

Algorithmic Exposure and Gamophobia: A Study of TikTok's "Marriage is Scary" Content Among Generation Z Women in Bogor City, Indonesia

Dwi Rini Sovia Firdaus

Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Pakuan University, Jl. Pakuan, RT 02/RW 06, Tegallega, Kecamatan Bogor Tengah, 16129 Kota Bogor, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study examines the association between perceived exposure to algorithmically curated TikTok content and fear of commitment to marriage (gamophobia) among Generation Z women in Bogor City, Indonesia. Drawing on Algorithmic Communication Theory, Cultivation Theory, and Cultural Script Theory, it explores how repeated exposure to negative marriage narratives in personalised content is associated with views of marriage in a collectivist culture. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 100 Generation Z women aged 15 to 29 who regularly use TikTok and are familiar with the hashtag "Marriage is Scary." Perceived content exposure and gamophobia were measured using self-report Likert-scale instruments, and data were analysed using simple linear regression. Greater perceived exposure to "Marriage is Scary" content was significantly associated with higher gamophobia scores ($\beta = 1.057$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 35.1% of the variance. Three dimensions of perceived content exposure were assessed: ideological assumptions about marriage ($M = 3.24$), perceived credibility of content sources ($M = 3.22$), and persuasive tone ($M = 3.31$). Gamophobia was most strongly expressed as panic about marriage ($M = 3.33$), followed by anxiety when discussing marriage ($M = 3.19$) and fear of self-disclosure ($M = 3.17$). Given the cross-sectional design, the findings indicate an association rather than a causation, suggesting that personalised algorithmic content may be linked to the formation and change of views on marriage while highlighting the potential influence of customised social media content on marriage-related anxiety among Generation Z women in Bogor City, Indonesia.

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E-mail address:

rinfirdaus@unpak.ac.id (Dwi Rini Sovia Firdaus)

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a sacred and legal bond between a man and a woman. In fact, some religion

consider marriage as a worship. However, in recent years the decision to get married has changed. Many Generation Z choose to postpone marriage or even do not want to get married. They tend to be more hesitant to decide long term commitment. This change is not only happening in Western countries, but also in various countries in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. Previously, marriage was seen more as a social, cultural, and religious obligation, rather than an individual choice.

Data shows the number of registered marriages in Indonesia has declined in recent years. This decline began to be seen since the late 1990s. In 2022, the number of recorded marriages is still decreasing to 1,705,348, and in 2023, the number drops again to 1,577,255, which is the lowest number since 1997 (Fauziyah & Putri, 2024). Several structural factors such as economic uncertainty, education levels, and changes in gender roles are already contributing to these changes. It is alleged that digital media can also influence the younger generation's views on marriage. For Generation Z, social media is not only a place to have fun, but also an important platform to understand relationships, norms, and the direction of life in the future.

TikTok differs from other platforms due to the existence of a "For You Page," which utilises algorithms to display content tailored to users to keep them engaged. Short videos aired on the "marriage is scary" account share stories about the dangers and injustices that can potentially occur in

marriage (Jarwan & Abu- Al-Rub, 2024). While this kind of content often exposes real concerns and experiences (Asy'ari & Amelia, 2024), its repeated appearance on TikTok raises questions about how marriage-related concerns can change the perception of young women in Indonesia who are juggling their lives and trying to balance social and religious expectations.

Departing from this background, this study explores the impact of watching "Marriage is Scary" content on TikTok on gamophobia among women from Generation Z in Indonesia. By attributing this phenomenon to the framework of algorithmic communication theory and cultivation theory, this study aims to explain how a personalised digital world is able to shape views on marriage, particularly in a collectivist culture that is undergoing rapid social change. The trend of "Marriage is Scary" that is widely talked about by women who are ready to get married raises the urgency that this condition requires further and thorough study. The hashtag has spawned thousands of videos that expose fears and doubts about marriage from a woman's point of view (Asy'ari & Amelia, 2024).

Figure 1 illustrates the volume of hashtags related to "Marriage is Scary" as of January 2025, while Figure 2 displays the search interest trend for the same topic, with a peak occurring between August 11 and 17, 2025. This clearly indicates significant interest among netizens in the evolving discourse surrounding the fear of commitment within Generation Z.

