

Young Generation Perceptions of Marriage: Analyzing the #MarryIsScary Hashtag on TikTok

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the TikTok hashtag #MarryIsScary influences young people's negative perceptions of marriage. As social media shapes public discourse, this research examines the role of TikTok in amplifying marriage-related anxieties. Using a qualitative digital ethnographic approach, this study analyzed 100 videos and 1,000 comments associated with #MarryIsScary to assess dominant narratives and user engagement. Findings indicate that 68% of videos portray marriage negatively, citing fears of commitment, financial burden, and emotional instability. Additionally, 60% of comments reinforce these concerns, reflecting a growing skepticism toward marriage, especially among women aged 18-30 years. TikTok's algorithm further amplifies these views, fostering an echo chamber effect. The platform serves as both a public discourse space and a reinforcement mechanism for shifting social values. Young users actively engage in discussions that challenge traditional marital expectations, revealing evolving attitudes toward relationships and long-term commitments. To counterbalance negative marriage narratives, a creative educational approach is needed. Engaging, positive content can provide a more realistic perspective on marriage, supporting informed decision-making among young users.

KEYWORDS
Hashtag, Tiktok,
Marry Is Scary,
Content,
Perception

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is traditionally considered as one of the important stages in a person's life, which carries not only personal but also social impacts. However, views on marriage are now experiencing a significant shift, especially among the younger generation (Marini et al., 2022). They are starting to question the relevance of marriage in modern life, which is marked by changes in social values and increasing awareness of personal issues, such as career, mental health and individual freedom (Utomo & Sutopo, 2020). This critical

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view of marriage is increasingly visible on social media, especially TikTok, which has become a space for the younger generation to express their thoughts and feelings (Knox, n.d.)

TikTok, as one of the fastest growing social media platforms, has become a medium that not only functions as entertainment but also a place to share opinions and life experiences (Saurwein & Spencer-Smith, 2021a). One phenomenon that has attracted attention is the use of the hashtag #MarryIsScary, which reflects TikTok users concerns about the institution of marriage (Blumer, 2009). This hashtag is used to share content that criticizes marriage and expresses various fears, such as commitment, financial burdens, and social expectations that are considered burdensome (Chung, 2022). This content often goes viral, reinforcing negative perceptions of marriage among its users.

The younger generation, especially those from the millennial group and Gen Z, are the population segments that most actively use social media and are often both producers and consumers of digital content (Wicks et al., 2024). They are more open in expressing views that differ from traditional norms, including regarding marriage. (Permadi, 2023) TikTok provides a space that allows them to express themselves in creative ways, such as through short videos that combine humor, criticism and personal experiences. TikTok's algorithm that promotes content based on user interactions amplifies the spread of this narrative, which ultimately influences public perception more broadly (Nasrullah & Gustini, 2022).

In contrast to previous generations who saw marriage as a social necessity, today's young generation tends to see it as a choice that needs to be considered carefully. A study by (Marini et al., 2022) shows that marriage expectations among Gen Z are strongly influenced by individual factors such as career, emotional stability, and personal life balance (Ausat, 2023). This contributes to the emergence of narratives against marriage on social media, which further strengthens their uncertainty about the institution.

The presence of the hashtag #MarryIsScary on TikTok reflects a new social reality where marriage is no longer considered the main goal in life, but rather as one of many choices that may be taken or avoided. The narrative developing on TikTok shows a shift in social values driven by fear of commitment and changes in relationship dynamics (Madhani et al., 2021). Content generated through these hashtags often depicts marriage as burdensome and scary, which can impact an individual's well-being (Rauschnabel et al., 2019).

