

Memos and Constructions of TikTok Culture in #DontPlayPlayBosku

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Abstract

Memos have become a medium to convey messages on TikTok. However, memos are often underestimated. The researcher has noticed that TikTok is not merely a platform as it is also a memetic, complex text. As a platform, TikTok not only mediates and facilitates the production of short videos but also becomes a culture. Through the Don't Play Play Bosku audio meme phenomenon, this study aims to provide a perspective on how meme themes are conveyed to the public to create a high engagement space and what sorts of ideology are offered by creators in the TikTok culture space. The researcher conducted digital ethnographic observations, qualitative content analysis, and used the Shifman's three-dimension approach to analyze 10 video samples qualitatively. This study found three meme themes, including inadequacy, metaphor and a practice of playfulness, and mental satire. At the content level, memos are not only an expression of videos but also an audio control to negotiate. At the form level, memos are delivered with word twists, reactions, and effects frequently repeated. The practice of memos at the stance level indicates that the ideological position of creators in bringing up memos is an elaboration of videos and audio that give birth to these three themes in the mechanism of TikTok culture. Memos as a TikTok culture is a culture that is actively produced and continuously consumed. The construction of TikTok culture is formed from the rituals shared in algorithm-framed imitation and replication.

Keywords: audio memos, memos, memetics, TikTok

1. Introduction

Memos today have become a communication medium frequently shared on TikTok. According to Shifman (2013), since the birth of the internet, memos have been created as a form of creative multiparticipant expressions in which cultural and political identities are conveyed and negotiated. Nowadays, however memos have surpassed that and even become a remix of images, videos, audio, and messages (Zhao & Abidin, 2023). In the context of internet culture, memos become online artifacts that are spread through imitation, competition, and transformation (Abidin, 2018; Ask & Abidin, 2018; Shifman, 2013).

Memos are a simple mechanism to convey messages on TikTok. The researcher sees that, as a platform with 4 billion downloads (Iqbal, 2024), TikTok is not merely a social media platform as it is also a complex, memetic text. As a platform, TikTok not only mediates and facilitates the production of short videos but has also become a culture. The creation, imitation, and remixing of short videos can be interpreted as the practice of memefication (Lin et al., 2023). However, content moderation and viewing experience established by algorithm also become the determinant of the practice of memetics.

A total of 35 million videos are uploaded on TikTok each day (Ceci, 2024). While not all videos will go viral and mutate into memos, TikTok has created new ways of interaction in sharing stories, thoughts, lifestyles, and tastes outside of the structure of egocentric social media (Burgette et al., 2021). In addition, the popularity of TikTok and memos is possible over the acceptance of jokes in their videos (Han & Kuipers, 2021).

The researcher has observed a number of studies that examined memos on TikTok. For example, the studies of memos with pandemic situations conducted by Frigillano (2023), Al Rousan (2023), Myrick et al. (2022), and Matamoroz-Fernandez, Rodriguez, and Wikstrom (2022) that revealed memos as a coping strategy for the public in dealing with Covid-19. In addition, research by Oswald et al. (2023) and Mihailidis (2020) found memos as a new modality of social communication and a form of expression culture among young people. Meanwhile, in the correlation between memos and social movements, McSwiney et al. (2021), Zhao & Abidin (2023), Zeng & Abidin (2021), and Vijay & Gekker (2021) revealed memos as a modality of social communication, a form of political participation, and a new expression culture among young people. Overall, it seems that memos have become a medium that follows a set of rules in communicating (Ask & Abidin, 2018; Mortensen & Neumayer, 2021; Wagener, 2020) and using digital media performed by 1.2 billion TikTokers around the world (Dean, 2023).

This also occurs to the meme *Don't Play Play Bosku* (Don't play around, people!) that has been viewed 11 million times and popular in Indonesia since 2020. The popularity began through a short video clip owned by Awkarin, an Indonesian influencer, posted by the TikTok account @prontaxan. Awkarin is a figure who frequently exposes her lifestyle of having fun, throwing money around, and going on spree (Syafitri et al., 2019). She is a popular influencer on Instagram with 7.1 million followers. In the short 9-second video, Awkarin expressed the phrase, “*Visi foya misi foya, visi misi foya foya. Don't play play bosku*” (Vision? Spree. Mission? Spree. Vision mission? Spree. Don't play around, people!). Being interpreted freely, this joke seems to invite anybody who wants material satisfaction to not waste their time and to be more serious. Shortly after that moment, the researcher saw many videos with the hashtag #DontPlayPlayBosku appearing on the For You page. They imitated by posting videos containing jokes of twisting hedonism with their own creations, and then the audio from Awkarin was used as the back sound.

