



The algorithm's gaze: Gender, age, and the structuring of TikTok content consumption patterns in urban Indonesia (A case study in Surabaya)

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ABSTRACT

TikTok was one of the fastest-growing social media platforms in Indonesia, particularly among Gen Z and millennials. This article aimed to analyze the role of the TikTok algorithm in shaping content consumption patterns based on gender and age. The study employed a qualitative approach using two main techniques. First, content analysis was conducted on 200 popular videos appearing on the For You Page to identify thematic tendencies. Second, in-depth interviews were carried out with 30 active users in Surabaya (15 women and 15 men), selected purposively based on the intensity of their usage and the diversity of their backgrounds. These findings were complemented with data from two audiences' insight platforms revealing fluctuating gender distribution among TikTok users in Indonesia. At certain periods, women dominated the user base, while at other times, men accounted for a higher percentage. This dynamic indicated that the TikTok algorithm was responsive not only to individual preferences but also to demographic shifts. The results showed that women were more likely to consume lifestyle, beauty, and aesthetic-related content, whereas men more frequently engaged with humor, sports, and technology. The novelty of this study lay in the finding that Gen Z demonstrated flexibility in crossing gender stereotypes; for instance, women actively engaged with technology content, while men were interested in beauty-related content. Thus, the TikTok algorithm functioned both to reinforce gender- and age-based preferences and to provide space for identity negotiation within the digital cultural sphere. This study contributed to gender, technology, and social media studies in Indonesia.

Keywords: Gender; TikTok; Technology; Algorithm.

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ABSTRAK

TikTok merupakan salah satu platform media sosial dengan pertumbuhan paling pesat di Indonesia, terutama di kalangan Gen Z dan milenial. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis peran algoritma TikTok dalam membentuk pola konsumsi konten berdasarkan gender dan usia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan dua teknik utama. Pertama, analisis konten terhadap 200 video populer yang muncul pada beranda For You Page untuk memetakan kecenderungan tema. Kedua, wawancara mendalam dengan 30 pengguna aktif di Surabaya (15 perempuan dan 15 laki-laki) yang dipilih secara purposive berdasarkan intensitas penggunaan dan keragaman latar belakang. Data ini diperkaya dengan temuan dari dua platform audience insight yang menunjukkan variasi distribusi gender pengguna TikTok di Indonesia. Pada periode tertentu, perempuan tercatat lebih dominan, sementara pada periode lain laki-laki justru lebih tinggi persentasenya. Dinamika ini mengindikasikan bahwa algoritma TikTok responsif terhadap perubahan demografi sekaligus preferensi pengguna. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perempuan lebih sering mengonsumsi konten gaya hidup, kecantikan, dan estetika, sedangkan laki-laki cenderung mengakses konten humor, olahraga, dan teknologi. Kebaruan studi ini terletak pada temuan bahwa Gen Z menunjukkan fleksibilitas dalam melampaui batasan stereotip gender; misalnya, perempuan aktif mengikuti konten teknologi, sedangkan laki-laki tertarik pada konten kecantikan. Dengan demikian, algoritma TikTok berfungsi ganda: memperkuat preferensi berbasis gender dan usia, namun sekaligus membuka ruang bagi negosiasi identitas di ranah budaya digital. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada kajian gender, teknologi, dan media sosial di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Gender; TikTok; Teknologi; Algoritma.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of modern society's daily life. Among various social media platforms, TikTok has experienced rapid growth globally, including in Indonesia. Based on data from We Are Social & Hootsuite (2023), TikTok has more than 92 million active users in Indonesia, making it one of the social media platforms with the most users in this country. Most TikTok users in Indonesia are the younger generation, especially from 16 to 34 year age group, most of whom live in urban areas. This is supported by the ease of internet access and technology which is more evenly distributed in urban areas compared to rural areas.

TikTok has also become a global phenomenon with more than 1 billion monthly active users (Statesman, 2023). The platform stands out for its advanced algorithms, which are able to recommend content to users based on their preferences and previous interactions. However, despite its popularity, TikTok presents challenges in a gender context, because this platform's algorithm has the potential to strengthen gender stereotypes or biases that exist in society. Cyborg feminism explains the interaction between humans and technology, as well as how technology shapes gender identity (Haraway, 1985). Zuboff (2019) also explains how technology and algorithms, especially in the context of digital capitalism, control and shape human behavior. Van Dijck (2018), in addition, discusses how social media shapes a culture of connectivity and how technology, including algorithms, mediates social interactions.