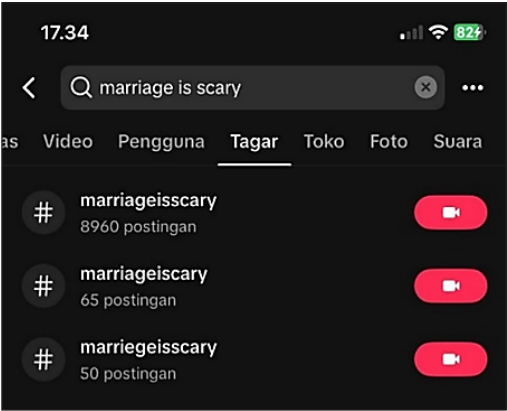


Figure 1. Volume of #MarriageIsScary content on TikTok (N = 9,075 posts as of January 2025)
Source: Tiktok, 2025

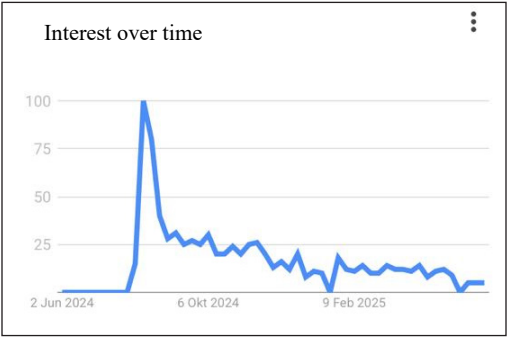


Figure 2. Google Trends search interest for “Marriage is Scary” (August-December 2024)
Peak interest occurred August 11-17, 2024
Source: Google Trends, 2025

According to Tirta & Arifin (2025), the phenomenon of “Marriage is Scary” among Generation Z is influenced by various psychological, social, and cultural factors, where social media plays an important role. On sites like TikTok, the “Marriage is Scary” trend often discusses issues such as infidelity, divorce, and problems that arise in long-term relationships, so gamophobia has become more common in Indonesia. This phenomenon affects people of different ages

and backgrounds (Safiudin, 2024; Jarwan & Abu- Al-Rub, 2024). Women seem to be more sensitive to gamophobia due to high levels of anxiety and social pressure to marry (McLean et al., 2011; Jarwan & Abu- Al-Rub, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Exposure and Relationship Cognition

However, algorithmically curated platforms introduce new patterns of exposure: whereas audiences actively select what they view on traditional media, TikTok’s algorithm recommends content that may repeat similar narratives (Karizat et al., 2021), which may reinforce existing attitudes over time.

New research in Human Communication Research indicates that using social media can change how people think their relationships should be by making them compare themselves to other people. Bouffard et al. (2022) discovered that TikTok usage diminished relationship satisfaction due to social comparison. Tong et al. (2011) demonstrated that the selection of one's online presentation establishes unattainable standards for relationships. But most of these studies were about how good romantic relationships are, not about how people feel about marriage in general. They also came out before TikTok and other similar sites became very popular.

This body of work is valuable but has two limitations relevant here: it focuses predominantly on relationship quality rather than attitudes toward marriage as an institution, and it relies on Western samples

collected before platforms such as TikTok achieved their current level of algorithmic curation.

Customised Content Ecosystems and Algorithmic Communication

The theory of algorithmic communication says that modern social media sites change how people talk to each other a lot by using automated content curation systems that tailor the information users see based on how likely they are to engage with it (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014). Broadcast media works on a one-to-many basis, while algorithmic platforms make content ecosystems that are different for each user. This has four major effects on how people think:

1. Personalised Content Ecosystems:

Many observers describe TikTok's recommendation algorithm as "unprecedentedly powerful" because of its ability to identify and promote content users' preference (Anderson, 2020). Researchers call this process the "algorithmic filter bubbles," where users increasingly encounter content aligned with their existing beliefs which may strengthen those beliefs over time (Pariser, 2012).

2. Filter-Bubble Reinforcement:

Algorithmic reinforcement offers a new lens on how relationship-related attitudes are shaped online. When a Generation Z woman watches a "Marriage is Scary" video to completion or shares it, the algorithm registers this

engagement and recommends similar content. As a result, she may be exposed to a concentration of content that is unfavourable toward marriage. Contents that may not accurately reflect the state of most marriages but instead reflects the algorithm's focus on engagement (Guess et al., 2021).

3. Micro-Cultivation Environments:

Algorithmic Communication Theory posits that this stream of tailored content creates a "micro-cultured environment," in which attitudes may shift more quickly than through traditional mass media (Beam, 2014). Whereas broadcast television has historically shaped public attitudes gradually, algorithmic platforms can make specific topics highly visible within weeks or months (Thorson & Wells, 2015). This suggests algorithmically structured platforms may accelerate attitude change by concentrating exposure within a short period.

4. Engagement-Based Content Distortion:

Algorithmic systems prioritise engagement over representativeness. Content that depicts unusual or extreme events is nonetheless often promoted because it tends to trigger strong emotional responses (Cotter, 2021). As a result, algorithms may focus more on dramatic and emotional narratives of betrayal or abuse, as such stories are extremely rare.