While Han & Kuipers (2021) highlighted the importance of humor forms and techniques in memes to gain popularity, the researcher argued that it is worth noticing how TikTok culture is constructed. As confirmed by Shifman (2014), each creator carries their own message in the memes they produce. The researcher also found that the spreading replication videos, in fact, had a higher attraction rate compared to Awkarin's original audio which only reached 668.9 thousand views. For example, the meme video by @pendinginan that has been viewed by more than 700 thousand people, @djtesamorena with 13.4 million views, and @hao with more than 900 thousand views. Therefore, this study formulates the following questions: What are the themes that appear in the meme *Don't Play Play Bosku*? And how is the construction of TikTok culture offered by the creators in the production of the meme message *Don't Play Play Bosku*? This research provides a perspective on how the themes of twisting hedonism jokes are conveyed to the public to create a high engagement space and what sorts of ideology are offered by the creators in the space of TikTok culture.

This article begins by reviewing short videos as a phenomenon. Next, the researcher discusses the concept of internet memes and the overview of TikTok. The researcher then describes the Shifman's method and approach used to analyze the videos routinely collected. In the findings and discussion section, the researcher presents the themes found. These themes support the findings about the construction of TikTok culture in the meme *Don't Play Play Bosku*.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Internet Memes

The explanation of Shifman's mimetic dimensions (2014) always begins with the elaboration of the concept of imitation created by Dawkins (in Schmid, 2004). These properties prove that the diffusion that occurs indicate the superiority of transmission and unlimited storage on the internet. For Shifman (2014), the properties of memes are only superficial and were born in a time when the internet was not even imaginable. Until then, he defined that internet memes are a group of digital units that share a common content, form, and stance which are created based on consciousness and then distributed, imitated, and even changed through the internet by more than one user.

The trinity of Shifman's mimesis (2014) is divided into three levels, including content, form, and stance. The content refers to the ideology conveyed. The form includes certain visual, audio, or text which is directly received by the human senses. The stance is defined as the dimension of depiction by the creators in positioning themselves as a text, sign, ideology, image, and all determinants for potential speakers. Nissenbaum & Shifman (2018) acknowledged that the borders of the last two dimensions ultimately blend in because memes involve individuals to position themselves in the content.

Memes are generally underestimated and considered trivial. Despite the assumption that people spread memes for the purpose of jokes, memes often contain social and political criticism. Memes are capable of making changes and provide public narratives both in person and online, such as the meme #BlackLivesMatter in opposing systemic racism in the US (Leach & Allen, 2017) and the meme #MeToo in fighting sexual harassment and violence (Zeng, 2020). El Khachab (2016) examined how users in Egypt utilized internet memes to blend visual techniques and joke conventions to convey political messages. Pearce and Hajizada (2014) explored the use of Azerbaijani government memes to fight the opposition. Other studies looked at internet users' efforts in spreading memes as a form of creative expression to counter censorship in China (Du, 2014; Wallis, 2011). The seizure of the Crimea region and the reactions of various countries of the world have also become the object of memes (Wiggins, 2016). In Indonesia, the meme #2019GantiPresiden emerged as a reaction of resistance from those marginalized by mainstream media channels (Sujoko, 2019) followed by the meme #IndonesiaTerserah as a form of medical personnel's resistance to the practices of government policy in relation to Covid-19 (Yesicha & Irawanto, 2020).

In audio memes, Abidin and Kaye (2021) have explored studies of the quality of earworms on the sound templates on TikTok. They argued that sounds as an aural turn have a special quality of being able to entertain and fill the mind and thought of the listeners compared to other forms.

Sound templates as the center of meme formation have provoked the creation of millions of videos on TikTok. One of the viral trends on this application is the sound remix of Gala Sky's words "Toyik Toyik mana?" (Where is Toyik, Toyik?). Gala's voice is matched in such a way that it produces unique but fun music for the audience to hear. This sound remix content created by Derix Mail has reached more than 18.4 million views since April 6, 2022. The audience then asked Derix Mail to remix another sound with the narration "Uti bangun" (Uti, wake up), and the remix produced was even more successful with 28.4 million views.

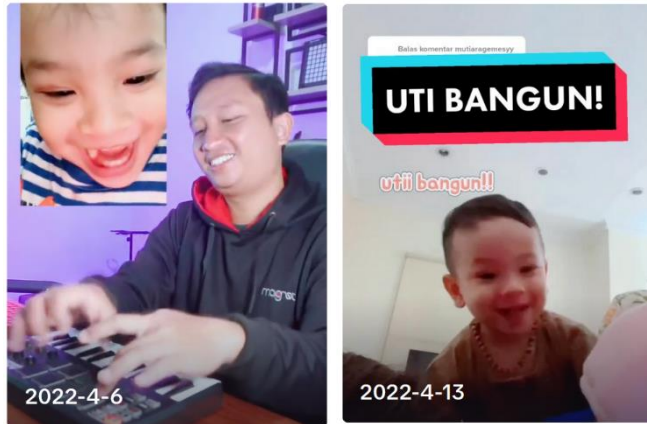


Figure 1. Production of speech composing by @derxmail. Screenshot by author

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Figure 2. Stills of audio meme and dance creation in Cupid-Twin Version. Screenshot by author

In a global context, Murray (2023) reported that the song Collide was the most popular remix audio meme of 2023 as it has been used by over 4.2 million TikTok videos. Then, it was followed by the success of the Cupid-Twin Version of remix audio meme that led to the creation of a new dance for TikTok users. However, due to allegations of plagiarism of Sen Aşkımızdan's song, the researcher has been unable to find the number of views of this sound since April 2022.

