Exploring Youth Perspectives on Pornography in Indonesia and Malaysia: A Reception Analysis of Attitudes, Impacts, and Social Implications

NUR KHOLISOH
MELLY RIDARYANTHI
Universitas Mercu Buana

SABARIAH MOHAMED SALLEH*
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The rapid proliferation of pornographic and sexually violent content on social media has made it easily accessible to a wide audience, including adolescents, raising serious concerns in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, where cultural values, religious teachings, and social norms often conflict with such material. Adolescents, who are among the most active users of platforms like TikTok, encounter pornographic and sexually violent content both intentionally and unintentionally, often through algorithms and suggestive content embedded in the apps. This is also true for adolescents in Indonesia and Malaysia, two countries with similar cultural and historical backgrounds. This study uses reception analysis to explore the interplay between production, text, and audience to understand how adolescents aged 15–19 in Indonesia and Malaysia interpret such material. The results indicate that most participants adopted a negotiating stance, acknowledging the content's existence but rejecting its influence due to strong cultural and religious values. Others demonstrated a resistance stance, struggling with conflicting perceptions stemming from social expectations and personal beliefs. However, none of the participants took a hegemonic position, approving of the content and embracing it in their lives. Based on the results, this study highlights the complexity of dealing with pornography in the digital age, where adolescents must reconcile exposure to massive global media with local cultural frameworks. This underscores the importance of more nuanced communication strategies to address the impact of social media on adolescent development in both Indonesia and Malaysia.

Keywords: *Reception analysis, adolescents, pornography, social media, TikTok.*

INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of social media has significantly increased adolescents' exposure to pornographic content. According to the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), 91.58% of 6,000 teenagers had been exposed to pornography by 2018, illustrating the scale of the issue in Indonesia (KPAI, 2018). This exposure is largely driven by algorithmic content delivery and the unfiltered nature of digital platforms, making sexually explicit material readily accessible. Hutagalung (2017) also noted that Indonesia ranked highest globally in 2015 for online searches using terms such as "sex" and "porn," based on Google Trends. As internet access continues to grow across Southeast Asia, the need to address online risks among youth becomes increasingly urgent (UNESCO, 2021).

Early and repeated exposure to pornography can have serious psychological and health-related consequences. A study by Yunengsih and Setiawan (2021) found a significant relationship between early exposure to pornography and risky sexual behavior among

adolescents, including increased rates of unprotected sex, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections. Adolescents, due to their developmental stage, are especially vulnerable to media influence and often lack the critical capacity to assess harmful content (Yutifa et al., 2015). Moreover, Álvarez-Segura et al. (2025) emphasized that early and repeated exposure to pornography may distort the development of healthy sexuality and increase tolerance toward sexually aggressive behaviors. These risks reinforce the importance of comprehensive digital literacy and sex education initiatives tailored to culturally sensitive contexts in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Pornography is historically associated with illicit sexual behavior; the term has evolved significantly in modern discourse. Today, pornography broadly encompasses various forms of sexually explicit content, including images, texts, and audio materials that depict or suggest obscene or immoral acts (McKee et al., 2019). Scholars have identified distinct categories of pornography based on the medium, such as visual (photographs or videos), action-based (live performances or reenactments), and auditory (voice or sound-based stimuli). Increasingly, these categories are integrated into multimedia formats, giving rise to what is now termed "porn media," a concept describing the convergence of multiple forms of explicit content into a unified digital experience (Paasonen, 2021).

In both Indonesia and Malaysia, the regulation of pornography is shaped by strong cultural, religious, and moral values, yet the legal approaches differ slightly in scope and implementation. In Indonesia, pornography is strictly regulated under Law Number 44 of 2008, which provides an expansive definition encompassing visual, textual, audio, and gestural content that includes sexual exploitation or violates societal norms. This law prohibits not only explicit sexual acts and nudity but also suggestive content such as illustrations, animations, and gestures deemed obscene. It reflects Indonesia's broader commitment to protecting public morality and cultural values, particularly in its Muslim-majority society, where religious teachings strongly influence legal norms.