This article explores how algorithms organize information and content across various media platforms, as well as their impact on their users (Gillespie, 2014). This research examines how YouTube users attempt to manage their visibility through understanding and adapting to the platform's algorithms (Bishop, 2019). In all the research above, it is very relevant to discuss how the TikTok algorithm works within the framework of surveillance capitalism to influence content consumption patterns based on gender and age. In addition, it explores algorithms as one of the non-human actors that play a role in user experience on digital platforms such as TikTok.

Meanwhile Noble (2018) shows how search algorithms reinforce social bias, including racism and sexism, Chen et al., (2016) analyze how social media algorithms filter content and influence user interactions. This is relevant in understanding whether the TikTok algorithm also reinforces gender stereotypes or treats gender differently in content recommendations. Understand how TikTok serves content based on demographic factors such as gender and age. This research differs from Bucher's, exploring the power of algorithms in regulating the visibility of content on Facebook and how algorithms create tensions between visibility and invisibility (Bucher, 2012). This concept can be applied to understand how TikTok displays or hides content based on user demographics. Meanwhile, the data shows that TikTok actually displays demographic data.

In the context of gender and technology, Haraway (1985), a prominent feminist, has made important contributions to the theory of cyborg feminism. In his book "A Cyborg Manifesto" he emphasized that technology, including social media such as TikTok, is not separate from social and political constructions, but is part of a complex relationship between humans and technology. He emphasizes that gender identity is no longer tied to the biological body, but is instead constructed through our interactions with technology and media. This is relevant to TikTok, where algorithms can shape users' perceptions of gender, through the repetition of content that reinforces or changes existing gender norms.

A number of scholarly articles have explored the role of algorithms in reinforcing gender bias on social media. For example, Eubanks (2018) in his book "Automating Inequality" shows how digital algorithms can reproduce social injustice, including gender inequality. Additionally, a study by Noble (2018) in "Algorithms of Oppression" examines how digital search algorithms reinforce racial and gender bias. Despite this, there is still little research that specifically explores how the TikTok algorithm influences users' gender experiences in Indonesia, especially among urban communities.

Research on algorithms and gender in social media generally focuses on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Google, while studies on TikTok are relatively limited, especially in the Indonesian context. In addition, the majority of international research on TikTok discusses aspects such as entertainment, marketing, and social interaction patterns, without an in-depth focus on how the TikTok algorithm influences gender construction in urban communities. Through the use of Haraway's cyborg feminism theory, this research seeks to explore more deeply the relationship between digital algorithms, gender identity, and age, which is expected to enrich literature related to technology and gender in the digital era. In Indonesia, although data shows that the majority of TikTok users come from urban communities, there are still limitations in research looking at how the TikTok algorithm interacts with gender and age in shaping user experience. This research gap provides room for

further studies to explore how the TikTok algorithm shapes gender perceptions and experiences among urban users, as well as how the interaction between age and gender influences content preferences.

This study provides new insights into the role of TikTok's algorithm in shaping content consumption patterns across gender and age in Indonesia by combining user interviews with audiences' insight data. Unlike previous research that primarily emphasized algorithmic reinforcement of existing preferences, this study demonstrated how Gen Z users actively crossed gender stereotypes in their content choices. The findings highlight the dual function of the algorithm: reinforcing demographic tendencies while simultaneously enabling identity negotiation in digital spaces. This dual perspective offers a fresh contribution to gender and media studies in the context of Indonesia's dynamic digital culture.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of algorithms in shaping digital experiences has increasingly become the focus of critical scholarship in media and gender studies. In examining *The Role of the TikTok Algorithm in Forming Content Consumption Patterns Based on Gender and Age in Surabaya, Indonesia*, it is necessary to situate the discussion within broader theoretical debates about technology, gender identity, and media culture. Donna Haraway's seminal work, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), laid the groundwork for understanding technology not as a neutral instrument but as a socio-political force that actively participates in shaping identity. Haraway (1991) argued that the cyborg, a hybrid of human and machine, symbolizes the breakdown of rigid binaries, including male and female. This perspective is particularly relevant for TikTok, where the algorithm functions as a "cyborg" mediator that channels users into gendered consumption categories while also enabling hybrid expressions of identity. In Surabaya, TikTok users embody this hybridity by both conforming to and resisting algorithmically reinforced gender stereotypes.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity further enriches the understanding of how TikTok mediates identity (Butler, 1990). Butler emphasized that gender is not an innate essence but rather a performative act, continuously reiterated through practices, gestures, and discourses. On TikTok, gender performances are not only enacted by users but also amplified by the algorithm, which prioritizes certain forms of content. For example, women's repeated engagement with beauty tutorials and lifestyle vlogs reinforces normative femininity, while men's engagement with humor, sports, and technology reiterates hegemonic masculinity. Yet Butler's framework also reveals the algorithm's potential to destabilize norms, as alternative performances such as women engaging in technology content or men in beauty and fashion are algorithmically amplified and circulated to wide audiences. In Surabaya, where digital culture among Gen Z is vibrant and dynamic, these subversive performances are particularly visible, showing that TikTok is a site where performativity both consolidates and disrupts gender categories.