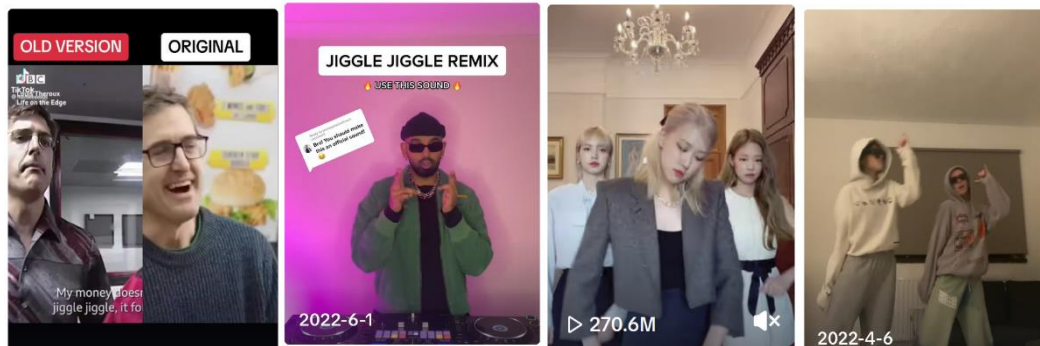


Figure 3. Stills of audio meme and dance creation in Jiggle Jiggle and Cupid-Twin Version, Screenshot by author.

A similar phenomenon is the audio meme "My money don't jiggle jiggle it folds" by Theroux in a BBC2 documentary video in 2000 that has now been viewed 11.3 million times. DJ Horizonaus as the remixer only gained 667.8 thousand views. The popularity of this audio meme was followed by the #jigglejiggle dance created by a K-Pop group, Pink. Meanwhile, in other countries, the popular memes include *Whistle* in the USA, *Feel Good* in Estonia, *Caramelldansen* in Sweden, *Forget* in Australia, and *2 Phut Hon* in Vietnam. The use of such kind of audio memes has involved the juxtaposition of lyrics and musicals to convey the narratives, creating an affective atmosphere while accommodating what Zeng and Abidin (Zeng & Abidin, 2021) defined as a new mode of expression.

2.2 TikTok as Platform

Established by ByteDance, TikTok produces and distributes short 15-to-60-second videos with 15-second background music from a variety of genres that allow content creation ranging from singing, dancing, posing, pranks, dressing up, collaboration, cooking, and many more. First launched in 2016, TikTok has soared into the territory of social media platform by giving users the ability to create short videos of three minutes long. This year of 2024, TikTok has reached 4.7 billion downloads globally. In the 2021 phase, TikTok became the most downloaded application with around 1 billion users (Silberling, 2021).

As the most popular application in Indonesia (Fitrianti et al., 2022), TikTok reported that in the third quarter of 2023 it had reached 769.9 million uploads. Therefore, since 2016, TikTok has collected more than 4.1 billion uploads with 1.22 billion active users (Dean, 2023). TikTok users in the world spend an average of 90 minutes per day accessing TikTok and more than 8 times a day opening the TikTok app with 60% active users aged 16-24 years, 26% aged 25-44 years, and 80% aged 16-34 years, consisting of 60% female users and 40% male users (Doyle, 2023).

The performance of user posts becomes the basis for determining the popularity of TikTok content. They strive to gain many other users' engagement such as views, comments, and shares as a trigger to the *For You* page (Matamoros-Fernández, 2023). Everybody scrambles to appear on the page, be it through hashtags, keywords, filters, duets, or trending audio memes to gain many followers (Abidin, 2020). Memes take a variety of forms, including not only image-based and text-coated but also audio-visual based memes (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). *Use This Sound* is a key technical feature on TikTok to create such interaction (Kaye et al., 2021; Matamoros-Fernández, 2023). The public plays a major role in participating (Parahita & Pamungkas, 2023; Yang et al., 2024) in using digital resources (Kim & Li, 2021), such as replication (Ask & Abidin, 2018). Given that memes are a unit of digital content, the nature of memes is very fluid since it is easy to spread, imitate, and replicate (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2018; Shifman, 2014).

TikTok has exposed various content and personalities to the users through user posts on the *For You* page which refers to the landing page or homepage of TikTok. There are approximately 981 thousand videos uploaded every day, or 272 videos per second, and this shows that there are more than one billion videos circulating every day on TikTok (Daniel, 2023). Anybody who appears on this page will easily gain public recognition. By accessing this application and landing on the *For You* page, users are presented with various videos that have been tailored to their interests to facilitate content search. Such feeds are powered by a recommendation system that delivers content to each user and may also be of interest to other users (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). What distinguishes TikTok from other applications is the presence of the *For You* feed. The use of #fyp is the most popular hashtag on TikTok of all time as it has been used and viewed by 36.31 trillion people (Daniel, 2023).

