

Non Binary and Androgynous Gender Representation of TikTok Influencers in the Digital Era

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Abstract — *In the digital era, social media such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter have become public spaces that facilitate more unrestrained self-expression for Indonesians. TikTok, in particular, has become an important platform for non-binary individuals and androgynous influencers to creatively and performatively shape their identities. This study aims to describe and analyze the packaging of visual and narrative messages on TikTok accounts of androgynous/non-binary influencers in Indonesia, and to explore patterns of audience acceptance and rejection reflected in comments. The study employed qualitative methods within a post-positivist paradigm, utilizing content analysis methods that included thematic content analysis and discourse analysis. The results show that non-binary and androgynous representations by four focal influencers are packaged in a multimodal and strategic manner. These findings underscore the importance of a shared ethical responsibility among content creators, platforms, audiences, and policymakers, and recommend expanding the sample, conducting in-depth interviews, undertaking longitudinal studies, and enhancing moderation policies and ethics-based digital literacy.*
Keywords: *Androgyny, Digital ethics, Gender nonbinary, TikTok*

Abstrak — Di era digital, media sosial seperti TikTok, Instagram, dan Twitter telah menjadi ruang publik yang memfasilitasi ekspresi diri lebih bebas bagi masyarakat Indonesia. TikTok khususnya menjadi platform penting bagi individu gender non biner dan influencer androgini dalam membentuk identitas secara kreatif dan performatif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dan menganalisis pengemasan pesan visual dan naratif pada akun TikTok influencer androgini/non-biner di Indonesia, serta mengeksplorasi pola penerimaan dan penolakan audiens yang tercermin dalam komentar. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dalam paradigma post-positivisme dengan metode analisis isi (thematic content analysis dan discourse analysis). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan representasi non biner dan androgini oleh empat influencer fokus dikemas secara multimodal dan strategis. Temuan ini menegaskan kebutuhan pembagian tanggung jawab etis antara pembuat konten, platform, audiens, dan pembuat kebijakan serta merekomendasikan perluasan sampel, wawancara mendalam, studi longitudinal, dan peningkatan kebijakan moderasi serta literasi digital berbasis etika.

Kata Kunci: *Androgini, Etika digital, Gender non biner, TikTok*

INTRODUCTION

Social media now plays a crucial role in building identity and self-expression, particularly in the construction of gender identity in the digital era. Social media platforms like TikTok offer broader access for individuals to share personal experiences,

social norms, and cultures, including various forms of gender identity that are often not represented in mainstream media (Santonniccolo et al., 2023; Can Acar, 2021; Jan & Rahman, 2022). TikTok is often described as a virtual playground and is more aptly considered a creative medium than a social media

platform (Anderson, 2020). TikTok, with its creative and interactive video format, provides a space for communities to discuss and express diverse gender identities, free from the constraints of traditional visual styles, narratives, and online culture. The audiovisual options and various effects available on TikTok provide users with a space to imagine, making it a means of escape from reality. Additionally, TikTok's interactive features make it easy for users to share and comment on content, creating a vibrant online community that can discuss, support, or oppose various forms of gender expression.

The growing public awareness in recent years has encouraged increased attention to gender identity issues in Indonesia, especially non-binary identities and androgynous expressions. Non-binary identity refers to an identity that is not tied to a male or female category. In contrast, androgyny refers to expressions that combine masculine and feminine traits, making it difficult to categorize them as either masculine or feminine. This phenomenon is gaining high visibility through digital platforms, especially TikTok, which, in 2024, reports a very large user penetration among young people. For example, TikTok is recorded to have more than 108 million active users over 18 years old (We Are Social, 2025). Such visibility triggers the formation of communities, new identity practices, and creative economy opportunities, but it also produces social risks such as cyberbullying, stereotypes, and discrimination.

In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon of non-binary and androgynous gender identity shows a unique complexity that makes it important and interesting to research. First, it reflects the intersection between the current of globalization, which brings the discourse of gender diversity, and local cultural norms, customs, and religious values that tend to be conservative and patriarchal (Jerome & Hadzmy, 2022; Fadhlina, 2024; Nisya & Dwi Ardhanariswari Sundrijo, 2022). This creates diverse social dynamics, where acceptance may be more open among urban and digitally exposed young generations, yet rejection and misinformation are still dominant in many conservative communities (Jerome & Hadzmy, 2022; Fadhlina, 2024; Nisya & Dwi Ardhanariswari Sundrijo, 2022). Secondly, digital platforms serve as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, they facilitate increased awareness, community support, and a space for self-expression, as evidenced by hashtags such as #Nonbinary that have garnered more than 4 million impressions, as well as the emergence of androgynous influencers who are redefining gender boundaries in the public sphere. TikTok's diversity-supporting policies also provide a more expansive space for individuals to experiment with identity without fear of the social stigma they often encounter in the real world. However, on the other hand, these platforms are also a battleground where negative stereotypes, discrimination, and a lack of understanding of the broader society escalate into

cyberbullying. Data shows that as many as 373 LGBTIQ+ individuals (including non-binary) reported experiencing violence and discrimination online and offline during 2021-2023 (Konde.co., 2025), with an increase in cases of online gender-based violence (KBGO) by 14.17% in 2024 to reach 330,097 victims overall (Komnas Perempuan, 2025), where vulnerable groups such as non-binary people are often targeted for human rights violations due to rigid gender norms (Amnesty International Indonesia, 2025).

