MIKAILALSYS
Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences

e-ISSN : 2987-2286
p-ISSN : 2987-3924

Index : Dimensions, Scilit, Crossref, Garuda, Semantic, Lens,Google Scholar,Base, etc

https://doi.org/10.58578/mikailalsys.v4i1.9829

The Effect of Watching "Marriage Is Scary" Content on TikTok on Marital Attitudes among Early Adults

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Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Mar 15, 2026	Apr 12, 2026	Apr 24, 2026	Apr 29, 2026

Abstract

The rise of "marriage is scary" content on TikTok has created a digital phenomenon in which marriage is represented through negative narratives, including infidelity, domestic conflict, financial pressure, and fear of choosing the wrong partner. Such content may shape beliefs, evaluations, and perceptions of marriage among early adults, particularly those who have never been married. This study aims to examine the effect of watching "marriage is scary" content on TikTok on marital attitudes among early adults. A quantitative approach with an explanatory design was employed, involving 112 respondents selected through purposive sampling. The respondents were 18–25 years old, unmarried, active TikTok users, and had watched "marriage is scary" content on TikTok. Data were collected using a questionnaire consisting of a watching behavior scale and a marital attitude scale, then analyzed using simple linear regression with SPSS version 27. The findings indicate that watching "marriage is scary" content has a significant negative effect on marital attitudes, with a contribution of 17.7%. This result shows that the higher the tendency to watch "marriage is scary" content, the lower the individual's positive attitude toward marriage. The study contributes to social psychology and digital media studies by demonstrating how exposure to negative marriage-

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related content can shape marital attitudes in early adulthood. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of digital literacy and balanced premarital education to help early adults critically evaluate marriage-related content on social media.

Keywords: Marriage is Scary; Marital Attitude; TikTok Content; Digital Media Exposure; Early Adulthood

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has changed how individuals construct values, perceptions, and expectations about marriage. Marriage is one of the fundamental institutions in social life because it is closely related to family formation, social stability, and long-term interpersonal commitment. In the Indonesian legal context, marriage is understood as a physical and emotional bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife, with the aim of forming a happy and lasting family based on belief in God. In line with this view, marriage is expected to create a harmonious, prosperous, and happy family life(Itryah & Ananda, 2023). However, the meaning of marriage among young people appears to be shifting along with social, economic, cultural, and digital changes.

At the national level, the shifting view of marriage can be seen from the declining number of marriages in Indonesia. Data from Statistics Indonesia in *Statistik Indonesia 2024* show that the number of marriages in 2023 reached 1,577,255, decreasing by approximately 128,000 compared to 2022. Over the last ten years, the number of marriages in Indonesia decreased by 28.63%, or around 632,791 marriages. This decline indicates that marriage is no longer viewed by some young people as an immediate life priority. Rizal (2025)explains that the decline in marriage rates is related to changes in early adults' attitudes toward the institution of marriage. These attitudes are known as marital attitudes, which refer to individuals' subjective evaluations of marriage as a social and personal institution (Xie & Hong, 2022).

Marital attitudes include individuals' readiness to marry, expectations of married life, and positive or negative evaluations of long-term commitment. Tabkhi et al. (2025) stated that individuals with more positive attitudes toward marriage are more likely to decide to marry. Positive marital attitudes may also influence romantic relationship behavior and contribute to better relationship quality. Conversely, negative marital attitudes

are reflected in low interest in marriage, fear of commitment, and doubt about the possibility of maintaining a long-term marital relationship. Helal et al. (2024)emphasized that negative attitudes toward marriage may emerge when individuals associate marriage with fear, uncertainty, and potential failure.

The current digital environment has intensified the formation of marital attitudes through social media exposure. Social media often presents negative representations of marriage, such as divorce cases involving public figures, stories of infidelity, domestic conflict, and unrealistic portrayals of ideal romantic relationships. Such exposure may increase individuals' doubts about the success and stability of marriage in contemporary life (Adhani & Aripudin, 2024). Ariyanti & Iman (2025) explained that the development of social media has made romantic relationships no longer limited to direct interaction, but also shaped by digital information and representations. Similarly, Maulita et al. (2025) found that news about infidelity on social media can reduce trust in romantic or marital relationships, indicating that digital content may influence individuals' evaluations and attitudes toward marriage.