The *For You* feed is one of the distinctive features of TikTok, which allows every user to view the same popular videos for the audience. Therefore, it can be concluded that the feed reflects the unique preferences of each user. The system recommends content based on video ratings that come from a combination of such factors as user interaction with the videos liked and shared, the accounts followed, the comments posted, the content created, the language preference, and the video information, including the text, sound, and hashtags.

No specific content is displayed on the *For You* page since TikTok is emphasized as a content distribution platform based on user interests. Therefore, any content posted on TikTok should be distributed to *For You* users who have an interest in the content. Such interest is triggered by many factors. In addition to the preference factor, the relevance factor also affects how a piece of content can go viral. The BTS Meal phenomenon is one example of a trend of how relevance can affect virality. All the videos related to BTS Meal, from how to get it and how to taste it to how to make it as a collector's item, are popularly commented on, liked, and shared on other social media than TikTok.

Many users still misunderstand the working principle of TikTok, which contrasts with other social media that apply the principle of push to followers. While the distribution of content on other platforms implements searches based on keywords, TikTok users should find out keywords to obtain the desired content. In both working systems, hashtags are certainly required to allow users to search for the desired video. TikTok applies a recommendation-based principle in which the *For You* page will recommend videos that users might like. On the other hand, TikTok identifies users through their interactions in a *For You* way, thus allowing the hashtags on TikTok to function more as content grouping.

3. Method

This research uses qualitative method to explore Shifman’s three dimension. Knowing that hashtag is an important component in understanding memetics media (Highfield & Leaver, 2015), the author conducted digital ethnographic observation from September 2022 until November 2023. The author focused on the tag *Don’t Play Play Bosku* and *Visi Foya Misi Foya* dan discovered 84,400 videos which had replicated the audio meme. This technique was chosen considering there has not been any tools that currently can specifically collect data on TikTok, unlike in other social media. The process took a long time, at least one hour each working day. The author selectively followed, unfollowed, liked, and unliked posts in order to experiment with the algorithm and map themes that surfaced. The author kept written record, captured screens, and downloaded videos.

To develop this corpus analysis, the author adopted purposive sampling which allowed the author to intentionally seek information-rich themes and capture important analytical variations in the phenomenon. From 84,400 videos (see Figure 4) which replicated, the author filtered the sample through content analysis and obtained 145 videos which could serve as population and met the following criteria: (1) replicate the sound *Don’t Play Play Bosku*, (2) not an advertisement or endorsement video, (3) not a repost, (4) not a video containing snippets of gaming activities, (5) not an animated video, and (6) not a video containing personified objects.

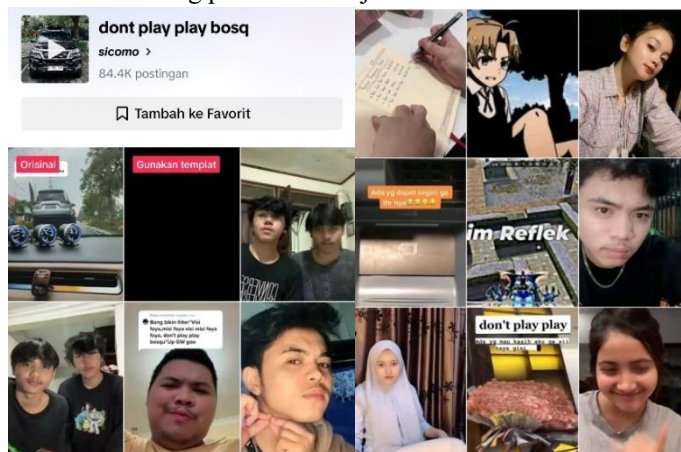


Figure 4. Distribution of the Replication of Tag Don’t Play Play Bosku Audio Meme

The author filtered the videos for the second time to obtain the following sample criteria: (1) have more than 50,000 likes and (2) have been shared for more than 5,000 times, which signify that the videos were considered interesting by users and appeared on the For You feed. The author excluded 135 videos that were deemed less popular and obtained the sample $n = 10$, which consisted of @pendinginan, @sicomo, @djtesamorena, @hao, @jathheeeee, @kadekedwan, @tasyarev, @nataliave407, @abiyahkhorunisa, and @tennytap, and considered videos which represented the dominant themes. It is important to note that, on TikTok, no one can guarantee how long a creator can be at the top of most liked and most watched creators considering TikTok data is constantly changing.

