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Beyond Macho: The Representation of Generation Z's Soft Masculinity in the Fineshyt Trend on Indonesian Tiktok

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Abstract - This study examines the representation of soft masculinity among Indonesian Generation Z males through the "Fineshyt" trend on TikTok. Based on the theories of hybrid masculinity, gender performativity, and multimodal discourse analysis, this study aims to deconstruct how this digital trend produces and normalizes non-aggressive masculine identities. Using a qualitative approach and multimodal discourse analysis methods, 15 TikTok videos with the hashtag #fineshyt from the period July–October 2025 were purposively selected and analysed. The findings show that soft masculinity in this trend is characterized by reflexive protective gestures, emotional control (nonchalance), and the strategic use of point of view (POV) narratives. Collectively, these elements construct an image of masculinity that is calm, situational, and empathetic-protective. However, the analysis also reveals ambivalence: while offering an alternative to hegemonic macho masculinity, this soft masculinity subtly reproduces gender power hierarchies by consistently positioning men as active protectors and women as the protected. This study concludes that the Fineshyt trend represents a rearticulation—not a rejection—of masculine power into a form that is more acceptable in Gen Z's affective-digital culture. This study extends the discourse on affective-digital culture in Indonesia by demonstrating how soft masculinity operates as an affective and algorithmically mediated strategy that rearticulates masculine power through emotionally resonant and multimodal performances.

Keywords: Soft Masculinity; Gender Communication; Multimodal Discourse Analysis; TikTok; New Masculinity.

Introduction

Masculinity has long been understood as a social construct associated with values of dominance, physical strength, rationality, and emotional control. Hopkins & Giazitzoglu (2024) assert that in classical studies, masculinity is often positioned as a gender identity that places men in a dominant role in social and gender relations. The concept of hegemonic masculinity explains how certain forms of masculinity are produced and reproduced as social ideals, while other forms of masculinity are marginalized or considered less legitimate (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Raewyn, 1995). As culture and media evolve, it becomes apparent that masculinity is not static, but rather undergoes transformation in accordance with changes in social context and technology.

The development of digital media, especially social media, has become a space for negotiating contemporary gender identities. One social media platform, TikTok, gives its users the opportunity to not only act as consumers but also as active producers in representing themselves visually, affectively, and performatively (Studeny & Mohammed, 2023). Unlike other text-based social media platforms, TikTok relies on short videos that emphasize body language, facial expressions, and emotions, thus opening up more space for non-verbal articulation of gender identity. Additionally, studies show that TikTok's algorithm, which is oriented towards audience engagement and affection, encourages content that displays emotional closeness, interpersonal relationships, and everyday narratives to more easily gain visibility and social legitimacy (Zhou, 2024).

The participatory culture that has developed on TikTok also allows users to replicate, modify, and viralize certain patterns of representation, thereby forming recurring visual and affective norms. A study (Sigurdardottir & Rautajoki, 2024) on TikTok activism proves that gestures and body language are powerful sources of meaning. this principle is relevant to masculinity, which is no longer represented solely through verbal narratives or explicit symbols of power, but rather through a combination of body gestures, facial expressions, emotional tone, and everyday settings that work simultaneously to construct meaning. Therefore, the representation of masculinity on TikTok needs to be understood as a multimodal practice that not only reflects gender identity but also produces and normalizes certain forms of masculinity in contemporary digital culture.

A phenomenon that has recently emerged is the Fineshyt trend on TikTok Indonesia. The term fineshyt literally refers to physical attractiveness, but in practice, the content often focuses on male figures (Abidin, 2020). In this trend, men are portrayed as calm, reflective, and protective figures in everyday situations, such as when they are in the dining room, public spaces, or domestic spaces. Simple gestures such as catching objects, positioning the body as a protector, or responding to potential disturbances quickly but without excessive emotional expression become recurring visual elements that gain affective legitimacy in the digital space.

This representation shows the emergence of a form of masculinity that differs from the conventional macho image. In popular culture studies, this form is often referred to as soft masculinity, which emphasizes calmness, affection, and self-control without completely relinquishing male power in gender relations (Jenny Lee et al., 2020). Soft masculinity does not necessarily negate the structure of hegemonic masculinity, but works through aesthetics, affective performance, and the normalization of gestures that appear non-aggressive. Therefore, soft masculinity is often ambivalent—offering an alternative to aggressive masculinity, but still potentially reproducing power relations in subtle ways.