Theories of masculinity provide further insights into how algorithmic content curation intersects with age and gender. Connell (2005) explained the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which describes cultural forms of masculinity that dominate and marginalize both femininities and non-hegemonic masculinity. On TikTok, the algorithm often amplifies content that reflects hegemonic masculine ideals, such as sports challenges, fitness routines, or technological

demonstrations. Kimmel (2008) in Guyland complements this by showing how young men, particularly in transitional stages of life, construct their identities through humor, peer validation, and the avoidance of vulnerability. Comedy skits that emphasize physical strength, competitiveness, or emotional detachment are frequently promoted on TikTok, normalizing these behaviors as markers of masculinity. At the same time, the platform provides space for alternative masculinities, such as men expressing vulnerability or engaging in beauty tutorials, illustrating the dual role of the algorithm in reinforcing and challenging dominant masculine norms.

Female users' experiences on TikTok can be better understood through McRobbie (2009) critique of post-feminist media culture. In *The Aftermath of Feminism*, McRobbie argued that the media often presents women as empowered subjects, but this empowerment is deeply tied to consumerist ideals of beauty, fashion, and lifestyle. TikTok exemplifies this contradiction: while female creators in Surabaya gain visibility and economic opportunities through influencer culture, their content often revolves around aesthetic self-presentation and domestic roles. This dynamic reflects what McRobbie described as the post-feminist paradox where women's increased visibility is coupled with a reinforcement of consumerist femininity. However, deviations exist, as many young women in Surabaya increasingly produce content on technology, comedy, and social issues, pushing back against restrictive gendered scripts. Thus, TikTok becomes a contested site where empowerment and limitation coexist, shaped by the logics of algorithmic amplification.

Beyond gender theory, critical scholarship on algorithms underscores the political nature of recommendation systems. Noble (2018), in *Algorithms of Oppression*, demonstrated how search engines perpetuate racial and gender biases, challenging the myth of algorithmic neutrality. Noble's findings are relevant to TikTok, where algorithmic patterns appear to sort users into gendered categories of content consumption. For instance, the repeated recommendation of beauty and lifestyle videos to women and sports or humor to men reflects how algorithms function as cultural actors that perpetuate inequality. However, algorithms can also amplify counter-narratives. On TikTok, male beauty influencers and female technology creators gain visibility, albeit often in tension with the algorithm's broader logics. The dual nature of reinforcement and resistance makes TikTok an important site for examining the politics of algorithmic bias.

When integrated, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the role of TikTok's algorithm in shaping gendered content consumption. Haraway's cyborg feminism highlights the hybrid entanglements of humans and machines; Butler's performativity explains how gender is both reiterated and destabilized through algorithmically amplified acts; Connell and Kimmel illustrate how masculinities are reproduced and contested through media practices; McRobbie emphasizes the contradictions of post-feminist visibility and consumerist femininity; and Noble demonstrates how algorithms reproduce systemic bias while also enabling counter-narratives. Together, these perspectives frame TikTok not simply as a platform for entertainment but as a cultural technology that organizes social relations in ways that are both restrictive and liberating.

In the context of Surabaya, these theoretical insights take on particular significance. As one of Indonesia's largest and most diverse cities, Surabaya represents a microcosm of the nation's digital culture. The city's young population actively engages with TikTok as both

consumers and producers of content, negotiating their identities in interaction with algorithmic systems. Women often encounter algorithmically reinforced norms that push them toward beauty and lifestyle, while men are directed toward humor, sports, and technology. Yet the fluidity of Gen Z's digital practices allows many to cross these boundaries, embodying Haraway's cyborg hybridity (Haraway, 1985; Haraway, 1991; Butler's, 1990) subversive performativity. TikTok's algorithm, therefore, plays a dual role: it reinforces demographic tendencies while simultaneously creating openings for identity negotiation.