Because TikTok videos deliver ambivalent content which allows the viewers to independently find meaning from their own (Hautea et. al., 2021), the author started by assessing prominent descriptive characteristics from the collected data as well as identifying and separating repeated data. Next, the author compared the content and identified three major themes, namely “Inadequacy” ($n=2$), “Metaphors and practice of playfulness” ($n=4$), and “Mental satire” ($n=4$). The category scheme of this analysis was developed based on TikTok’s ‘meme categorization’ from Zeng et al. (2021) and Zeng & Abidin (2021).

Table 1. Summary of Video Population

	n	%
Duet video	29	21.48%
Humor	31	22.96%
Health	19	14.07%
Stitch video	21	15.55%
Dancing	35	25.92%

Table 2. Summary of Video Sample

	Creator	Likes	Share
Inadequacy	1. @pendinginan	694.8	20.6
	2. @sicomo	92.8	5.7
Metaphors and practice of playfulness	1. @djessamorena	511.3	46.7
	2. @hao	303.4	10.9
	3. @jajatheeeee	51.4	27.0
	4. @kadekedwan	50.1	21
Mental satire	1. @tasyarev	401.2	9.4
	2. @nataliave407	200.7	7.9
	3. @abiyahkhorionisa	410.3	6.8
	4. @tennytap	200.9	11.9

The author analyzed every theme which appeared on the videos by focusing on the layer of video feature, audio feature, gesture, movement, the use of filter, editing technique, transition, dialog, and the use of caption. Shifman's three memetics dimensions allow a deeper understanding of the construction of hedonic jokes that creators offered in the production of *Don't Play Play Bosku* meme message. The analysis started with studying the content level, followed by form level and stance level. The application of the three levels are evident in the following research stages. In the first stage, the author studied the meme by analyzing it using content dimension. This means the author assessed the ideology expressed by the creators. Next, the author analyzed the form dimension which included the noticeable visual, audio, and text. The third stage analyzed the stance dimension, during which the author provided the ideological depiction that the creators intended in replicating the meme. After the three dimensions were presented, the author compared the finding with theories used as references. Lastly, the author drew a conclusion to answer the research questions.

4. Results and Discussion

Don't Play Play Bosku as Audio Meme

In this section, summarize the collected data and the analysis performed on those data relevant to the discourse that is to follow. Report the data in sufficient detail to justify your conclusions. Mention all relevant results, including those that run counter to expectation; be sure to include small effect sizes (or statistically nonsignificant findings) when theory predicts large (or statistically significant) ones. Do not hide uncomfortable results by omission. Do not include individual scores or raw data with the exception, for example, of single-case designs or illustrative examples. In the spirit of data sharing (encouraged by APA and other professional associations and sometimes required by funding agencies), raw data, including study characteristics and individual effect sizes used in a meta-analysis, can be made available on supplemental online archives.

The audio of *Don't Play Play Bosku* was sourced from Awkarin's Instagram video quoted by @prontaxan. This video showed as if Awkarin made the slogan *Don't Play Play Bosku*. In fact, the creator of this slogan was the @prontaxan account through Awkarin's Instagram. The creator stated, "*Berikut adalah visi dan misi dari @prontaxan: Visi foya, misi foya, visi misi foya foya. Don't play play bosku*" (Here is the vision and mission of @prontaxan: Visi foya, misi foya, visi misi foya foya. Don't play play bosku). Denotationally, the phrase sounds like a persuasion to waste money, live in luxury, and work only for money. However, from a different perspective, Awkarin's point might be that life needs pleasure, so dare to start and do everything seriously. Then the utterance "*bosku*" (my boss) is an informal expression. Some Indonesians say "*siap bosku*" (Ready, Boss!) instead of answering with "*OK*" or "*OK boss*". The use of such utterance can now be attached to anybody, not only to bosses or supervisors but also to friends, older people, or even only for fun or joking.

Awkarin's video only showed her sitting in a public space, with a moderate tone of voice, showing no other gestures, and the look on her face showed a happy mood. Spoken directly by Awkarin without any background sound or accompanying music, this sound video received 28.6 thousand likes, 1,479 saves, and 734 shares, whereas the original sound has been replicated in 292 posts.



Figure 5. Stills of Awkarin by @prontaxan. Screenshot by author

Awkarin is a symbol of the upper social class who likes to live extravagantly and exhibit hedonism in the media. Therefore, the text “*Don't play play bosku*” that tends to be uttered by an influencer will have the potential to become viral content, and it can be replicated then become meme content. Although the text was uttered by Awkarin as an actor of the upper social class, it did not necessarily represent Awkarin’s real life. This can be seen from various documentations in the media depicting Awkarin as a decent sort of person. In October 2018, she went to Palu, Donggala, and Sigi for a disaster relief activity to help earthquake victims. She also showed such involvement again in April 2019 by volunteering for the tsunami relief in Banten. Awkarin also shared logistics for the demonstrators at the House of Representatives. She is known as a philanthropist. Everything seen by the audience does not necessarily represent what Awkarin has done. Her advice “*visi foya misi foya visi misi foya foya*” might be a mere speech or simulation. However, it is also possible that Awkarin’s attitude apply to both going on spree and being philanthropic.