The influence of social media is particularly relevant for early adults because this age group is highly exposed to digital content. According to We Are Social and Meltwater (2024), Indonesian social media users spend an average of 3 hours and 11 minutes per day accessing social media. The demographic data also show that users aged 18–24 represent a large proportion of social media users, consisting of 14.0% women and 13.1% men. Early adulthood is a transitional period in which individuals begin to adjust to new social roles, life patterns, and interpersonal expectations (Bahtiar et al., 2025). Dougall et al. (2022)dan Reifman & Niehuis (2023)also explained that individuals aged 18–25 are in the stage of emerging adulthood, characterized by identity exploration, including exploration of romantic relationships and future life commitments.

Early adults who have never been married are in the premarital stage, where attitudes and expectations about marriage are often formed before direct marital experience occurs. Allison (2023) stated that perceptions of the importance of marriage and readiness to enter marriage begin to develop long before individuals actually marry. Therefore, unmarried early adults may be more vulnerable to external sources of information, including digital narratives about marriage. Ajala et al. (2023) explained that marital attitudes can be influenced by internal and external factors, one of which is social media. Each social media user is free to convey their thoughts, emotion, and perspectives on

various matters through their personal account (Mardianto, et al). Kıymaz & Çötok (2024) also stated that social media has become one of the main sources used by individuals to obtain representations of life after marriage. This condition shows that social media can function as an important source in shaping young people's views about marriage.

In the context of TikTok, negative narratives about marriage have recently spread rapidly through content associated with the phrase "marriage is scary." This content generally presents stories about traumatic marital experiences, domestic problems, financial pressure after marriage, infidelity, divorce, and fear of choosing the wrong partner. Sundari & Febriana (2025) explained that one example of "marriage is scary" content is related to infidelity cases involving influencers, which triggered emotional responses from followers and contributed to the perception that marriage is risky or frightening. Adhani & Aripudin (2024)found that narratives in "marriage is scary" content can be categorized into several themes, including family problems, fear of choosing a partner, advice about marriage, and demands in married life. Similarly, Oktaviani and Krismono (2025) identified five major themes in this phenomenon: fear of partners, uncertainty about the future, household conflict, financial anxiety, and the influence of social media.

Watching behavior can be understood as an individual's activity in responding to stimuli received through visual media content. Meivina (2022) explained that watching is not merely a passive activity, but involves cognitive processes in receiving and interpreting media messages. Biocca (1998) also stated that audience behavior in interacting with media is related to how individuals cognitively and behaviorally process media content. In this sense, watching "marriage is scary" content involves not only choosing content, but also interpreting its messages, comparing them with personal beliefs, and forming emotional responses. Rahayu (2010) referred to this process as media exposure, which reflects the extent to which individuals access, pay attention to, and interpret media content. From a behaviorist perspective, Watson (1930) argued that human behavior is formed through stimulus-response relationships from the environment. Therefore, repeated exposure to negative narratives about marriage on TikTok may act as a stimulus that shapes responses such as fear, anxiety, doubt, or avoidance toward marriage.

Several previous studies have discussed the relationship between digital media exposure and attitudes toward marriage. Fu (2025) showed that individuals' engagement with social media plays an important role in shaping their views and attitudes toward marriage. Mariska and Sumardjijati (2025) found that exposure to "marriage is scary"

content influenced Generation Z's attitudes toward marriage, particularly in the cognitive and affective aspects. Oktaviani and Krismono (2025) also showed that TikTok comments on the "marriage is scary" phenomenon reflect a shift in perceptions of marriage as something risky and uncertain. In addition, Azizah et al. (2025) found that 83.2% of respondents felt influenced by negative stigma about marriage, including concerns about changes in partner behavior after marriage, domestic violence, lack of support, and weak spiritual guidance from a partner. However, most existing studies have focused on content analysis, digital discourse, or stigma, while empirical research examining the effect of watching "marriage is scary" content on marital attitudes from a social psychological perspective remains limited.

