

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PERFORMATIVE MASCULINITY ON TIKTOK'S "PERFORMATIVE MALE" TREND IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze how masculinity is conceptualized and how audiences respond to the "Performative Male" trend on TikTok in Indonesia. This study employs a qualitative netnographic approach, with data consisting of fifteen selected videos uploaded by Indonesian users participating in the trend. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the analysis emphasizes three analytical categories: expression of emotion, feminine-coded masculinity, and the role of vulnerability. The findings show that masculinity in the "Performative Male" trend is conceptualized as a performative and flexible identity, characterized by calm emotional expression, an aesthetic lifestyle, and openness to vulnerability. Furthermore, audience responses reveal that this form of masculinity in the "Performative Male" trend is not fully accepted within society, as indicated by the dominance of critical responses.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana maskulinitas dikonseptualisasikan serta bagaimana respons audiens terhadap tren "*Performative Male*" di TikTok di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode netnografi, dengan data yang terdiri dari lima belas video terpilih yang diunggah oleh pengguna Indonesia yang mengikuti tren tersebut. Dengan menggunakan teori performativitas dari Judith Butler, analisis difokuskan pada tiga kategori yaitu: ekspresi emosi, maskulinitas berkode feminisme, dan peran kerentanan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa maskulinitas dalam tren "*Performative Male*" dikonseptualisasikan sebagai identitas yang performatif dan fleksibel, yang ditandai dengan ekspresi yang tenang, gaya hidup estetik, serta keterbukaan terhadap kerentanan. Selain itu, respons audiens menunjukkan bahwa bentuk maskulinitas ini belum sepenuhnya diterima oleh masyarakat, sebagaimana ditunjukkan oleh dominasi respons kritis.

Introduction

Masculinity is a social construct shaped by societal expectations regarding what "real men" are supposed to be defined as "not feminine" (Connor, Fisher., & Spelten, 2021). Masculinity is often portrayed through muscular bodies, emphasizing strength, independence, and technical competence (Farci & Scarcelli, 2024). As a result, these societal expectations create a stereotype that defines how men should present themselves. However, while gender stereotypes can provide a sense of identity, they often become rigid boundaries that limit people and cause negative consequences for individuals who are perceived to fall outside their expectations (Nadal, 2017). For instance, men who present themselves in a feminine style are still considered taboo or even labelled as deviant, because society often perceives men as having to look macho. This phenomenon often arises in both everyday social life and the digital media space.

The media plays a powerful role in challenging stereotypes and encouraging a more inclusive understanding of gender (Nigah, 2024). Media, particularly social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, function not only as sites of documentation but also as arenas where individuals express their identities for public consumption. In recent years, within the competitive social media landscape, TikTok has managed to grow and expand its influence. This platform's success is anchored in three factors: a highly personalized algorithm, a short video format, and popularity among different groups (Hayath & Maruf, 2025). There are several types of video content on TikTok, such as video challenges, advertisements, tutorials, and trends. A trend on TikTok does not merely function as entertainment but often emerges in response to underlying social issues faced by society, including those related to gender identity. Among the numerous trends related to the issue of gender identity, one of the most recently discussed is called the "Performative Male" trend that spread rapidly across countries. Many young men on TikTok have joined in this trend to show a new perspective on how masculinity can be performed in the digital era.

According to Urban Dictionary (2025), a performative male refers to men who deliberately project their feminine side rather than the masculine side typically portrayed by men, primarily to increase popularity and attract attention from women. Furthermore, they want to appear mature, so women feel safe around performative males. In gender studies, this phenomenon can be understood through Judith Butler (1990), who states that gender is not biologically innate but rather something that is continuously constructed, negotiated, and repeated through actions and behaviors.

The "Performative Male" trend on TikTok demonstrates that masculinity is not a fixed identity but rather something flexible that can be performed. Instead of projecting a traditional image of masculinity, which relies on a firm physical presence, this trend has spread across countries, including Indonesia. Based on the phenomenon, this study would like to analyze how masculinity is conceptualized in the "Performative Male" trend on TikTok in Indonesia. This research also aims to explore whether this trend opens up new spaces for masculinity expression outside of traditional norms or instead forms new stereotypes that limit men's ability to express their identities.

In order to support this research, several relevant previous studies provide relevant insights for this analysis. The first previous study conducted by Foster & Baker (2022) discusses the representation and negotiation of masculinity on TikTok. Through a visual content analysis of 205 videos from 43 male creators, the findings show that while they adopt feminine aesthetics such as jewellery and dance, they still reinforce hegemonic masculinity norms through an emphasis on masculinity, physical attractiveness, and heterosexual-affirming music lyrics. This reveals that while TikTok is an inclusive platform, its representation of masculinity actually reproduces gender and sexual inequalities. This study also highlights the limitations of TikTok's inclusive potential and emphasizes the need for further research into its impact on audience perceptions.

Previous research from Rositah & Dharma (2025), investigated the deconstruction of gender identity expressed by male influencer Karel on TikTok. Using a qualitative study applying Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, this study found that Karel embodies a fluid and inclusive gender identity that successfully disrupts masculine and feminine binary categorization. This study revealed TikTok's role as a cultural arena in which deconstructed gender identities are negotiated, normalized, and commercialized, thereby redefining gender discourse in digital spaces.

Furthermore, a study by Lolita & Isnaini (2023) aims to analyze the process of self-disclosure and persona management of men who express their feminine side, such as dressing, makeup, dance, and personal stories on TikTok through the content they share. Using Goffman's dramaturgical theory, the researcher interviewed four male informants with feminine personas, resulting in the finding that TikTok functions as their 'front stage' where they expressed themselves through dance, crossdressing, makeup, and cosplay content to build popularity and follow trends. They reported that their feminine personas were primarily performative to gain popularity, not a representation of their true identities.