These algorithmic systems tend to surface predominantly negative narratives about marriage to Generation Z women who engage with them. This dynamic may intensify marriage-related anxieties in Indonesia, where traditional marriage expectations are increasingly in tension with values of modern individualism. Building on this personalised-exposure mechanism, the following subsection considers how the emotionally resonant, first-person format of this content amplifies its persuasive power through narrative processes.

User-Generated Content and Narrative Persuasion

Research in communication demonstrates that personal narratives carry substantial persuasive power (Green & Brock, 2000). Audiences are more likely to believe user-generated content when it feels authentic and relatable, and repeated exposure to marriage-related narratives can shift attitudes through this narrative-persuasion process (Carr & Hayes, 2014; Dal Cin et al., 2004). Short, emotionally engaging stories that require little deliberation make TikTok an especially effective platform for narrative persuasion (Appel & Richter, 2007). Generation Z users who tend to prioritise authenticity, are more likely to trust sources that appear to present real, unfiltered experiences (Schroth, 2019). These narrative dynamics operate within a broader cultural framework of marriage-related expectations, which the next subsection addresses through Cultural Script Theory.

Cultural Scripts and Psychosocial Communication Processes

Cultural Scripts Theory, put forward by Schank & Abelson (1977), argues that people absorb typical behavioural patterns from their culture, known as “scripts”. These scripts help them act and understand certain situations. For example, marriage scripts contain culturally inherited expectations regarding the timing of marriage, the choice of partners, roles based on gender, and life journey (Lahad & Kravel-Tovi, 2019). However, the content on TikTok with the theme “Marriage is Scary” offers an alternative script that tests pre-existing expectations. This digital script highlights the importance of individual freedom, the expectation of an equal partnership, and the acceptance of postpone or reject marriage in order to achieve personal satisfaction (Asy’ari & Amelia, 2024).

Psychosocial Mechanisms

Two communication mechanisms appear to link cultural scripts to individual attitudes. First, social comparison processes lead Generation Z women to evaluate their relationship prospects in comparison to those of their peers, similar to behaviours observed on TikTok (Festinger, 1954). When comparison referents report unfavourable outcomes, expectations diminish due to availability heuristics that prioritise salient examples (Tversky & Kahnema, 1971). Second, narrative transportation makes people feel like they are really going through what someone else is going through. This means they are less likely to question what

you say and more likely to believe it (Green & Brock, 2000). When people read first-person accounts of trauma, they might start to feel the same way as the people telling the stories.

Theoretical Integration: An Accelerated Micro-Cultivation Mechanism

Classic Cultivation Theory assumes relatively homogeneous, long-term exposure to mass media and explains how such exposure can gradually shape audience beliefs on its own, however, it does not account for how exposure becomes individually targeted and self-reinforcing. Algorithmic Communication Theory supplies this missing mechanism: personalised curation and engagement-based amplification mean that a single expression of interest, such as a completed view and a share, can trigger a cascade of increasingly similar content, compressing into a much shorter window, a process that classic cultivation theorised as unfolding over years of broadcast exposure. Cultural Script Theory explains why this algorithmically curated content is especially likely to be experienced as threatening in a collectivist context, where marriage is understood as a social and religious obligation rather than an individual choice. Content that frames marriage as risky directly contests an internalised cultural script rather than merely adding new information.

Integrating these three perspectives, this study proposes an accelerated micro-cultivation mechanism specific to algorithmic platforms, in which personalised

curation (Algorithmic Communication Theory) intensifies and speeds up the belief-shaping process described by Cultivation Theory. The resulting content is interpreted through, and gains its emotional force from, culturally inherited marriage scripts (Cultural Script Theory). This integration is this paper's specific theoretical contribution. It explains not only that algorithmic exposure and gamophobia are associated, but why algorithmic platforms may be associated with attitude change more quickly, and along different lines, than the mass-media environments on which cultivation theory was originally built.

Generation Z and Digital Communication

Adaptability to the digital environment is a hallmark of Generation Z, who also show a preference for visual-based communication and a sceptical view of traditional institutions (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). They rely on social media as a primary source of information in shaping their views. Every day, an estimated 85% are active on social media, while 60% - 70% report feeling stressed or anxious from time spent on TikTok (Arief, 2025), a pattern consistent with broader evidence linking frequent TikTok use to elevated anxiety symptoms among young users.

Women in Generation Z are more likely to have anxiety disorders than men from the same or earlier generations (McLean et al., 2011), which may make them more susceptible to anxiety-inducing content. Research indicates that women report greater relationship-related anxiety and

engage more with relationship-related content on social media (Arief, 2025; Dhir et al., 2018).

Marriage in Indonesia's Evolving Social and Cultural Context

We have talked about how cultural scripts and algorithmic communication change how people think and feel. Now we will look at the unique cultural setting in Indonesia that makes women of Generation Z more likely to be affected by content that says, "Marriage is Scary." Indonesia is a good place to learn about how people feel about marriage because it has both old and new ways of life. Indonesia has the most Muslims of any country in the world and is the fourth most populous country. It has strong collectivist cultural values, and marriage is seen as a social and religious duty that brings families and communities together (Nilan, 2008).

