

Self-Deprecating Cyberculture on TikTok: Experiences of Young Indonesians

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The TikTok self-deprecating (SD) cyberculture is built on the exchange of SD memes among users who deprecate aspects of themselves on a daily basis. Predominantly composed of young people, SD memes on Indonesian TikTok reflect discourses on the daily struggles faced by young Indonesians. To explore and categorize the discourses, our research conducted a 6-month virtual ethnography, analyzing 786 videos observed through a conditioned TikTok's For You Page. This study disclosed persistent discourses in the lives of young Indonesians. The article further discusses the aspects that support TikTok's SD cyberculture in revealing private struggles that young people might hesitate to share with whom they have daily interactions.

Keywords: self-deprecation, meme, cyberculture, TikTok, virtual ethnography

TikTok is a short-video platform. It initially gained popularity as a musical application that was mostly crowded with content on dancing (Kennedy, 2020). As more creators joined the platform, the content landscape diversified. While dance content remained popular, comedic content also thrived on TikTok (Schellewald, 2021). The spectrum of comedic content on TikTok is broad. One notable form of comedy on TikTok is self-deprecating (SD) humor. Self-deprecation, a long-standing humor strategy, involves poking fun at one's personal failures, mental health, personality, physical appearance, or intelligence level (Greengross & Miller, 2008). Generally, SD memes took the form of static images. However, TikTok's unique features and accessibility have facilitated the transformation of these static memes into dynamic video formats.

In addition to adopting a new video format, SD memes have found their place in the virtual space of TikTok. The widespread circulation of these memes on the platform has contributed to the formation of a cyberculture. This cyberculture encompasses a diverse community of creators from various demographics. Among these demographics, Indonesia holds the position of the second-largest population, boasting more than 109 million active Indonesian users on the platform (Dogelio, 2023). In the SD cyberculture on TikTok

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as well, active participation is observed among young Indonesians. Furthermore, in a study by Ask and Abidin (2018), SD humor in memes serves as a means for students to express their struggles. This suggests that the memes shared in the SD cyberculture among young Indonesians on TikTok can similarly serve as a medium for expressing daily struggles.

This study aims to uncover the struggles young Indonesians communicate in TikTok's SD cyberculture. Understanding these struggles can equip individuals and institutions with valuable insights to better support young Indonesians they interact with daily. Additionally, through the use of the virtual ethnography method, this study seeks to establish a foundation for future research on TikTok cyberculture, particularly the SD cyberculture. Its potential to unveil various aspects of specific demographics makes it a compelling avenue for further exploration.

To delve deeper into the experiences of young Indonesians in the SD cyberculture on TikTok, this study seeks answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: What discourses are communicated by young Indonesians in the SD cyberculture on TikTok?

This main question is further divided into two sub-questions:

RQ1a: What role does TikTok play in shaping the messages in SD memes on TikTok?

RQ1b: What role does SD humor play in constructing the messages in SD memes on TikTok?

In this article, we argue about the capability that TikTok has as a platform to enable young Indonesians to candidly express their daily challenges, which offers unique insights into their lives. Our argument revolves around the role of TikTok as a platform and SD humor as a communication strategy, both instrumental in shaping and constructing the messages in SD memes on TikTok.

TikTok as a Platform for Memetic Communication

TikTok, with its evolution from 15-second to three-minute video uploads, provides users with a versatile platform for creative expression (Feng, Chen, & Wu, 2019; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Offering features such as recording, editing, and the addition of text, captions, and hashtags, TikTok supports diverse meme-based communications. Users leverage these tools for imitation, parody, and creative variations to connect with a wide audience. TikTok's features have not only facilitated meme creation but also nurtured a new space for memes within virtual communities. In promoting meme production, TikTok encourages user interaction by facilitating sharing, appreciation, and comments on other users' TikTok videos (Hautea, Parks, Takahashi, & Zeng, 2021). This interactive environment is crucial for memetic interaction, allowing memes to not only exist but also thrive through engagement.

To comprehend the impact of TikTok as a platform on memes, we turn to McLuhan's (1964) media ecology theory. This theory underscores the dynamic interplay between individuals and the technology they use, asserting that the medium itself influences the messages and interactions in a given environment. The

unique features and characteristics of TikTok, such as the user-generated content (UGC) culture, short-video format, video-editing tools, For You Page (FYP), and community features, shape the nature of memetic communications. The medium, in this case, is not merely a passive channel but an active force influencing how memes are created, shared, and interacted with on TikTok. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the role of TikTok as a facilitator of memetic communication.

Humor in Memetic Participation

Humor, integral to meme appeal, virality, and cultural impact, is the primary driving force behind memetic participation (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). The engagement of individuals in meme-related activities, such as sharing, remixing, and creation, is motivated by their interest in humor, leading to a continuous process of reappropriation where existing ideas combine with new elements for innovative meme concepts (Milner, 2018). Humor in memes, also doubling as bonding icons, fosters shared understanding and reinforces collective identity, contributing to increased memetic participation (Newton, Zappavigna, Drysdale, & Newman, 2022). Ultimately, humor in memes transcends mere entertainment.