Despite the number of studies that explore masculinity and gender identity on TikTok and other platforms, previous studies have focused on broader representations of masculinity, feminine male personas, or gender deconstruction in general. More importantly, no existing research has specifically analyzed the "Performative Male" trend as a distinct cultural phenomenon, particularly within Indonesia's cultural context, where gender identity remains relatively rigid. The concept of masculinity for young men in Indonesia develops through deeply rooted traditions and strict adherence to societal expectations (Malhotra & Hopkins, 2025)

This study draws on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990), which argues that gender is not biologically innate but is continuously constructed, negotiated, and repeated through actions and behaviors. Butler's concept of gender performativity helps explain that "Performative Masculinity" emerges as gender is continuously enacted through repeated practices. Moreover, since this phenomenon circulates in digital environments, the study applies a netnographic approach to examine how users participate in and shape the trend within online communities. The objective of the study, based on the topic explored, is outlined as follows:

1. To analyze how masculinity is conceptualized in the "Performative Male" trend in Indonesia through the lens of Butler's gender performativity theory.
2. To investigate how audiences respond to the performance of masculinity in the "Performative Male" trend on TikTok in Indonesia.

Method

This study employs a netnographic approach. The netnography approach is an adaptation of the ethnography approach that focuses on the context of online space to interpret cultural practices that occur through digital content and interaction (Kozinets, 2015). The primary data source consists of fifteen selected videos under the "Performative Male" on TikTok posted between June 2025 and October 2025, created by Indonesian users who participated in the trend.

Data collection was conducted through two stages. The first stage is netnographic observation, in which the researcher observes how the "Performative Male" trend circulated and is discussed on TikTok. In the second stage, the researcher selected videos based on several criteria such as relevance to the topic, content appropriateness, content types, and the level of public engagement, as indicated by the number of likes, comments, and shares. Furthermore, each selected video was saved for subsequent close analysis.

In analyzing the data, the researcher uses Creswell's method (2018) and applies Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990). The first stage is organizing the data; the researcher will organize the selected videos from the TikTok "Performative Male" trend. The second is reading and familiarizing oneself with the data; to gain a deeper understanding,

the researcher repeatedly viewed each video. The next stage is generating themes, the researcher grouped the coded data to align with the three analytical focuses, such as:

- (1) Expression of emotional in masculinity: Refers to how individuals display and manage emotions as part of gender performance.
- (2) Feminine-coded elements in masculinity: Feminine-coded elements refer to practices, behaviors, and aesthetic choices culturally associated with femininity but performed by men.
- (3) Role of vulnerability in masculinity: Vulnerability refers to openness to emotional expression, sensitivity, and non-dominant behavior within masculine identity.

Results and Discussion

The analysis will be divided into two sections corresponding to the research questions. The first section focuses on content analysis, examining how masculinity is constructed through performative practice in the “Performative Male” TikTok video trend. The analysis draws on Judith Butler’s theoretical framework of performativity and focuses on three emerging categories: emotional masculinity, femininity-coded masculinity, and the role of vulnerability in masculinity, which views gender as something constructed through the repetition of action in social spaces. The second section discusses audience response through the comment section. Within a netnographic framework, comments are understood as spaces of digital social interaction that reveal how the meaning of masculinity is negotiated, accepted, or questioned by viewers. Through these two sections, the analysis not only outlines how masculinity is represented in the content but also how that meaning is socially produced and constructed within the digital space of TikTok.

The fifteen videos below were selected based on the highest level of engagement, considering the two main criteria: more than 10,000 views and over 100 likes.

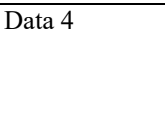
Table 1. Selected Data of “Performative Male” Content

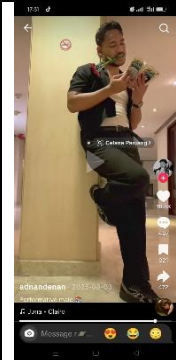
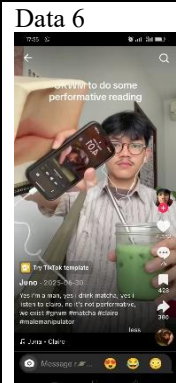
No	Upload Date	Creator	View	Like
1	September 10, 2025	@axe_indonesia	10,500.000	18.900
2	September 9, 2025	@adityaharivonda	12,600	1.347
3	September 6, 2025	@jordyhevandi	12,100	761
4	August 8, 2025	@calisariboi	26,600	166
5	August 3, 2025	@jok.recaro	117,900	10,600
6	June 30, 2025	@junorgasm	47,000	4,350
7	July 29, 2025	@seblakagakbasidikit	287,700	40,400
8	July 30, 2025	@her.byuss	505,100	50,400
9	July 31, 2025	@hachiwarae	322,800	35,600
10	August 1, 2025	@themaplemedia	478,700	22,100
11	August 21, 2025	@tiktoknyaadam	13,700	1,111
12	August 1, 2025	@faridzalfarizii	10,500	426
13	July 1, 2025	@bookcabinets	25,400	1,183
14	August 8, 2025	@jollygoodfellow.jgf	26,600	166
15	August 17, 2025	@rahmanperm	16,300	908

Conceptualization of Masculinity in the “Performative Male” Trend on TikTok in Indonesia

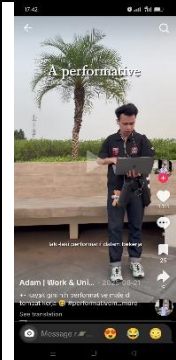
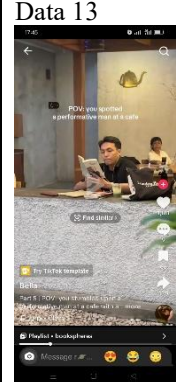
The section presents a content analysis focused on three analytical categories to examine how masculinity is constructed through performative practice in the “Performative Male” TikTok trend.

