

The Tiktok Trends "*Umur 25 harus punya apa*" And "*Ga apa-apa kan kalau...*", From The Perspective of Male and Female Students

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Abstract

This research examines the influence of TikTok's viral narratives on the life expectations of Gen Z college students, specifically focusing on the "milestones at 25" versus "self-acceptance" trends. Utilizing Stuart Hall's Reception Analysis, the study investigates how students at Universitas Islam Riau actively decode these contrasting digital messages based on their unique socio-cultural contexts. While the "*umur 25 harus punya apa*" trend reinforces societal pressures to achieve specific professional and economic markers, the "*ga apa-apa kan kalau...*" narrative offers an alternative framework centered on individual pacing and self-compassion. The findings categorize student interpretations into three distinct decoding positions: dominant-hegemonic (acceptance of social milestones), negotiated (selective adaptation of expectations), and oppositional (rejection of traditional success metrics). Ultimately, the research demonstrates that students are not passive consumers; rather, they critically navigate digital discourse to shape their own identities and future aspirations amidst competing societal pressures.

Keywords: TikTok trend; *umur 25 harus punya apa*; *ga apa-apa kan kalau*;
social media; college students

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, technological and informational advancements are developing at an extremely rapid pace. Social media has transformed Indonesian society, impacting cultural, ethical, and normative aspects, as well as the dissemination of information. Social media can be defined as digital platforms that provide each user with the means to participate in social interaction. Social media can help you reach a lot of different goals, such as sharing information and materials through text, photos, and videos. Social networking sites are the most popular category of social media, as they allow users to connect with each other by sharing information. One of the most well-known social media platforms is TikTok.

Through TikTok, users' mobile devices function as a live studio. TikTok users are dominated by Generation Z, who were born between 1997 and 2012. The majority of this generation is still young and has not experienced life without technology. In 2022, TikTok became the most popular social media platform among Generation Z for the purpose of being a source of information. According to a Jakpat survey, 24% of respondents from the 1997-2012 generation stated that they use TikTok to find information. The statistics show that TikTok has an advantage over some other social media platforms, such as YouTube (23%), Instagram (22%), Twitter (17%), Facebook (10%), LinkedIn (2%), Pinterest (1%), and Snapchat (0%). This survey was conducted by Jakpat with a margin of error of 3% monthly throughout 2022, involving 1,329 respondents from Generation Z (Firanti. A et al., 2021)

Various content on TikTok presents visual representations of daily life that can influence Generation Z's views on values, social norms, and lifestyles, as well as the life goals considered most ideal or otherwise. This has the potential to affect their perspectives on thinking and choices for living in the future. Social media, as the main product of this digital revolution, not only serves as a tool for interaction but also as an important means of self-expression. TikTok is a real example of the impact of social media development. Its presence has transformed communication from a controversial medium into a modern and fully digital one, with a variety of services that can be utilized, making communication more efficient.

The role of social media is not limited to freedom of expression; it also encompasses the complex interaction between individuals and existing norms. Gender norms promoted or encountered on social media can provide positive reinforcement or, conversely, create social pressure that influences individuals' self-perception. In this context, analysing social media usage becomes a relevant approach to exploring how individuals from diverse backgrounds and life experiences navigate their self-identities.

In recent years, social media platforms like TikTok have become the primary means for young people to express themselves and share their views. TikTok, with its short video format, has successfully attracted the attention of

many users, especially among college students who are generally categorized as Generation Z. This research focused on two emerging trends on this platform: "umur 25 harus punya apa" and "ga apa-apa kan kalau..." This trend reflects the expectations and pressures faced by young people, particularly college students, in achieving their life goals.

Picture 1.
Screenshot of "umur 25 harus punya apa"



Source: *TikTok- Account owner is confidential* (2025)

The "umur 25 harus punya apa" trend highlights societal expectations that require individuals to achieve certain milestones before the age of 25. This achievement could be a stable career, a high level of education, or even owning a home. There is significant social pressure among students to meet these expectations. On the other hand, the "ga apa-apa kan kalau..." trend offers a more relaxed perspective, where individuals are allowed not to meet those targets, creating space for self-acceptance and understanding that everyone has their own path.

Picture 2. Screenshot of "ga apa-apa kan kalau..."



Source: *TikTok- Account owner is confidential* (2025)

Both of these trends can influence how students view their lives and futures. Younger generations are more likely to experience anxiety and stress due to social comparison on social media. This has the potential to affect their mental health. Therefore, it is important to understand how male and female students respond to these two trends. Do they feel pressured to meet expectations, or are they more accepting of the fact that everyone has a different life journey?