Apart from that, the influence of social media in shaping social perceptions creates its own challenges in balancing the developing narrative (Gesundo et al., 2022). Social media, such as TikTok, not only functions as a platform for sharing content, but also as a medium that can influence and shape public opinion (Soraya & Kartina, n.d.). When negative narratives become dominant, there is a risk that these views will further strengthen negative perceptions of marriage among the younger generation. (Bell & Oquendo, 2024)

Therefore, it is important to examine further how the narrative developing on TikTok through the hashtag #MarryIsScary influences the younger generation's

perception of marriage(Elvianti & Wibowo, 2022). This research will not only provide a deeper understanding of the social phenomena that occur, but can also be a basis for designing more relevant digital educational and preaching approaches. By understanding communication and interaction patterns that occur on social media, it is hoped that effective strategies can be found to balance views on marriage among the younger generation (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

METHOD

This research uses ethnographic methods to investigate how social interaction occurs through the use of hashtags on digital platforms, especially TikTok social media. Ethnographic methods allow researchers to directly observe user behavior and understand the context of communication that occurs in online communities(Kozinets, 2015). By using this approach, research can identify communication patterns, prevailing norms, and the way social media users interact with each other and shape social narratives (Thurlow et al., 2011).

In the context of hashtags like #MarryIsScary, ethnography can help reveal how narratives about marriage are shaped, negotiated, and shared by users through comments, videos, and reactions to related content (Hasny et al., 2021). This method not only examines what is said, but also understands the cultural and social context that influences communication (Soraya & Kartina, n.d.). Ethnographic approaches in social media research enable deep insights into interaction dynamics that are not apparent in other research methods(Nasrullah, 2018)

Researchers will be directly involved in participant observation and data collection, including text, video, and various other forms of communication displayed on digital platforms (Nasrullah, 2018). Through content analysis and participation in online communities, this research is able to show how speech acts and interactions on social media reflect broader society's views on marriage (Marini et al., 2022). Ethnography is a relevant method because this research allows us to capture the nuances of communication in digital environments, understand user motivations, and explore how users participate in shaping public discourse(Saurwein & Spencer-Smith, 2021b).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research found that the hashtag #MarryIsScary on TikTok became a platform used by the younger generation to express their concerns about the institution of marriage(Rheingold, 2000) . Of the 100 videos analyzed, 68% of the content presented a negative perspective on marriage, 22% was neutral or informative, and only 10% presented a positive view of marriage. These videos contain various complaints and fears related to marriage, including financial problems, social pressure, and emotional instability.

User interactions via comments show a similar pattern. Of the 1,000 comments collected, 60% of comments supported a negative narrative about marriage, 25% showed a neutral or informative attitude, and 15% contained support or a positive view of marriage. Many comments highlighted concerns about marital failure and questioned the relevance of marriage in a modern context.

Analysis shows that content that uses engaging visual effects and popular music tends to be viewed and commented on more, thereby reinforcing the spread of emerging narratives (Bell & Oquendo, 2024). Videos with interesting visual effects get an average of 50% more views than videos without them. TikTok's algorithm plays a significant role in spreading this content, with 75% of users reporting that #MarryIsScary-related content appeared on their feed without them looking for it.

Interviews with several TikTok creators who actively use the hashtag #MarryIsScary reveal that they feel freer to voice opinions that are not in line with traditional norms through this platform. Most creators stated that they used TikTok as a medium to share personal experiences and critical views on marriage that are rarely discussed openly in society.

In terms of demographics, the majority of users who interact with this hashtag are aged between 18-30 years, with the proportion of women being 65% and men being 35%. This shows that women are more active in expressing their fears or dissatisfaction with the concept of marriage. This fact indicates the need to balance narratives about marriage on social media with a more constructive perspective.

This discussion shows that TikTok has become a significant medium in shaping social perceptions about marriage, especially among the younger generation. The use of the hashtag #MarryIsScary reflects changes in values and expectations regarding marriage which are no longer seen as a necessity, but as a choice that can be reconsidered. Content that goes viral through this hashtag plays a role in influencing public opinion and spreading negative views towards the institution of marriage.

The TikTok algorithm, designed to maximize user engagement, plays a crucial role in the dissemination of critical content related to marriage. Videos that incorporate popular visual effects and trending music tend to appear more frequently on users' feeds, reinforcing the dominant negative narratives surrounding the topic. This algorithm does not merely function as a content distribution tool but also as a powerful opinion-shaping mechanism, influencing how audiences perceive and respond to such discussions.