This situation creates a cultural conflict, because on the one hand Generation Z Indonesian women must face their parents' expectations to be ready for marriage, while on the other hand they want to achieve success and independence. They feel a "role conflict," which means they are trying to balance being a modern career woman and a traditional girl who wants to get married (Bennett, 2005). This cultural divide may make them more likely to feel that the content of "Marriage is Scary" reinforces their fears that marriage will limit the freedom and opportunities they have.

According to APJII approximately 79.5% of Indonesians use the internet,

of whom 157.6 million are TikTok users (Widiyan et al., 2025), reflecting rapid national adoption of digital technology. actualisation, and gender equality. This trend diverges from collectivist norms surrounding marriage in Indonesia (Nilan, 2008). Indonesia's Generation Z women experience confusion between the cultural norms they learn in their families (marriage is important, inevitable, and is the primary role of women) and the digital norms they encounter in cyberspace (marriage is a choice, can be restrictive, and requires careful choice of partners).

Gamophobia: Conceptual Definition and Emerging Research

Many people are not familiar with the term gamophobia, which describes as a fear of commitment. This fear is especially related to marriage. The term comes from the Greek words "gamos" meaning "marriage," and "phobia" meaning "fear." Although psychological research has addressed commitment phobia, the influence of digital media on gamophobia has not been widely studied (Paska & Laka, 2024). People who experience gamophobia not only feel constant fear but also tend to avoid talking about marriage because they have anxiety about starting a commitment (Cherry, 2025).

Cross-cultural study from Jordan showed that women are more susceptible to gamophobia than men. This is due to emotional expectations and pressure from society which are often heavier for women than for men regarding marriage (Jarwan & Abu- Al-Rub, 2024). Research that

explores the influence of digital media use on gamophobia outside Western countries has not been found.

Prior works of (Bouffard et al., 2022) and (Tong & Walther, 2011) focused on studies about (1) measured relationship/romantic-partner satisfaction rather than attitudes toward marriage as an institution, (2) used Western, pre-TikTok era or platform-agnostic samples, and (3) did not isolate a single algorithmically amplified hashtag phenomenon. To our knowledge, this is the first quantitative study to link exposure to a specific algorithmically curated TikTok trend to gamophobia in a non-Western, collectivist, Muslim-majority setting.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

The combination of algorithmic communication theory, cultivation theory, and cultural script theory in Indonesia resulted in the following hypotheses and research questions.

H1: Generation Z women in Bogor City, Indonesia who watched the video “Marriage is Scary” on TikTok tended to show signs of gamophobia. The more often they are exposed to this kind of content, the higher the level of anxiety they experience. The hypotheses are that cultural tensions in Indonesia regarding the role of women and algorithmic reinforcement both contribute to negative views of marriage. It is alleged that the content “Marriage is Scary” is biased and changing people’s views on the

marriage institution because it is created by Generation Z.

The next three research questions explore the mechanisms and moderating factors:

RQ1: How can the “Marriage is Scary” content shape one’s views on marriage? Considering their ideological assumptions, the source reflection, and the tone of the information conveyed.

RQ2: What forms of gamophobia emerge? Does it lead to fear of self-disclosure? Anxiety during discussions? Or panic about commitment?

Exploratory Supplementary Analysis (not a formal research question): In addition to RQ1 and RQ2, we conducted an exploratory, post-hoc analysis of variance in gamophobia scores across levels of content exposure, to examine whether unmeasured individual or cultural factors might help explain differences not captured by the confirmatory hypothesis and research questions above. Because residual variance is not itself a well-formed research question, this analysis is reported separately from RQ1/RQ2 as hypothesis-generating rather than confirmatory, and any discussion of unmeasured moderators (e.g., family communication, religiosity, media literacy) should be read as speculative rather than as a finding of this study. This exploratory analysis is reported and clearly distinguished from the confirmatory RQ1/RQ2 findings in the Results and Discussion section.

METHODS

Planning the Research and Choosing a Sample

This research employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of exposure to algorithm-driven TikTok content on gamophobia. The explanatory approach enables hypothesis testing, while the cross-sectional design illustrates current phenomena, such as the decline in marriage rates and the emergence of "Marriage is Scary" content.

Population and Sample

The study's participants were women from Generation Z (ages 15 to 29 at the time of data collection) who resided in Bogor City, Indonesia, and were habitual TikTok users acquainted with "Marriage is Scary" content. We chose the city because many people there are on social media. According to the national statistics, there were 126,100 women from Generation Z living in Bogor City (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Bogor 2025, 2026). Slovin's formula was used only to determine the minimum required sample size from this known population; at a 10% margin of error, it does not itself constitute a probability sampling method. The resulting minimum sample size was 100 respondents.