This study aims to explore the differences between male and female students' views on these two trends. For example, are men more likely to feel pressured to achieve certain accomplishments compared to women? Or, conversely, are women more accepting of the reality that not everyone has to meet those expectations? Through this research, it is also hoped that factors influencing students' views on both trends can be identified. For example, do family background, education, or social environment influence how they view life achievements? It is hoped that it will contribute to the development of literature on the influence of social media on young people.

By analysing popular TikTok trends, this research can provide new insights into how social media shapes individual perceptions and expectations. In the digital age we live in, it's important to understand the impact of platforms like TikTok on the mindset of young people. Research specifically on the influence of TikTok content on how men and women view decision-making regarding life goals or behaviour has not been conducted precisely, but some similar studies that exist are titled "The Influence of the TikTok Application on Generation Z Communication: A Review of Changes in Interaction Patterns and Digital Expression," which aims to explore how this application affects the way Generation Z communicates, including changes in their digital self-expression (Andriani. E et al., 2024).

Other research related to TikTok and Gen Z has also been conducted by Khafidhoturrofia and Majid, providing in-depth insights into TikTok's role as an agent of change in shaping how this generation views and approaches the business world (Khafidhoturrofia, 2023). Finally, research on the Impact of TikTok on Social Behaviour and Cultural Values Changes in Generation Z showed that TikTok has a significant impact on the social behaviour and cultural values of Gen Z. TikTok is not only an entertainment platform but also a tool for social and cultural transformation that reflects contemporary dynamics (Syahri FM, 2024). With the previous research mentioned, the novelty of this study lies in the discussion of TikTok trends.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Reception Theory of Stuart Hall

Stuart Hall put out reception theory in 1973, sometimes known as audience reception theory. This reception theory posits that audiences receive

media texts, not the author or the message itself. Its fundamental tenet is that the audience, not the media author, determines if a media piece is successful in communicating its message or at least in being received. Stuart Hall is one of the people well-known for his theories on reception analysis. Stuart Hall questioned the idea that communication is not linear but rather circulates in his 1980 work *Encoding/Decoding*. Sender-message-receiver is the sole communication flow that has been widely recognized up to this point. However, Hall presented a novel communication flow scheme known as the circulation circuit. According to Hall (in Morissan, 2015), there are four steps in communication, which are as follows:

1. Production: This process involves encoding messages based on prevailing societal ideologies, after which the message producer communicates societal values and views.
2. Circulation: In this process, the presentation of the message influences the audience's reception and digestion.
3. Use (Consumption/Understanding): This step requires an engaged recipient to decipher the message. In terms of audience comprehension, this procedure is rather intricate.
4. Reproduction is the process through which the audience interprets the message using their own experiences and beliefs. We can define the reproduction process as the audience's reaction to the delivered message.

Encoding and Decoding

Model of Encoding and Decoding Before sending the message to the recipient, a communicator prepares it using the code they think is most effective. This procedure is known as encoding. Decoding, on the other hand, is how the communicator's message is understood by the recipient. In this phase, the recipient tries to piece together and interpret the symbols or codes that were sent by the sender in their entirety. According to Morissan (2015), the process by which the source converts thoughts and ideas into a format that the recipient's senses can understand is known as encoding. This phenomenon is because the meaning that the media intends to convey is not always the same as the meaning that the audience interprets or receives (in Inriyanti et al., 2022).

Decoding refers to the audience's ability to understand communication and compare it with the meaning they have previously retained. We use our views, presumptions, and past experiences to interpret messages that other people send us. In cultural studies, deciphering media signals is a crucial step. We acknowledge that a large amount of the information that society consumes comes from the media and audiences, who unwittingly accept, support, or embrace the concepts advanced by prevailing ideologies (Morissan in Ilfiyasari & Malau, 2021).

The process of creating media text, including media activities that create particular communication messages using language codes, is referred to as encoding. Conversely, decoding is the process by which the viewer deciphers codes to extract meaning from the text. Another way to conceptualize the receiving (decoding) action is to view it as the process of converting or interpreting physical messages into a format that makes sense to the recipient (Sarah & Kurniasari, 2022).

The encoding-decoding process applies to the following three audience classes:

1. The dominant position, also known as hegemonic reading, refers to a scenario where the public internalizes the message that the media disseminates. In this instance, the media conveys its message through the cultural norms of the prevailing society.
2. Negotiated position (negotiated reading), which characterizes the audience's stance of typically supporting the prevailing ideology while rejecting its application in other situations.
3. Oppositional reading, which happens when a group of people use various words or phrases to critically reinterpret media messages or codes. The public has varying opinions about the topics that are presented in the media.