By prioritizing content with high interaction rates—such as likes, shares, and comments—the algorithm amplifies controversial or emotionally charged discussions, making them more visible and widespread. As a result, users are repeatedly exposed to similar perspectives, creating an echo chamber effect where critical views on marriage gain greater traction and validation. This process shapes public discourse, particularly among younger audiences, and influences their perceptions of long-term commitment.

Ultimately, TikTok's algorithm not only determines which content gains popularity but also subtly molds social attitudes by amplifying certain viewpoints over others. This highlights the increasing influence of digital platforms in shaping

contemporary social norms and underscores the need for balanced and diverse content to provide a more comprehensive perspective on marriage.

Further discussion reveals that most of the users who interact with this hashtag are the younger generation who are at the phase of life where the decision to get married is important. TikTok gives them a space to express their fears and doubts regarding marriage without worrying about social stigma. This shows that social media platforms function not only as entertainment media but also as social discussion spaces that influence personal views and decisions.

The existence of gender differences in interactions with this hashtag shows that women are more open in expressing their fears about marriage. This may be due to greater social expectations for women in marriage, such as household responsibilities and motherhood. The developing narrative shows a gap between traditional expectations and the modern reality that women face in marriage.

The negative narrative developing on TikTok regarding marriage also raises concerns about the long-term impact on broader social perceptions. If not balanced with a positive or educational view, this narrative can strengthen negative stigma and fear of marriage among the younger generation. Therefore, there is a need to present content that balances views on marriage and presents a more constructive perspective.

In this context, digital da'wah through platforms such as TikTok becomes very relevant. A creative and adaptive approach is needed to convey positive messages about marriage, which are not only relevant to the lives of the younger generation but are also visually attractive and interactive. Education that involves a balanced understanding of the challenges and beauty of marriage needs to be developed to provide a more realistic and positive picture.

Table 1. The study findings

Category	Description	Percentage
Percentage of Videos Based on Marriage Narrative	Negative	68%
	Neutral	22%
	Positive	10%
Percentage of Comments on Marriage Views	Supporting negative narrative	60%
	Neutral or Informative	25%
	Supporting Positive Views	15%
Difference in Viewership Based on Visual Effects	Videos with attractive visual effect	50% more viewers
Gender Proportion of Interacting Users	Women	65%
	Men	35%

The findings of this study indicate that TikTok plays a transformative role in shaping social perceptions of marriage, particularly among millennials and Gen Z. The widespread use of the #MarryIsScary hashtag suggests a shift in how marriage is

perceived—not as an inevitable life milestone, but as a choice that requires critical reconsideration. Through viral content, TikTok has become a powerful medium for reinforcing and disseminating negative views of marriage, further influencing younger users' attitudes toward long-term commitment.

A key factor in this phenomenon is TikTok's algorithm, which prioritizes content that generates high engagement, such as videos with controversial, emotional, or relatable themes. This algorithmic system not only distributes content but also shapes public discourse by repeatedly exposing users to similar narratives. The resulting echo chamber effect strengthens the perception that marriage is risky, financially draining, and emotionally taxing, especially for women who face higher societal expectations regarding household responsibilities and motherhood.

Additionally, the fact that women engage with this hashtag more than men reflects gendered concerns about marriage. Women's participation in this discourse suggests that traditional marital expectations are increasingly being questioned, with many expressing anxiety about financial dependence, loss of autonomy, and societal pressures. This aligns with previous studies indicating that younger generations prioritize personal growth, emotional stability, and financial independence before considering marriage (Marini et al., 2022; Utomo & Sutopo, 2020).

The long-term implications of these shifting perspectives are noteworthy. If the dominant narrative surrounding marriage continues to be negative, fewer young people may view marriage as a desirable or viable life choice, potentially leading to societal changes in family structures, birth rates, and relationship dynamics. The continuous reinforcement of fear-based narratives could also contribute to a rise in commitment avoidance and long-term relationship scepticism among younger generations.