Ultimately, the literature indicates that TikTok's algorithm is best understood as a socio-technical actor that both reflects and shapes cultural norms. For users in Surabaya, this means that content consumption patterns are not merely individual preferences but socially mediated experiences shaped by the interplay of algorithms, gender, and age. The theoretical frameworks discussed above demonstrate that while algorithms may perpetuate existing stereotypes, they also create new possibilities for representation and transformation. This duality makes TikTok a significant site for examining the intersections of gender, technology, and culture in contemporary Indonesia.

3. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a case study method to examine the role of the TikTok algorithm in shaping content consumption patterns based on gender and age. The case study approach was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to explore a contemporary phenomenon in depth, capturing the complex interaction between algorithmic systems and human practices within their social and cultural contexts. Qualitative research was particularly suitable since the study aimed not only to identify patterns of media consumption but also to understand how these patterns were socially constructed and interpreted by users. Previous studies on digital culture and gender, such as Yens et al., (2025), have demonstrated the importance of exploring how young people negotiate beauty standards in online spaces, while Irawati et al., (2024) showed how women's online practices reflected both self actualization and experiences of social embarrassment. These works reinforced the relevance of qualitative inquiry to capture the fluid and contested meanings of identity and representation in digital environments.

The study was theoretically grounded in Haraway's cyborg feminist theory, which emphasized the hybrid relationship between technology, identity, and social construction. Haraway's framework guided the interpretation of the TikTok algorithm not simply as a technical mechanism but as a socio-technical actor that shaped, mediated, and occasionally disrupted gender norms. By applying this lens, the research critically examined whether TikTok's algorithm reinforced traditional stereotypes such as women being directed toward lifestyle and beauty content and men toward sports and technology or enabled the emergence of more diverse expressions of identity.

The unit of analysis was TikTok users in Indonesia aged between 18 and 34 years old, as this demographic represented the largest segment of the platform's user base and was the most digitally active in consuming and producing content. To provide a manageable scope, the empirical focus was placed in Surabaya, one of Indonesia's largest urban centers. Surabaya was chosen not only for its diverse social and cultural landscape but also because it reflected broader national trends in youth engagement with digital media. Concentrating on one urban context

allowed the study to capture detailed user experiences while still offering insights that resonated with the wider Indonesian setting.

Data collection combined three complementary strategies: content analysis, in-depth interviews, and secondary demographic insights. First, content analysis was conducted on 200 popular TikTok videos that appeared on the *For You Page* (FYP). The FYP was selected because it is the primary site where TikTok's algorithm curates content, thus providing a direct window into how algorithmic mechanisms structured visibility and engagement. Videos were sampled across various genres such as beauty, lifestyle, humor, sports, and technology and analyzed to identify recurring themes and gendered representations. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 active TikTok users in Surabaya, comprising 15 women and 15 men. Participants were selected purposively, ensuring variation across gender and age categories within 18 to 34 years demographic. Semi-structured interviews explored participants' perceptions of algorithmic influence, their everyday practices of content consumption, and their reflections on whether the algorithm constrained or expanded their engagement with gendered content. Third, the study utilized data from two audience insight platforms that provided demographic information on TikTok's user base. These insights revealed fluctuations in gender composition: at certain times, women were the majority of users, while at other times men were more numerous. This dynamic distribution added important context to understanding how the algorithm adapted to changing demographics.

The process of data analysis followed several steps. Videos were thematically coded to identify dominant genres and discourses, interview transcripts were coded to reveal patterns of perception and interpretation, and the audience insight data were triangulated to situate individual narratives within broader demographic shifts. Haraway's cyborg feminist perspective was applied throughout to interpret the findings. Conceptualizing the algorithm as a cyborg, a hybrid agent that blurred boundaries between human and machine enabled the researcher to examine its dual role in reinforcing and disrupting gendered practices. This perspective also allowed the study to connect individual accounts with larger debates on identity and technology in digital society, resonating with earlier findings on social construction of beauty (Yens et al., 2025) and the ambivalent role of social media in women's self-representation (Irawati et al., 2024).