We examine SD humor through the lens of humor theories. In incongruity theory, humor emerges from unexpected or incongruous elements in jokes or memes (Morreall, 1983). Self-deprecating memes on TikTok often leverage this theory by exploiting the tension between the expected and SD statements, creating a humorous dissonance. In another theory, which is relief theory, humor serves as a release of psychological tension (Meyer, 2000). Self-deprecating memes may also be used as a coping mechanism to alleviate social or personal stressors associated with societal expectations and self-perception. Then, according to superiority theory, humor arises from the act of belittling others (Ferguson & Ford, 2008). While SD humor does not involve belittling other individuals, it does allow individuals to belittle aspects of themselves, asserting control over their own vulnerabilities. Examining SD humor through these theories is crucial for comprehending its role as a facilitator of memetic participation in SD memes on TikTok.

Motivation of This Study

In the domain of TikTok research, numerous studies have employed the virtual ethnography method to investigate various facets of the platform. Schellewald (2021) used this method to discern six communicative forms prevalent in TikTok videos, encompassing comedy, documentary, communal, explanatory, interactive, and meta genres. Concurrently, Iodice and Papapicco (2021) examined TikTok as a source of entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic, while Su, Baker, Doyle, and Yan (2020) delved into the use of TikTok by athletes for online promotional activities.

The SD humor as well has undergone extensive examination in diverse studies. For instance, Chaerani and Junaidi (2019) investigated SD humor as a critical tool capable of encouraging resistance against diet culture. Another study by Ask and Abidin (2018) explored the use of SD humor in memes as a mode of expression related to the challenges faced by students. Meanwhile, Sorenson (2014) delved into SD in the context of rhetorical purposes in politics, where humor is employed to construct an image, defend against attacks, assail opponents, and diminish social distance from the audience.

While existing research has extensively explored both TikTok and SD humor in various contexts, there is a notable gap in scholarly investigations specifically dedicated to the SD cyberculture on TikTok. Moreover, despite Indonesia having the second-largest population of TikTok users, prior studies on Indonesian demographics have predominantly centered around TikTok's influence on individual behavior and lifestyle or its applications in education, health promotion, journalism, and brand marketing (Agustin, Sihabudin, & Duku, 2023; Azizah, Ananda, & Faristiana, 2023; Haninuna, Nayoan, & Bunga, 2023; Meilida, 2023; Muthohar & Hartono, 2023; Natalia & Winduwati, 2023). Scholarly attention toward this particular demographic in SD cyberculture on TikTok remains limited.

This gap in research on the specific dynamics of how young Indonesians navigate and engage with SD humor within the unique affordances of TikTok presents a crucial opportunity for further investigation. In the following section, we will delve into the methodological approach employed to explore this unique cultural phenomenon.

Methodology

A cyberculture has its own set of social rules and is attached to its cyberspace, meaning that the exploration of a cyberculture can only be done virtually through the virtual ethnography method (Bell, 2006; Hallett & Barber, 2014; Johansson & Lindberg, 2021). The TikTok SD cyberculture is mostly crowded with young creators and can be found worldwide. To thoroughly explore this cyberculture, this virtual ethnography study focused solely on the cyberspace crowded with young Indonesians. This allowed us to identify the discourses communicated by young Indonesians in the TikTok SD cyberculture.

In parallel with Skågeby's (2011) procedure to conduct a virtual ethnography study, we first attempted to become part of the virtual community. From March 1 to October 31, 2020, we actively participated in the SD cyberculture by uploading SD memes and interacting with other TikTok users. This initial step was aimed at helping us get familiar with the cyberculture and identifying variables to consider in the upcoming observation.

One month before the main observation period, we conditioned a TikTok account's FYP to only recommend Indonesian TikTok creators who produced SD memes. TikTok has a simple interface that instantly directs users' attention to the FYP after they open the application. The FYP is where the algorithm that is believed to have "godlike powers" works (Cotter, DeCook, Kanthawala, & Foyle, 2022). Based on a user's previous viewing behavior, the algorithm continuously feeds them with new, personally relevant content from around the world. Users who enjoy SD memes will continue to be recommended with new SD memes.

To condition the FYP for us to be involved in the cyberculture, we used a blank TikTok account. In this account, we only interacted with SD memes by various content creators. The interaction implied here involved liking, commenting on, and following certain content creators. In this conditioning step, the guidelines for engaging with the videos were to make sure that the video was a humorous meme and that the humor was conveyed through the SD strategy. If a video only contained the act of SD without a

humorous aspect, or a video contained only a humorous aspect without the act of SD, then we would not interact with the video.