This study aims to describe and analyze the packaging of visual and narrative messages on the TikTok accounts of androgynous/non-binary influencers in Indonesia, as well as explore the patterns of audience acceptance and rejection reflected in comments. The purposively selected sample comprised four focused accounts, 25 representative videos per account, and selected comments for each video. The analysis was carried out using thematic content analysis to identify dominant themes and discourse analysis to examine the construction of discourse. To ensure coding consistency, inter-rater reliability is tested using Inter-Coder Reliability with the Holsti Formula.

The study also uses Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which views gender as the result of repetitive actions. Butler stated that gender is not a fixed identity; rather, it is unstable and in constant flux, as it is the result of performatively repeated actions (Judith Butler, 1986; Mochammad Fadhlazis Wijanarko & Fatimah Madaniyyah, 2025). It can be said that gender is the result of repeated actions in a social context. In the context of digital media, this theory can be applied to understand how gender identity is constructed and negotiated through various forms of representation and online communication practices (Coghlan, 2024). Content creators or influencers in digital media can utilize virtual spaces to perform diverse gender performances, beyond traditional gender boundaries (Carp, 2025). They can explore, critique, and expand their understanding of gender through the narratives, language, and visual symbols they present. One of the tangible outcomes of repeated gender actions is the formation of androgynous categories. Androgynous, in the context of identity, means a blend of feminine and masculine characteristics. This term originates from the Latin words "andros," meaning male, and "gyne," meaning female. Androgyny is a concept of a genderless or non-gendered character (Githapradana, 2022). Androgyny rejects traditional gender categories, thereby becoming a genuine reflection of the concept presented in queer theory: challenging rigid social norms related to sexuality and gender. Queer theory itself proposes a much more inclusive, fluid, and complex understanding of human identity and experience by embracing ambiguity, contradiction, and fluidity (Manning et al., 2020). In the context of queer theory, androgyny is not just an

identity or gender, but also a performative action that challenges dominant social structures and opens up more expansive space for diversity.

This androgynous characteristic is one way individuals present themselves outside traditional gender boundaries, either through neutral fashion styles, makeup that combines masculine and feminine elements, or gestures that are not tied to gender stereotypes. In today's popular culture, androgynous styles are increasingly accepted and becoming a new medium of expression in various fields, including fashion, art, and digital media. The relationship between androgyny and non-binary gender lies in the position of both outside the binary gender system. Non-binary gender is an umbrella term for gender identities that are not entirely masculine or feminine, including androgyny as a form of non-binary expression. A non-binary person displays androgynous traits in their appearance or behavior, or conversely, an androgynous individual may choose to identify as non-binary. Both challenge social constructs that compartmentalize gender, allowing individuals to express themselves more authentically and flexibly according to their personal experiences.

The literature used next is the Social Identity Theory put forward by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. This theory explains how individuals form their self-identity, in part, through membership in social groups (Nairn & Piatti-Farnell, 2023). This theory argues that individuals tend to categorize themselves and others into groups (ingroup and outgroup), which in turn affects their self-esteem and behavior (Harnish, 2021). In the context of TikTok, individuals with non-binary or androgynous identities can form online communities (ingroups) that support one another, share experiences, and foster a sense of belonging (Wulandari et al., 2025). Interactions within these groups can reinforce their self-identity and provide validation that they may not get in a physical space.

From the perspective of deontological ethics and policy ethics, there is a conflict between the right of individuals to express themselves authentically and the social impact that results from their actions. Deontological ethics itself focuses on the obligations and moral rules that must be followed, regardless of the consequences (Khair & Syafri, 2023; Smith et al., 2023). In this context, the individual's right to express themselves authentically can be considered a moral obligation that must be fulfilled, regardless of the social impact that may arise (Khair & Syafri, 2023). However, deontological ethics also emphasizes the moral responsibility not to harm others (Smith et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the theory of virtue ethics is also relevant for assessing personal expression in the digital space, as it emphasizes the importance of moral character and values such as courage, honesty, and empathy (Ess, 2017). In the case of androgynous and non-binary influencers, identity openness can be seen as a form of courage and honesty towards oneself, as well as the ability to navigate potential

value conflicts with audiences who hold certain normative views. In social media, audience participation through comments, reactions, or content duplication, on the other hand, is a form of social response that also determines the ethical value of an identity representation (Laid et al., 2022). When audiences respond in the form of appreciation or sharp criticism, they help shape the meaning of the content and reinforce the prevailing social norm. In this case, digital ethics is not only inherent in influencers but also in audiences and platforms as part of the digital ecosystem.

Moreover, the dynamics of digital media today cannot be separated from the logic of algorithms and audience participation. Social media algorithms, such as those used by TikTok, play a significant role in shaping users' social identity preferences by presenting personalized content based on individual interests (Yin, 2025). TikTok automatically promotes content that receives a high level of interaction, both positive and negative, thereby expanding its reach to a broader audience. Likewise, content that displays androgynous identities is a more heterogeneous public consumption, including those who are not familiar with non-normative identities.

Previous research has also shown that non-binary and androgynous gender individuals face challenges in terms of social acceptance, legal protection, and access to supportive resources (Johansson et al., 2022; Schudson & Morgenroth, 2022). In addition, several studies have also explored the experiences of individuals with non-binary and androgynous gender identities in relation to their psychological well-being (Burstall et al., 2024; de Graaf et al., 2021). However, there is still little research that focuses on narratives and discourses around non-binary and androgynous gender identities on social media (Mayoh & Jones, 2021; Wickham et al., 2023). Recent research has also shown that non-binary and androgynous gender individuals have a higher level of gender diversity than cisgender individuals, including in the context of autism (Dorn et al., 2023; Hendriks et al., 2022), thus confirming the importance of understanding the complex interactions between individual agency, social perceptions, and the role of digital spaces in shaping gender and sexual identities (Hechler et al., 2025; Mo et al., 2024).