Similarly, in Malaysia, pornography is prohibited under several legal frameworks, including the Penal Code and the Film Censorship Act 2002, which restrict the production, distribution, and possession of obscene material. Malaysia also enforces Islamic law (Syariah) in certain states, particularly affecting Muslim citizens, with additional penalties for moral offenses, including the consumption of pornography. These legal contexts provide a backdrop for this study, which compares adolescents' interpretations of pornographic content on TikTok in both countries. Despite shared historical and religious roots, variations in media regulation and enforcement shape how youth in each nation engage with and resist such content.

Byron et al. (2024) emphasized that adolescents actively engage with and interpret sexual content on social media, highlighting the importance of understanding their perceptions and the impact on their development. Adolescents' comprehension of the content and its potential consequences can have either a positive or negative influence on their lives. Consuming pornography content could satisfy individual curiosity (Kholisoh et al., 2022). If they develop an informed and critical understanding of pornography, it can foster healthier attitudes towards sexuality and media consumption.

In the context of this study, TikTok is one of the social media platforms that has been highlighted as a medium to access pornography. It was reported in a study of 650 Thai users (both girls and boys) that they have used TikTok, whereby 50% of them have sent nudity content. Besides, it was stated that 90% have even received sexual offers (Dilon, 2020). A

study conducted among youth in India has also shown a similar picture. It was reported that people are increasingly complaining about TikTok's illicit content. The finding shows that 59% of people agreed on the fact that irrelevant content, which leads to hazardous and pornographic videos, has appeared and is incidentally exposed to adolescents who are using the app (Kaur, 2020). Therefore, this study focuses on TikTok as the medium.

This study employed reception analysis, a valuable method for examining how media texts are interpreted by audiences. Reception analysis pays attention to the specific social circumstances in which reading takes place (Burton, 1999). This method explores the interaction between media content and its consumers, focusing on how individuals negotiate, accept, or resist the messages presented in the media. It is not just about the content itself but about how the audience makes sense of it based on their socio-cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and moral frameworks. Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) stated that examining how young audiences interact with digital content within their specific cultural and social contexts is important, highlighting the dynamic ways adolescents interpret media based on their lived experiences and value systems. This interaction is especially significant when considering how adolescents engage with sensitive cultural products like pornography, as their interpretations are often shaped by personal beliefs, societal expectations, and digital literacy.

Reception analysis helps to uncover the diverse ways in which young people interpret these media texts, whether they align with dominant societal values, negotiate between conflicting messages, or resist the content altogether. The meaning of a text is polysemic and open, so that it allows the audience to understand and interpret the message differently (Tulloch, 2023). Reception analysis attempts to uncover the narratives behind the audience's narratives. Researchers seek to reveal the deepest meanings of these phenomena. For this reason, it is necessary to research the analysis of adolescent receptions of pornography on TikTok. The relevance of reception analysis in this study is to acknowledge adolescents' active role in making meaning of what they see on social media. Rather than being passive recipients, they engage with the content in ways that reflect their personal and cultural identities.

Based on the background stated, this study was conducted to answer the following research question: How is the reception of adolescents in Southeast Asia regarding pornography on TikTok? This study managed to determine the reception of adolescents in Southeast Asia about pornography on TikTok (Study on adolescents in Indonesia and Malaysia). In addition, this study aimed to find a communication model design in determining steps to cope with the impact of pornography on TikTok, especially among adolescents. The results of this study are also expected to be the reference for parents, educators, government, and related parties in determining strategic steps to overcome the impact of pornography on TikTok on adolescents. This study highlights the reception of attitudes, their impact, and their social implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid advancement of communication technologies has significantly reshaped the structure of digital society. The use of smartphones has led to various impacts, including the reshaping of digital society, including screen addiction and pornography consumption (Habidin et al., 2025). These changes create a complex digital environment with both positive and negative consequences. Furthermore, concerns regarding pornography in Indonesia and Malaysia are not new. A study on soft-core pornography in Indonesian films is one of the

academics' concerns about pornography in Indonesia. The rise number of pornographies in media content has enforced the state laws on pornography (Rochimah & Junaedi, 2012).