Table 2. "Performative Male" Content Analysis Based on Three Categories

Data	Expression of Emotion	Feminine-Coded	Role of Vulnerability
Data 1 	The man shows emotion in a quiet and subtle way through calm posture, slow movement, and reflective activity. In the framework of gender performativity, this repeated calm behavior produces masculinity associated with introspection and emotional awareness rather than overt intensity.	His style is perceived as more "feminine" by society. He looks clean, stylish, and careful with his appearance. The attention to grooming, aesthetic presentation, and relaxed styling reflects feminine-coded practices culturally associated with softness and self-care. These elements construct masculinity through aesthetic awareness rather than physical dominance.	Vulnerability shows when the subject allows himself to engage in soft and reflective activity in a visible public setting. He does not attempt to perform toughness or masculinity through dominance. Instead, vulnerability emerges through calm solitude and openness to being perceived as gentle.
Data 2 	He appears soft and happy, enjoying music by Clairo, books, and matcha. He expresses emotion through lifestyle rather than dominance. Instead of displaying strong facial emotion, the subject communicates feeling through taste, music, and reading. This indicates performative masculinity constructed through emotional sensitivity.	His interests and style, such as Clairo's songs, matcha drinks, feminist books, vintage layers, tote bags, and women-centered content, blend traditionally feminine-coded practices. These elements emphasize sensitivity, aesthetic taste, and attention to appearance. This creates a hybrid masculinity where masculine identity integrates feminine-coded lifestyle practices.	He openly embraces interests that challenge traditional masculinity in public, showing vulnerability and comfort with being seen as different. This reflects strategic vulnerability, where the subject knowingly presents himself in a non-traditional masculine way. Vulnerability here is expressed through openness to difference and emotional self-expression.
Data 3 	He appears calm and focused, reading a philosophy book, <i>Madilog</i> , while drinking. Emotion is expressed through stillness and concentration rather than facial expression. The reflective activity constructs a quiet emotional atmosphere. This indicates masculinity grounded in intellectual introspection and emotional control.	Wearing accessories like a tote bag and headphones. Drinking from a tumbler and reading in public create a gentle, aesthetic vibe. The outfit is clean, minimal, and styled, reflecting care in appearance. These elements function as feminine-coded aesthetic markers associated with softness and sensitivity. This reflects hybrid masculinity combining intellectual masculinity with aesthetic softness.	Reading a philosophy book, "Madilog," in public shows openness to being seen as "different." He is not hiding his interests even if they do not fit traditional masculine norms. This reflects intellectual vulnerability. The subject allows himself to be perceived as thoughtful and non-dominant.
Data 4 	He shows a romantic and playful mood by holding a flower in his mouth. The pose is relaxed and slightly dramatic. This data shows stylized emotional expression. The romantic gesture constructs	The flower is a strong symbol associated with femininity and romance. His leaning pose and stylized presentation feel expressive and soft. The outfit remains masculine, but styling introduces sensitivity. This	Acting playful and romantic in public can feel risky within traditional masculine norms. He allows himself to look expressive and slightly exaggerated while reading and holding the flower.

	masculinity through aesthetic performance. This aligns with gender performativity, where repeated expressive gestures produce identity.	combination constructs hybrid masculinity where masculine identity incorporates feminine-coded symbols. The flower acts as a visual marker of softness.	This reflects expressive vulnerability. The subject openly performs softness and emotionality. Vulnerability is shown through willingness to appear romantic and non-dominant.
Data 5 	His expression is calm and neutral, focused on reading. Emotion is shown through quiet activity. Listening to music while reading suggests an inner emotional world. Emotional expression here is subtle and internalized through atmosphere rather than facial expression.	Wearing a tote bag, holding a book, and neat outfit give a “soft boy” aesthetic. The layered shirt, loose shorts, and accessories show intentional styling. Feminine-coded practices such as aesthetic dressing and calm activity construct masculinity grounded in softness.	Reading and dressing this way in public shows he is comfortable being seen as he is. He is not aiming to project dominance or traditional masculinity. Vulnerability emerges through openness and calm self-presentation. The subject allows himself to appear soft and reflective.
Data 6 	The subject shows a neutral and slightly serious facial expression, yet his actions such as playing the song “Clairo – Juna,” drinking matcha, and reading, construct a calm and reflective emotional atmosphere. This indicates that emotion is not expressed directly through facial intensity, but through curated lifestyle practices. Rather than suppressing emotion, the subject performs a subtle emotional presence through aesthetic and reflective practices.	Matcha, listening to Clairo, and reading a book entitled Lolita by Vladimir N (a novel often examined in feminist criticism) function as feminine-coded aesthetic practices associated with softness, calmness, and emotional sensitivity. The glasses, neat shirt, and tote bag with some cute keychains emphasize careful styling and self-presentation.	The text “yes I’m a man... no it’s not performative” indicates awareness of audience judgment. By addressing potential criticism, the subject performs strategic vulnerability. He openly acknowledges that his lifestyle may be questioned, yet continues to present himself softly and reflectively. Vulnerability here emerges through openness to interpretation and social evaluation.
Data 7 	The subject’s face appears calm and serious, almost emotionless, yet emotional engagement is expressed indirectly through listening to music using two phones. This suggests that emotion is mediated through activity rather than facial expression. The exaggerated use of two phones indicates that emotional expression is stylized and performative.	The subject’s highlight that he listening to Clairo, known for soft and emotional music, functions as a feminine-coded aesthetic signal. The accessories such as earphones, keychain, and simple but curated styling, emphasize gentleness and sensitivity. These visual and auditory elements construct masculinity through mood	Holding two phones while playing music creates an exaggerated and humorous presentation. This reflects ironic vulnerability, where the subject knowingly performs emotional engagement in an exaggerated manner. By doing so, he acknowledges the performative nature of the trend. Vulnerability appears through self-

