standpoint Theory highlights that young women assess life milestones—such as marriage—from their distinct social standing, critically weighing gender equity, personal autonomy, and potential vulnerability. Access to unfiltered digital content prompts adolescents in Surabaya to re-evaluate traditional relationship structures through their own socio-cultural standpoints.

Several empirical studies offer foundational insights into digital media effects and marital decision-making. Rani Sandora demonstrated through quantitative research that exposure to content detailing violence against women on the Instagram account @perempuanberkisah had a positive and significant effect on individuals' inclination to remain unmarried. In a qualitative investigation, Nur Ilahin (2022) highlighted how TikTok usage significantly shapes student character development, proving that extensive screen time and continuous media consumption alter behavioral patterns and social perceptions.

Further exploring relationship perceptions, qualitative research by Adjeng Rizka Suwarnoputri, Hayu Stefani, Naila Najah Putriviandi, Nasywa Nurjihan, Hanan Nahda, Amanda Setiawan, and Syifa Kautsar revealed that shifting social values, academic pressures, peer environments, and mass media exposure collectively reshape youth understanding of marital readiness, underscoring the need for tailored psychosocial support. Complementing these findings, a qualitative study by Alya Azma Fazira, Lintang Ratri Rahmiaji, and Hapsari Dwiningtyas (2023) examined the communication narratives surrounding women's choices to abstain from marriage, discovering that women opting out of marriage frequently face social stigma, rejection, and discrimination from environments that view singlehood as unconventional.

The research framework links digital media exposure to individual decision-making through two theoretical lenses. Grounded in Agenda Setting Theory, exposure to the "Marriage is Scary" trend on TikTok acts as an external stimulus characterized by media framing, interactive communication features, and network amplification, which directly influences youth character and information processing (Ilahin, 2022). Repeated exposure to alarming marital narratives fosters negative perception formation regarding domestic life. Grounded in Standpoint Theory, these media-induced perceptions interact with personal experiences, knowledge, and social position, altering how adolescents in Surabaya evaluate relationship milestones (Alya, Ratri Rahmiaji, & Dwiningtyas, 2023). Consequently, heightened anxiety may prompt adolescents to consider delaying marriage, seeking alternative living arrangements, or opting for singlehood. Thus, the primary hypothesis (H_1) is There is a significant influence of the "Marriage is Scary" trend on TikTok on the marriage decision-making of adolescents in Surabaya. And the null hypothesis (H_0) is There is no significant influence of the "Marriage is Scary" trend on TikTok on the marriage decision-making of adolescents in Surabaya.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Approach and Data Sources

This study adopts a quantitative research approach utilizing measurement, numerical computation, and statistical formulas to analyze empirical data. The quantitative design is used to evaluate the empirical impact of the "Marriage is Scary" TikTok trend (Variable X) on marriage decision-making among adolescents in Surabaya (Variable Y). Data collection relies on a structured questionnaire containing closed-ended statements scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*) (Sugiyono, 2011). The research utilizes two primary data sources: primary data collected directly through self-administered online questionnaires distributed to adolescents in Surabaya, and secondary data gathered from academic textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, and official institutional reports to contextualize the empirical findings (Sujarweni, 2014).

Conceptual and Operational Definitions

Conceptually, Variable X(Trend "Marriage is Scary") refers to the viral phenomenon on TikTok characterized by short-form video content framing marriage through risks, emotional distress, financial instability, and domestic violence. As new social media platforms gain popularity, users engage with trending content to express shared concerns, where frequent exposure reinforces negative views toward marriage (Demmy Deriyanto, 2018). Operationally, Variable X is measured through framing awareness, communication engagement, social networking effects, and perceived positive or negative platform influences. Conceptually, Variable Y (Marriage Decision-Making) represents the cognitive evaluation and behavioral intention regarding marriage among adolescents in Surabaya. Informed by cognitive development principles, individuals construct knowledge and form life perspectives by synthesizing external information from media, peers, and social observation (Piaget in Sardy, 2013; Demmy Deriyanto, 2018). Operationally, Variable $Y$is measured through indicators of marital knowledge, risk perception, peer communication processing, and final marital decisions, such as delaying marriage or opting for singlehood.

Population, Sample, and Data Collection

Primary data collection was conducted systematically through self-administered digital questionnaires distributed to generate quantifiable statistical indicators measuring the relationship between Variable $X$and Variable Y(A Data, 2014; Deepublish). The population for this study comprises adolescents residing in Surabaya aged 18–24 years ($N = 100$) who are active TikTok users (E. Roflin, 2021). The sample was selected using probability sampling via simple random sampling (Primadi Candra Susanto, 2024). The final sample size comprised $n =$ 30 adolescent respondents in Surabaya, calculated using Slovin's formula for initial model validation and empirical testing.

Data Analysis, Validity, and Reliability

Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS software to execute descriptive statistics, instrument testing, and hypothesis testing (Ali Muhson, 2006; W. T. Bhirawa, 2020). Instrument validity was evaluated using the Corrected Item-Total Correlation against the critical value ($r_{\text{table}} = 0.361$ at $N = 30, \alpha = 0.05$). All items yielded valid scores ranging from 0.483to 0.847, exceeding the critical threshold (Anastasi, 1990; Nilda Miftahul Janna, 2021). Instrument reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, where a value of $\alpha \geq 0.60$indicates acceptable

internal consistency (Dunakhir, 2019). The 7-item instrument produced a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.843, confirming high measurement reliability and precision.