The novelty of this research lies in its empirical focus on the Indonesian context, combining thematic content and discourse analysis with the lens of platform affordance, as well as the use of codebooks and inter-coder reliability testing (Holsti, CR) to enhance the validity of the findings. Its uniqueness lies in the simultaneous emphasis on the visual/narrative representation strategies of influencers, the dynamics of comments as interaction data (not just psychological reception), and the implications of platform moderation policies relevant to the development of educational interventions and

the protection of rights in the digital realm.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach in the post-positivism paradigm with a content analysis method on TikTok online data (period 2024–2025). The primary measurement tools are a structured codebook, a codebook containing operational definitions, code categories, inclusion/exclusion criteria, sample citations, and coding procedures (complete documentation is included in the appendix). The unit of analysis is described in detail: (1) visual unit = segment of video reels that displays androgynous expressions/styles; (2) text units = captions and transcripts of oral narratives; (3) Reaction units = individual comments (along with the likes/shares metric as context). The purposive sample consisted of 4 Indonesian influencer accounts (with followers exceeding 10,000) that consistently displayed androgynous/non-binary characteristics. The selection of accounts was also based on an engagement rate threshold of at least 2% (calculated over the last 6 months) with the formula:

Engagement Rate = $\frac{Likes + Comments + Shares}{Views} \times 100\%$

For each account, 25 representative videos and several comments were taken per video (purposive/stratified sampling based on the relevance of the comments). Validity is strengthened through the triangulation of sources (videos, captions, comments, and platform policy documents), the triangulation of methods (thematic content analysis and discourse analysis), and the triangulation of previous theories/studies that will be used for comparison in discussions. For coding reliability, inter-coder reliability is applied: two coders encode 15–20% independently of the initial sample, tested with the Holsti formula:

$CR = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$

With M = the number of agreed-upon coding decisions, N1 and N2 = the total number of coding decisions 1 and 2, and with an acceptance threshold set at $CR \geq 0.80$, if the codebook threshold is not met, it is revised, and retraining is carried out until an agreement is reached. All steps of the codebook development, unit of analysis, and results of Holsti calculations will be documented in the appendix for methodological transparency.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

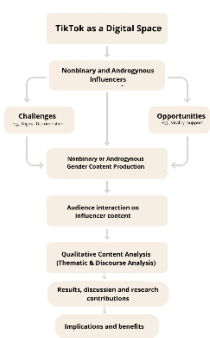


Figure 1. A Framework of Research Thinking

RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Table 1. TikTok Influencer Sample Profile and Content Metadata

Influencer	Followers	Average Engagement Rate (%)	Number of Videos Analyzed	Sampling Period	Average Views per Video
INF_001 @semnicki_	1.7 million	4,61%	25	2024-2025	200 thousand
INF_002 @millencyruss	207 thousand	2,29%	25	2024-2025	100 thousand
INF_003 @andreaslukita_	585 thousand	2,45%	25	2024-2025	40 thousand
INF_004 @joviadhigunahunter	280 thousand	3,93%	25	2024-2025	80 thousand

Source: Research results, 2025

Androgynous and Non-Binary Representations on TikTok

The phenomenon of androgynous and non-binary influencers is growing in Indonesia, primarily through the TikTok platform that offers a space for self-expression without traditional gender restrictions. TikTok, with its dynamic short video format, has revolutionized the way individuals, especially androgynous and non-binary influencers, express themselves and interact online. The platform uniquely allows its users to quickly communicate various aspects of their identity, including gender identity. More than just an entertainment app, TikTok offers a digital canvas for androgynous and non-binary individuals, allowing their identities to be showcased, explored, and even questioned. The use of creative elements such as diverse music, innovative visual effects, and participation in viral trends becomes a powerful tool for influencers to present themselves. Through lip-syncing, dance, brief narratives, or other original content creations, users can curate their self-image and highlight how they understand and express their gender. These can include representations that conform to traditional gender norms, an exploration of gender fluidity, or the affirmation of a non-binary identity. Influencers representing these two identity spectrums are increasingly in the spotlight, not only because of the unique aesthetics they offer, but also due to their courage in challenging societal gender stereotypes.

In many ways, TikTok has evolved into a vast

social "laboratory". In this virtual space, gender norms that may already be deeply rooted in society can be openly questioned, challenged, and reconstructed. Influencers can find supportive communities, share their experiences, and encounter a variety of alternative identities that they may not often encounter in their physical environment. Interaction through comments, duets, and stitches allows for continuous dialogue, creating an ecosystem where gender expression is no longer limited to rigid binary categories, but rather a rich and ever-evolving spectrum. This paved the way for a broader understanding and greater acceptance of gender identity that exists in today's society. The majority of their androgynous and non-binary identities are showcased through short video content that focuses on the world of fashion, makeup, and skincare; these elements are often associated with the feminist identity. Many creators, especially men, appear confident in clothing that is generally considered feminine, such as dresses, skirts, or feminine accessories. Not a few of them also shared makeup tutorials, beauty product reviews, or before-and-after transformation videos that affirmed their ability to apply makeup and process gender identity through visual performance.