To confirm that a video involved the act of SD, we made sure that the content creator solely used the texts in their video to make fun of themselves without attempting to make fun of others. Also, to confirm if a video was humorous, we checked the comment section of each video to confirm that the audience was responding in a way that they would respond to humorous content in general.

Another important guideline in this research was to ensure that the content originated from young Indonesians. To ascertain this, we investigated the profile associated with each video to find clues about the creator's identity. Some users directly stated their nationality in their profile. For users without nationality statements, we examined the captions and comment sections of their videos for clues indicating their nationality, such as the use of the Indonesian language and mannerisms when interacting with other users.

This conditioning step was solely intended to instruct the algorithm to fill the account's FYP with SD memes produced by young Indonesians. Later, the FYP recommended SD memes not only from creators who we had previously interacted with but also from other young Indonesian creators.

After the FYP was conditioned, the main observation period lasted for six months, from October 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022. For approximately 45 minutes a day, we observed SD memes recommended on the FYP. For each encountered video that fit the guideline of being a humorous meme conveyed by a young Indonesian through the SD strategy, the video link was recorded in a spreadsheet field diary.

Over the six months of observation, we compiled a data set of 1,000 TikTok links. The next step was to provide a short description for each video. However, 196 videos were found to be inaccessible due to deletion or privacy settings, leaving us with 804 videos for which we could provide descriptions.

Next, assisted by the short descriptions, we categorized each video into themes and discourses. During this step, more videos were found to be either deleted or set to private, leaving us with 786 remaining videos. Ultimately, 786 videos were categorized into four main discourse topics, which will be discussed in the next section.¹

Even though the videos were public, users' anonymity was maintained for ethical reasons. Based on insights gained during the initial observation period, it was revealed that most TikTok users in this cyberculture preferred not to have their family and real-life friends view their content. Many users changed their minds about the public accessibility of their videos, deleting or making private previously public videos. Therefore, whenever a screenshot of a video was taken to be provided as an illustration for this study, the creator's face was censored with an emoji that best represented the emotion they expressed in the video. For readability, the texts were translated from Indonesian to English.

¹ The categorized data set is available on OSF: <https://osf.io/h3e9d/>

Discourses on TikTok's SD Memes Among Young Indonesians

The four main discourse topics identified are interpersonal relationships, personal well-being, habits, and self-image. This section delves into the common themes present within each discourse. We will further contextualize and interpret the findings in the discussion section.

Interpersonal Relationships

As illustrated in Table 1, the interpersonal relationships discourse encompasses three themes: Romantic relationships, friendships, and family. In the romantic relationships theme, young Indonesian creators deprecated aspects of themselves that they perceived as hindrances to achieving an ideal romantic relationship. In the friendships theme, creators expressed self-deprecation toward their struggles within friendships. In the family theme, creators deprecated the way they dealt with family conflicts.

Table 1. The Jokes Found in the Interpersonal Relationships Discourse.

Theme	What the Creators Joked About
Romantic relationships	Personal flaws, technology-fostered behaviors, religious differences
Friendships	Need to feel a sense of belonging, efforts to maintain friendships, friendship bumps
Family	Family pressures, household conflicts, strict parents, toxic parents

The romantic relationship theme was the most frequently encountered theme during the whole exploration. In this theme, the religious differences topic was the most joked about by young Indonesians. In an example video, as shown by its screenshot in Figure 1, the creator wrote, "Already know he came from a different religion, but every time he approaches, I still want, 1d10ttt" (CEO Sad Girl Boongan, 2022). In the background, the creator lip-synched to an audio that she chose, which was the sped-up version of the song "That's What I Like" by Bruno Mars (2016, 00:00:39–00:01:13) uploaded by TikTok user Spe4d.songs (2021). The creator also used a video filter that allowed her to have floating hearts surrounding her body. The same filter and audio were also used by many other creators to discuss their romantic relationships.



Figure 1. Screenshot of a video by CEO Sad Girl Boongan (2022).

In the video, the creator engaged in self-deprecation by expressing a desire for attention from a romantic interest despite being aware of their different religious backgrounds. This is further accentuated by the user's use of the word "1d10ttt," which can be interpreted as "idiot." Religion plays an important role in the daily lives of Indonesians. Therefore, interfaith relationships are generally met with opposition from the public, primarily due to the fear that their children or family members might undergo religious conversion to adapt to their partner's faith (Aini, Utomo, & McDonald, 2019). Additionally, while religious differences were the most discussed theme in this study, during the initial observation, we barely encountered discussions on this topic by creators from other countries, in the SD cyberculture as well as on TikTok in general. This highlights the significance of religious differences as a source of conflict in the romantic relationships of young Indonesians.