The research ensured rigor and ethical responsibility through triangulation, member checking, and adherence to ethical protocols. Triangulation across content analysis, interviews, and audience insights enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants, allowing them to confirm or refine the accuracy of the interpretations. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional research ethics board, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by the use of pseudonyms and the omission of identifiable details.

Overall, this methodology combined qualitative depth with critical theoretical framing. Content analysis captured algorithmic logics, interviews revealed user perspectives, and audience insights contextualized these within demographic patterns. The integration of Haraway's cyborg feminist theory enabled the analysis to move beyond descriptive accounts of user preferences toward a critical examination of algorithms as socio-technical actors shaping identity and social life. By focusing on Surabaya, analyzing 200 algorithm curated videos,

purposively sampling 30 users, and incorporating demographic insight data, the study provided a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of how TikTok's algorithm influenced patterns of gendered consumption and identity negotiation in Indonesia's digital culture.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

TikTok had 126.8 million users aged 18 years and over in Indonesia in early 2024, 46.5 percent of TikTok ad viewers in Indonesia are women, while 53.5 percent are men (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2024). The use of TikTok in Indonesia cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context that shapes people's digital behavior. This platform, which was originally known as an application for light entertainment, has now developed into a multifunctional medium, influencing the way Indonesian people interact, express themselves, and build their digital identity.

4.1. Gender Demographics

In Duffy & Hund (2015), women form identities and represent themselves on social media, including how algorithms influence the visibility of their content. Meanwhile, in Gray & Stein (2020), this research examines how algorithms on social media mediate interactions between users and how this influences gender dynamics. Marwick (2013) discusses how social media shapes celebrity culture and self-branding, which can be linked to TikTok's algorithm in promoting or hiding user content based on gender identity. And Marwick also discusses how social media shapes celebrity culture and self-branding, which can be linked to TikTok's algorithm in promoting or hiding user content based on gender identity.

TikTok has become a tool for driving social campaigns in Indonesia (Setiawan, 2021), including campaigns related to gender, environmental and social justice issues. TikTok also reflects social class differences (Lim, 2022), where users from the urban middle class tend to create more “polished” and aesthetic content, while users from rural or suburban areas may utilize creativity with limited resources. However, TikTok has opened up more equal access, where content from various social classes can get equal attention on this platform.

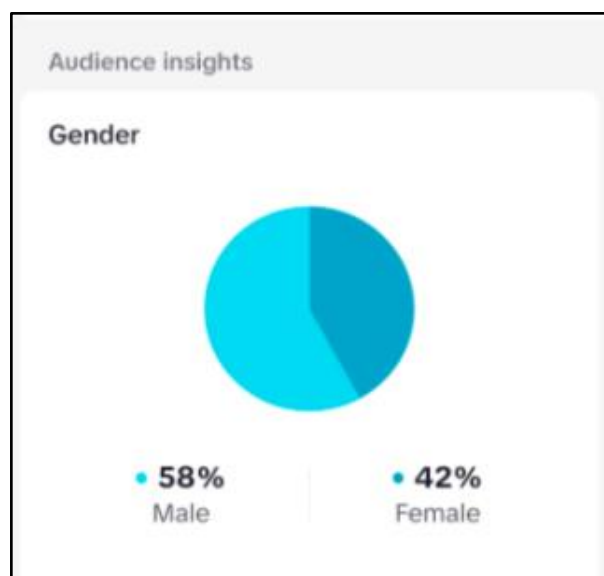


Figure 1. Gender demographics the audience who saw your TikTok video.

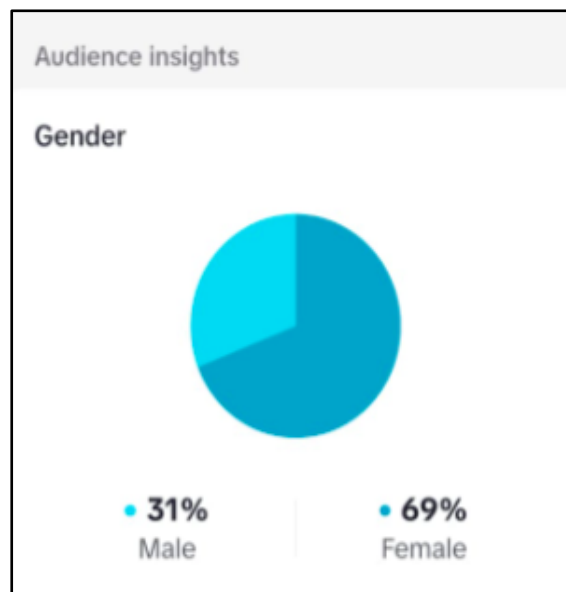


Figure 2. Gender demographics the audience who saw the TikTok video.