		and aesthetic rather than physical presence.	awareness, as the subject allows himself to appear slightly humorous and non-traditional.
Data 8 	The subject displays visible confusion while tasting the drink described as “should have umami.” His facial expression becomes more open and reactive compared to the calm expressions in other data. This indicates direct emotional expression rather than controlled emotional presentation. The subject allows uncertainty and confusion to be visible.	The act of discussing taste and sensory experience reflects sensitivity to detail, which is culturally associated with feminine-coded attentiveness. Drinking aesthetically presenter water and focusing on flavor further emphasizes emotional and sensory awareness. The simple but styled outfit, including shirt, cap, and accessories, reinforces soft aesthetic masculinity.	The subject openly shares his confusion and opinion, even when unsure. This reflects casual vulnerability. He does not attempt to appear confident or dominant, but instead allows emotional uncertainty to be visible. Vulnerability is therefore expressed through spontaneous reaction and emotional honesty.
Data 9 	The subject appears friendly and slightly shy, with relaxed posture and open body language. Emotion is expressed through softness and approachability rather than intensity. The calm and gentle expression constructs masculinity as emotionally accessible. This suggests a performative shift where masculinity is associated with calm interaction rather than dominance. Emotional expression is subtle but present through posture and facial expression.	The use of books, water, colorful outfit, and curated accessories reflects a soft aesthetic lifestyle. These elements emphasize sensitivity, attention to detail, and self-expression. The styling highlights care in appearance, which is culturally associated with feminine-coded practices. Masculinity is therefore constructed through aesthetic identity and visual sensitivity.	The slightly awkward pose suggests that the subject is not trying to appear perfect. This reflects casual vulnerability. He allows himself to appear shy and relaxed in public. Vulnerability is expressed through openness and non-dominant posture. The subject embraces softness rather than asserting confidence.
Data 10 	The subject appears calm and focused while reading, with emotion expressed through quiet internal reflection. Listening to music while reading creates a reflective mood. Emotion is therefore internalized and mediated through solitary activity. In performativity terms, repeated solitary reading constructs masculinity associated with introspection and calmness.	Reading in public with a tumbler, relaxed, layered outfit, and casual bag creates a soft aesthetic presentation. These elements emphasize calm lifestyle, sensitivity, and attention to appearance. The styling reflects feminine-coded softness integrated into masculine identity. Masculinity is constructed through aesthetic and reflective practices.	Sitting alone and reading in public while others are busy with their phone reflects quiet vulnerability. The subject embraces solitude and introspection without attempting to appear dominant. Vulnerability emerges through openness to quiet personal moments. This indicates comfort with emotional sensitivity and reflective masculinity.
Data 11	The subject appears focused and serious while working, indicating controlled emotional expression directed toward productivity.	The teddy bear accessory functions as a strong feminine-coded symbol associated with softness, comfort, and emotional	Bringing a teddy bear into a work setting reflects casual vulnerability. The subject openly integrates playfulness into a serious

	However, the presence of music creates a personal emotional space that softens this seriousness. Emotion is therefore not displayed directly but mediated through atmosphere and routine. This reflects performative masculinity constructed through calm concentration and quiet emotional presence. The subject balances seriousness and emotional sensitivity, suggesting that masculinity can include calm productivity without suppressing emotional awareness.	warmth. Combined with clean styling approach and careful presentation, this element introduces sensitivity into masculine identity. The contrast between working seriously and carrying a playful object creates a hybrid masculinity, where masculine productivity coexists with feminine-coded softness.	environment, allowing himself to appear soft in a context traditionally associated with masculinity and productivity. This challenges hegemonic masculinity, which often values seriousness and emotional control.
Data 12 	The subject appears relaxed and slightly cheerful, with emotion expressed through casual movement and playful attitude rather than strong facial expression. Emotional presence is subtle and embodied in posture and movement. This suggests masculinity constructed through comfort and ease rather than control. The subject does not perform seriousness or dominance, but instead performs softness through everyday movement.	The relaxed layered outfit, glasses, and small carried items create a soft everyday aesthetic. This aesthetic aligns with “soft boy” masculinity, where fashion and presentation communicate emotional awareness. The subject’s styling reflects feminine-coded traits such as attention to detail and gentle presentation, which contribute to hybrid masculine identity.	Walking casually and presenting himself in a relaxed way reflects casual vulnerability. The subject does not attempt to assert dominance or confidence. Instead, he allows himself to appear soft and approachable. This openness to being seen in a playful and relaxed manner indicates comfort with non-hegemonic masculinity.
Data 13 	The subject appears calm and focused, with very subtle emotional expression while reading and listening to music. Emotion is internalized and suggested through solitary activity. This reflects masculinity constructed through introspection and quiet emotional awareness. In performativity terms, repeated solitary reading and listening practices create masculinity associated with inner emotional depth rather than external expression.	Reading a book entitled “A Feminine Mystique” in a café, drinking matcha, carrying a tote bag, and wearing a simple styled outfit reflect an aesthetic lifestyle emphasizing softness and care. These elements function as feminine-coded markers associated with calmness and sensitivity. Masculinity is constructed through taste and environment rather than physical strength.	Sitting alone and reading in public reflects quiet vulnerability. The subject is visible but not seeking attention. This indicates openness to solitude and emotional introspection. Vulnerability emerges through calm presence rather than dramatic expression. The subject performs masculinity that allows emotional depth without overt display.
Data 14	The subject displays calm and focused behavior, with quiet internal emotion	Matcha, reading, and listening to Clairo signal soft aesthetic masculinity. These	The subject presents himself in a carefully styled way in public,