METHODOLOGY

According to Moleong, data sources are one of the most vital elements in research. There are two types of data sources commonly used in social research: primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data is data obtained directly from research subjects by applying measurement tools or direct data collection tools to the subjects as the source of information. The research method used is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. This research seeks to understand trends on the TikTok platform related to Generation Z, specifically regarding the topics "umur 25 harus punya apa" and "ga apa-apa kan kalau..." through the perspectives of male and female students at Universitas Islam Riau. Data sources were determined using a purposive sampling technique, with the following informant criteria: 1. Active students at Universitas Islam Riau. 2. Born between 1997 and 2012 (Gen Z). 3. Have a TikTok account and actively log in at least once a day. 4. Are aware of the TikTok trends mentioned in the title. 5. Willing to be interviewed.

This research was conducted at Universitas Islam Riau, with a duration of one year. Data collection methods include interviews and documentation. Interviews were conducted directly to obtain the subjects' perceptions and thought patterns regarding the research problem, while documentation provided historical data in the form of records, letters, and artifacts.

Data analysis was conducted by integrating the techniques of Miles and Huberman, which involved interactive activities including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure data validity, the researcher used triangulation techniques, which confirm the consistency of findings from various methods and data sources.

Based on this research, it is hoped that students and the general public can utilize information about social media content, assess positive and negative content, and understand cross-gender perspectives. The research also aims to broaden understanding in the fields of social sciences, humanities, and communication.

Table 1. Informants

No	Name	Faculty	Gender
1.	A.H.K	<i>Psikologi</i>	Female
2.	H.A	<i>Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis</i>	Female
3.	R	<i>Fisipol</i>	Female
4.	I	<i>Teknik Informatika</i>	Male
5.	O	<i>Ilmu Komunikasi</i>	Male
6.	S.N	<i>Fakultas Hukum</i>	Male

Source: Researcher's Data, 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As we approach the age of 25, many of us unknowingly experience significant changes in our lives. This shift can be challenging, even making some people feel confused and anxious. Research conducted by Martin (in Herdian, 2023) states that individuals experiencing a Quarter Life Crisis with higher levels of anxiety are more common among millennial students than older age groups. The quarter-life crisis is included in the stage of human development from adolescence to adulthood, where individuals will experience a period of transition and face various crises, both physically and psychologically. At this stage of development, individuals will begin to plan their life goals and future (Nurhadianti, 2021). One of the factors that causes individuals to experience a quarter-life crisis is changes in interpersonal relationships, work and financial scope, self-identity, and academic problems (Allison in Sari, 2021). Additionally, some other causes are social media and social pressures, which can trigger feelings of anxiety, discomfort, loneliness, and even depression (Budiarti, 2021).

The impact of a Quarter Life Crisis is highly varied, with a tendency toward negative effects. The impacts include emotional instability, increased stress, high anxiety, decreased mental health, and can lead to depression because individuals feel pressure from the uncertainty of the future, especially regarding their careers and personal lives. The Quarter Life Crisis phenomenon occurs in response to questions present in the social environment. Questions that arise at that age are about work, marital status, relationships, and so on. The situation with that question confused individuals about what would happen in the future. This crisis is caused by individuals growing and developing, which demands life choices regarding work, financial capabilities, and marriage. Individuals feel more depressed when they compare their lives to idealized images of social life around them, especially from the social media they consume daily. Many of these images depict things considered ideal by some, and audiences with low literacy and emotional maturity are exposed to assuming that this idealism is general.

First of all, let's look at it from a career perspective. By the age of 25, the majority of male informants begin to feel pressured because they feel they haven't yet achieved their desired position or success in their careers. They might feel anxious because their peers have already started successful careers, while they are still stuck in the same place. Additionally, relationship issues can also be a trigger for a quarter-life crisis in men. At the age of 25, many of them begin to feel pressured by societal expectations to settle down in a serious relationship or even get married. They might feel unprepared to take such a big step, but they also don't want to feel alone amidst the pressure from their surroundings. Not only that, but the pressure to achieve personal accomplishments can also be a heavy burden for some men at the age of 25. They might feel dissatisfied with what they've achieved, or burdened by the expectations set by parents, friends, or society. Pressure from family, friends, and the general public often becomes a heavy burden for 25-year-olds. In this highly competitive society, the expectation to achieve certain accomplishments, whether in career, education, or personal life, can create pressure that affects one's mental well-being.

For female informants, it is believed that those who may not have decided to get married and still choose a career will be the subject of gossip from those around them. Therefore, for women aged 25, there aren't many other options besides getting married as soon as possible. For some people, they might choose a different path by pursuing a career. But even that wasn't free from the gossip of the social environment around them. It's a different story when they live in urban societies that don't see age as a basis for marriage. Indeed, the position of women at this age is very difficult. Not only will the community environment put pressure on them, but also family members who may be affected by the pressure from the social environment.