However, in 2016, an empirical study and content analyses on sexual content in mainstream entertainment media, which were published from 2000 to 2015, show that sexual media content is prevalent in mainstream media (Ward et al., 2016). Furthermore, the study indicates that the sociocultural impact of sexual content in video games could contribute to the sexual attitudes and behaviors of consumers. In the Indonesian context, the rise of digital media intensifies sociocultural problems. Negative digital content, in this context, is pornography, which can be easily accessed by individuals, including adolescents. Such content can affect viewers' attitudes, especially regarding sexuality (Hafiar et al., 2019). The argument follows a study on the anticipatory action of pornographic exposure that has shown the influence of pornographic exposure on students' visual impairment regarding sexuality. These findings suggest that pornography could influence not only adolescents but also possibly vulnerable groups.

Cultural perception of pornography among youths also demonstrates complexity. A study on the pornography discourse in the reception of Enny Arrow's stencil novels among millennial men revealed that pornography can be perceived as a consumption and taboo. Even though the study proved that men read the stencil novels, yet, the informants considered that pornography should not be the conversational topic in society (Anggraini et al., 2021). Digital platforms such as YouTube can further complicate the issue. YouTube is one of the digital media channels that has an impact on its viewers. A study on audiences' reception of Frontal TV content on YouTube, which shows pornographic content, has revealed that the audiences do not agree on the content provided (Saputra et al., 2022). Furthermore, one of the informants representing the Ministry of Communication and Information of the Republic of Indonesia has expressed concern about the content's impact, assuming it will negatively influence children.

Adolescence in particular requires guidance to develop safe digital habits. They require additional information for their understanding in safely use of smartphones and social media to prevent access to pornography (Meilani et al., 2023). Guidance from family, school and community is necessary as well, for pornography is the opening gate for sexual risk behavior that should be prevented (Kholisoh et al., 2021; Meilani et al., 2023). Parents provide gadgets for their children to easily access various digital media without noticing the importance of adequate awareness and literacy regarding social media usage and content consumption (Kholisoh et al., 2023).

A recent study on the influence of pornography on social media towards adolescents resulted in findings of three things that influence adolescents to pornography which are a lack of knowledge about sex, a lack of parental approach, and lastly, easy exposure to videos with pornographic content on social media (Pardamean et al., 2023). These findings underscore the intersectional nature of the issue, where digital literacy, family dynamics, and technological accessibility jointly shape individual exposure and response to pornographic content.

The literature document a shift in the media and how pornography content reaches young people. Earlier studies focused on sexual content in mainstream media, followed by established links between exposure and changes in sexual attitudes (Ward et al., 2016). Studies conducted in Indonesia show that the proliferation of sexualized media led to legal and policy responses (Rochimah & Junaedi, 2012), while a study on soft-core pornography in

domestic film contexts has identified public ambivalence and regulator tension. More recent work highlights smartphone-driven transformations of media use and related harms such as screen addiction and increased pornography exposure (Habidin et al., 2025). These studies create a substantive foundation and show important gaps that justify the focused reception analysis of pornography content on TikTok among adolescents, both timely and necessary.

METHODOLOGY

Paradigm

This study adopted a constructivist paradigm, which stands in contrast to positivist and post-positivist approaches that emphasize objectivity and empirical observation as the foundation for discovering scientific truths. The constructivist paradigm posits that reality is not a single, fixed entity but is socially and contextually constructed through individuals' subjective experiences (Bogna, Raineri, & Dell, 2020). Knowledge, therefore, emerges from the interactive process between researchers and participants, where meaning is co-created through dialogue, reflection, and interpretation. This approach is particularly relevant when exploring sensitive and culturally embedded topics such as adolescent exposure to pornography on social media, where interpretations are deeply influenced by local values, religious teachings, and personal beliefs.

In Southeast Asian contexts, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, where cultural and moral frameworks play a significant role in shaping social behavior, the constructivist paradigm enables a more nuanced understanding of how adolescents internalize or reject these frameworks. Prayogi et al. (2023) further emphasize that constructivism, as an epistemological foundation, allows researchers to uncover localized meanings and variations in perception that cannot be generalized but must be interpreted within their specific social environments.