	conveyed through reading, drinking, and listening to music. Emotional expression is subtle and reflective. This suggests masculinity constructed through controlled emotional awareness. The repetition of calm aesthetic activities produces masculinity grounded in introspection.	elements emphasize sensitivity and emotional awareness. The fashion-forward outfit adds elegance and careful styling, reinforcing feminine-coded presentation. This reflects hybrid masculinity combining masculine identity with feminine-coded style.	openly inviting attention and potential judgment. This reflects strategic vulnerability. Vulnerability emerges through deliberate self-presentation and openness to interpretation.
Data 15 	The subject's expression appears serious and controlled, yet underlying motivation reveals emotional influence. Emotion is therefore present but internalized. This suggests masculinity constructed through controlled emotional awareness rather than expressive display. The contrast between serious expression and emotional motivation indicates that emotion shapes behavior even when not visibly expressed.	Reading a book, drinking matcha, wearing a tote bag, listening to Olivia Dean's song (songs that featuring themes of female empowerment) and curated styling reflect soft aesthetic masculinity. The subject's attention to appearance reinforces feminine-coded traits integrated into masculine identity.	The text indicating that he changed himself to be liked reveals explicit vulnerability. The subject openly acknowledges external influence and desire for approval. This reflects strategic vulnerability, where emotional openness is expressed through narrative explanation. Vulnerability here is more explicit compared to other data, as the subject directly admits emotional motivation behind his presentation.

Expression of Emotion in Performative Masculinity

Most subjects display neutral facial expressions while expressing emotion through reflective activities such as reading books, particularly feminist books, and listening to emotional music like songs by Clairo which are associated with a soft and emotional tone and are popular among young women listeners. They also sit alone, or enjoying matcha drinks. This pattern appears in data 1, data 5, data 10, data 13, and data 14, where the subjects appear calm and focused in solitary activities. Emotion-in this context-is not expressed and communicated through facial intensity but internalized through the atmosphere created by these activities.

In data 1, the subject reads a book in public with relaxed body language and calm demeanor. Emotion is communicated through stillness rather than explicit facial expression. In data 5, the subject reads while listening to music, suggesting an internal emotional world. In data 10, the subject sits alone while reading, creating a reflective and introspective mood. Similarly, data 13 and data 14 depict reading in cafés and listening to emotional music, reinforcing a sensitive and calm masculinity. These patterns indicate a form of subtle masculinity where emotional awareness is present but expressed in restrained ways.

In addition, some data demonstrate playful and ironic emotional expression. In data 4, the subject holds a flower in his mouth and poses romantically, an act culturally associated with femininity. In data 7, the subject humorously holds two phones while listening to music, indicating ironic emotional expression. In data 8, the subject shows confusion while tasting a drink, displaying spontaneous emotional expression. In data 12, the subject moves casually

and playfully, expressing emotion through body language. Data 11 also presents emotional expression through the use of a teddy bear accessory, which introduces a soft and playful element.

These findings show that emotion in the “Performative Male” trend is not suppressed as in hegemonic masculinity but is instead redefined through aesthetic everyday practices. From Butler’s gender perspective of gender performativity, the repetition of soft emotional expressions constructs a new masculine identity grounded in sensitivity. Masculinity in this trend is therefore conceptualized as emotionally aware, calm, and reflective, produced through repeated emotional performances

Feminine-Coded in Performative Masculinity

Across the fifteen data, male subjects consistently adopt aesthetic symbols culturally associated with femininity, such as tote bags, Labubu keychains, matcha drinks, soft music preferences. They also engage with feminist books, wear layered outfits, and careful attention to appearance. These elements appear in data 2, data 3, data 6, data 9, data 14, and data 15, and also in symbolic forms such as the flower in data 4 and playful accessories in data 11. Across the data, the recurring patterns can also be identified in the use of specific audio and visual elements that serve as easily recognizable cultural markers. Most of the videos feature songs that associated with themes of feminism and women’s empowerment, such as those songs by Clairo, Olivia Dean, and Laufey. This can be understood as part of a performative strategy, where masculinity is constructed through elements that signal emotional awareness and align with audience expectations.

Some data show the presence of feminist-themed books, displayed while subjects read in public spaces like cafes. The repetition of these objects suggests that they serve not only as personal interests but also as visible symbolic elements that communicate a specific identity. The use of public spaces further indicates that these elements are intentionally arranged for observation, suggesting that reading is not merely a private activity but part of a performative display in both public and digital spaces.

In data 2, the subject displays interest in Clairo’s music, matcha, tote bags, and vintage styling, all associated with soft aesthetics. In data 3, the use of a tote bag and reading feminist books in public constructs form of intellectual and sensitive masculinity. In data 6, matcha, emotional music, and neat clothing reflect attention to detail. In data 9, colorful outfits and curated accessories reinforce aesthetic presentation. In data 14, fashion-forward styling combined with matcha and reading reinforces a form of soft masculinity. In data 15, tote bags, reading habits, and styled appearance highlight a form of aesthetic-based masculinity.