Personal Well-Being

As illustrated in Table 2, the personal well-being discourse encompasses three themes: Academic life, emotional state, and mental health issues. In the academic life theme, young Indonesian creators

deprecatated the way they were dealing with their troublesome academic life. In the emotional state theme, creators expressed self-deprecation toward how emotionally troubled they were. In the mental health issues theme, creators deprecatated the mental condition they were dealing with.

Table 2. The Jokes Found in the Personal Well-Being Discourse.

Theme	What the Creators Joked About
Academic life	Need for motivation, distractions, lack of academic skills
Emotional state	Mood swings, anxieties
Mental health issues	State of exhaustion, masking

In the mental health issues theme, content about masking is commonly joked about. As shown in the screenshot of a video in Figure 2, the creator wrote, "When people told you to 'be yourself,' but you know that if you become yourself, you'll get yourself in prison" (Alexander, 2021). In the background of the video, the creator dramatically cried and screamed while lip-synching to an audio uploaded by Sin (2021) of a woman screaming, "I'm tired you know, I'm so done" with a dramatic intonation. Many other creators also used the same audio and dramatic expression for similar content to communicate how exhausted they were with their personal situation.

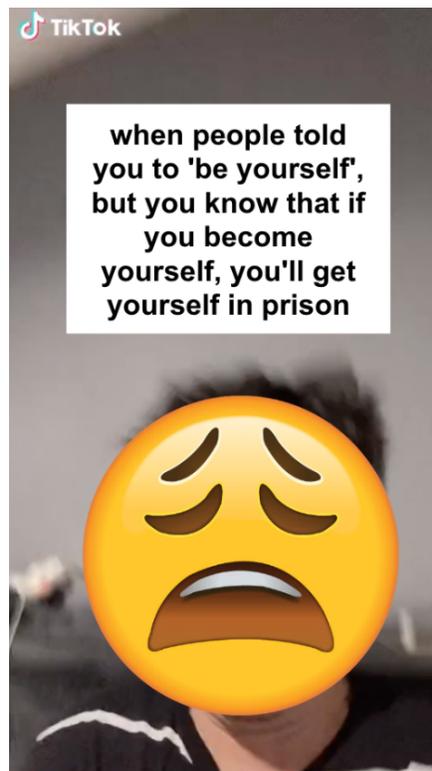


Figure 2. Screenshot of a video by Alexander (2021).

In this video, the creator engaged in self-deprecation, expressing his struggle to be his authentic self, as doing so could get him into trouble. In Indonesia, societal norms emphasize conformity, including suppressing overt negative emotions, maintaining harmonious relationships, and complying with authority. These expectations may lead individuals to suppress their real thoughts and feelings, including their anger (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010). Some users in the comment section of this video shared that they could not be their true selves because they feared being disliked by others. While that is the simple case for many users, others mentioned more extreme reasons, such as the fear of harming those who angered them, harming their father, setting fires in forests, finding happiness in the sight of dead animals, or desiring to witness accidents involving others.

Habits

As illustrated in Table 3, the habits discourse encompasses two themes: Daily habits and financial habits. In the daily habits theme, young Indonesian creators deprecated the poor habits caused by various aspects of their lives. In the financial habits theme, creators expressed self-deprecation toward how they behaved in finance-related circumstances.

Table 3. The Jokes Found in the Habits Discourse.

Theme	What the Creators Joked About
Daily habits	Poor sleeping habits, boredom, forgetfulness, distractedness
Financial habits	Money-saving and shopping habits

In the daily habits theme, a commonly joked-about experience was related to creators' boredom. As shown in a screenshot of a video in Figure 3, the creator wrote, "My brain each time it is a little bored" (Jai, 2022). In the video, the creator was shown opening the Twitter application while lip-synching to an audio. The audio used was from the TV series *You* by Gamble and Sullivan (2019, 00:13:25–00:13:36). In the audio uploaded by Sweetkatarine (2021), the main character of the TV series says, "Hello, you. No, I'm not doing that." Other creators used this audio to show what they wanted to do but quickly told themselves not to. In this video, when the audio turned to "No, I'm not doing that," the creator immediately stopped himself from the urge to open Twitter.