4.1 Inadequacy

Content Level. The video produced by @pendinginan was an imitation through lip sync. At the content level, this meme showed the setting of a place resembling a room in the house. The audio used was different as it had undergone a remix process. As the video played, the intro of the accompanying audio appeared slowly from the right side of the screen. The person positioned himself standing and lip-syncing from the sound *Don't Play Play Bosku* which had been changed from @sicomo.2gd. This account remixed the sound, and the result was then used by @pendinginan. The sound *Don't Play Play Bosku* from @sicomo.2gd has been used 84.9 thousand times to date. Based on this chronology, @sicomo.2gd became the second party in the sound replication. At the time of the study, the video by @pendinginan ranked tenth among the users of the sound from @sicomo.2gd. Meanwhile, the video by @pendinginan indicated no replication since the sound was taken from @sicomo.2gd.



Figure 6. Stills of videos by @pendinginan, @sicomo.2gd, and audio replication. Screenshot by author

Form level. The description of the video information read “*visi misi misi visi visi mivis vivis*”. The creator twisted the original phrase “*visi foya misi foya visi misi foya foya*” and correlated it with another expression “*visi misi misi visi visi mivis vivis*”. This expression has no literal meaning because it is classified as an ambiguous utterance. That is, there is a

mixture of the sounds of the language uttered. This occurred because it was likely that the sound “*visi foya misi foya visi misi foya foya*” was uttered too quickly by Awkarin, thus lacking clarity and not allowing the meaning to be understood immediately by the audience. The creator twisted it with the intention of making a joke, representing an audience that did not understand the meaning of the original sound. Therefore, this sound became a newly created sound resulting from the first sound replication that had no correlated meaning.

Stance level. Instead of analogizing to the text by Awkarin as an upper social class member, the user @pendinginan put himself in a different position under Awkarin’s social status. The text should read “*Visi foya misi foya visi misi foya foya*”, but the lower class is considered as those who do not attain good foreign language education. The lower class can only join the trend but are unable to imitate how the upper social class behave. Consequently, this video became a form of misappropriation and misdirection of the reality in the original sound.

4.2 Metaphors and Practice of Playfulness

Content Level. The creator @djtesamorena_real replicated the text *Don’t Play Play Bosku* through the music she controlled. The text *Don’t Play Play Bosku* later became DJ Tessa Morena’s repertoire. Therefore, it can be concluded that the audience has not taken into account the ownership of the text. Until this analysis was conducted, the researcher found that this meme has been viewed 13.6 million times with 511.3 thousand likes, saved by 36.2 thousand users, and shared 46.7 thousand times.



Figure 7. Stills of videos by @djtesamorena, @hao, @jajatheeeee, and @kadekedwan. Screenshot by author

At the content level, @hao said: “*Selamat datang di Ramayana Surabaya. Silakan kakak promo Ardiles buy 1 get 1 nya, Homyped diskon 45%, kemeja kasualnya juga 90ribu rupiah saja dari 120ribu. Silakan kakak. Kok jadi madura saya.*” (Welcome to Ramayana Surabaya. Enjoy your shopping. We have a promo, buy 1 get 1 from Ardiles, 45% discount from Homyped. Casual shirts only 90 thousand rupiah from 120 thousand. Please, enjoy your shopping. How come I turn into a Maduran). He mimicked the salesperson’s verbal style that he thought @djtesamorena had imitated. Meanwhile, @jajatheeeee and @kadekedwan reacted to the accent of @djtesamorena’s pronunciation.

Form level. The text *Visi Misi Foya* was displayed in large font. The narrative *Don’t Play Play Bosku* was spoken by adjusting the background music she controlled. Therefore, at this level, everyone would be aware that the owner of the sound was her. This is the same with the previous memes by @pendinginan. He used @sicomo.2gd’s replicated sound while @sicomo.2gd processed the sound into a new form without eliminating the essence of the narrative. This is also evident from the equipment attached to a DJ. Then on the hashtags, the creator wrote the captions #djtesamorena, #tessamorena, and #fyp to highlight her identity.

The account @hao clothes resembling a salesperson, attaching a background as if he was in a department store identical to such selling strategies inherent in people’s mind. Hao considered the verbal style of DJ Tessa’s repertoire to be very identical to that of a salesperson in a department store. Meanwhile, at the form level, Hao used the *stitch* feature to quote DJ Tessa’s video. The video by @hao has been viewed by more than 805 thousand users.

Stance level. By partially altering the narrative and sound, the meme was reused by thousands of videos on TikTok and inspired a series of meme sub-genres. One of such niches is @hao’s department store salesperson meme, in which the video by the character @hao simulated the same activity and was paired with @djtesamorena’s video and sound.