The repetition of these feminine-coded elements demonstrates that masculinity in this trend is hybrid masculinity, combining masculine and feminine attributes. Masculinity is no longer positioned in opposition to femininity but instead incorporates feminine-coded practices as part of male identity. From Butler’s perspective, repeated use of feminine-coded symbols contributes to the construction of a new masculine identity that challenges traditional norms. Masculinity becomes increasingly defined through taste, lifestyle, and sensitivity rather than dominance or physical strength. Therefore, the use of feminine-coded elements indicates curated masculinity. The subjects consciously select visual symbols that communicate softness and aesthetic awareness.

The Role of Vulnerability in Performative Masculinity

Across the fifteen data, vulnerability appears in various forms, including solitude, confusion, softness, and openness to public judgment. This can be seen in data 3, data 8, data 11, data 12, and data 15, as well as in data 1, data 5, and data 10, where subjects sit alone in public spaces.

In data 3, reading a philosophy book in public demonstrates openness to being perceived as different. In data 8, the subject expresses confusion about taste, showing spontaneous emotion. In data 11, the use of a teddy bear accessory introduces softness within a work setting. In data 12, relaxed and playful movement reflects comfort in self-expression. In data 15, the text indicating self-change to gain approval reveals explicit emotional vulnerability. Vulnerability also appears through solitude in data 1, data 5, and data 10, where subjects sit alone reading in public. In hegemonic masculinity, solitude and sensitivity are often perceived with weakness. However, in this trend, vulnerability becomes integrated into the construction of masculine identity.

From Butler's perspective, vulnerability can be understood as part of gender performance. When sensitivity, solitude, and openness are repeatedly performed, they construct a new masculine identity. Masculinity is no longer defined by dominance but by controlled emotional openness. Vulnerability in this trend also reflects strategic vulnerability, where individuals display openness while managing how they are perceived by audiences.

The Audiences Respond to the Performance of the “Performative Male” Trend on TikTok in Indonesia

The audience responses aim to examine how performative masculinity in the “Performative Male” trend on TikTok is evaluated, accepted, or challenged based on existing social norms and cultural expectations in Indonesia. The data in this study were drawn from ten comments per video across three selected videos, rather than from all fifteen dataset videos that have been presented in the previous section. The three selected videos were considered based on their high engagement, with more than 400,000 views, and had more than 300 comments. Moreover, since not all comments provide meaningful interpretations, this study selected five comments from each video based on their clear opinions, particularly those that directly address the representation of masculinity in the “Performative Male” trend. Comments that did not contain meaningful interpretation, such as emojis or unrelated expressions, were excluded.

The analysis is categorized into three types: positive responses, ambivalent responses, and critical responses. Positive responses include comments that show support and acceptance of the representation of masculinity in the content. Ambivalent responses reflect mixed and uncertain attitudes. These responses show an acknowledgment of the trend as performance, but not fully reject it. The last, critical response refers to the comment that criticizes or rejects the representation of masculinity in the trend.

Data 1: Creator @axe_indonesia

Context of the Data:

The first video content shows a young man dressed casually in a public area, like in a park, while walking and reading a book. Several people around are seen glancing at him, suggesting that his behavior attracts attention in public spaces

Data Analysis

Username	Comment	Category
@adibthejets	gw agak ngeri kalo liat laki2 bawa tas model begitu...	Critical
@spaceh0e3000	I prefer my man manly	Critical
@Dofi	Jujur ya klo dri outfit gua suka cowok tpi ini kok vibesnya feminim	Critical
@campur2shop.id	Dengerin musik pake headset trus baca buku trus yg lu baca tersimpan di otak mana 🤔🤔🤔	Critical
@ramaadityaaditya6782	karna bawa tas model cewek..ya dikirain cucok ma orang	Critical
@sanosukarara	Normalisasi kek gini diindo plis, kadang kalo baca buku ditempat umum kek gini dikatain caper 🤔	Ambivalence
@egizul_1	Kalo lagi jalan ga keren banget si sambil baca buku, bisa nabrak orang. Mending buku di pegang dulu baru di baca nanti pas lagi duduk	Critical
@_rk0007	di lirik karna tampil,bak ABG wanita	Critical
@rahmat_le	sok keren	Critical
@boycott.ega	biasanya modelan gini suka cwo	Critical

The audience responses to data 1 are dominated by critical responses, indicate that masculinity in Indonesia is still evaluated based on fashion, attributes, and reading activities. It can be seen from data 1 that most of the audience critically commented about the use of the tote bag and the style that is culturally associated with femininity. Comments such as “gw agak ngeri kalo liat laki2 bawa tas model begitu,” “Jujur ya klo dri outfit gua suka cowok tpi ini kok vibesnya feminim,” and “I prefer my man manly,” suggest that the masculinity still becomes questionable for the man who adopts feminine-coded in their fashion and style. The criticism also targets at the way the actions are staged. Most of the viewers do not see reading as an intellectual activity, but rather as a performance to gain public attention. Comments such as “sok keren,” “Dengerin musik pake headset... yang lu baca tersimpan di otak mana,” and “sambil baca buku pas jalan... bisa nabrak orang” suggest that the audience reads the behavior as overperformed and unnatural. Therefore, the comment “biasanya modelan gini suka cwo” also indicate that men with this kind of style in Indonesia considered as deviant or even labelled as LGBT.