In Figure 1, you can see the gender distribution of the audience who saw your TikTok video, where 58% of viewers are men and 42% are women. This shows that there is male dominance in the audience of this content. From a gender research perspective, this could raise questions about how TikTok's algorithm promotes content based on gender, or whether certain types of content are more appealing to male audiences. Meanwhile, in Figure 2, the audience who saw the TikTok video was 31% male and 69% female. Abidin (2021) stated that TikTok allows a variety of gender expressions. TikTok's algorithm allows individuals to explore various gender representations without having to adhere to rigid traditional norms. For example, many male users display their feminine side through comedy or dance content, while women can perform in a more free and expressive way.

Male users on TikTok are often associated with content related to humor, sports, and masculine and other activities (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2008). Men are more often associated with comedic or satirical content, where they display humorous and sometimes masculine stereotypes, such as stupidity, physical strength, or avoidance of emotion. Male users also engage more frequently in content related to sports, fitness and physical challenges. They are often depicted as strong, powerful, and oriented towards physical achievement. Another strong stereotype is that men are more inclined towards content related to technology or gadgets, reinforcing the view that they are more rational and skilled in more technical fields.

Women on TikTok are often associated with content that is considered "feminine," such as makeup tutorials, fashion, beauty, and lifestyle tips (Gill, 2017; McRobbie, 2009). Female users often produce content such as: make-up tutorials, beauty product reviews, and skincare content, which is one form of content commonly associated with female users on TikTok. This reinforces the stereotype that women are more concerned with physical aesthetics and appearance. Apart from that, women are also active in following the dance challenge trend, which is often associated with light and fun physical activity. Even though it does not explicitly reinforce gender stereotypes, this trend positions women as subjects who show femininity through body movements. There is also a tendency to see women using TikTok as a platform

to share parenting tips or household activities, reinforcing traditional gender roles that associate women with domestic duties.

TikTok has also become a space where users can challenge and deconstruct these stereotypes (Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1991). Many male users are involved in beauty and fashion content, while female users are also increasingly active in creating content involving technology, sports and comedy. TikTok has become a platform for various forms of gender expression, including for the LGBTQ+ community, allowing for more diverse and inclusive gender representation. The emergence of male beauty influencers on TikTok, such as James Charles or local creators, shows that the expression of femininity is no longer limited to women. Some women on TikTok have also begun to actively share content related to technology, gadgets, and content that is traditionally considered "masculine".

The TikTok algorithm also has a role in reinforcing or changing gender stereotypes. In Noble (2018) and Pasquale (2015), these algorithms tend to recommend content based on interests that are often tied to a user's gender identity, but can also challenge these stereotypes by featuring content from creators who transcend traditional gender boundaries. Therefore, Turkle (2011) and Gill (2017) reported that the use of TikTok in Indonesia shows how gender stereotypes are starting to change in the context of digital culture. There is an increase in more fluid gender representation, especially among urban youth. TikTok not only reflects traditional stereotypes but also serves as a tool to break them through more inclusive and diverse representation.

4.2. Age Demographics

Below is the percentage of audience insight based on age:

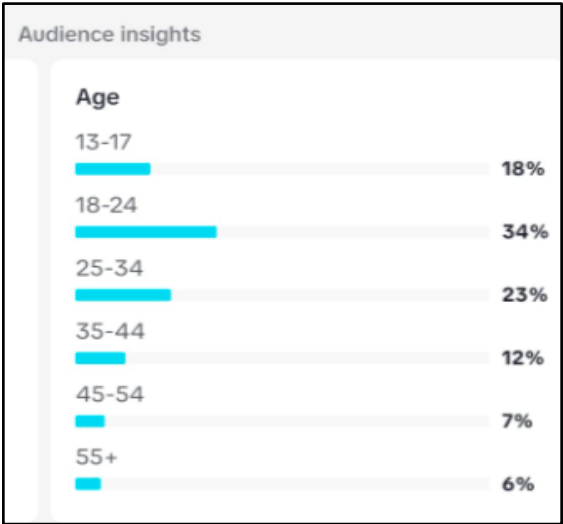


Figure 3. Age Demographics (Researcher, 2024).