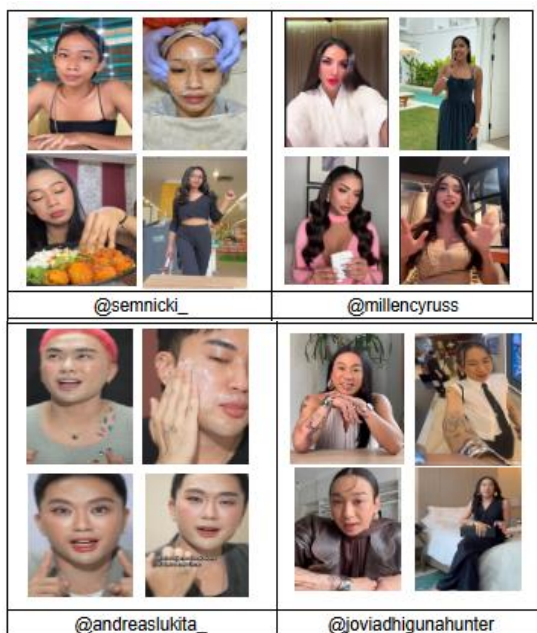


Figure 2. Identity profile in the digital space of influencers on the TikTok platform

Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@semnicki_ .
<https://www.tiktok.com/@milencyruss> .
https://www.tiktok.com/@andreaslukita_ .
<https://www.tiktok.com/@joviadhigunahunter>

Messaging on TikTok is becoming increasingly effective thanks to the use of trending audio, creative filters, and engaging editing techniques. Androgynous and non-binary influencers can spark discussions in the comments section about freedom of expression and gender flexibility through a

combination of visuals, narrative, and interactivity with the audience. The global narrative of identity fluidity can now be adapted into local contexts, creating a new space for the meaning of gender social construction in Indonesia. Influencers such as @semnicki_ , @joviadhigunahunter, @andreaslukita_ , and @milencyruss are real examples of how TikTok has expanded the reach of androgynous and non-binary identities. The content they display is not only entertainment or viral trends, but also as a medium for education and self-affirmation in the digital space. Revealing @joviadhigunahunter's identity through non-verbal communication through fashion is still considered polite by local standards. Jovi exudes confidence by combining feminine fashion elements, such as skirts and dresses, with striking makeup and an expressive attitude in verbal communication. On the other hand, @andreaslukita_ places more emphasis on narrative and cinematography elements in the content, showcasing makeup skills and dramatic changes in appearance. The two have received numerous offers of cooperation from various well-known fashion and makeup brands, indicating that the industry's acceptance has also grown in tandem with their increasing popularity on TikTok.

In addition, other figures such as @semnicki_ and @milencyruss also contribute to enriching the non-binary representation on the platform. Known on the @semnicki_ account since the COVID-19 pandemic, Sem started her career as a content creator through cooking videos, which always uniquely feature her well-groomed and beautiful long nails. At the beginning of his appearance, Sem appeared in a masculine style. However, over time, she underwent a progressive stylistic transformation, shifting towards a more feminine look. Meanwhile, @milencyruss, also known as Milen Daru, consistently shares her travel content and feminine expression. The content she shares often focuses on the world of fashion, beauty tutorials, makeup, and daily vlogs that record her activities and lifestyle. Milen Cyrus's characteristics as an influencer stand out for her courage to show her authentic self, her subtle makeup touch, and her ability to share personal stories. These four creators, with their respective approaches and characteristics, have shown that the spectrum of non-binary and androgynous identities can be expressed through various forms of visual narrative, with increasingly positive acceptance by audiences and the industry.

In this study, the author observed and analyzed TikTok content uploaded between 2024 and 2025. During this time period, the content that has been uploaded is grouped into three principal theme codes as well as patterns in TikTok audience's video content, captions, and comments related to non-binary and androgynous gender identity. Table 2 is a list of analysis codebooks that have been grouped.

Table 2. Research analysis codebook on non-binary and androgynous gender representation of TikTok influencers

Main Category	Code	Description
Physical and Visual Representation	How influencers present their identity through visual elements in video content and profile photos.	
	1.1 Masculine Features	The content predominantly displays physical features conventionally associated with masculinity. These include: men's clothing (suits, shirts), stiff and upright posture, and short haircuts.
	1.2 Feminine Features	The content predominantly displays physical features conventionally associated with femininity. These include: dresses, skirts, high heels, flowing hair, and bold makeup.
	1.3 Androgynous Features	Content that combines masculine and feminine features, or displays a style that is not gender-specific. This includes: loose-fitting clothing that doesn't reveal the body shape, short hairstyles with makeup, or clothing combinations that don't conform to gender stereotypes.
Audience Response	Audience reactions and interactions to influencer content.	
	2.1 Support and Affirmation	Comments that show acceptance, emotional support, recognition, or appreciation of the influencer's identity or expression. "You're so cool, thank you for being yourself!" "I'm non-binary too, I love your content!"
	2.2 Criticism and Rejection	Comments that express disapproval, judgment, misinformation, or rejection of non-conventional gender identities or expressions. "This is wrong with religion, why are you doing this?" "You're a guy/girl, don't be weird!" "Just trying to get attention."
	2.3 Questions/Curiosities	Comments that ask questions, seek clarification, or show interest in learning more. "What is non-binary?" "What does it feel like to be androgynous?" "Can you explain that further?"
	Ethical implications arising from representation and interaction.	
Ethical Issues/ Implications	3.1 Cyberbullying/ Hate Speech	Comments containing threats, insults, taunts, or derogatory language based on gender identity. "You freak! Go die!" "That's so ugly." "You have no morals!"
	3.2 Commodification/ Fetishization	Content or comments that unethically exploit gender identity for popularity, profit, or sexual objectification. Comments that focus solely on physical appearance in a sexualized manner. Influencers who use clickbait with the title "I'm non-binary, guess my gender!"