We used purposive sampling, supplemented by snowball recruitment, to identify participants meeting the following criteria: (1) identified as female; (2) ages 15 to 29; (3) resided in Bogor City; and (4) used TikTok regularly and were familiar with "Marriage is Scary" content. This is a non-probability sampling approach,

and findings should be interpreted with its associated generalisability limits in mind (see Limitation). Awareness of the content was defined as being able to recognise the phrase "Marriage is Scary" have having viewed at least one TikTok video on this theme within the preceding three months.

Data Collection Procedures

From December 2024 to January 2025, data was gathered in two waves. The survey tool was tested by Wave 1 (N = 30) to make sure it was correct and reliable and to find any problems with it. Wave 2 (N = 100) collected primary data via Google Forms distributed to: (1) university student networks (n = 51); and (2) snowball sampling from the initial respondents (n = 49). It took 15 to 20 minutes to complete the survey. There were no incentives offered.

Ethical Considerations

Everyone who participated agreed to do so. People in Indonesia are very sensitive about marriage, so the survey made it clear that people could choose to take part and that their answers would be kept secret. People were told they could leave at any time and skip questions.

Measures

Independent Variable: Exposure to Content Related to "Marriage is Scary"

Following Neuendorf (2017), this study assessed perceived content exposure using a 13-item instrument spanning three dimensions of perceived message characteristics. Responses to all items

were recorded on five-point Likert scales, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree.” The average score for all 13 items ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.54$, $\alpha = 0.78$) yielded the overall perceived content exposure score. As detailed in the Limitations, this instrument captures perceived characteristics of the content (ideological assumptions, perceived source credibility, and persuasive tone) rather than objective, behavioural exposure (e.g., viewing frequency, watch time, or algorithmic reach).

Sample Items:

1. *Ideological Assumptions* (4 items, $\alpha = 0.605$): Your beliefs about marriage come from how you see things. "I believe that 'Marriage is Scary' content can alter my perception of marriage."
2. *Source of Messages* (4 items, $\alpha = 0.642$): How people feel about how trustworthy and responsible the sources of the content are. For example, "I trust 'Marriage is Scary' content more when it comes from my own experience than from research."
3. *Tone of Information* (5 items, $\alpha = 0.652$): The emotional and persuasive aspects of how information is presented. For instance, "The tone of 'Marriage is Scary' content tends to make people afraid of marriage."

Dependent Variable: Gamophobia

Jarwan & Abu- Al-Rub (2024) gamophobia was assessed using 18 items

across three dimensions, using the same five-point Likert format described above. The average across all 18 items ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.58$, $\alpha = 0.92$) yielded the overall gamophobia score.

Sample Items:

1. *Fear of Self-Disclosure* (6 items, $\alpha = 0.858$): Not being able to tell your partner how you feel. "I'm scared to tell my partner about my flaws because I'm scared of getting hurt or being left behind."
2. *Anxiety When Discussing Marriage* (6 items, $\alpha = 0.841$): Feeling anxious and not wanting to talk about marriage. For example, "My partner talks about marriage, and it makes me nervous."
3. *Panic About Marriage Concept* (6 items, $\alpha = 0.895$): a strong fear of making a commitment to marriage. For instance, "The idea of being responsible for a lot in marriage makes me feel anxious."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample Characteristics

The final sample ($N = 100$) consisted exclusively of Generation Z women aged 15 to 29 years ($M = 22.3$, $SD = 2.8$). Twenty-eight percent of people are 18 to 20 years old, thirty-five percent are 21 to 23 years old, twenty-nine percent are 24 to 26 years old, and eight percent are 27 to 30 years old. 22% of people have a high school diploma, 51% are currently in college, 23% have a college degree, and 4% are graduate students

or have already graduated. Everyone who was there said they had watched "Marriage is Scary" contents before.

Data Analysis

The assumption tests indicated no infringement of linearity ($\text{sig} = 0.143$), normality ($\text{sig} = 0.240$), or heteroscedasticity ($\text{sig} = 0.189$). This means that it is possible to use linear regression.

RQ1: What do people think about "Marriage is Scary" content?

Through descriptive analysis, moderate levels of agreement were found across the dimensions of perceived content exposure. The three highest mean scores were persuasive tone ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.55$), ideological assumptions ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.58$), and perceived source credibility ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.61$). These patterns suggest exposure operates with a variety of viewing angles. Ideological assumptions seem to influence basic beliefs about marriage, while perceived credibility and emotional tone reinforce these beliefs in everyday life.

RQ2: Gamophobia Expression

RQ2 explores gamophobia expression in a variety of fields. Fear of marriage obtained the highest score ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.61$), followed by anxiety when talking about marriage ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.58$), and fear of sharing feelings emotionally ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.64$).