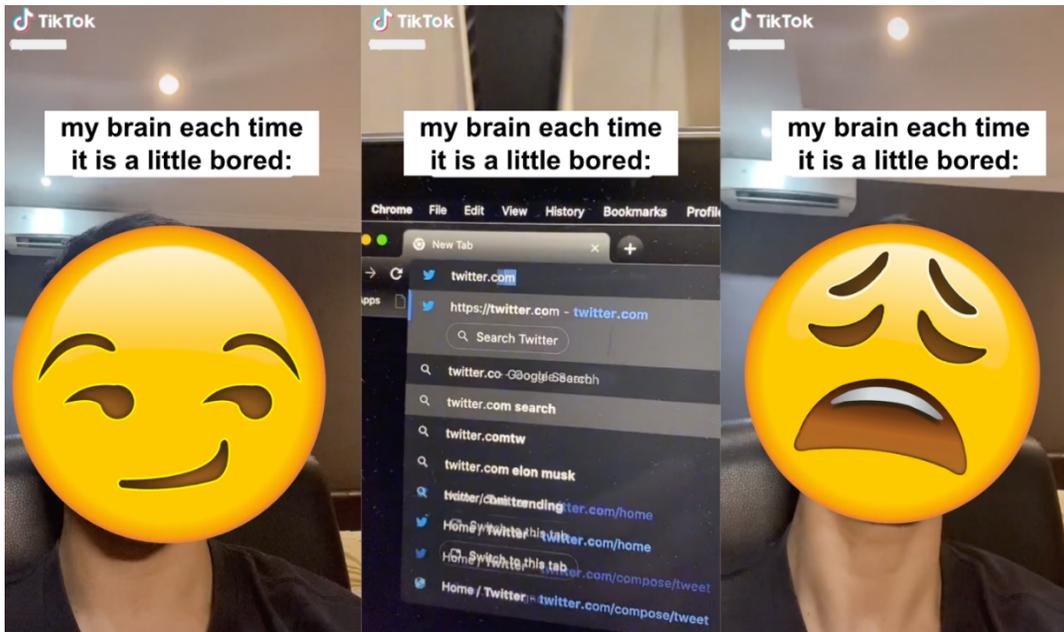


Figure 3. Screenshots of a video by Jai (2022).

In this video, the creator engaged in self-deprecation for being easily tempted to open the Twitter platform to view adult content. On Twitter, plenty of adult content is openly available to anyone. Many other users also mentioned having separate Twitter accounts for this type of content. In Indonesia, accessing adult content is challenging because the government actively blocks pornographic sites (Angkupi, 2017). While it is possible to access these sites through a virtual private network (VPN), Twitter provides unlimited access to this type of content without the hassle of using a VPN. It allows users to view adult content from a familiar and easily navigable platform, making it tempting for bored individuals to indulge in such content on Twitter.

Self-Image

As illustrated in Table 4, the self-image discourse encompasses two themes: Online presence and physical appearance. In the online presence theme, young Indonesian creators deprecated the embarrassing online acts they did in the past. In the physical appearance theme, creators expressed self-deprecation toward their own physical appearance.

Table 4. The Jokes Found in the Self-Image Discourse.

Theme	What the Creators Joked About
Online presence	Embarrassing online acts
Physical appearance	Insecurity about physical appearance

In this discourse category, physical appearance was commonly joked about. In Figure 4's video, laughing throughout the whole video, the creator said, "That moment when someone tried to insult by saying 'you're ugly,' and then I want to get angry, but I already know (laughs), indeed, try better next time, tell me something I don't know" (Carli, 2021). The creator's subtitle in the video was "WKWKWWK," which is a common way for Indonesians to communicate their laughter in a text. The video was not posted under a specific trend, considering how the audio used was a piece of simple music by Nova (2019) that creators commonly used as background music for any type of content. However, the creator silenced the music to only include their own voice. This is a common practice among creators to ensure that their video gains visibility by using popular audio tracks.



Figure 4. Screenshots of a video by Carli (2021).

The creator expressed self-deprecation regarding her physical appearance, turning the tables on the individual who insulted her by undermining their attempt to insult her as "ugly." Body-shaming remains an issue with limited awareness in many parts of Indonesia. Consequently, numerous groups are actively campaigning and attempting to highlight the seriousness of this issue in places such as high schools (Khairun, Equatora, Zulyadi, & Saputra, 2023). Other similar content creators also shared their own self-deprecating methods, such as comparing the beautiful images they posted on social media with their actual appearances.

Discussion

This exploration of young Indonesians' self-deprecation regarding their flaws or personal circumstances in TikTok's SD cyberculture revealed four key discourse topics. The first and the most

prominent discourse topic is interpersonal relationships. In this topic, romantic relationships emerged as the most discussed theme, underscoring its central role in the lives of young Indonesians. Religious differences in romantic relationships were the most joked about as it is generally impossible for young Indonesians to gain family approval for their interreligious or even interracial romantic relationships (MacDonald, Marshall, Gere, Shimotomai, & Lies, 2012). Another significant theme is friendships. The existence of this theme reflects the importance of maintaining high-quality friendships for young Indonesians. Unlike romantic relationships, friendships were generally seen as more flexible in terms of interreligious and interethnic dynamics (Parker, Hoon, & Raihani, 2014).

The last theme in this discourse topic is family, of which family dynamics is a major subtheme. Family closeness and respect are major values of Indonesian culture. Obedience to parents and the preservation of family honor are considered fundamental obligations for young Indonesians. An example of this is that it is common for young Indonesians to reside with their parents until marriage (Piercy, Soekandar, Limansubroto, & Davis, 2005). This exploration sheds light on the potential of romantic relationships, friendships, and family relationships as significant stressors that young Indonesians face daily.