In the video by @djtesamorena_real, the text *Don’t Play Play Bosku* remained a representative narrative. At the memetic level, this video underwent a mechanism called remix, which involved the elements of manipulative music technology. DJ Tessa’s associated communication style is the use of repertoire that is serious but does not seem patronizing. The repertoire is attached to the electronic music that is played and attracts the audience.

The audience received a new image of satire at the content level from @hao. This was because the metaphor of the delivery from @djtesamorena analogized to the salesperson became central positivistic or humorous. The position of the addresser in this video was as a salesperson who was persuading buyers. Therefore, the fatigue function occurred, in which there was an establishment of communication with others, or in this case the buyers. This function can be seen in the text above. The attitude dimension of Hao's video did not follow the original text. The original text used a conative function because it invited and motivated the audience to do something.

4.3 Mental Satire

Content Level. In the caption, @tasyarev wrote, “Wkwkwk Neeehh Sound Baru Check” (Here is a new sound, check it out.). At the content level, memes like this are categorized as the daily performance meme. She showed herself relaxing and jokingly narrating, “Visi foya misi foya. Visi misi: gayanya sosialita, duitnya enggak ada” (Vision? Spree. Mission? Spree. Vision Mission? Socialite life but no money). The creator @tasyarev did not lip-sync; instead, she narrated it directly. Her satire was shown by a reaction of laughter at the end of the narrative. The video was liked by 401.2 thousand viewers, and it has been viewed 4.6 million times. Similar to the videos by @nataliave407, @abiyahkhourunisa, and @tennytap, all of them delivered content related to satire.

Form level. The creator placed the narrative at the top of the video, parallel to the finger pointing at where the text was positioned. This video was created using zoom-in and zoom-out effects. The final section was closed with a zoom-in transition to the sound of repeated laughter that became the highlight of the video. Without wearing glamorous and excessive clothes, with the setting of the background, these four creators only relied on satire in their videos.



Figure 8. Stills of videos by @tasyarev, @nataliave407, @abiyahkhourunisa, and @tennytap

Screengrab by author

Stance level. The trend of *Don't Play Play Bosku* audio meme made the audience forget or even became unaware of how the reality began. Even the meaning has settled and lost. The high enthusiasm of users for other videos of the same kind has made *Don't Play Play Bosku* popular. Users flocked to make similar videos, using the same sound and carrying their respective identities to reap the same popularity. After Awkarin, it seemed that many users produced similar videos and replicated them in such a way (Shifman, 2014). Figure 6 shows the accounts @tasyarev, @abiyahkhourunisa, and @tennytap who did similar things.

Construction of TikTok Culture in the Meme *Don't Play Play Bosku*

The phrase *Don't Play Play Bosku* was a triggering event that emerged from the continuous interaction between Awkarin, @prontaxan, and the public. This event received unexpected responses and was welcomed by the public with a frenzy of high attraction rate from the audience to replicate the meme. The spread from Awkarin to the public occurred through pieces of information on culture transmitted interpersonally from @prontaxan, thus having an impact at a macro level. The pieces of information on culture include public acceptance of Awkarin as an influencer who hegemonized the trend of flexing culture, cancel culture, consolation to the new normal era, and others (Monanda & Nurjanah, 2017; Sulkhan, 2020). The public freely reproduced the meaning of *Don't Play Play Bosku* as well as the narrative contained in it (Shifman, 2014).

The mapping of the themes found becomes the designation of the function of the sound as a frame of the same pattern and of the reinterpretation of Awkarin's narrative as a text as well as portraying @pendinginan as inadequate. Awkarin's utterance was taken out of the context and juxtaposed with other sound preparations to exaggerate the absurd and the ridiculous. The authority of the dominant narrative to legitimize Awkarin's hedonism meaning was weakened by the marking of the different narrative by @pendinginan. The claims of such hedonism narratives and their historic

significance are countered by questioning their reality in the public. In this case, the public approved the construction of the joke by @pendinginan that improvised Deuze's creative way (2006) to participate in the narrative *Don't Play Play Bosku*. Instead of living in a screen realm where Awkarin is a public figure who is identical to going on spree, they created their own world through a practice of playfulness where *Don't Play Play Bosku* was only a joke that later settled down. This kind of parody creates a new linguistic structure and culture of criticism that not only deconstructs the phenomenon humorously but also goes viral through networks to generate new meanings in diverse contexts (Kumar, 2015).

While social media like Instagram tends to focus on image rather than text, TikTok prioritizes both. The feature in all TikTok posts is a round button on the bottom right side. When clicked, users can see a catalog ranging from the first original video to other videos that imitate it. To the right of the original video is an option to 'use this audio' and allow users to create their own videos with the same background audio template, which they can decorate by adjusting the volume or overlaying their own dialogue when creating posts. The 'template-able' back sound has become the center of viral trends on TikTok. It can be understood as an audio meme and is a template that drives content production.