Source: Research results, 2025

After initial coding and pattern identification, the researcher proceeds with thematic content analysis to systematically identify, analyze, and report on theme patterns in their primary focus data. After that, to dig deeper into how these representations and interactions are constructed, the researcher employs discourse analysis, which examines the construction of language, power relations, ideologies, and multimodal aspects (visual, audio, and editing) in videos, captions, and comments. To ensure the quality and consistency of coding, an Inter-Coder Reliability measuring tool using the Holsti Formula is employed: $R = 2MN1 + N2$. In this study, with $N1 = N2 = 100$ units of analysis and an agreement rate of $P = 0.94$, the following results were obtained: $M = 0.94 \times 100 + 1002 = 94$. Therefore, there were 94 agreed units of analysis and

six units of disagreement. Holsti's agreement rate of 0.94 indicates very high inter-rater reliability, suggesting that the codebook has been clearly formulated and that raters can implement it consistently. However, the six dissenting units (UA007, UA067, UA068, UA077, UA079, UA083) should be the focus of discussion to examine the nuances of interpretation and, if necessary, refine the operational definitions in the codebook to improve consistency further. The following is Table 3, which is the result of coding from the analysis unit.

Table 3. Coding Results and Inter-Appraisal Agreements (100 Units of Analysis)

Code Category	Number of Analysis Units Coded by Assessor A	Number of Analysis Units Coded by Assessor B	Number of Agreements (M)	Level of Agreement (PP) Holsti
Physical and Visual Representation				
1.1 Masculine Features	0	2	0	0.00
1.2 Feminine Features	13	14	13	0.96
1.3 Androgynous Features	17	13	13	0.87
Audience Response				
2.1 Support and Affirmation	23	25	23	0.96
2.2 Criticism and Rejection	18	16	16	0.94
2.3 Questions/Curiosities	13	13	13	1.00
Ethical Issues/ Implications				
3.1 Cyberbullying/Hate Speech	12	13	12	0.96
3.2 Commodification/ Fetishization	4	4	4	1.00
Total	100	100	94	0.94

Source: Research results, 2025

From the above results, the phenomenon of gender expression and diverse gender identity actions is very relevant to the theory of gender performativity proposed by Judith Butler. According to Butler, gender is not a fixed identity, but rather the result of a series of actions, repetitions, and social performances that individuals continuously engage in, both in public and private spaces (Judith Butler, 1986). Through digital platforms such as TikTok, these creators conduct "gender as performance"; they actively demonstrate, frame, and negotiate gender meanings through fashion-chosen content, narratives, and various forms of visual communication. Every action in front of the camera, transformation of appearance, and interaction in the comment column is part of a performative practice that helps to shape, challenge, and dynamize the boundaries of gender identity in society. Through this process, TikTok becomes a space of actualization where gender is collectively and dynamically renegotiated. Here is picture 1, which shows some snippets of comments in the comment column of *influencers* on the TikTok platform.

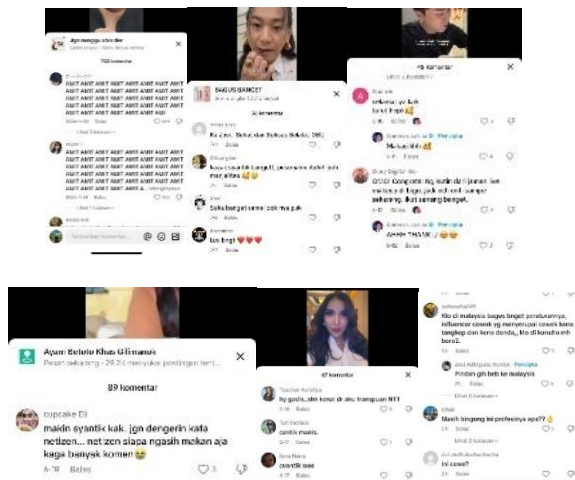


Figure 2. Some snippets in the comment column of influencers on the TikTok platform

Source:

<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSSXEGhjX/>
<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSSXoNkvY/>
<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSSXooHLq/>
<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSSXEGfhE/>

From Butler's point of view, the results can also be drawn, namely, the variety of netizens' comments above can be read as discursive practices that strengthen, negotiate, or correct gender performativity. Affirmative comments function as a reiteration and constitution of social reality for the identities displayed, i.e. repetitive actions that legitimize and reinforce the subject in discourse, corrective, judgmental, or mocking comments act as a social regulatory mechanism that seeks to enforce binary norms through symbolic sanctions and coercive language, comments full of confusion or questions that open up space for negotiation and learning. Marking possible category shifts through public interaction. Meanwhile, comments that reduce performance to entertainment or commodities reflect the process of performative citation born out of market logic, in which gender expressions can be uprooted from the context of authentic identity and reproduced for consumption. This overall interaction shows how digital platforms become an arena where gender performativity is constantly reproduced, contested, and negotiated through language, social sanctions, and interrelated institutional forces.

Additionally, this phenomenon can also be understood through the Social Identity Theory proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. This theory explains that an individual's self-identity is built mainly through membership and recognition in a social group (ingroup). On TikTok, the non-binary and androgynous community grows into a supportive group that provides validation and a sense of belonging for its members. Positive interactions with fellow creators and audiences in these groups strengthen both personal and collective identities, while helping community members navigate

challenges from outgroups that may be less supportive of their efforts.

Thus, TikTok not only provides a space for expression but also becomes an arena for the actualization of Butler's theory, where gender is practiced, debated, and reinterpreted collectively and dynamically. This phenomenon not only marks the courage of individuals in fighting for self-authenticity but also reinforces the message that TikTok can play an inclusive space that supports diversity and changes in public perceptions of gender identity in Indonesia.