Based on these issues, this study aims to examine the effect of watching "marriage is scary" content on TikTok on marital attitudes among early adults. This study is important because it addresses a relatively new digital phenomenon that has developed rapidly on TikTok and has potential implications for how young people evaluate marriage. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to connect watching behavior as a form of digital media exposure with marital attitudes as a psychological construct in the premarital stage. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of social psychology, particularly in understanding attitude formation toward marriage in the digital era. Practically, this study may provide useful insights for premarital counseling, healthy relationship education, and psychological interventions for early adults who experience fear, uncertainty, or difficulty in building long-term romantic commitment.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design. The quantitative approach was used because this study focused on measuring the relationship between variables through numerical data and statistical analysis. Creswell (2014) stated that quantitative research is appropriate for testing theories by examining measurable relationships among variables using standardized instruments. In addition, explanatory research was considered suitable because this study aimed to explain the causal relationship between watching "marriage is scary" content on TikTok as the independent variable and marital attitudes as the dependent variable. The population of this study consisted of early adults in Indonesia. The sample was selected using a non-probability sampling technique with a purposive sampling method. This technique was applied because

respondents had to meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, namely being 18–25 years old, unmarried, active TikTok users, and having watched "marriage is scary" content on TikTok. The minimum sample size was determined using the Lemeshow formula, resulting in 96 respondents, which was then rounded to 100 respondents. This sample size was considered adequate for examining the influence of watching "marriage is scary" content on marital attitudes among early adults.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of two scales: the watching behavior scale for "marriage is scary" content and the marital attitudes scale. The watching behavior scale was developed based on Nabila and Anna Rifa (2020), consisting of five dimensions: selectivity, intentionality, utilitarianism, involvement, and imperviousness to influence. This scale contained 16 valid items and used a five-point Likert scale. The marital attitudes scale was adopted from Watanata and Nabila (2025), based on the marital attitudes scale developed by Braaten and Rosen (1998), consisting of positive and negative dimensions with 23 items and a four-point Likert scale. Instrument validity was examined through content validity and construct validity, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The watching behavior scale showed a reliability coefficient of 0.876, while the marital attitudes scale showed a reliability coefficient of 0.805, indicating that both instruments were reliable. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27. The analysis included descriptive statistics, normality testing using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, linearity testing through Test for Linearity, and simple linear regression to test the hypothesis. The hypothesis was accepted if the significance value was less than 0.05, indicating that watching "marriage is scary" content had a significant effect on marital attitudes.

RESULTS

1. Classical Assumption Test

a. Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the data distribution was normal or not. In this study, the normality test was calculated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) statistical test. The data are considered normally distributed if the significance value is greater than 0.05.

Table 1. Normality Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	Unstandardized Residual
N	112
Mean	0.0000000
Std. Deviation	7.94514501
Absolute	0.048
Positive	0.048
Negative	-0.047
Test Statistic	0.048
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.200

Note. Test distribution is normal and calculated from data.

The results of the normality test using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test are presented in Table 4.10. Based on the results, the test statistic value was 0.048, and the significance value was 0.200. Residual data are considered normally distributed when the significance value is greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the residual data in this study were normally distributed.

b. Linearity Test

The linearity test was conducted to determine whether the independent variable had a linear relationship with the dependent variable. If the significance value in the deviation from linearity column is greater than 0.05, the relationship between the variables can be considered linear.

Table 2. Linearity Test

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Combined	3975.188	42	94.647	1.438	0.089
Linearity	1510.517	1	1510.517	22.946	0.000
Deviation from Linearity	2464.671	41	60.114	0.913	0.618
Within Groups	4542.240	69	65.830		
Total	8517.429	111			

Based on Table 2, the result of the linearity test showed that the significance value of deviation from linearity was 0.618, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be stated that there was a linear relationship between watching "marriage is scary" content and marital attitude. Thus, the linearity assumption in the regression analysis was fulfilled.

2. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing in this study aimed to determine whether there was an effect of the independent variable, namely watching "marriage is scary" content, on the dependent

variable, namely marital attitude. The hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression analysis.

Table 3. Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.421	0.177	0.170	7.98118

Predictor: Watching "marriage is scary" content.

Based on Table 3, the Model Summary shows an R Square value of 0.177, or 17.7%. This indicates that watching "marriage is scary" content contributed 17.7% to marital attitude. Meanwhile, the remaining 82.3% was influenced by other factors outside the variables examined in this study.