Method

This study employs Stuart Hall's reception analysis, which focuses on how audiences interpret and engage with media messages. Reception analysis is grounded in understanding how individuals derive meaning from media content and how their interpretations are shaped by psychological, social, and cultural factors (Song, 2024). This approach emphasizes that meaning is not solely embedded in the text but is constructed through the audience's active decoding. As such, audiences are viewed as dynamic participants in creating meaning, influenced by their unique cultural contexts, social backgrounds, and personal experiences (Lull, 2000). The method explores why different people or social groups interpret the same media content differently, highlighting the role of ideological and contextual factors in shaping those interpretations.

Reception analysis also seeks to uncover the social consequences of these interpretations, particularly how they influence individuals' perceptions, behaviors, and societal norms. The focus of this method is the process of decoding, interpreting, and understanding the content of the text or media message (Anggraini et al., 2021). By focusing on the decoding process, this method aims to understand how audiences make sense of media texts and the broader implications of these interpretations within society (Livingstone, 2019). Moreover, the reception analysis framework offers insight into how contemporary digital media, including social platforms, shape audiences' active roles in constructing meanings and engaging with media content in a globalized, digitally mediated world.

In this analysis, the audience refers to a group of people who receive messages from the mass media, those who read, listen to, and watch media, or the communication target (Nasrullah, 2019). Audiences can actively interpret media text; therefore, they are free to interpret the meanings encoded and offered to them through media texts, which are considered polysemy (carrying many potential meanings) (Anshar et al., 2024). The use of social media among adolescents as active recipients will certainly influence them (Suryanto et al., 2024).

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with selected adolescents in Indonesia and Malaysia. The informants were selected purposively to reflect variations in socio-cultural backgrounds in both Indonesia and Malaysia. A purposive sampling technique was employed in this study the considering that the study needs specific informants to participate. The details of the informants are as follows:

Table 1: Informants characteristics

Area	Informant/Age
Jakarta	AR (22)
Bogor	RK (18)
Depok	CC (20)
Tangerang	AM (22)
Bekasi	RG (23)
Puterajaya	F (19)
Bangi	G (21)
Kajang	H (20)
Petaling Jaya	I (22)
Kuala Lumpur	J (23)

In-depth interviews were conducted to elicit informants' reception (understanding and interpretation) of adolescents' responses to media texts, in order to obtain honest and open reception. There are various factors taken into consideration that might affect, such as media texts seen or read, adolescents' experiences of media texts from the perspective of subject position, and the meaning of media texts for adolescents, including religious factors, minority factors, historical factors, social and cultural factors, educational factors, and gender.

To ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the data collection process, in-depth interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom Cloud Meeting, a widely accessible and user-friendly video conferencing platform. This approach was chosen not only for its logistical convenience but also in response to the ongoing digital communication habits of the target demographic, i.e., urban adolescents in Indonesia and Malaysia who are already familiar with such tools. Virtual interviews allowed for flexible scheduling and eliminated geographical barriers between the Greater Jakarta and Klang Valley regions, facilitating cross-border data collection without the need for physical travel.

Furthermore, the virtual setting may have created a more comfortable environment for participants to discuss sensitive topics like pornography, particularly given the anonymity and privacy that online platforms can offer (Archibald et al., 2019). All interviews were conducted with the prior informed consent of the informants, ensuring ethical compliance and respect for participants' autonomy and comfort. Despite the virtual format, the

researcher maintained a semi-structured approach to allow for spontaneous elaboration and nuanced responses, thus preserving the depth and richness of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This sub-section will present the research result where data were gathered through in-depth interviews, both in the greater Jakarta area in Indonesia and the Klang Valley area in Malaysia, as follows:

a) The Use of Social Media

All informants use social media in carrying out their daily activities. There are several social media commonly used by resource persons, namely: Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Line, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram. From the many existing social media platforms, not all of them are used equally by all sources. There are four social media used by all sources, namely: Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube. Only a small number of informants use the line, Facebook, and Telegram. This is due to the results of an interview with Bunga, who said;

Based on interview results, the duration of daily social media use is highly varied, ranging from 2 to more than 8 hours. The use of social media is generally carried out by the resource persons in the afternoon until the evening, because in the morning and afternoon, they are still engaged in learning activities, both online and offline. This was stated by Khansa, who usually uses social media via cellphones. All sources understand social media as a means to convey and receive information.