Exploratory Supplementary Analysis: Variance Across Exposure Levels

This exploratory analysis examined patterns of variance to identify possible unmeasured moderators and is not part of the confirmatory RQ1/RQ2 findings above. In the demographic analysis, age ($r = 0.12$, $p = 0.234$) and education ($r = 0.09$, $p = 0.381$) showed no significant association with gamophobia scores. However, participants who reported similar levels of content exposure displayed highly variable gamophobia scores: within the highest quartile of exposure, scores ranged from 2.41 to 4.67, spanning nearly the full scale.

Three levels of gamophobia were identified: Low (score < 2.5 , $n = 18$), Moderate (score $2.5-3.5$, $n = 54$), and High (score > 3.5 , $n = 28$). This group faces very different amounts of content: Low ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.61$), Medium ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.56$), High ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.48$), $F(2,97) = 18.43$, $p < 0.001$. Even so, 23% of individuals with high levels of gamophobia reported higher exposure than the median, suggesting that exposure alone does not determine risk.

These patterns suggest that unmeasurable variables, such as family communication quality, religious adherence, media literacy, cultural identity strength, and prior relationship experience may help explain the relationship between content exposure and gamophobia. This interpretation is speculative and hypothesis-generating rather than a tested finding of this study. The unexplained variance (64.9%) indicates that further investigation of these potential moderators is warranted.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Content Exposure Effects on Gamophobia

Simple linear regression analysis indicated a significant association between content exposure and gamophobia. The study employed several statistical tests to examine the influence among Generation Z women in Bogor City.

1. *Simple Linear Regression Analysis* in Table 1 revealed a positive relationship between the variables, expressed through the equation $Y = 13.337 + 1.057X$.

From Table 1 we understand that each 1 percent increase in perceived exposure was associated with a 1.057-point increase

in gamophobia score. The constant value of 13.337 represents the baseline gamophobia level when content exposure is zero.

2. *Simultaneous Test (F-test)* in Table 2 yielded an F-value of 53.040 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that perceived algorithm-driven content exposure was significantly associated with gamophobia among Generation Z women in Bogor City.
3. *Coefficient of Determination* in Table 3 explains that the research can solve 35.1 percent of the problem about the effect of content exposure on gamophobia, while could not explain the remaining 64.9 percent.

Table 1
Simple linear regression analysis

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardised B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardised Coefficients Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	13.337	6.183		2.157	.033
“Marriage is Scary” content	1.057	.145	.593	7.283	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Gamophobia					

Source: Data processing results using SPSS

Table 2
Simultaneous test

ANOVA					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	1870.109	1	1870.109	53.040	.000 ^b
Residual	3455.331	98	35.258		
Total	5325.440	99			
a. Dependent Variable: Gamophobia					
b. Predictors: (Constant), “Marriage is Scary” content					

Source: Data processing results using SPSS

Table 3
Coefficient of determination

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.593 ^a	.351	.345	5.938
a. Predictors (Constant), “Marriage is Scary” content				

Source: Data processing results using SPSS

Relative to typical effect sizes in communication effects research, in which media-exposure variables commonly account for 10% to 20% of attitude variance (Slater, 2015), an effect size of 35.1% for perceived content exposure on gamophobia is comparatively large. The substantial remaining unexplained variance suggests that algorithmic media exposure operates within a broader cultural and social system rather than exerting a fully deterministic effect on its own.

Principal Findings

This study found three key findings.

Finding 1: Perceived Content Exposure Was Associated with a Substantial Shift in Marriage-Related Attitudes

Participants reported that “Marriage is Scary” content was associated with a substantial shift in their perspectives on marriage (M = 3.24), with ideology, source credibility, and tone of information all rated “high” to “very high.” These patterns suggest exposure operates across multiple dimensions simultaneously: ideological assumptions appear to shape basic beliefs about marriage, while perceived credibility and emotional tone may reinforce these

beliefs in everyday life. This is consistent with the content ecosystem functioning as a form of informal marriage education that emphasises risk more than benefit, and it contributes to ongoing research on algorithmic communication and cultivation. It also raises questions about how young users interpret relationship narratives within highly personalised media environments.

Finding 2: Gamophobia Is Common and Multidimensional

Participants reported “high” to “very high” levels of fear of self-disclosure (M = 3.17), anxiety during discussions (M = 3.19), and panic about the concept of marriage (M = 3.33). The elevated score (M = 3.40) for fear that marriage would hinder life achievements may reflect a particularly salient concern for Generation Z women, who have access to more education and career opportunities than previous generations yet continue to face gender inequality within the household (Blithe, 2015). The “Marriage is Scary” theme may resonate because it engages real concerns about role conflict and opportunity costs, even where it may portray these risks as more severe than they typically are.