Table 4. Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1510.517	1	1510.517	23.713	0.000
Residual	7006.912	110	63.699		
Total	8517.429	111			

Dependent variable: Marital attitude.

Predictor: Watching "marriage is scary" content.

Based on Table 4, the ANOVA results were used to determine whether watching "marriage is scary" content significantly affected marital attitude. The analysis showed a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which met the testing criteria. Therefore, it can be concluded that H1 was accepted, meaning that watching "marriage is scary" content on TikTok had a significant effect on marital attitude.

Table 5. Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	70.727	3.431		20.615	0.000
Watching "marriage is scary" content	-0.290	0.060	-0.421	-4.870	0.000

Dependent variable: Marital attitude.

The coefficient table was used to formulate the simple linear regression equation, namely $Y = a + bX$. Based on Table 4.14, the regression equation obtained was:

$Y = 70.727 - 0.290X$

The regression coefficient value of -0.290 indicates a negative effect of watching "marriage is scary" content on marital attitude. This means that the more frequently

individuals watch "marriage is scary" content on TikTok, the more negative their attitude toward marriage tends to be.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the effect of watching "marriage is scary" content on TikTok on marital attitude among early adults. The results showed that watching "marriage is scary" content had a significant negative effect on marital attitude. This finding was supported by the significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the research hypothesis was accepted. The regression coefficient showed a negative direction, meaning that the higher the intensity of watching "marriage is scary" content, the lower or more negative the marital attitude of early adults. In other words, repeated exposure to negative narratives about marriage on TikTok may reduce individuals' positive views toward marriage.

The coefficient of determination showed an R Square value of 0.177, which means that watching "marriage is scary" content contributed 17.7% to marital attitude. This result indicates that TikTok content has a measurable influence on how early adults evaluate marriage. However, the influence is not dominant because 82.3% of marital attitude is explained by other factors outside this study. These factors may include personal experience, family background, emotional maturity, cultural values, religious understanding, peer influence, and direct observation of marital relationships in real life. This is in line with Kıymaz & Çötok (2024), who explained that marital attitude is influenced by both internal and external factors, including personal experience, emotional conditions, social environment, culture, mass media, and religious institutions.

The results of this study are consistent with Ajala et al. (2023), who found that exposure to "marriage is scary" content had a negative influence on young people's attitudes toward marriage. Repeated exposure to negative narratives can shape the perception that marriage is a frightening, risky, and uncertain institution. In the context of TikTok, the personalized algorithm may strengthen this effect because users are repeatedly presented with similar content on their For You Page. This condition may create a digital reality in which marriage is mostly represented through stories of betrayal, domestic conflict, emotional suffering, financial burden, and divorce. As a result, individuals may develop a distorted perception of marriage when negative narratives are not balanced with positive or realistic representations.

The finding that most respondents had a high level of watching behavior toward "marriage is scary" content also reflects the strong relevance of this phenomenon among early adults. The categorization results showed that 59 respondents or 52.7% were in the high category. This means that most respondents had a strong tendency to access and watch "marriage is scary" content on TikTok. This condition is important because early adulthood is a developmental phase in which individuals explore romantic relationships, personal identity, and future life commitments. Allison (2023) stated that early adulthood or emerging adulthood is marked by identity exploration, including in the area of love and romantic relationships. Therefore, repeated exposure to negative marital narratives during this stage may influence how individuals construct expectations and concerns about marriage.

The findings can also be explained through the behaviorist theory proposed by Watson (1930), which states that human behavior is formed through the relationship between stimulus and response from the environment. In this study, "marriage is scary" content can be understood as a digital stimulus received through repeated watching behavior. The more frequently individuals are exposed to narratives about domestic violence, infidelity, financial pressure, and household conflict, the more likely they are to form emotional and cognitive responses such as fear, anxiety, doubt, and skepticism toward marriage. This is supported by Azizah et al. (2025), who found that negative stigma about marriage may influence young people's perceptions, especially regarding concerns about changes in partner behavior after marriage, domestic violence, lack of support, and other marital risks.