> In my opinion, social media can be interpreted from the words' social' and 'media'. Media here is interpreted as an intermediary or medium, while social is the scope that connects individuals. So, social media is a medium that is used to connect individuals with individuals, groups with groups, individuals with groups, and vice versa. [Informant A]

R also stated that social media is a platform for all of us who use it, where we can find, share, and do other things related to cyberspace. Meanwhile, AR argued that social media is a place for us to be creative, a place for diverse opinions and content such as news, funny videos, and so forth. The informants saw social media as two sides of a coin, which have positive and negative sides, as stated by RG, who stated that;

> The positive thing is that I now know a lot of information that wasn't known before, whether it's disaster news, an incident, or something related to education. On the negative side, namely, people who show things that should not be shown and hoax news. [Informant RG]

A similar response was conveyed by AR: using social media can be positive, as it is a place to be creative and seek knowledge, while it can turn negative when consumed, for instance, pornography or content that is misused, such as a tutorial on assembling bombs that can be accessed on YouTube. Meanwhile, AM argued that the positive and negative impacts depend on how people use it.

> Depending on how it is used, social media can be positive or negative. Examples of such negative use are currently rampant online gambling, pornography, and scams (fraud). [Informant AM]

After exploring the use of social media among the informants, the following findings show their understanding of pornography and its existence on social media.

b) Understanding of pornography

The informants have different understandings regarding pornography. CH addressed pornography as related to misbehavior, and there will be a victim involved in a consent matter.

> In my opinion, pornography is an immoral act, and harassment can arouse someone's lust… Yes, there is an element of sacrifice. [Informant CH]

The female informant's perspective is slightly different. She highlighted the experience of learning about sex during high school and referred to pornography as media content related to sex. However, it is more of a biological term that she came to understand. Meanwhile, speaking about the sexual intercourse that is being exposed in the media, especially social media, she highlighted the cultural values when discussing it. Taboo is one of the things that makes pornography forbidden to talk about bluntly in society. CC highlights the discussion on topic related to sex.

> (In my opinion about) sex, I used to study sex in science and hadith. For science, I studied conception, and for Islamic hadith (for circles), I was taught in 3rd grade in high school about how husband and wife should relate while in bed. My friends and I, because we are still studying at the same institution, still find it a bit taboo to discuss pornography. Once, I asked a male friend about those who are addicted to watching pornography. [Informant CC]

She is studying at an Islamic boarding school; therefore, Islamic values and culture were very strong during the discussion. She mentioned that pornography is not a usual topic for discussion among friends in the boarding school. Moreover, she was mostly interacting with female students, which made the pornography topic even taboo to discuss in the boarding school. Furthermore, she conveys that it is taboo to discuss sexuality or something related to it;

> For boarding school friends, it is still very taboo for both women and men, and for friends outside the scope of Islamic boarding schools who are basically from outside the Islamic boarding school environment. They are used to (discussing pornography), so I can't help but try to be normal only when they talk like that. Moreover, sometimes they like to (boast) mention female genitalia, male genitalia, and the like. To be honest, for my former friend, it seemed impossible to say, so when I left the Islamic boarding school, I was a bit culture shocked and saw that discussing sex was normal outside the Islamic boarding school environment. [Informant CC]

Yet, outside the boarding school, topic related to pornography is something light to discuss, and in fact, they can talk about it with the opposite sex. Aside from pornography, the discussion further exposed the informants to the definition and their personal understanding pertaining to sexuality.