The second discourse topic is personal well-being. Academic life is one of the themes in this topic. Young Indonesians covered by this theme often experience a lack of well-being. Studies have also shown mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress in young students, which have the potential to hinder their academic performance (Astutik, Sebayang, Puspikawati, Tama, & Dewi, 2020). Apart from impacted academic life, young Indonesians also grapple with their emotional states. Mood swings and anxieties are just a small part of the burdens they face. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, they also contended with feelings of loneliness and confusion, decreasing concentration, negative thoughts, and even migraines (Santosa, Widyastuti, Basuki, Kasman, & Buchori, 2021).

The final theme in the personal well-being topic is mental health issues. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, many young Indonesians experienced self-harm and suicidal ideation (Liem, Prawira, Magdalena, Siandita, & Hudiyan, 2022). Although this exploration was conducted during the pandemic, and many studies related to this topic took place during the pandemic, it does not imply that these issues were caused solely by the pandemic. There are many variables that contribute to young Indonesians' personal well-being. This also does not exclude the interpersonal relationships discourse as a potential contributor to the decreasing well-being in the lives of young Indonesians.

The third discourse topic is habits. The first theme in this topic is daily habits. One habit often mentioned is distractedness. During the pandemic, there was no choice but to conduct even academic activities online. However, the numerous online activities contributed significantly to students' distraction (Wulanjani & Indriani, 2021). The other theme in this topic is financial habits. For example, with regard to young Indonesians' admiration for K-pop figures, the purchase of products related to K-pop is often criticized as it leads to excessive spending by young Indonesians. Apart from K-pop products, many brands use K-pop figures to boost their sales, potentially encouraging K-pop fans to be more consumptive (Andira, Prasetyo, & Ananda, 2023). Many of these habits seem to be influenced by external variables as the changing circumstances of society present young Indonesians with new daily challenges to deal with.

The last discourse topic is self-image. The first theme is online presence. For young adults who lived their childhood in a social media era, such as that of Facebook, it is almost inevitable to experience embarrassment over their past social identities (Schoenebeck, Ellison, Blackwell, Bayer, & Falk, 2016). The second theme is physical appearance. Many Indonesian young adults do not have a positive body image (Novitasari & Hamid, 2021). How young Indonesians perceive their own image may have an impact on their anxiety and overall quality of life.

The discourses discussed so far highlight the capability of the SD cyberculture to disclose various real-life issues of young Indonesians. To further understand the elements that contribute to this capability, our research raises two additional sub-questions.

The Role of TikTok

Our first sub-question is, "What role does TikTok play in shaping the messages in SD memes on TikTok?" In addressing this query, our discussion will be guided by the media ecology theory perspective. This theory asserts how the characteristics of the medium play a crucial role in shaping the creation and reception of messages (Lum, 2014). Therefore, the following paragraphs will dissect specific aspects of TikTok, examining their respective roles in shaping SD memes throughout the creation and reception processes.

The first aspect is the culture of UGC on TikTok. User-generated content is instrumental in allowing Internet memes to be based on creators' actual experiences (Csordás, Horváth, Mitev, & Markos-Kujbus, 2017; Wagner, 2023). In the SD cyberculture, UGC shapes messages by influencing creators to deprecate their own experiences. Another role of UGC is that of guiding creators to engage in acting in their SD memes. This also implies that creators need to show their faces to the audience unlike Internet memes in general, where the creators do not reveal their faces and instead use images belonging to others (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022; Scialabba, 2020).

Moreover, the videos uploaded to TikTok do not merely preexist. They are specifically tailored to enable creators to convey their messages. Content creators express themselves through facial expressions or body movements to communicate in SD memes on TikTok. By featuring their faces in the memes, creators may establish a stronger emotional connection with their audience, enhancing the relatability of the content. However, the necessity to reveal their faces in videos may, to some extent, limit the stories or experiences that creators feel comfortable sharing, potentially restricting the diversity of themes in SD memes on TikTok.

The second aspect of TikTok is its short-video format. There has been a growing audience preference for this format, which appears to encourage increased information consumption and sharing behavior (Sun, 2021). Although TikTok allows videos with a duration of up to three minutes, the SD memes in this research were typically shot in between 4 to 15 seconds. This brevity facilitates audience comprehension and enables them to consume a significant number of memes in a short period. The concise format also simplifies the process for audiences interested in saving or reposting multiple memes. For creators, the short-video format shapes the messages in SD memes on TikTok by influencing how creators

design their scripts to be engaging, yet concise. TikTok, with its short-video format, has transformed SD memes, which were once extremely popular as images, to a video format, which is even more popular now.