Figure 3 shows the age range of the video viewers. The 18-24 year age group dominates with 34%, followed by 25-34 year olds (23%) and 13-17 year olds (18%). This gives a clear picture that the majority of your audience is the younger generation. In Abidin, TikTok offers easy-to-use tools for creating creative content, such as filters, sound effects, and intuitive video editing tools (Abidin, 2021). This appeals to the younger generation who want to experiment with their creativity and express their identity. TikTok allows them to visually express their

lifestyle, interests and personal views. TikTok's algorithm that supports content personalization based on interests strengthens young users' engagement in certain digital subcultures, so they keep returning to the platform to discover and follow new trends.

The relationship between age and gender, there is content that is interesting for both genders, if the content is viral content and becomes a global trend. Both men and women in the 18-24 age range often follow global trends that appear on TikTok. This content can be in the form of challenges, memes, or music trends. Apart from that, eShort video-based education, such as study tips, career insights, or financial education, also attracts attention from both genders. Younger generations are generally more engaged in social and political issues that are important to them, such as gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, climate change and human rights. TikTok is often a place to discuss these topics in an easy-to-digest format.

4.3. Gendered Content Consumption Patterns

The findings from both content analysis and interviews indicate that consumption on TikTok in Surabaya remains strongly gendered. Women respondents overwhelmingly reported that the algorithm frequently exposed them to lifestyle, beauty, and aesthetic content. Content analysis of 200 videos further supported this, showing that beauty tutorials, skincare routines, and fashion hauls were prominently featured in feeds associated with female users. Conversely, men reported being directed more often toward humor, sports, and technology content. Popular male-oriented videos included comedic skits, football challenges, and gadget reviews. These results resonate with Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which associates men with rationality, strength, and technical skills, while marginalizing alternative masculinity.

Similarly, they align with McRobbie's (2009) critique of post-feminist culture, in which women's empowerment is linked to consumerism and aesthetic self-presentation. TikTok's algorithmic amplification of these gendered genres suggests that it is not a neutral system but one embedded in cultural scripts that sustain traditional gender norms. At the same time, respondents described a sense of algorithmic "pushing." Several female users explained that even when they engaged with technology or humor content, the algorithm continued to privilege beauty and lifestyle videos. Male respondents similarly reported that attempts to diversify their feeds were met with persistent recommendations for sports or comedy. This reflects Noble's (2018) argument that algorithms reproduce social bias, reinforcing dominant identities and limiting exposure to alternative perspectives.

4.4. Generational Dynamics and the Role of Gen Z

While gendered patterns were prominent, the findings also highlighted significant generational dynamics, particularly among Gen Z users. Younger participants (aged 18–24) demonstrated greater flexibility in crossing gendered boundaries of content consumption. For instance, several female respondents described actively seeking out technology-related videos and gadget reviews, while some male respondents reported following beauty influencers and experimenting with fashion content. This flexibility can be interpreted through Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. Gen Z users engaged in alternative performances of gender by adopting practices typically associated with the opposite gender. These performances, once amplified by the algorithm and circulated to wider audiences, destabilized the reiteration of

normative gender categories. In this way, TikTok became a site of subversion as well as conformity.

From Haraway's (1991) perspective, these practices illustrate the cyborgian hybridity of Gen Z identities. By interacting with algorithmically curated feeds, young users in Surabaya did not simply consume content passively but negotiated their identities in dialogue with technological systems. They embodied the cyborg by merging human agency with machine-driven curation, thereby expanding the boundaries of gender expression. This generational dynamic also reflected Kimmel's (2008) observation that young men construct identity through experimentation, humor, and peer interaction. On TikTok, this experimentation extended beyond traditional masculine content, allowing young men to explore beauty and lifestyle genres without fully abandoning their masculine identities. Women, similarly, leveraged TikTok to extend their engagement beyond normative femininity into technology and political discourse, reflecting both subversion and innovation.

4.5. The Algorithm as Reinforcer and Enabler

The dual role of the TikTok algorithm emerged as the most significant finding of this study. On one hand, the algorithm reinforced existing gender stereotypes by consistently recommending gendered content categories, regardless of user attempts to diversify engagement. On the other hand, the algorithm also enabled identity negotiation by amplifying alternative performances that crossed traditional boundaries. This ambivalence is central to understanding TikTok's role in shaping digital culture in Surabaya. The reinforcement function aligns with Noble's (2018) critique of algorithmic bias and McRobbie's (2009) post-feminist paradox: the system sustains inequalities while presenting the illusion of choice.