Given the potential societal impact of this negative marriage discourse, it is crucial to introduce balanced and constructive narratives that provide a realistic and holistic view of marriage. The study suggests that strategic digital engagement, including educational and interactive content, is necessary to counteract the dominant negative perceptions surrounding marriage. By leveraging social media effectively, a more diverse and nuanced discussion can be fostered, allowing young users to see marriage beyond the extremes of idealization or fear-driven narratives.

One of the most effective approaches is promoting digital education on marriage. Content creators, educators, and influencers should collaborate to develop engaging and informative content that highlights both the challenges and benefits of marriage. Instead of presenting overly romanticized or excessively critical portrayals, digital campaigns should focus on realistic narratives. These could include successful marriage stories, practical relationship advice, and discussions on personal growth within committed relationships, helping young audiences gain a comprehensive understanding of marriage.

Another important strategy is encouraging meaningful discussions through positive hashtags. Alternative hashtags such as #MarriageMatters or #HealthyRelationships can be promoted to broaden the discourse on marriage. By diversifying perspectives and providing alternative spaces for conversation, these

hashtags can help balance the overwhelming presence of #MarryIsScary, offering a more constructive and solution-oriented narrative.

Since TikTok's algorithm prioritizes visually engaging and highly interactive content, it is essential to utilize creative and visually engaging formats for educational messages about marriage. Short videos incorporating humour, storytelling, Q&A sessions, and interactive elements may be more effective in capturing and maintaining audience interest. Content that is both entertaining and informative has a higher chance of being widely shared, ensuring that positive and balanced narratives reach a broader audience.

Additionally, engaging social and religious leaders in digital da'wah can be a powerful tool in shaping a more informed and constructive conversation around marriage. Religious and social leaders can leverage TikTok and other digital platforms to contribute culturally relevant, well-informed, and engaging discussions about marriage. A nuanced and adaptive approach is needed to connect with young audiences, addressing their concerns and doubts without enforcing rigid traditional norms that may feel outdated or out of touch with their lived experiences.

Finally, it is essential to encourage critical media literacy among young users. Social media users should be equipped with the ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret the content they consume. Schools and online communities can promote awareness campaigns on how social media algorithms influence perceptions and shape discourse. Encouraging users to question viral narratives and seek multiple perspectives can foster independent, well-rounded views on marriage, rather than allowing negative stereotypes to dominate their understanding.

By implementing these strategies, the discourse surrounding marriage on TikTok can be reshaped into a more constructive and balanced conversation, empowering young people to make informed and thoughtful decisions about their relationships and future commitments.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this research shows that TikTok, through the hashtag #MarryIsScary, has become a significant platform in forming negative perceptions of marriage among the younger generation. Most of the content using this hashtag puts forward narratives of fear and worry related to marriage, such as financial burdens, emotional instability, and social pressure. TikTok's algorithm that promotes content based on user interactions amplifies the spread of this narrative, thereby influencing the public's views at large, especially among the 18-30 year age group.

User interactions on TikTok, such as comments and response videos, reflect a significant shift in social values, where marriage is no longer seen as a necessity but as an option that can be reconsidered. This phenomenon is supported by data showing that 60% of comment support a negative view of marriage and women are the group most

active in voicing their dissatisfaction. This indicates the need for a more balanced and educative discussion space to offset the negative narrative that is developing.

As an influential social media platform, TikTok not only functions as an entertainment medium but also as a public space that shapes personal opinions and decisions. Therefore, a creative and relevant digital educational and preaching approach is needed to convey positive and constructive messages about marriage. This is important to ensure that the younger generation gets a balanced and realistic picture of marriage, so that they can make decisions that are wiser and in line with positive social values.

While it is essential to acknowledge the valid concerns expressed through this discourse, a more balanced and constructive narrative must be fostered to prevent an overly negative or fear-driven perception of marriage. Leveraging digital education, creative content, and meaningful discussions can help reshape social perceptions, offering a more comprehensive and realistic view of marriage for the younger generation.

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