In reception theory, contextual factors influence how audiences read media, as Hall stated. Encoding is the process of structuring meaning by media

producers who attempt to articulate codes that represent a system of signs as desired by the producers. Decoding, on the other hand, is the process of meaning-making by the audience according to their social and cultural context when consuming or receiving media texts. Encoding is done by message producers, while decoding is done by message recipients. For Hall, both may have different backgrounds and experiences, making it possible for differences to occur between them in interpreting the message.

Placement of Informants into Stuart Hall's 3 Audience Positions

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The analysis of the informants' responses regarding the *"umur 25 harus punya apa"* trend indicates that by the age of 25, everyone is generally expected to have a job, a house, and financial stability. Success is defined by achieving one's goals, having a stable income, and being self-sufficient. In the context of gender, although there is no significant difference between men and women in achieving success, societal expectations for men tend to be higher. Although the informants haven't felt that pressure yet, they are aware that this reality could affect their future life decisions. Social pressure mostly comes from friends and social media, especially TikTok, and this significantly influences one's outlook and future life decisions. Although on TikTok, most 25-year-olds' achievements are about money or high income, some informants believe there are other things that can be achieved first, such as a career, while others prioritize personal relationship stability, such as getting married. Career success is considered important for financial security. Other achievements that should be considered are skill development, mental health independence, and even better relationships with family or the social environment.

Meanwhile, the *"ga apa-apa kan kalau..."* trend is seen as a way to make peace with one's life journey, where it's brave to admit that different achievements are normal. Everyone's achievements cannot be compared because their starting lines are different. Plus, the process they went through—some were easy, some difficult, and some very difficult. This trend is considered more positive than the previous one because it is felt to provide emotional support, but it also has the potential to lead to apathy toward someone's efforts to try harder to achieve what they want. From a gender perspective, men are more focused on financial and career stability, while

women face greater expectations regarding marriage. When categorized into Stuart Hall's 3 reception positions, the following results were obtained:

1. Dominant

The majority of informants agree with the philosophy behind the "*ga apa-apa kan kalau...*" trend. Although they have big dreams, some of which are family demands, they are aware that happiness in life doesn't come from just one thing.

2. Negotiation

In this position, almost all female informants believe that the two trends are balanced, meaning that although they personally have big dreams, the social environment still accepts women who don't achieve career success, as long as they succeed in other areas, such as getting married.

3. Oppositional

This position primarily involves the acceptance of male informants, who do not fully agree with the "*ga apa-apa kan kalau...*" trend. They believe that men are naturally providers in society, so they must strive to succeed by the age of 25 or so, at least financially.

Comparing oneself to peers becomes a common phenomenon at the age of 25. Social media and everyday social interactions often serve as a means of comparing one's own achievements with those of others. As a result, individuals may feel insignificant or doubt their abilities and achievements. This comparison not only includes achievements in career or education, but also other aspects such as relationships and lifestyle. Generally, we tend to assume that people who are 25 years old are indeed considered adults, regardless of their background or level of education. Even if they are in college, they must have already graduated and not be a burden to their parents.

CONCLUSION

In the context of media consumption, reception theory plays a crucial role in understanding how individuals perceive societal norms. Encoding occurs when media producers create messages according to certain codes, while decoding is the audience's interpretation influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds. This theory indicates that varying interpretations among audiences emerge from their diverse experiences and contexts.

The responses from informants regarding societal expectations at 25 reveal a general presumption that individuals should attain stable employment, housing, and financial security by this age. While both genders face pressure, societal expectations for men tend to be more stringent. Most informants acknowledge that while they haven't yet felt significant pressure, they are cognizant of how these expectations could impact their future

decisions, particularly under the influence of social media platforms like TikTok, which often highlight material achievements.

Trends stating "ga apa-apa kan kalau..." indicate a cultural shift towards accepting varied life paths and achievements, suggesting emotional support among peers while potentially fostering apathy towards striving for personal goals. Although men often prioritize financial and career stability, women navigate greater societal expectations regarding marriage.

Within Stuart Hall's three audience positions, informants' reactions are categorized as follows: the majority reflect a dominant position supporting the " ga apa-apa kan kalau..." trend, recognizing that happiness derives from multiple life aspects; females often negotiate by balancing personal ambitions with social acceptance; meanwhile, male informants are more likely to adopt an oppositional stance, adhering to the traditional view that men should be financial providers by their mid-20s. This comprehensive analysis illustrates the nuanced pressures faced by 25-year-olds and the role of societal expectations in shaping their life trajectories.

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