Ambivalence response is limited in this data, as most comment tend to directly reject rather than negotiate the meaning of the content. However, there is a comment categorized as ambivalent because it does not explicitly reject the subject’s behavior but instead the comment highlights broader social perception. Comments that mention being labeled as “caper” (attention-seeking) do not directly criticize the individual’s behavior. Instead, they describe how others commonly judge such behaviour in society. In this context, the subject is evaluated not merely as an individual, but as someone who risks crossing established masculine boundaries in Indonesian society.

Based on the comments on the first video, critical reactions to the tote bag and feminine appearance show that the audience still adheres to rigid norms of masculinity. This suggests that in the Indonesian, gender performance remains strongly tied to clear and recognizable visual codes. When men deviate from these codes, their performance is perceived as a failure to be “masculine” because it does not align with established social expectations in Indonesia. These responses suggest that society still views masculinity through the lens of conventional norms: men are expected to appear masculine and avoid gestures that seem too forced or too similar to femininity. Consequently, Data 1 shows that

displays of soft masculinity in public spaces are still interpreted as artificial or merely attention-seeking.

Data 2: Creator @her.byuss

Context of the Data:

The second video features a man describing activities and a lifestyle that are often associated with performative males, including journaling, searching for music like Clairo at a record store, and searching for feminist books at the bookstore. The man in this video shows his preferences by criticizing matcha drinks for lacking “ceremonial grade” and “umami,”. He also mentions his Pilates appointment and his activities with his girlfriend.

Data Analysis

Username	Comment	Category
@crownmage	I don't get why this is a bad thing? cz in here he seems like he cares about his gf and the other stuff is just his personal interest? i don't get it	Positive
@naufgnwn	male manipulator final boss 🤡	Critical
@yz0815	yall lost the plot of this performative male trend this is completely normal. Lets not shame men who are comfortable with their own masculinity. ≠ Performative.	Positive
@kcdbb_	performative men trend belom bisa masuk Indonesia because of soooo many reasons	Ambivalence
@cimoymonthug	alias cowo heboh penuh gimmick	Critical
@bulbadrey	may this man never find me	Critical
@strawbiecake	this generation will hate being themselves dan show it more because somehow social media always making funny about literally everythings	Ambivalence
@user208785401	I think it's the same case with pick me girls, people doing certain things not because they genuinely wanna do those things but more of doing and saying certain things to project certain image.	Critical
@itsannwardhan	journal, read books, understand matcha culture, exercise, and calls his gf "queen"??? husband material 🤝🤝	Positive
@dreeeeeeeeeeamerr	Why is this wrong??? People start at different point. What seems to be “performative” could be one's first step to be a better person. Again... why do you think this is a jokes material?!	Positive

The audience's response in data 2 are more divided. This content receives positive, ambivalent, and critical reactions. Several positive comments, such as “I don't get why this is a bad thing,” “Let's not shame men who are comfortable with their own masculinity,” and “husband material,” indicate that some audiences view this practice as desirable masculine qualities. In this context, masculinity is valued not through dominance, but through care, good taste, emotional sensitivity, and self-improvement.

The ambivalent responses as seen to comments such as “performative men trend belom bisa masuk indonesia” and “this generation will hate being themselves” show that some audiences interpret the content not only from the perspective of the individual content creator, but also from a broader cultural perspective. These responses suggest that the trend is closely linked to social norms, platform culture, and generational concerns. This means that data 2 serves as a space where masculinity is not only evaluated but also culturally

negotiated. Audiences perceive the subject as an emotionally mature figure and see him as a strategically constructed persona.

At the same time, critical responses in this data reveal a different interpretation. Comments such as “male manipulator final boss,” “cowo heboh penuh gimmick,” and “may this man never find me,” and “I think it’s the same case with pick me girls, people doing certain things not because they genuinely,” suggest that the audience questions the subjects motives particularly those present themselves within the ‘performative male’ framework. These comments do not necessarily reject the activities themselves, journaling, reading, liking Clairo, or appreciating matcha, but they reject the possibility that these activities are undertaken as strategies to appear attractive. Thus, the critique shifts from gender expression to authenticity.

Overall, the responses to data 2, audience reactions indicate that performative male not merely displayed spontaneously but can also be consciously constructed. When the performance of masculinity appears too polished or follows a specific pattern, the audience begins to question whether it is truly an expression of self or merely a strategy to build an image. These responses indicate that contemporary masculinity is increasingly evaluated through the lens of authenticity. Soft masculinity may be acceptable, even appealing, but only when it is perceived as genuine. However, there is a risk that such masculinity could also be interpreted as artificial. Therefore, the central tension in data 2 is not merely about how masculinity is expressed, but about the unstable boundary between self-expression and self-branding in digital culture.

Data 3: @themapplemedia

Context of the Data

The video shows a scene in an office break room where a man is reading a book, while drinking and listening to music, while other people there are focused on their phone.

Data Analysis

Username	Comment	Category
@jenniecee_20097	i hope from this performative male trend could lead this trend and create new perspective from society about “reading a book in a chill time”. I mean, all people judging the person who wants to be smart and picturing him as a “pick me” as long as this guy adhere	Postive
@cavvnuel	yg kek gini diterapin di negara tingkat patriarki sama toxic masculinity tinggi ya gabakal bisa, org baca buku aja dikira edgy 🤡	Ambivalence
@adibjdp	Baca buku sambil bawa gelas agak janggal sih...	Critical
@anggaswg10_	ga cocok di lingkunganku, langsung di framing “pick me”	Ambivalence
@daezeukka4	sebenarnya perfomative male itu negative or positive? walau keliatan nya "kaya yg caper", tapi kan membaca buku kan habit yg positive, semudah itukah lu judge orang gr gr itu? membaca buku itu normal lho mau dimana mana juga, mau caper ge biarin lah urusan dia, ngapain kita ngurusin gaya2 orang lain, terkait ttg penyimpanan, emang menurut lu mereka menyimpang? apa nya yg menyimpang?emang homoseksual di indikasi kan melalui penampilan? nyatanya enggak selalu.	Ambivalence