In addition to visual representations, narrative strategies also play an important role in shaping the discourse of masculinity on social media. The point of view (POV) narrative, which is widely used in TikTok content, allows men to be positioned as the main subjects who observe, assess, and respond to situations. Through POV narratives, masculinity is framed as a practice of situational awareness and relational presence, so that protective actions and emotional calm appear natural and unforced. From the perspective of representation theory, the media not only reflects reality, but also actively produces and normalizes meaning through such discursive practices (Hall, 1997).

Previous studies have begun to explore the transformation of masculinity in Indonesia's digital space. For example, (Kartika & Iqbal, 2023) researched how social media, particularly TikTok, functions as a space for expressing the limitations of masculinity experienced by men. The results of the study show that many men and women on TikTok are aware of the negative impact of toxic masculinity, with a number of educational content emerging. Meanwhile, Kumalasari et al., (2025) researched the @lakilakibaru account, which represents a new type of fair male by sharing family roles, supporting women, and rejecting all forms of gender-based violence. This representation shows that men can have feminist awareness and not be trapped in traditional masculinity norms.

The emergence of soft masculinity is also supported by research (Amir et al., 2025) and (Nabila & Daulay, 2025) which shows that the representation of masculinity on TikTok Indonesia is not hegemonic, but rather fragmented and pluralized with the emergence of soft masculinity and ubersexuality. However, previous research tends to focus on hegemonic or toxic masculinity in Indonesian social media, with limited attention to how masculinity is constructed through specific narrative formats within platform-driven cultures. In particular, the role of POV-based storytelling in shaping affective and relational masculinity remains underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by examining the fineshyt trend as a multimodal and narrative-driven phenomenon, highlighting how soft masculinity is constructed, normalized, and negotiated through POV structures within TikTok's algorithmic environment.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the representation of soft masculinity in the fineshyt trend on TikTok Indonesia through a multimodal discourse analysis approach. More specifically, this study answers two questions: (1) How does the Fineshyt trend on TikTok represent forms of soft masculinity among young Indonesian men?; (2) How do POV narratives in TikTok content shape the discourse of empathetic masculinity that can encourage the creation of more equal gender relations in the digital space?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study was developed to provide a conceptual basis for understanding how representations of masculinity are produced, negotiated, and normalized through digital media, particularly TikTok. Given that the object of study is in the realm of digital communication, communication theories are used as the main basis, while other theories serve as supporting elements to strengthen the analysis.

Masculinity as a Social Construction in Communication

In communication studies and gender studies, masculinity is understood not as a biological characteristic inherent to men, but as a social construction shaped through communication practices, media representations, and power relations.. (Raewyn. Connell, 1995) introducing the concept of hegemonic masculinity to explain how certain forms of masculinity are legitimized as the ideal standard, while other forms of masculinity are placed as subordinate or marginal. This concept emphasizes that masculinity is always relational and contextual.

In the context of media communication, hegemonic masculinity is reproduced and maintained through narratives, visuals, and recurring symbols. However, the development of digital media has opened up space for the emergence of alternative representations of masculinity that are not always in line with the traditional macho model. Therefore, the study of masculinity in this research is positioned as part of a dynamic and continuously negotiated process of symbolic communication.

Hybrid Masculinity and the Rearticulation of Masculine Power

The concept of hybrid masculinity is used as the main framework for interpreting how contemporary masculinity combines traditional masculine values with expressions associated with femininity. (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014) explain that hybrid masculinity allows men to maintain their position of power through the selective adoption of practices previously considered non-masculine, such as empathy, gentleness, and affection.

In the context of the fineshyt trend, hybrid masculinity is evident through a combination of protective gestures, emotional calmness, and non-aggressive aesthetics. Soft masculinity does not function as a rejection of masculine power, but rather as a strategy to rearticulate power so that it is more acceptable in Gen Z digital culture. This framework is important for reading the ambivalence of masculinity representation, where progressive values are intertwined with the implicit continuation of the gender hierarchy.

Gender Performativity and Digital Masculinity Practices

The theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1999) is used to explain that gender is not an innate identity, but rather the result of actions performed repeatedly in a particular social context. Gender is produced through performances that appear natural because they are constantly repeated. In digital media, gender performances take place not only verbally, but also through body gestures, facial expressions, and affective tones.

In the fineshyt trend, masculinity is shaped through performative actions such as protective gestures, nonchalant attitudes, and POV narratives that position men as reflective subjects. These actions function as performative acts that repeatedly construct an image of soft masculinity. The performativity approach allows this study to read masculinity as a practice of visual and affective communication, rather than as a stable essence of identity.