Digital Ethics in the TikTok Platform

TikTok is one of today's most popular social media platforms, providing a space for creative expression and social interaction across all ages and backgrounds. Along with the increase in the number of active users, the platform has become an open stage for anyone to create and disseminate short video content on a variety of themes, ranging from fashion and entertainment to education and sensitive issues such as non-binary gender identity and androgynous expression. The growing diversity of content on TikTok is accompanied by ethical challenges in digital communication that require consideration.

From the perspective of deontological ethics and virtue ethics, the central dilemma that arises is the conflict between an individual's right to express themselves authentically and their social responsibility for the impact of such content. On the one hand, influencers like Joviadhiguna, Andreas Lukita, Sem, and Milen Cyruss have the right to openly represent their gender identity as a form of freedom of expression. However, as public figures, they are also required to consider the impact of the visual and narrative messages they convey on a broad and diverse audience. This raises an ethical dilemma regarding the boundaries between individual rights and social responsibility.

In response to this challenge, TikTok has released community guidelines that affirm its support for freedom of expression and inclusivity. The platform strives to respect and protect the diversity of culture, identity, appearance, viewpoint, and experience of each of its users. Specifically, TikTok guarantees the protection of individual characteristics, such as sexual identity and orientation, in accordance with the principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In practice, TikTok allows various forms of social expression and discussion, as long as the content does not lead to personal attacks or hate speech that can harm vulnerable groups.

However, the freedom of expression provided by TikTok also carries the risk of ethical dilemmas, such as pornographic content, SARA, the spread of hoaxes, quarrels, slander, body shaming, and harassment. The lack of a standard rule in the use of language on social media has led some users to ignore aspects of values, norms, and communication ethics,

which can negatively impact the overall health of the digital space.

To overcome these challenges, TikTok has implemented several mechanisms designed to enforce digital ethics. While the platform offers excellent opportunities for freedom of expression, not all content receives the same level of exposure in the For Your Page (FYP) feature. Every piece of content still requires a review process before it can gain a broader reach. On the other hand, TikTok also offers a privacy settings feature that allows users to restrict who can view their videos, comment on them, and follow their accounts. Thus, users remain in control of their digital space, while platforms strive to uphold digital ethics, ensuring that diversity and safety are maintained.

Although TikTok has implemented various efforts to maintain digital communication ethics, the challenges it faces remain significant. The growing diversity of content and interaction on TikTok requires a comprehensive and sustainable approach to managing emerging ethical dilemmas. This includes enhancing community guidelines, refining content moderation systems, and educating and empowering users to foster a healthy, inclusive, and responsible digital culture.

Furthermore, additional research is needed on the impact of TikTok content on vulnerable audiences, particularly children and adolescents. In-depth empirical studies can provide valuable insights into understanding the psychological, social, and cultural implications of these platforms, enabling digital ethics enforcement efforts to be carried out more effectively. Collaboration among academics, practitioners, and other stakeholders is also necessary to develop a comprehensive and adaptable ethical framework in response to the evolving development of social media technologies.

Ultimately, maintaining digital communication ethics on TikTok is a complex challenge and requires a multidimensional approach. A balance between freedom of expression and social responsibility must be continually pursued so that the platform can become a healthy, inclusive, and safe digital space for all its users. This effort is not only beneficial for TikTok but can also serve as a model for other social media platforms in managing ethical dilemmas in the growing digital era.

Ethical Dilemmas in Androgynous and Non-Binary Representations: Social Response vs Social Responsibility on TikTok

Based on thematic content analysis and discourse analysis of 100 units of analysis (period 2024–2025) which were coded into three main themes (physical and visual representation, audience response and ethical issues/implications) it was confirmed that non-binary and androgynous individuals on the TikTok platform face challenges of social acceptance, risk of stigmatization, and implications for psychological well-being, in line with previous

findings that show limitations in social acceptance and protection laws for this group (Johansson et al., 2022; Schudson & Morgenroth, 2022) and vulnerability to psychological well-being issues (Burstall et al., 2024; de Graaf et al., 2021). The polarization of audience responses found from community affirmations to hate speech, bullying, and stigmatistic terms such as "sissy/bencong" attached to influencer content support the claim that identity narratives on social media have not been explored in depth (Mayoh & Jones, 2021; Wickham et al., 2023) and show the real consequences of online visibility on social and psychological safety (Hechler et al., 2025). Furthermore, the variations in identities and vulnerabilities reported in the literature, including correlations with neurodivergent conditions such as autism, underscore the complexity of non-binary/androgynous experiences that have also been reflected in previous studies that have been published (Dorn et al., 2023; Hendriks et al., 2022). This explains why public reactions can range from empowering solidarity to aggression that reinforces normative boundaries.

The role of algorithms and platform commodification logic that drive content amplification based on engagement increases reach as well as risk exposure, so that community affirmative practices can be directly proportional to increased exposure to online aggression, as suggested by studies that discuss interplay between individual agency, social perception, and the role of digital spaces (Beischel et al., 2021; Rubin et al., 2020). Findings specific to accounts such as @semnicki_, @joviadhigunahunter, @andreaslukita_, and @milencyruss show a pattern of multimodal message "packaging" that simultaneously invites community support and normative resistance from conservative groups. Methodologically, the coding consistency was supported by Holsti's inter-rater reliability test, resulting in a reliability coefficient (R) of 0.94, which strengthened the analytical credibility and confirmed the coding consistency. However, six units (UA007, UA067, UA068, UA077, UA079, UA083) showed rater disagreement. This disagreement is primarily related to the interpretation of ambiguous comments, which can be perceived as constructive criticism, confusion, or hate speech, highlighting the fragility of the line between empowering visibility and exposure to social risk. These findings underscore the need for ethical responsibility of content creators, the role of platform moderation, and the importance of media literacy strategies for audiences to reduce negative impacts while maximizing the educational and inclusive potential of such representations.