> Sexuality (in my opinion) is the act of sex or sexual activity, which is not much different from harassment, but harassment occurs when one person lusts for one person, not if (actions) sexual, both accept, and both want consent... (My) Family never discusses, but friends do (discuss pornography and sexuality. [Informant CH]

On the boy's side, AR stated his understanding that pornography is a video that displays obscenity, but is usually considered art by some people. According to Arfiano, pornography is different from sexuality.

> …pornography is more about content that can stimulate the audience, while sexuality is the attraction of one individual to another, and then proceeds to courtship or marriage. In other words, sexuality is pornography. [Informant AR]

Meanwhile, AM stated that;

> Pornography is content related to sexuality and is then commercialized. So… It's different, the difference is that sexuality is an experience of two human beings with the purpose of reproduction, while pornography is made for recreational purposes or mere pleasure, and there is no biological purpose. [Informant AM]

Further understanding, according to RG;

> Pornography, in my opinion, is what we can see and hear related to, if in Islam it is called genitalia, and related to maturity. Meanwhile, Sexuality is knowledge that leads (related) to sex. Sex is an adult activity performed by a pair of adult men and women. [Informant RG]

AR determines whether the content is pornographic. If it shows genitals and has intercourse, it is considered pornographic. If you only wear sexy clothes like a bra or bikini, it is not considered porn. Meanwhile, RG stated that;

> Types of pornography are verbal, photos, and videos… For photos and videos, when I scroll through social media, it's like a snippet from a husband-and-wife movie scene. Usually, I find on Instagram and TikTok. [Informant RG]

A slightly different matter was stated by AM in his statement, as follows;

> I identify that something is called pornography on social media, namely, the content contains something erotic that can invite sexual desire… Usually in the form of short videos… There are intentional and unintentional patterns. [Informant AM]

Pornography: Experience and Impact

The exploration of their understanding of pornography is extended to the experience of accessing pornography content, especially through social media. The informants admitted that they have been exposed to pornography content both by mistake and intentionally. The role of the surrounding circle of friends in their exposure to such content. Furthermore, among their circle, the pornography content is usually discussed, but in a casual and humorous manner. It is not that they intentionally discuss it for some new understanding or perspective regarding the sexual activity. Usually, there are (types of) friends who like to relate (discussion) in that direction (pornography and sexuality), so we indirectly discuss that (pornography and sexuality) as well [Informant CH].

> (Usually) only viral ones, for example, the previous (viral) hit (porn video) 47 seconds... I don't know where the video (source) came from. I only got it from the WA group with one view mode… When I saw that bit, I just looked; there was no purpose, and I was also curious (about the content). After that, I immediately (scrolled) up again. [Informant CH]

Informant CH stated that he never intentionally searches for pornography content, unless it is given by a friend. The informants notice that some pornography content somehow passes through their timeline or becomes FYP (For your page) due to the algorithm; therefore, they can access it. However, they can click it, pause for a while to view the content, or scroll past it. CH admitted that he would sometimes stop to look into the content, but it did not really get his attention to further search for it.

The discussion among friends was also becoming the group's consensus; it would not be shared further. The ethical code is understood among the group members. The female informant has different comments regarding discussions among friends. Again, since the background of boarding school with bold cultural and Islamic values, it is taboo for them to discuss pornography content in detail. However, it is also different when she mingled with friends from the other school. The pornography content was discussed for their curiosity, and since they know who is in the video. Yet, it is not so much about the sexual activity that they are focused on, but rather the fact that the one in the video is someone famous among their age.

> Yes, because my background is Islamic, even though I don't go deep into it, and that (related to sexuality) shouldn't be something that he (name of artist) is proud of. [Informant CC]

The informants tend to skip pornography content that passes through their FYP or timeline due to their lack of interest in the content itself. Basically, the pornography content on social media is not something that the informants seek for the purpose.

> It didn't go through on purpose, because if it's (intentionally) searched for (like) it's useless looking for that video (pornography)… Usually, I only take a quick look and immediately scroll, because I'm not interested (in the pornographic content on the homepage). [Informant CH]

However, there was an experience of searching for pornography content due to their curiosity about the viral video, which was considered to contain pornography. Yet, she could not find it on TikTok. It is interesting that an informant mentioned that TikTok usually blocks pornography content. She gave an example: when a celebrity's viral video was trending, she could not find it, nor did she ever see it on her FYP (For Your Page).