The memetic TikTok culture can be observed in the logic of video making. First, users produce a TikTok video to gain visibility. Replicating and imitating popular videos rather than creating their own is one of the conveniences offered on TikTok, as seen from the similar *Don't Play Play Bosku* audio meme. Every video has a chance to be discovered, liked, saved, and then shared if its audio and content are replicated and linked to the videos that have been previously popular. Second, if somebody remixes audio to become more interesting, there is an opportunity that the audio will eventually catch the attention of the followers of a popular user (e.g. Awkarin). In this case, the researcher understands that influencers provide privileges and even benefits for users because the popularity of the audio can eventually increase the number of followers and engagement and encourage others to replicate.

Technically, users rely on a specific narrative to tell a story, consider the form of the music and rhythm, complement or juxtapose audio memes with video content and captions, and organize and simplify content into a specific format (Abidin, 2020). The complexity of the technical aspects is usually accompanied by the sophisticated and intelligent editing work that TikTokers use to drive the visual narrative of the content. On TikTok, transition editing is a technical aspect that frequently wins praise and appreciation, such as videos by Zach King (Al-Heeti, 2021).

Meanwhile, the "stitch and duet" feature is popular on TikTok because they allow users to react or build on other clips by recording their own videos alongside the original ones as they are being played. This function has been widely and creatively applied to show that TikTok users follow tutorials to add to the long chain of collaborative content (Abidin, 2021) and to react to meme content (Zeng, Schafer, & Allgaier, 2020). In the context of the meme *Don't Play Play Bosku*, the duet and stitch feature is the most frequently used by users to provide feedback on the slogan.

Memes are useful to guide the meaning of an event that attracts most people. Memes start from the normative world (Shifman, 2014) of what should happen and then memes recreate the reality. It is the distance between these two scenarios that later develops the jokes. In other words, memes create humor from public situations while making the normative world less clear. Memes accommodate diverse opinions from the audience (López-Paredes & Carrillo-Andrade, 2022). Memes are ambivalent. Sometimes they are antagonistic yet socialist, creative, disruptive yet funny and incisive, and they should be considered essential as this and not as that. TikTok culture creates a creator's frame of reference to be able to accept jokes in any forms

TikTok creates a mode of self-representation and identity for audiences that cannot be found on other social media (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Therefore, it seems that the purpose of the audience joining TikTok is to get entertainment. However, when the audience starts planning to create content, it is the time when efforts for self-representation and identity creation begin to form in the creators. Those who play with the features may become differentiators or create content that is similar to previous creations.

From this, it can be understood that TikTok memes create a self-contained narrative to the public by offering its background, resolution, and humor in an upright screen (Miltner & Highfield, 2017). The use of audio memes allows users to create new modes of expression. In many TikTok videos, lip-syncing has become a common way for users to construct the key message in lines of lyrics (Abidin, 2020; Zeng & Abidin, 2021). Accompanied by the user's hand movements, lip sync is *a codified way of expressing affect* (Rettberg, 2017) where lips, lyrics, and music regulate certain energy, moods, or movements to allow users to do the same and play along. Audio aesthetics are an important instrument for users to claim and establish identity (Cervi & Divon, 2023).

Memes as a TikTok culture is a culture that is always actively produced and consumed. Smith & Coplan (2021) underscores this sort of memes as a speed-first culture. Memes are an attempt to achieve visibility over the attention economy on TikTok. Then, by becoming the first and replicator of popular audio, whoever becomes the first and the fastest becomes the one who will gain that visibility. However, it is too difficult for the researcher to be able to observe

who is the fastest and the first to replicate. In fact, there is not even a single method capable of tracking it with certainty. Smith & Coplan (2021) called it as a moment of ephemeral memetics.

In the end, the condition of TikTok culture is said by Anderson (2020) as an era of creative chaos carried out by surreal millennials. Through TikTok, people look for entertainment. By playing TikTok, people get pleasure merely through viewing short videos and creating simple content from the existing sounds, and TikTok frames them in the space of algorithmic identity (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).

4. Conclusion

This research focuses on the themes of the meme *Don't Play Play Bosku* and the TikTok culture constructed by the creators. The researcher points out three classifications of the emerging themes: inadequacy, metaphors and a practice of playfulness, and mental satire. From the three themes emerging, at the content level, memes are not only an expression of the video but also an audio control to negotiate. At the form level, memes are delivered with frequently repeated word twists, reactions, and effects. The practice of memes at the stance level shows that the ideological position of creators in bringing up memes is an elaboration of videos and audio that give birth to these three themes in the mechanism of TikTok culture.

The findings of this study confirm that the construction of TikTok culture in users is formed from shared rituals in imitation and replication. Examining this kind of TikTok culture cannot only refer to a single analysis of videos but also requires an analysis of TikTok culture as an algorithm-framed participatory platform.

For further research, broader samples can be used to produce more comprehensive findings. Future researchers can conduct comparative studies on the practice of memetics and digital culture on TikTok compared to other platforms. Then, research topics on the offline identity of TikTok users who have been participating in memetics can also become a recommendation to be considered for by future researchers

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