In the midst of this wave of attention, fundamental questions arise about the social responsibility of these influencers. Are they enough to be a representation that gives voice to marginalized groups, such as non-binary and androgynous individuals, or is there a moral burden to also pay

attention to the impact it has on the youth community, including teenagers who are the primary audience of TikTok? In many cases, their openness about identity has the potential to spark a broad public debate, presenting the risk of further stigmatization not only for themselves but also for the wider community. Influencers are in a dilemma: on the one hand, they struggle to make the issue of gender diversity acceptable, but on the other hand, they must be calculating and careful in packaging their messages, so as not to exacerbate discrimination or give unwanted influence, especially for early age followers who do not have adequate gender literacy. Their existence is perceived as a threat to the value order, which often draws on religious, cultural, or educational narratives as the basis for its criticism, ultimately eliciting mixed reactions from audiences. Most refer to it as "sissy" or "bencong" and are closely associated with "LGBT", which describes discrimination against a minority group. Responses like this are not only personal attacks, but also reinforce the normative boundaries that shackle gender expression.

The social response faced by influencers is ultimately not entirely within their control. TikTok's algorithm encourages virality without filtering out the social constructs and values that its users embrace. All forms of expression, whether they break or maintain norms, have the potential to trend and cause polarization. Content that is celebrated in one group can be the subject of attacks in another. Therefore, social responsibility does not only stop at daring to be different, but also includes digital risk management: how they provide a healthy space for discussion, avoiding retaliation against hate speech with new hatred, and still maintaining the personal and mental safety of their followers. Education is an important part. When influencers choose not just to perform, but actively provide explanations or clarifications regarding androgynous and non-binary identities and meanings through Q&A, discussions, or cross-community collaborations, they are exercising the role of public educators, not mere popularity seekers.

This social responsibility, within the framework of deontological ethics, cannot be ignored, especially since the digital space is a public space, not a private one. This kind of discriminatory behavior is not in line with TikTok's commitment to provide space and support for everyone as long as it does not campaign hate and provocation against a group. In response to this, TikTok tries to protect its users with the comment filter feature, where incoming negative comments will not be immediately displayed in the comment column but need a response from the owner of the account or the video whether it will be approved or deleted, this feature is an effort by TikTok to reduce hate speech and words that are inappropriate for many people. However, this feature is not entirely perfect; the audience can still express blasphemy in other languages, for example, on @andreaslukita_ ,

@joviadhigunahunter, and @semnicki_ accounts, which, to date, still receive nasty comments. The following is the result of coding with the audience response category, code 2.2: Criticism & Rejection.

Table 4. Coding results that show audience responses with code 2.2 **Criticism & Rejection.**

ID Unit of Analysis	Main Category	Description of Unit of Analysis
UA003 https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSDdhQkoV/	Audience Response	Comment: "cepet cepet sadar bang" "sia laki jir kunaha jadi kie men" "kok ada jakun kak?"
UA027 https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSDdQ4nP4/	Audience Response	Comment: "masih mending pas jadi lanang@n" "keliatan laki-laki nya" "cuma bisa berkata astaghfirullah"
UA042 https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSDdH4eu6/	Audience Response	Comment: "astaghfirullah" "tidak untuk ditiru ya gaes" "innalilahi waainalilahi rojiun"
UA084 https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSDd4d2JR/	Audience Response	Comment: "yg nanya ko d JKT bnyk cwo model gini,trs ko gk risih atau malu Ama orang.. sini aku kasih tau ini jakarta kota multikultur dan kota yg gk sibuk ngurusin personaliti orang, selama gk keterlalu saah sa aja.. jadi ywdh biarin aja toh Dy beli buat kesenangan Dy bukan buat nyenengin kalian"

Source: Research results, 2025

However, amidst various currents of criticism, TikTok remains a dynamic space for androgynous and non-binary influencers to interact directly with their audience, thereby creating a more supportive and inclusive community. Not a few netizens then gave support and appreciated the courage and creativity of androgynous creators. Many positive comments emerged, such as "so beautiful!", which signifies the public's acceptance of diversity and appreciation for the art and self-expression they display. Nevertheless, obtaining this support is not an easy task. Jovi Adhiguna, for example, began to express his androgynous identity openly in 2019 through the Instagram platform. He often receives numerous negative comments, but most of the responses he receives contain support and appreciation. The same experience is also shared by Milen Cyrus, who often receives enthusiastic comments and positive encouragement from her TikTok followers. The numerous comments received by both Jovi and Milen ultimately build confidence and comfort in expressing their identity on social media, as well as strengthen their enthusiasm for continuing to work and becoming an inspiration for many people.