Multimodality in Digital Communication Analysis

The multimodality approach is used to analyze how the meaning of masculinity is constructed through the interaction of various semiotic modes. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2016) emphasizes that meaning in visual media is not produced by a single mode, but rather by a combination of text, images, gestures, sound, and visual composition. In the context of TikTok videos, these elements work simultaneously to shape the audience's representation and affective experience.

Through a multimodal approach, this study analyzes how body gestures, facial expressions, POV narratives, music, and everyday settings contribute to the production of soft masculinity meaning. Multimodality serves as the main analytical framework for reading empirical data, while also bridging the theories of masculinity and performativity with visual communication practices on social media.

Theoretical Position of the Research

Based on this theoretical framework, this research positions the fineshyt trend as a digital communication practice that represents post-macho masculinity. Soft masculinity is understood as a form of hybrid masculinity that is produced through repeated performances and represented multimodally. Soft masculinity in this context does not erase gender power relations, but rather rearticulates them in a more subtle, reflective, and culturally acceptable form in the digital space.

This theoretical framework forms the basis for analysis in understanding how the meaning of masculinity is produced, negotiated, and normalized in the fineshyt trend on TikTok Indonesia.

Material and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multimodal discourse analysis method (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2016), which is suitable for examining how meaning is constructed not only through text, but also through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes, including visuals, audio, gestures, and narrative structures in TikTok videos.

The object of this research is TikTok video content that is part of the fineshyt trend and features representations of young Indonesian men. The research was conducted on the TikTok platform as a digital communication space. Data collection was carried out within a specific time frame, July–November 2025, taking into account the consistency of the trend and audience engagement. The research data consisted of 15 TikTok videos that use the hashtag #fineshyt and meet the following criteria; (1) The video used a POV format or short narrative about a gentle/protective male figure; (2) It was uploading by an Indonesian user between July and October 2025; (3) It displays sufficienly active interaction with at least >10.000 views or >500 likes; (4) Relevant to the themes of soft masculinity, gentle protector, or emotional masculinity.

The selection of 15 videos is not intended for statistical generalization, but rather to enable an in-depth qualitative analysis of recurring multimodal patterns. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, prioritizing interpretative depth over representational breadth.

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data consists of TikTok videos analyzed based on visual elements of gesture, narrative/POV, audio/tone, and setting. Secondary data consists of scientific literature relevant to the study of masculinity, digital communication, and representation theory.

Data collection was conducted through non-participatory observation and documentation of TikTok content. Each video was coded as V01 to V15 and analysed based on predetermined multimodal elements. The unit of analysis consists of integrated semiotic elements, including body gestures, facial expressions, POV text, audio cues, and spatial settings, which are examined as interconnected meaning-making resources. The analysis was conducted using a multimodal coding sheet that referred to the framework (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2016) and hybrid masculinity theory (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014) The coding sheet covers the following categories: (1) Protective, reflective, non-aggressive body gestures; (2) Calm, flat, nonchalant facial expressions; (3) POV narrative, point of view, subject position, framing; (4) Public, domestic, institutional settings; (5) Audio, tone, emotional atmosphere.

The analytical process was carried out in three stages. *First*, multimodal description, which involved identifying and describing all mode elements in each video. *Second*, multimodal interpretation, which involved connecting these elements with the concepts of soft masculinity, hybrid masculinity, and performativity. Finally, contextual explanation, which links the findings to the cultural context of

Gen Z and gender power relations in the digital space. This approach is inductive, so that meaning is constructed from data to theory, not the other way around (Miles et al., 2014).

Result and Discussion

Based on multimodal analysis of 15 videos in the fineshyt trend, four consistent main representation patterns were found:

(1) Non-Aggressive Protective Gesture Pattern. In 11 of the 15 videos (V01, V03, V05, V07, V09, V10, V12, V13, V14), men were shown performing reflexive and calm physical protective actions. These actions included: catching potentially dangerous objects (V01, V12), positioning the body as a shield (V03, V14), and responding to disturbances quickly but without excessive emotional expression. These gestures appear in various contexts: public dining areas (V01, V05), domestic spaces (V03, V11), institutional spaces (V12), and informal public spaces (V07, V14);

(2) Nonchalant Expression Patterns and Emotional Control. A total of 9 videos (V01, V02, V06, V08, V09, V11, V12, V13, V15) show men with flat, calm, and controlled facial expressions, even in situations that are constructed to be risky. None of the videos show panic, verbal aggression, or explicit emotional expressions. This nonchalant attitude is a dominant visual attribute, both in romantic interactions (V01, V06) and everyday situations (V11, V12);

(3) POV Narrative Dominance Pattern. A total of 12 videos (V01, V02, V04, V05, V08, V09, V10, V11, V12, V13, V14, V15) use POV narration to frame the male perspective as the main subject. Through this narrative, men are positioned as observers who are aware of the situation, assess risks, and take protective action without instruction or coercion;

(4) Wide Variation in Settings. Representations of soft masculinity are found in various settings: public spaces (restaurants, campuses, markets), domestic spaces (homes, rooms), and institutional spaces (classrooms, offices). There are no significant differences in gesture patterns or expressions based on the type of space.