Another aspect is TikTok's video-editing tools. These features allow creators to express their ideas using elements such as texts and audios (Laboriel, 2021). Since each creator in the SD cyberculture uses the editing features provided by TikTok, this allows SD memes to have a uniform format. The editing tools also enable videos to align with TikTok trends, considering how a TikTok trend is generally associated with specific TikTok audio, filters, or even the use of particular texts. In the creation process, the video-editing tools mold the messages by designing the final product of the video itself. Regarding the reception process, the video-editing tools, which support uniformity, allow the audience to easily recognize similar memes on TikTok by observing the style of a certain video.

The next aspect is TikTok's FYP, where the algorithm operates. The FYP actively delivers new and relevant content to the audience (Cotter et al., 2022). In contrast to social platforms that primarily favor prominent creators, TikTok's algorithm facilitates the discovery of even small creators with minimal engagement, thus expanding participation in the SD cyberculture. On TikTok, creators may rely on the platform's algorithm to recommend their content to the audience's FYPs, rather than solely depending on views from their current followers.

Since the algorithm gives exposure advantages to videos associated with a trend, to secure a spot on the FYP, creators often tailor their content to align with popular trends. While conforming to a trend might seem as if it could make the videos uniform, shaping a message into a trend does not stifle creators' creativity. Instead, it fosters a sense of cohesion in memes, making it easier for the audience to recognize and appreciate the humor. Overall, this dynamic encourages an increasing number of creators to contribute regularly, resulting in a more diverse range of themes and ensuring that discussions remain relevant and current. From the audience's perspective, the continual influx of new SD memes keeps them eagerly anticipating fresh content.

The last aspect is TikTok's community feature. This feature exists in the comment section of every TikTok video (MacKinnon, Kia, & Lacombe-Duncan, 2021). In the comment section, creators can communicate with the audience, and the audience can engage with each other by leaving comments and liking one another's comments. Interactions through these features allow members of the SD cyberculture to bond over shared experiences. For the audience, the fostered sense of relatability in the cyberculture may imbue certain SD memes with a deeper and more meaningful significance. As for the creators, a surge in engagement, indicated by the number of comments or positive feedback, serves as motivation to produce more SD memes. Additionally, creators strive to tailor their content to audience preferences, taking into account the responses they receive.

The preceding paragraphs have delved into several characteristics of TikTok, including the UGC culture, short-video format, video-editing tools, FYP, and community features, and how they play a role in the shaping of SD memes on TikTok. These aspects of TikTok contribute to the capability of the SD cyberculture to disclose real-life issues. To further understand another element that contributes to this capability, our research introduces a second sub-question.

The Role of SD Humor

Our second sub-question is, "What role does SD humor play in constructing the messages in SD memes on TikTok?" In addressing this query, our discussion will be guided by several humor theories, including incongruity, relief, and superiority theories. In incongruity theory, humor arises from the unexpected elements in a joke (Morreall, 1983). In relief theory, humor serves as a release of psychological tension (Meyer, 2000). In superiority theory, humor arises from the act of belittling others (Ferguson & Ford, 2008). The following paragraphs will examine the role that SD humor plays in the construction of memes on TikTok through the lens of these various humor theories.

The essence of SD humor lies in portraying oneself in a manner that contradicts societal expectations. Memes involving SD, willingly shared by creators, diverge from the typical intention of maintaining a positive image. Thus, the mere use of SD humor in a joke inherently introduces incongruity. However, how individuals perceive incongruity is subjective (Forabosco, 2008). What one audience considers as having more incongruity in an SD meme may differ from another audience's perspective. This divergence can stem from the familiarity of the depicted scenario.

For instance, consider two SD memes. If an audience is familiar with the scenario in the first meme and regards it as a common practice rather than a violation of expectation, they may perceive only a minor incongruity. However, if the same audience is less acquainted with the second meme, viewing the scenario as less of a daily occurrence, they might find it more unexpected than the first, attributing a higher level of incongruity to that scenario. As audiences are typically more eager to engage with memes that provide a heightened element of surprise, creators strive to construct memes with substantial incongruity to attract more engagement.

In the SD cyberculture, users anticipate content that deliberately violates social expectations. Therefore, creators in the cyberculture can discuss topics that might typically be considered embarrassing in everyday conversations. This also implies that creators have an opportunity to address sensitive issues, which may elicit different reactions if not communicated through SD humor.

Another perspective through which SD humor is examined is the relief theory. Memes have frequently served as a means to alleviate stress (Zahoor, 2020). For creators in the SD cyberculture, sharing their struggles through memes can serve as a cathartic release of stress. This relief is not exclusive to creators. The audience members who resonate with the content may also experience a sense of relief, realizing that others share similar struggles.

The last humor theory to be applied in examining SD memes is the superiority theory. While this theory is often associated with humor directed at deprecating others, it can also be extended to self-deprecation, particularly in reflecting on one's past self (Morreall, 1983). Many creators of SD memes employ this perspective, mocking aspects of their own past, flaws, or circumstances.