Finding 3: A Significant Association Between Perceived Content Exposure and Gamophobia

Perceived content exposure accounted for 35.1% of variance in gamophobia scores ($R^2 = 0.351$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a substantial association. The positive regression coefficient ($\beta = 1.057$) indicates that greater perceived content exposure was associated with higher gamophobia in a pattern consistent with a dose-response relationship, though the cross-sectional design cannot establish causal direction. Meta-analyses of media effects more broadly tend to find small-to-moderate effects, with individual studies typically explaining 5-15% of variance in outcomes (Valkenburg et al., 2016); a 35.1% figure therefore represents a comparatively strong association, particularly given the complexity of relationship-related attitude formation.

These findings also deepen our understanding of how digital media effects mechanisms. Research on traditional media effects has focused primarily on more passive exposure such as TV viewing time, while TikTok encourages active engagement, such as liking, commenting, and sharing, which may amplify the effect through mechanisms of commitment and consistency (Cialdini, 2007). When users interact with content, they psychologically make a commitment to the implied worldview, thereby reinforcing attitude change.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of algorithmic communication, attitude change is largely influenced by continuous exposure to personalised content, rather than random influences. The results of this study support the view that algorithmic personalisation can accelerate development in the digital world. These findings reveal three possible theoretical implications. First, the role of coaching differs in algorithmic media compared to broadcast media. Customised content impacts individuals' minds more quickly than in traditional media. Second, peer-generated content is perceived as more credible than scientific data in the context of personal relationships. This makes evidence-based education less effective in algorithmic settings, where engagement is more important than representation. Third, the impact of media on culturally influenced attitudes arises from a combination of algorithmic exposure, cultural tensions, and individual characteristics, rather than solely from media determinism. A substantial portion of the variance (64.9%) remains unexplained, suggesting that important unmeasured variables exist, such as family communication, religious involvement, media literacy skills, and past experiences.

This research suggests that “Marriage is Scary” content resonates because it engages with real concerns that make some women in Bogor City apprehensive about marriage, including gender injustice, the threat of domestic violence, and the financial pressures associated with marriage.

Effective intervention likely requires combining media literacy with broader social change addressing these underlying inequalities, rather than media literacy alone. Further research should employ longitudinal designs to help clarify cause-and-effect relationships, including measuring algorithmic exposure directly rather than relying solely on perception, assessing moderating factors such as family communication and religious involvement, and conducting cross-cultural comparisons and evaluations of media literacy interventions. As algorithmic platforms increasingly shape perceptions of romantic relationships, it is important for individuals to understand these platforms' role in order to make informed relationship decisions in the digital age.

IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

Media Literacy Education

Because this study uses a cross-sectional, correlational design, it cannot establish that exposure to "Marriage is Scary" content causes gamophobia; the recommendations below therefore vary in their evidentiary basis and are noted within each subsection as either directly supported by this study's findings (evidence-based) or informed by the broader literature rather than by this study's data (literature-informed). This outcome reveals that gamophobia is closely associated with perceived content exposure among Bogor City's Generation Z women, highlighting the importance of media literacy that engages critically with algorithms, such as:

1. **Understanding Algorithmic Curation:** Generation Z women may benefit from recognising that the "For You Page" on TikTok does not represent objective information; it displays what the algorithm predicts will attract the most interaction (Bucher, 2018a). Factors such as watch time, likes, and shares rank highest in TikTok's recommendation system. Over time, individuals may grow more convinced of their beliefs if they repeatedly encounter the same content.
2. **Evaluating Content Representation:** Critical viewers may benefit from asking whether content reflects typical experiences or an extreme, memorable minority. When encountering stories titled "Marriage Is Scary," it's essential to reflect, "Is this experience statistically common, or memorable due to its rarity? " What experiences are absent from my feed? Schools should teach the concept of availability heuristics explicitly and guide students in finding statistical data that clarifies their thoughts.
3. **Seeking Diverse Information Sources:** Algorithm-literate users may balance positive and negative perspectives on marriage, factual research, and diverse cultural viewpoints to avoid echo chambers. Literacy programs ought to equip learners with active curation strategies, like following accounts with differing viewpoints and intentionally interacting with challenging content to receive broader recommendations.

4. Managing Emotional Responses:

Algorithmic platforms aim to engage users on an emotional level, so literacy should include recognising when content instils fear and learning how to cope, such as taking breaks when feeling upset and seeking support beyond their network (Gross, 2002).