Table 1 summarizes these findings along with relevant data codes.

Table 1. Research Data Summary

Pattern of Findings	Empirical Indicators	The Meaning of Masculinity Discourse	Data Code
Non-aggressive reflective protection	Catching objects, shielding without being told.	Masculine power is subtly reproduced	V01, V03, V05, V12, V14
Nonchalant competence	Flat expression, emotional control	Non-reactivity as masculine capital	V01, V06, V11, V12
Normalization of hierarchy through romanticization	Compliments, humor, aesthetics	Hierarchical gender relations are softened	V01, V04, V05, V15
POV as legitimization of power	Male-dominant perspective	Masculine power appears natural and normal	V01, V02, V08, V09

Source: Fineshyt trend on TikTok

The Fineshyt Trend as a Representation of Soft Masculinity Among Young Indonesian Men

Within the framework of masculinity theory, the findings of this study indicate that soft masculinity in the fineshyt trend does not operate as a rejection of hegemonic masculinity, but rather as a form of rearticulation of masculine power into more subtle, reflective, and aesthetic practices. This pattern is in line with the concept of hybrid masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014) where traditional masculine values such as protection and strength are not abandoned, but adapted by incorporating elements of gentleness, calmness, and empathy.

Based on an analysis of data V01–V15, the fineshyt trend on TikTok Indonesia represents soft masculinity through protective gestures that are performed reflexively, calmly, and non-dominantly. Masculinity in these contents is not displayed through physical aggression, verbal control, or explicit expressions of power, but rather through situational and understated acts of protection. This pattern is also supported by findings Warner et al. (2022) About understated protective masculinity, but in the context of fineshyt, this protection is legitimized through emotional calmness and self-control rather than through violence or verbal domination. Gestures such as catching a thrown object (V01, V05,

V12), positioning the body as a protector (V03, V14), or stepping forward alertly but without drama (V10) become recurring visual forms that construct an image of masculinity that is "strong but not rough." Figure 1 is an example of a protective body gesture of catching a knife.



Figure 1. Protective Gesture

This representation shows an important shift from macho masculinity to a masculinity that is more adaptive to the affective values of Gen Z's digital culture. Protection is not framed as a form of domination over women, but rather as a reflexive ability legitimized through emotional calm and self-control. In this context, soft masculinity functions as a representational strategy that allows men to remain masculine without resorting to aggressive expressions. This is clearly seen in content that emphasizes a "cold," "cool," or "sigma" aura (V01, V12), where emotional non-reactivity becomes the main symbolic resource.

However, this representation is ambivalent. Although packaged in a non-dominative manner, the narrative of protection still consistently positions men as active subjects who take risks, while women are positioned as the protected party (V01, V03, V05, V14). Even in the context of humor and parody (V04), protective gestures remain central to the legitimization of masculinity. Thus, the fineshyt trend does not completely erase hierarchical gender relations, but rather reproduces them in a more subtle, romantic, and culturally acceptable form in the digital space.

Furthermore, soft masculinity in this trend is not limited to romantic relationships, but has expanded into the domestic and institutional spheres. Content with home (V11) and classroom (V12) settings shows that calmness, quick reflexes, and self-control continue to be constructed as expected masculine qualities in various everyday settings. This indicates that soft masculinity in fineshyt has been normalized as a relevant model of masculinity for young Indonesian men in the digital space.

POV Narratives and the Formation of Non-Dominant Masculinity Discourse in the Digital Space

Narratives play an important role in framing social reality, including in the construction of gender identity in digital media. As explained (Mire et al., 2024), Narrative consists not only of plot and characters, but also shapes the way readers interpret events and position the actors within them. In the context of this study, point of view (POV) narrative becomes a strategic tool for constructing an empathetic and non-dominative discourse of masculinity in the fineshyt trend on TikTok. Through this subjective perspective, viewers are not only passive observers, but are invited to directly experience the situation from the perspective of the men portrayed.