> Because many say they are similar, and according to my friends, the content is really bad, so I'm curious…for pornographic things on TikTok are easily blocked. [Informant CC]

The consumption of pornography is somehow influenced by the circle of friends. CC and CH mentioned their experience of being exposed to pornography content due to their friends who got access to it. The informants are not the first agents to obtain or search for the content sources; rather, they are exposed because they are part of a circle.

> He already got (porn films) and watched them at the beginning, then we were invited to watch. Because we were curious, when we were still in junior high school, we watched (porn films) until the end. [Informant CH]

The informant admitted that back in school, he intentionally searched for pornography video content. He stated that it was fun to joke and mock his friends about the video. It only happened during his school age; however, it stopped when he became mature and enrolled in university.

> Once, in the past…(pause) At the beginning I entered college… [Informant CH]

The intention to search for pornography related content is experienced by informants; however, it was not something that was considered addictive or routine. They tend to follow the discussion trend in the group circle or are dragged into the discussion that happened in the FYP or on their social media timeline. According to AR, he does not talk about sexuality and pornography with his parents and friends, because this is a personal matter, as stated in the following statement:

> …I never had discussions about sexuality and pornography…because I felt embarrassed to talk about it. [Informant AR]

The statement is slightly different from what was conveyed by RG, who stated that;

> …parents have never, but talk to friends or relatives, more often to friends…What is talked about is usually more about photographs and includes videos showing a woman showing her genitals. [Informant RG]

In contrast to RG, AM stated that since childhood, he was used to talking about sex with his parents.

> … In my family, I was taught about sexuality from a young age by my mother in the study of sexual fiqh… Like how to treat women, then I was taught about the shape of the body (vital organs) of the opposite sex, so later, when I get married and have intercourse, I have to take care of and respect it…I was taught since elementary school…Yes, my three siblings also received the same lesson regarding sexuality. [Informant AM]

Regarding the experiences of the informants regarding pornography on social media, AR stated that;

> (I use) Twitter a lot…. because the regulation (Twitter) is lighter than TikTok…What I feel when I watch pornography… As fulfillment of sexual needs (imagination). [Informant AR]

RG experienced different things, as he confessed that while at school, he saw pornographic content in the form of a picture. He shocked. However, he felt lucky that his circle of friends is more focused on hobbies and other activities, and it helps him not to consume pornography content. Meanwhile, AM usually watches pornography for about 30 minutes a day, with a span of 2 times per week. I watch pornography because I have a desire to see it for entertainment. He stated that he never seeks the company of his friends.

Experience in using TikTok
Discussing their experience using TikTok as a social media platform, informants in this study stated that they had been exposed to social media for a long time before TikTok. They have used Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to communicate and search for both information and entertainment. They have several reasons for using TikTok; the quotes are as follows:

> Because if I see (the trend) now, there are lots of buyers on TikTok, and there are also many fans. Like tiktok live and TikTok shop. [Informant CH]

> …I just actively played (tick-tock) in 2021… (previously used) Instagram, WhatsApp. [Informant CC]

They use TikTok for several reasons, such as making and connecting with friends, searching for motivational quotes, or using it for business purposes, since TikTok currently offers a live shop for users.

…And in the past, because I was a student, I liked (content) fragments of words, such as motivation and others… [Informant CC]

Usually, the content on Instagram (I contain content) is about cars, but sometimes they also insert pornographic content. [Informant CH]

AR stated that most pornographic content on TikTok can be such content that shows someone wearing thin clothes, wearing a bra or bikini, and he thinks it is natural. This statement is supported by RG's arguments that pornography on TikTok does not affect his life. AM explained that the TikTok content wasn't as vulgar as what he saw on Twitter.