Table 5. Coding results that show audience response with code 2.1 **Support & Affirmation**

ID Unit of Analysis	Main Category	Description of Unit of Analysis
UA006 https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSDdkCYt4/	Audience Response	Comment: "makin cantik kak. jangan dengerin kata netizen. netizen siapa ngasih makan aja kagak banyak komen"

UA023 https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSDdy5E9M/	Audience Response	cantik banget sam" "kangen liat kuku sem yang panjanggg"
		Comment: "bikin vlog Kya gini trs yakaa,seruu dan menghiburr,jngn liat omongan orggg👍"
		"kak balik yuuk, kita selalu sayang kamu💕"
UA031 https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSDdy46aC/	Audience Response	Comment: "tetap cantik dan menyala non. mamih bangga km maju. mamih pun transgender peramal tarot. yang udah sepuh senang lihat yang muda muda skr cantik dan berprestasi"
		Comment: "kok tambah cakep👍👍👍"
		"My love💕💕💕" "kak kamu eyelash dimana sii cantik bgttt"
UA040 https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSDdHoFtM/	Audience Response	

Source: Research results, 2025

Sociologically, this ethical dilemma of representation reflects the changes in digital society, where personal and public spaces merge, forming a new ethical terrain that has not yet been fully established in law or norms. The social responsibility of influencers is not only to represent their group, but also to participate in building a healthier dialogue, one that is not only viral but also empathetic, and to create a safe space in cyberspace. The greatest hope is that this representation encourages the growth of a more tolerant society; at the same time, it triggers the regeneration of Indonesia's gender discourse so that it is not trapped in stigma, but becomes a reflective and inclusive society in the face of diversity of identities.

From the perspective of virtue ethics, the courage to be oneself is indeed a highly valued virtue. However, these values will have a deeper meaning if accompanied by wisdom in conveying messages and awareness of social sensitivity in society. These four influencers tend to employ passive ethical strategies, namely maintaining consistency in their personal visual and aesthetic expression as a form of attitude statement, rather than directly responding to criticism or advocating openly. They do not openly fight criticism, but neither do they succumb to the social pressures that come with it.

This dilemma arises in conjunction with TikTok's characteristics as a content distribution platform governed by algorithms. When a piece of content goes viral, it can spread widely and reach audiences who do not intentionally choose or search for it. In this situation, the value of personal expression can be quickly redefined by the collective opinion of society. The line between expressing himself as an individual and influencing as an influencer has become increasingly blurred. Content that was initially created as a means of self-expression or to influence the audience's preference for a product can easily be misinterpreted or twisted by the wider public.

Thus, the ethical dilemma faced by androgynous and non-binary influencers is not only related to how they represent themselves, but also how they can

realize and manage the social influences that are automatically inherent in their digital existence. This is because the influence they exert is no longer limited to product trends, but also encompasses the courage to display differences and build a narrative of identity diversity. This can be seen from the increasing number of content creators who then become influencers with androgynous and non-binary identities. Therefore, the development of androgynous creators on TikTok needs to be balanced with an understanding of communication ethics, so that interactions in the digital space can be more tolerant, inclusive, and respectful of differences.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the representation of non-binary and androgynous by four focus influencers (Jovi Adhiguna, Milen Cyrus, Andreas Lukita, Semnicki) is packaged in a multimodal and strategic way, through fashion choices that mix masculine and feminine attributes, makeup techniques that emphasize gender ambiguity, narrative framing that highlights personal experiences, the use of music and editing to affirm mood. The packaging does not just display aesthetics but functions as a performative practice that, according to Judith Butler, builds and reproduces identity through repetition, citation, and variation of gender performance, so that these contents play a simultaneous role in validating, negotiating, or challenging existing gender norms.

The audience's response is not only bipolar positive/negative, but through thematic and discourse analysis, a spectrum of reactions that function differently discursively is revealed. Affirmative comments play a constitutive role (giving legitimacy and "realizing" identity in discourse), corrective comments and ridicule serve as social regulatory mechanisms that reinforce binary norms. In contrast, comments expressing confusion or questions mark the process of negotiating categories and public education spaces. From Butler's point of view, this interaction displays a dynamic of reiteration versus resistance, with some content repeating norms through "readable" feminine performances, while performances that "fail to imitate" only one gender open up the possibility of a more fluid understanding of gender. In addition, the emergence of commodification narratives that reduce performance to entertainment or market products indicates a tension between authentic expression and market logic that normalizes certain forms for the sake of consumption.

Representations that affirm community have the potential to be empowering. However, they also pose real ethical risks in the form of hate speech, bullying, and discriminatory solicitation that create vulnerability for creators. Therefore, the responsibility lies not only with content creators (in terms of creation ethics and framing), but also with

platforms (in terms of moderation and policies), audiences (in terms of media literacy), and public policymakers (in terms of protection against hate speech). The virtue ethics approach presented in this study is relevant to assessing the ethical intentions and responsibilities of creators; however, it needs to be combined with an analysis of the platform's power structure and regulation for a holistic solution. Methodological strengths and limitations: High inter-rater reliability ($P=0.94$) with the use of Holsti Formula $R = \frac{2M}{N1+N2}$ (indicating $M=94$ from $N1=N2=100$) strengthens the credibility of the theme's coding, but the presence of several dissenting units (UA007, UA067, UA068, UA077, UA079, UA083) indicates that there are interpretative nuances, especially in ambiguous comments that require microscopic qualitative analysis and enrichment of operational definitions in the codebook. The main limitation of the study remains on a limited sample of four popular influencers, so generalizations to the overall experience of the non-binary/androgynous community in Indonesia are still limited.

Recommendations for follow-up research and policy include the suggested expansion of the sample to include influencers from diverse socio-regional backgrounds, longitudinal analysis to track changes in public attitudes over time, triangulation of data with in-depth interviews of actors and audiences, and platform policy studies related to content moderation. For the practical implications, platforms need to enhance their anti-hate speech policies and develop gender-sensitive reporting tools. Creators are encouraged to adopt ethical practices in representation, and there is a growing need for ethics-based digital literacy programs that target a broad audience.

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