At the same time, the enabling function reflects Haraway's (1985, 1991) cyborg feminism and Butler's (1990) performativity, demonstrating that technological systems can also create openings for hybrid and subversive identities. One female respondent, for instance, described how her engagement with technology videos eventually led the algorithm to recommend more diverse content, including discussions of gender equality in STEM fields. Another male respondent reported that following male beauty influencers encouraged the algorithm to present more fashion and aesthetic content, broadening his exposure beyond sports and humor. These cases suggest that while the algorithm defaults to reinforcing stereotypes, user agency can redirect it toward more inclusive and hybrid pathways.

The urban setting of Surabaya shaped these dynamics in meaningful ways. As one of Indonesia's largest cities, Surabaya provides relatively high internet access and a diverse cultural environment, enabling users to engage actively with global trends while negotiating local values. Respondents emphasized that TikTok was central not only to entertainment but also to identity formation, peer interaction, and even professional aspirations. The city context also highlighted class and cultural differences. Middle-class respondents often produced more polished content, aligning with McRobbie's (2009) observation of consumerist aesthetics, while working-class respondents leveraged creativity with limited resources. Despite these differences, TikTok provided a shared platform where gender performances were mediated by algorithmic curation rather than purely by social background.

This reinforces Haraway's (1991) point that technology blurs boundaries and creates hybrid spaces where identities are continuously negotiated. Taken together, the findings show

that the TikTok algorithm in Surabaya both reinforces and disrupts gendered consumption patterns. Women were directed toward beauty and lifestyle, and men toward sports and humor, reflecting traditional stereotypes and hegemonic cultural scripts (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2008; McRobbie, 2009). Yet Gen Z's willingness to cross boundaries, combined with the algorithm's capacity to amplify subversive performances, created new possibilities for gender expression (Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1985, 1991). The result is a complex interplay where TikTok functions as both a site of reproduction and transformation. This duality contributes to broader debates on algorithms and identity. As Noble (2018) argued, algorithms are never neutral but embed social values and biases. The findings from Surabaya suggest that TikTok's algorithm is deeply implicated in the reproduction of gender norms but also provides a space for their contestation. For urban youth in Indonesia, TikTok represents both a challenge and an opportunity: a platform that constrains identity through stereotypes but also enables the negotiation of new, hybrid forms of gender expression.

5. CONCLUSION

TikTok users in Indonesia are situated in an evolving socio-cultural context, where gender stereotypes remain, but are also undergoing deconstruction as the digital platform opens up to a wider range of gender expressions. TikTok functions as both a medium to reinforce and challenge gender stereotypes in society. TikTok's algorithm plays an important role in shaping users' content preferences based on age and gender. TikTok tailors users' feeds ("For You" pages) to the content they most frequently watch, like, or interact with, indirectly reinforcing gender stereotypes in content consumption patterns. For example, female users are more often directed towards beauty, fashion and lifestyle content, while men view more content related to sports, technology and comedy.

TikTok users in Indonesia are dominated by the younger generation, especially in the 18-24 year age range. They adapt more quickly to new technology and consume content that is more visual and interactive. Popular culture factors and global trends, such as dance challenges and memes, are especially appealing to this age group. Research shows that young women (18-24 years) more often consume content that focuses on beauty, lifestyle and self-expression, while young men are more interested in comedy, sports and technology content. Despite this trend, TikTok also provides a space for the deconstruction of gender stereotypes, especially among Gen Z, who are more open to flexible gender expressions. TikTok's algorithm, which is based on user interactions, may reinforce gender stereotypes if users consistently consume content that conforms to traditional gender preferences. However, the platform also allows users to explore content beyond their gender stereotypes, especially for younger generations interested in social issues such as gender equality, feminism, and LGBTQ+. TikTok is not only an entertainment platform, but also an important means for the young generation in Indonesia to express their identity, explore social issues, and form digital communities. The role of TikTok's algorithm in shaping users' experiences may influence how they view gender, especially amidst an ever-changing digital culture.

TikTok's algorithm significantly influences content consumption patterns based on gender and age, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes but also providing space for deconstruction and more fluid expression of identity, especially among younger generations. This research fills a gap in the literature regarding how digital platforms and their algorithms

can shape user experiences, as well as providing insight into the social dynamics emerging in today's digital society.

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