Although watching "marriage is scary" content had a significant negative effect, the marital attitude of most respondents remained in the moderate category. A total of 76 respondents or 67.9% were in this category. This result indicates that watching negative marriage-related content does not necessarily make early adults completely reject marriage. Instead, it tends to reduce their positive evaluation of marriage and make them more cautious in considering marital commitment. This finding is in line with Lestari et al. (2024), who found that young people today tend to be more selective and careful in viewing marriage. Therefore, the moderate category may reflect a more critical attitude, in which individuals still recognize marriage as an important social and emotional bond, but also consider its risks more carefully.

The demographic characteristics of respondents also provide an important context for interpreting the findings. Most respondents were aged 21–23 years, with 74 respondents or 66.1% belonging to this age group. This age range is part of emerging adulthood, a phase in which individuals begin to think more seriously about romantic relationships and future commitments (Arnett, 2000). However, because the respondents were still in the premarital stage, their understanding of marriage was mostly shaped by observation, social narratives, and digital content rather than direct marital experience. This condition may make them more vulnerable to media influence, especially when the content they consume repeatedly emphasizes fear and risk in marriage.

The gender distribution also needs to be considered because the majority of respondents were female, with 99 respondents or 88.4%. This condition may be related to women's higher emotional involvement in content related to relationships and interpersonal dynamics. Krasnova (2017) explained that women tend to show stronger emotional engagement in relational narratives. In addition, "marriage is scary" content often discusses issues that are socially and psychologically close to women's experiences, such as domestic burden, domestic violence, gender inequality, and changes in women's roles after marriage. Rodiyah (2025) also emphasized that negative marital narratives often highlight social pressures experienced by women after marriage. Therefore, female respondents may be more emotionally responsive to this type of content and more actively involved in watching it.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on marital attitude by showing that digital media exposure, particularly watching behavior on TikTok, can influence how early adults evaluate marriage. Previous studies have discussed "marriage is scary" mainly as a digital discourse or social media phenomenon, while this study provides empirical evidence that watching such content has a measurable negative effect on marital attitude. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of digital literacy among young people. Early adults need to develop the ability to critically filter, interpret, and evaluate marriage-related content on social media so that their views are not shaped solely by negative narratives. Schools, universities, counselors, and premarital education providers may use these findings to design educational programs that present a more balanced understanding of marriage, including both its challenges and its potential for healthy, supportive relationships.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the number of respondents was limited to 112 people, so the findings should be generalized carefully to the broader population of early adults. Second, the sample was dominated by female respondents, which may influence the overall pattern of responses. Third, the use of self-report questionnaires may lead to response bias, as respondents may answer based on current social media trends or their subjective emotional reactions. Fourth, this study only examined one independent variable, namely watching "marriage is scary" content, while marital attitude may also be influenced by other psychological, social, cultural, and religious factors. Future studies are recommended to involve a larger and more balanced sample, examine other variables such as family communication, relationship experience, attachment style, religiosity, and digital literacy, and use mixed-method approaches to gain a deeper understanding of how digital narratives shape attitudes toward marriage.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that watching "marriage is scary" content on TikTok has a negative and significant effect on marital attitude among early adults. Based on the descriptive analysis of 112 respondents, most respondents had a high level of watching behavior toward "marriage is scary" content, with 59 respondents or 52.7% included in this category. Meanwhile, marital attitude was mostly in the moderate category, with 76 respondents or 67.9%. This indicates that most early adults do not completely reject marriage, but they also do not show a highly positive attitude toward it. The simple linear regression analysis showed a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which means that the research hypothesis was accepted. Thus, the higher the tendency to watch "marriage is scary" content on TikTok, the lower or more negative the marital attitude of early adults tends to be.

The findings contribute to the development of social psychology studies, particularly in understanding how digital media exposure can shape young people's attitudes toward marriage in the premarital stage. Practically, this study highlights the importance of digital literacy, critical media consumption, and balanced premarital education for early adults so that their views on marriage are not shaped only by negative narratives circulating on social media. The contribution of watching "marriage is scary" content to marital attitude was 17.7%, while the remaining 82.3% was influenced by other factors outside this study. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine other

relevant factors, such as family background, romantic relationship experience, religiosity, attachment style, gender perspectives, social support, and digital literacy, using broader and more balanced samples to provide a more comprehensive understanding of marital attitude formation in the digital era.

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