Based on an analysis of the content of V01, V08, and V09, it was found that the POV narrative consistently frames men as reflective and responsive subjects, rather than authoritarian figures who control interactions. In V01, for example, the camera positioned from the male's point of view allows the audience to witness how he scans his surroundings, identifies potential hazards such as falling objects, and calmly takes protective action. These cognitive and emotional processes, which are usually invisible in traditional representations of masculinity, become central to the story. Thus, masculinity is no longer reduced to heroic physical actions, but is elevated as a mental and emotional capacity to be fully present in relationships. Here is an example of one of the narratives found in the video content.



Figure 2. one of the narratives found in trending content

Figure 2 shows an example of POV narration in one of fineshyt's content, where the text reinforces the male perspective as a protective subject. POV narratives also function as an effective normalization mechanism for soft masculinity values. By depicting everyday situations that are familiar to young Indonesian audiences, such as eating in the campus cafeteria, hanging out at a cafe, or studying in the library, the POV format makes gentle protective behavior seem normal, easy to do, and integrated into daily routines. As expresed (Azizan & Mydin, 2022), The way a story is told greatly influences how empathy is represented; in the context of fineshyt, empathy is not portrayed as an extraordinary heroic attitude, but rather as an everyday habit that anyone can do. This is in line with the character of the TikTok platform, which prioritizes content that is relatable, short, and easy for other users to replicate.

However, these findings also reveal the ambivalence and limitations of POV narratives in realizing truly equal gender relations. Although men are portrayed as more reflective and less dominant, women's positions in these narratives often remain passive and instrumental. In V01, V05, and V15, women are primarily present as beneficiaries of men's protective actions, and their reactions—such as admiring glances or smiles of approval—serve as markers that these actions are "successful" or "worthy." In other words, the value of gentle masculinity itself still depends on recognition from women, which reinforces the relational scheme in which women act as external validators of male gender identity.

Even in V08, where there is a reversal of roles with women protecting men, the POV narrative still centers on male consciousness and reflection as the core of the story. Instead of shifting the focus to female agency, the camera captures the reactions and perceptions of the protected men. This shows that the POV narrative framework in the fineshyt trend still tends to maintain men as the center of subjectivity, even though the physical actions are performed by women. Thus, the potential of POV narratives to radically deconstruct gender hierarchies remains limited.

The implication of this finding is that the transformation of masculinity in the digital space cannot be measured solely by visible behavioral changes, but must also consider the narrative structures that frame those behaviors. POV narratives in the fineshyt trend successfully offer a more empathetic and reflective representation of masculinity, which is in line with the participatory cultural values of Gen Z. However, these narratives also subtly reproduce the gender logic that places men as the main subjects of the story and women as supporters or validators. To encourage the creation of more equal gender relations, bolder narrative experiments are needed, such as giving space to women's perspectives or depicting truly reciprocal and equal protective relationships.

Oppositional Readings and Audience Negotiation

While the findings indicate that soft masculinity is widely normalized through affective and aesthetic strategies, it is important to consider the possibility of oppositional readings among audiences. Not all viewers may interpret these representations as progressive or egalitarian.

Some audiences may perceive the fineshyt trend as a stylized performance that subtly maintains masculine dominance under the guise of emotional sensitivity. In this sense, soft masculinity can be interpreted not as a transformation of gender relations, but as a rebranding of male power in a more socially acceptable form.

This highlights that meaning in digital culture is not fixed, but negotiated, contested, and open to multiple interpretations, depending on the audience's social and cultural positioning.

Conclusions

This study shows that the fineshyt trend on TikTok represents soft masculinity as a form of masculinity that is protective, calm, and reflective, but subtly reproduces gender hierarchies by positioning men as active protectors and women as the protected party. The novelty of this research lies in the application of multimodal discourse analysis to examine the phenomenon of fineshyt—a specific trend that has not been widely studied—as well as the revelation of the ambivalence of the point of view (POV) narrative, which not only constructs an empathetic masculinity discourse but also functions as a mechanism for normalizing covert masculine power.

The theoretical contribution of this research is to enrich the study of hybrid masculinity and gender performativity by showing how masculinity is rearticulated through multimodal practices on digital platforms. Practically, these findings highlight the importance of critical media literacy, particularly in recognizing how seemingly inclusive representations of masculinity may still reproduce subtle forms of gender hierarchy. Media educators and content analysts should therefore encourage audiences to critically examine not only what is represented, but also how narrative structures and perspectives shape power relations in digital content.

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