@k1ng_zakar	ribett bgt kyaknya	Critical
@dwzkyzz	baca buku dikira so cool,padahal suka baca buku juga termasuk suatu kebanggan,selagi itu masih bisa nambah wawasan,no problem sih wkwk	Positive
@reecery29	kudu gitu banget ya pakaian nya 🤔	Critical
@paranoid.android66	baca buku sambil dengar musik agak kurang nyaman	Critical
@sekitardisitu	The girls are going to like this 🤔	Positive

The positive responses in this data are reflected in the defense of the subject's behaviour by normalizing the habit of reading and opposing unnecessary judgment. Comments such as "membaca buku itu normal... ngapain kita ngurusin gaya orang lain," "i hope this trend could create new perspective," and "baca buku juga termasuk suatu kebanggaan," indicate that the audience in this position interprets the content as potential behavior. They view reading not only as a performance, but as a valuable habit that should not be mocked simply because it is visible. These comments suggest that the video can serve as a counter-image to anti-intellectual or overly rigid expectations of masculinity. In this sense, the content is interpreted as opening space for a different model of masculinity. On the other hand, the comment "the girls are going to like this," suggests that the audience interpreted this not only as expression of masculinity but also as social strategy. In this video, masculinity framed as means of attracting women's attention.

The ambivalent comment in this content can be seen in comments such as "yg kek gini diterapin di negara tingkat patriarki sama toxic masculinity tinggi ya gabakal bisa," and "ga cocok di lingkunganku, langsung di framing pick me." These comments are categorized as ambivalent responses because their reaction towards the content do not directly support or reject the subject's behavior. Instead, they emphasize how the behavior would be interpreted in a specific social context. The focus is not on judging the individual, but rather on explaining the social consequences, where such actions might be viewed negatively by others. These comments indicate that the audience's response is heavily influenced by social and cultural context in Indonesia. The subject's behaviour is not necessarily considered wrong, but is viewed as difficult to accept in an environment where traditional masculinity still dominates. However, several critical comments expressing skepticism about the practicality of such behavior are considered as overly staged or unnatural. Some comments, such as "ribett bgt kyaknya," "kudu gitu banget ya pakaian nya," "Baca buku sambil bawa gelas agak janggal sih," suggest that the audience not directly reject the reading activity itself; instead, they question the manner in which it is performed. The subject behavior in this content is perceived as too calm, too structured, or too polished to appear natural. This indicates that viewers are sensitive to the difference between ordinary behavior and behavior that appears staged for the camera. Thus, the audience's critical response in this case stems from concerns about authenticity, as such behavior is perceived as insincere, appearing too constructed.

Therefore, the audience responses in data 3 suggest that masculinity is criticized not only by what an individual demonstrate, but also by means of how does the behavior is expected to be received in a real-world social context. The audience's response to this video reflects a tension between acceptance and rejection of a soft, more reflective, and unconventional form of masculinity, and questions whether such a form of masculinity can be accepted. These responses indicate that gender performance depends not only on the individual but is also influenced by social and cultural conditions. In the Indonesian context, which remains largely patriarchal and has fairly strong norms of masculinity, forms of

masculinity such as those displayed by the performative male have not yet been fully accepted.

Overall, across data 1, 2, and 3 that have been presented, audience responses demonstrate that masculinity in the “Performative Male” trend on TikTok in Indonesia is not interpreted consistently. Instead, it is understood in various perspectives, particularly through visual norms, authenticity, and social context.

Therefore, the comments across the dataset reveal a consistent pattern in audience responses. Most critical comments focus on visually apparent aspects, such as fashion, style, and the way the activity is portrayed. The use of fashion items with feminine connotation, such as aesthetic style or the use of a tote bag often perceived as inappropriate or “less masculine.” Furthermore, their daily activities, such as reading, especially when it is done simultaneously with listening to music in public spaces, are often viewed as unusual or overly staged. On the other hand, positive responses across the three datasets follow the same pattern. Supportive comments emphasize that their actions are normal practices and should not be judged. The responses interpreted these activities as self-expression, intellectual habits, and emotional awareness. Indicating that some audiences are open to the form of masculinity adopted by performative males in this trend.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the “Performative Male” trend in Indonesia is constructed as a flexible and performative identity. Masculinity is shaped through subtle emotional expression, the integration of feminine-coded elements, and openness to vulnerability. These aspects appear consistently across all fifteen data and construct masculinity as aesthetic, emotionally aware, and audience-conscious identity. Therefore, masculinity in the “Performative Male” trend on TikTok Indonesia reflects a shift from hegemonic masculinity toward a softer, hybrid, and curated masculinity constructed through repeated digital performances in line with Judith Butler’s gender performativity theory.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the audience’s responses to “Performative Male” on TikTok in Indonesia are dominated by critical responses. The total critical comments across the three data are 17, the total of positive comments is 7, and the total of ambivalent comment is 6. While the positive and ambivalent responses also exist across the three data sets selected, audience reactions are largely shaped by traditional expectations regarding masculinity, particularly those related to appearance and behavior. This suggests that while new forms of masculinity, especially in “Performative Male” trend are beginning to emerge in Indonesia, their acceptance remains limited because society continues to evaluate these forms based on established social and cultural norms that have long been part of Indonesian culture.

Declarations

The authors declare that this paper is an original work, true contribution and does not violate any copyright. The authors are fully responsible for the entire research process, including conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing.

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