Mental Health Services

When treating relationship anxiety, doctors should ask their patients how much time they spend on social media. This is because 60-70% of people who use TikTok a lot have mental health problems (Arief, 2025). Intervention must not disregard genuine concerns. "Marriage is Scary" talks about real issues that should scare people, like domestic violence and being treated unfairly. Some clinical interventions could be:

1. **Evaluation of Exposure:** Clinicians working with clients who present with relationship or commitment anxiety may consider asking about their exposure to "Marriage is Scary" content during intake.
2. **Reducing Content Exposure:** Suggesting that clients who are very anxious take short breaks from TikTok to lower their exposure.
3. **Cognitive Reframing:** Questioning wrong ideas about marriage that come from things that don't show the truth.
4. **How to Handle Things:** People should know how to deal with their feelings when they see or hear something that makes them mad.

Content Creator and Platform Accountability

The findings suggest that content creators share some responsibility for how their content is interpreted by audiences (literature-informed). Creators have a right to share personal experiences freely; however, the finding that 92% of participants expect content to reflect accurate information suggests a gap between creator intent and audience interpretation (evidence-based). Content creators might therefore consider: (1) contextualising experiences by noting that personal stories may not be statistically typical; (2) providing information about risk-reduction strategies alongside accounts of negative experiences; and (3) discussing difficult topics seriously without amplifying their perceived severity beyond what the underlying issue warrants.

Pre-Marital and Relationship Education

Traditional premarital education could more directly address concerns raised by "Marriage is Scary" content (literature-informed). Findings from this study indicate that marriage-related anxiety is most strongly associated with fear of lost aspirations ($M = 3.40$) and diminished friendships ($M = 3.37$) (evidence-based), suggesting that education programs might usefully address: (1) individuality, by offering strategies for balancing independence and closeness; (2) equitable partnership, by providing concrete approaches to dividing household responsibilities fairly; (3) friendship maintenance, by illustrating how marriage

can complement rather than replace existing friendships; and (4) personal growth, by showing how marriage can support rather than limit goal pursuit.

Simply reassuring Generation Z that media coverage exaggerates their concerns is unlikely to be effective. A more productive approach may be to support informed relationship decision-making by listening to their underlying concerns and providing practical tools to address them.

Population-Level Implications

Gamophobia induced by certain categories of algorithmically curated content may have downstream consequences for individual marriage decision-making and for population-level marriage rates in aggregate. Indonesia's marriage rate dropped by 7.5% in one year (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), 2024). However, this decline could reflect adverse dynamics (such as media-amplified fear) or more favourable ones (such as women gaining greater control over their own lives and fewer marriages entered under social pressure); this study cannot establish that content exposure caused the national decline in marriage rates, only that content exposure is associated with gamophobia within this sample. Women exhibited elevated gamophobia relative to men, potentially reflecting women's comparatively greater exposure to domestic violence, financial dependence on partners, and career disruption associated with marriage. Improving media literacy, alongside addressing the structural conditions that make marriage a genuine

source of concern for women, may help mitigate these effects.

LIMITATION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Creating Cross-Sectional Design and Formulating Causal Inference

Exposure to content related to gamophobia may indicate reverse causality, as individuals prone to marriage-related anxiety may seek out content that exacerbates their fears. There may also be a bidirectional relationship, such as a spiral of use and effect, where fear leads to content seeking, which intensifies fear, which then leads to further seeking. Future research should use longitudinal or experimental methodologies to clarify the causal direction.

Perceived Versus Objective Exposure

The independent variable in this study captures Generation Z women's perceptions of "Marriage is Scary" content's ideological assumptions, source credibility, and persuasive tone, rather than objective or behavioural exposure (e.g., frequency of viewing, watch time, number of videos encountered, or algorithmic reach). Future research should pair self-report measures with platform-provided analytics, such as TikTok's screen-time and content-history data, to measure exposure more directly.

Sample Limitations

First, the results of this study may not be relevant to Generation Z women who do not use TikTok, have never seen this

content, or use TikTok but dislike it. Second, the sample from Bogor City may not truly reflect conditions in rural Indonesia, where traditional marriage values are more dominant and access to technology is more limited. Third, the results may not be applicable to other countries with different marriage traditions, gender roles, and family structures. It is important to conduct similar research across cultures, particularly to determine whether the impact is felt more strongly when the content conflicts with traditional values or when individual choices are already significant.

Moderators that Were Not Assessed

This study did not examine important moderating factors that could explain the observed differences, such as the effectiveness of family communication, parental marital satisfaction, participation in religious activities, strength of cultural identity, media literacy, coping styles, previous relationship experiences, financial situation, or career advancement. These unassessed factors may account for 64.9% of the unexplained variance.

How to Determine Your Level of Gamophobia

Instead of conducting clinical interviews, this study employed a self-report questionnaire to explore gamophobia symptoms. The measurement tool used has good psychometric properties; however, it may not accurately detect clinically significant gamophobia that meets the criteria for a specific phobia. In future

research, researchers should apply clinical evaluations to differentiate between normal marital problems and pathological phobias.

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