From another perspective, certain SD memes may evoke a sense of superiority in the audience. This feeling can arise as the audience compares their own experiences with those depicted in the meme or

shared by other audience members in the comment section. With insight into others' experiences, the audience might feel that their own experiences are not as embarrassing or challenging, fostering a sense of superiority and boosting their self-esteem.

The preceding paragraphs have delved into the role of SD humor in constructing memes, examining the theories of incongruity, relief, and superiority. These characteristics of SD humor also contribute to the capability of the SD cyberculture to disclose real-life issues.

Conclusion

Guided by the virtual ethnography method, the SD cyberculture was observed over a six-month period. The analysis of 786 TikTok memes enabled the identification of themes, reflecting the lived experiences of young Indonesians. The four main discourse topics identified are interpersonal relationships, personal well-being, habits, and self-image. In the interpersonal relationships topic, the themes are romantic relationships, friendships, and family. In the personal well-being topic, the themes are academic life, emotional state, and mental health issues. In the habits topic, the themes are daily habits and financial habits. In the self-image topic, the themes are online presence and physical appearance.

The discovery of these themes proves the capability of the SD cyberculture on TikTok to illuminate the daily struggles experienced by young Indonesians. This ability is bolstered by the contributions of TikTok and SD humor in shaping and constructing the messages in the memes.

In the shaping of messages in SD memes on TikTok, various factors come into play. The UGC culture is crucial as it primarily encourages the disclosure of personal experiences. The short-video format imposes conciseness, requiring memes to be succinct and to the point. Video-editing tools allow memes to maintain a uniform and recognizable style. The FYP encourages creators to align their memes with current trends, ensuring visibility. The community feature fosters a sense of community, further encouraging future production and consumption of SD memes.

Meanwhile, regarding SD humor, the discussion explores how SD memes offer creators a medium to address issues that might not be openly discussed outside this context. For instance, individuals may receive more positive reactions when expressing SD statements about their mental health within the framework of SD humor compared with if shared outside this context. Additionally, the discussion delves into how SD memes may serve as a coping mechanism for users, providing a means to alleviate psychological stress. Furthermore, it explores how SD memes can be employed to evoke a sense of superiority, either toward past selves or in comparison with others who engage in SD.

While it may appear that TikTok's SD cyberculture primarily facilitates the discovery and discussion of daily issues, it is essential to recognize that many of these daily issues involve private or sensitive struggles. These are challenges that the young individuals might be hesitant to share with those they interact with in their daily lives, yet find an outlet for expression within the SD cyberculture. Moreover, the algorithm's promotion of memes within this cyberculture further narrows the audience, reducing the likelihood of sensitive content being viewed by individuals who may not understand or appreciate the context.

The creators' assumption of safety in sharing such issues on TikTok, despite the need to show their faces, is supported by the platform's inherent design. The SD cyberculture, where the act of self-deprecation is not only accepted but normalized, provides a supportive environment for individuals to open up about personal struggles. In contrast, if a creator were to discuss a sensitive issue without employing the SD strategy, the reaction from other users might be limited to sympathy. However, by constructing messages through the SD strategy and involving the message in the SD cyberculture, other users are more likely to respond in a more unique way.

Instead of mere sympathy, members often contribute by sharing similar experiences while also engaging in SD humor. This creates a sense of companionship, where individuals support each other not through pity but by relating to shared experiences. The SD strategy becomes a tool not only for personal expression but also for fostering a community where members connect through shared challenges, further establishing the SD cyberculture as a space for genuine understanding and mutual support.

The SD cyberculture on TikTok is particularly vital within the framework of Indonesian culture. Indonesia, known for its high-context communication style, influences how individuals express themselves. While openness in communication varies among individuals, the general emphasis on avoiding direct confrontation often leads to an indirect communication style. This nuanced approach is also observed among young Indonesians. Young Indonesians may encounter challenges in openly expressing their feelings, especially to avoid causing discomfort to those around them, including family and friends. However, the SD cyberculture provides them with a virtual space to express emotions and connect with others who resonate with their experiences.

Numerous creators use SD humor to address personal well-being, a topic that may not be openly discussed with parents due to potential embarrassment or escalation of issues. Self-deprecating memes can also serve as a platform for creators to voice complaints about struggles without directly harming others. For example, a creator may deprecate themselves for having no loyal friends. This indirect approach allows them to express dissatisfaction with friends without directly criticizing them. The use of humor maintains a lighthearted tone, preventing the content from sounding overly serious and minimizing the risk of causing embarrassment.

While future studies on the SD cyberculture on other social platforms might offer distinct insights, future virtual ethnography studies on TikTok SD cyberculture in various time frames and geographic locations can yield even more explicit insights and discourse categories. As societal circumstances and times constantly evolve, understanding the current struggles of specific demographics is crucial. These insights can inform policies and interventions aimed at supporting certain demographics, such as young Indonesians.

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