Normality and Linearity Assumptions

Data distribution and model assumptions were verified prior to hypothesis testing. The normality test was conducted using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov / Shapiro-Wilk procedure, where a significance value of $p \geq 0.05$indicates normal distribution (Eko Haryono, 2023). Variable $X(p = 0.700)$ and Variable $Y(p = 0.698)$ both exceeded 0.05, satisfying the assumption of bivariate normality. Furthermore, linearity testing confirmed a statistically significant linear relationship between Variable $X$and Variable $Y(p = 0.000 < 0.05)$, with a strong correlation coefficient $(R = 0.789)$ and a significant coefficient of determination $(R^2 = 0.623)$, validating the suitability of linear regression modeling (R.H. Nurjannah, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Regression and Correlation Analysis

Model Parameter	Statistical Value	Interpretation
Correlation Coefficient ($\boldsymbol{R}$)	0.789	Strong positive linear relationship
Coefficient of Determination ($\boldsymbol{R^2}$)	0.623	62.3% variance explained
Significance Value ($\boldsymbol{p}$-value)	0.000	H_1 Accepted ($p < 0.05$)

The empirical evaluation confirmed the measurement instrument's robustness across 30 adolescent respondents in Surabaya. All items demonstrated Corrected Item-Total Correlation values exceeding the critical threshold ($r_{\text{table}} = 0.361$), ranging between 0.483 and 0.847. Furthermore, the reliability testing produced a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.843 across all seven items. Because this value significantly exceeds the standard benchmark of 0.60, the measurement scale demonstrates high internal consistency and measurement precision, proving dependable for evaluating digital media impacts on youth marriage readiness (Anastasi, 1990; Dunakhir, 2019).

Data distribution and linear assumptions were systematically verified prior to regression analysis. The One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded asymptotic significance values of $p = 0.700$ for Variable X and $p = 0.698$ for Variable Y. Because both values exceed the standard significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$), the assumption of bivariate normal distribution is fully satisfied (Eko Haryono, 2023). Additionally, the linearity test confirmed a statistically significant linear path ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), demonstrating that linear regression modeling is appropriate for analyzing the relationship between TikTok trend exposure and marriage decision-making among adolescents in Surabaya (R.H. Nurjannah, 2013).

The linear regression analysis revealed a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.789, indicating a strong positive linear association between exposure to the "Marriage is Scary" TikTok trend and marriage decision-making among adolescents in Surabaya. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.623$) indicates that 62.3% of the variance in adolescents' marriage decisions in Surabaya is directly explained by exposure to the TikTok trend, while the remaining 37.7% is influenced by unmeasured external factors such as economic status, family background, and personal observation. With a significance value of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), the primary hypothesis (H_1) is accepted, confirming that digital media trends significantly impact youth marital decision-making.

The empirical findings confirm that the "Marriage is Scary" trend on TikTok exerts a statistically significant influence on the marital decision-making of adolescents in Surabaya. In line with Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), TikTok's algorithmic distribution amplifies risk-laden narratives surrounding marital infidelity, domestic violence, and financial distress, positioning domestic failure as a central concern for youth. Furthermore, these findings align with Standpoint Theory (Hartsock, 1987; Alya, 2023), which suggests that young individuals evaluate life choices based on their social position, media input, and relational experiences. For adolescents in Surabaya, repeated exposure to short-form videos detailing domestic struggles fosters heightened anxiety and risk aversion. Consequently, digital media consumption alters relationship expectations, prompting many adolescents to adopt cautious mindsets, delay traditional marriage milestones, or explore alternative relationship frameworks.

Beyond theoretical implications, these findings highlight the urgent need for practical interventions in digital literacy and youth development. Because algorithms on short-form media platforms like TikTok prioritize high-arousal negative content, adolescents in Surabaya are disproportionately exposed to catastrophic domestic scenarios without the necessary contextual nuance or counter-narratives. This environment fosters an exaggerated sense of risk regarding long-term commitment. Developing critical media literacy among adolescents is essential to help them evaluate viral trends objectively, allowing them to separate sensationalized social media content from the realistic, manageable dynamics of healthy interpersonal relationships.

To mitigate media-induced marital anxiety, collaborative efforts between educational institutions, community leaders, and mental health professionals are vital. Implementing targeted pre-marital education and counseling programs—focusing on constructive conflict resolution, financial planning, emotional maturity, and recognizing healthy relationship boundaries—can provide adolescents with actionable coping mechanisms. By empowering youth in Surabaya with balanced perspectives and practical relationship skills, society can alleviate digital anxiety, foster informed decision-making, and support resilient family foundations in the modern digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that exposure to the "Marriage is Scary" TikTok trend significantly influences the marriage decision-making process among adolescents in Surabaya. Empirical analysis demonstrates a strong direct connection between engagement with this viral trend and shifts in youth marital intentions. Algorithmic amplification of short-form videos focusing on domestic conflict, financial insecurity, and personal burnout fosters acute psychological anxiety, prompting youth to re-evaluate traditional relationship milestones, delay marriage, or consider alternative living arrangements. Theoretically, these findings validate Agenda Setting Theory by demonstrating how TikTok's content delivery prioritizes risk-heavy domestic narratives, elevating them into critical cognitive concerns for young users. Furthermore, Standpoint Theory is supported, as adolescents in Surabaya interpret these digital narratives through their distinct social standpoints, adopting a more critical and self-protective stance toward marriage. From a practical perspective, the study underscores an urgent need to address media-induced marital hesitation. Mitigating these anxieties requires multi-stakeholder collaboration to promote critical digital literacy and implement comprehensive pre-marital education. Equipping adolescents with realistic relationship skills, financial literacy, and constructive conflict resolution strategies will empower them to make life decisions grounded in genuine readiness rather than algorithmically driven fear.

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