On TikTok, there is pornography, but it is not as vulgar as on Twitter. There is (pornographic content), but it's rare, because pornography on TikTok is not as vulgar as on Twitter. Motives for watching pornography for entertainment are that they are tired of studying and working...usually they watch it at night. [Informant AM]

Usually, pornography on TikTok is in the form of pictures, such as adult comics from Japan and Korea.

The pornography on TikTok that stands out for me is adult comics originating from Japan, although not as vulgar as Twitter, then there are also vulgar words like the Japanese term 'yamete kudasai,' which means 'wait a minute' but pronounced in the style of an adult woman.

c) The Reception Analysis: Pornography on TikTok

After exploring their experience on social media, their understanding of pornography and sexuality, this is the part where the reception analysis is presented.

In my opinion, it can be said that it is natural because we are adults, so we can distinguish between good and bad. I say it's normal because it can be used as education for others, which is not normal (the behavior) like the video my friend received, (in the video it shows) a man is masturbating on a train. [Informant CH]

However, she further argued that as long as the content is considered acceptable, it is acceptable.

In my opinion, (content containing pornography) is still acceptable. For videos (that are) not exaggerated, like holding hands, hugging. [Informant CH]

The basic foundation of their understanding regarding pornography is based on the values and norms that they have, their societal perspective, and their construction. These values and norms are nurtured through social interaction in their social surroundings. Friends have influenced the basic standard of appropriateness as well.

> Based on what I have noticed in the environment…Yes, because many of my friends have partners who hold hands but don't hug. So, in my opinion, it is still okay to be accepted (tolerable). [Informant CH]

The informant stated an interesting argument regarding the needs of pornography in society. Pornographic content is said to be acceptable and appropriate for spouses in the context of literacy. However, it is not acceptable for underage teens or those who have not yet married.

> In my opinion, it can't be used as education for young people who haven't married, because there are no positives... Yes, because it (pornographic content) can arouse lust and lust. [Informant CH]

There is an informant who agrees on pornography content on social media. He stated that we cannot focus solely on our own preferences for that kind of content, since there are likely individuals who are interested in it. He also gives room for everyone to choose their own preferred content, including pornography. However, he took a chance to give a suggestion to his friends not to watch or access pornography content.

> Maybe there are people who are interested, so we don't care about our selfish (in a position) who are not interested... If I usually make fun of him and just let him go, if he really wants to watch, that's okay... Never (advised), "Don't, don't watch it," but if they want to watch, let them. [Informant CC]

AR has insightful arguments regarding pornography on social media and how to cope with that;

> Pornography on social media, in my opinion, is normal, because social media is a forum for conveying opinions and creativity…On social media, pornography is no longer taboo, even though in social norms (directly) it is still taboo, but on social media, it is not taboo, because (on social media) many deliberately make pornographic content for the sake of popularity. I think it's left to the government, but for parents to supervise their children more. Nowadays, role-play games are booming, so she (a child) plays the role of a famous actress and meets people who play role-play too, then she plays an adult role, but through chat (chat sex). [Informant AR]

The above arguments are similar to RG in that people could create content on social media, and we cannot control it, as social media is a medium for everyone.

> I think it's normal (common), but I'm still uncomfortable with pornography. because that's what other people do, and we can't control other people's actions. I think pornography on social media can still be tolerated in the context of social values. [Informant RG]

However, he argued that individuals under 17 years of age should not view such pornography as it is inappropriate for them. He basically has no problem with people creating content, even though it contains pornography, yet he decided not to follow the account or consume the content. On the other hand, A state that the distribution of pornography in social media is just a small number. He further argued that;

> In my opinion, Instagram is better, but TikTok still has less pornographic content. Because they have updated, from the start, it contained pornographic content, then it was blocked, and then they reappeared by minimizing pornographic content. [Informant A]

After the presentation of the research findings, the following table presents a matrix summarizing the reception analysis findings from this study:

Table 2: The reception matrix

	Dominant	Negotiated	Opposition
Pornography rate on TikTok		CH, AR, RG, AM	CC, F, G, H, I, J
Agree on pornography content on TikTok	RG, AM		CC, F, G, H, I, J
Feeling disturbed by pornography content on TikTok		AR, CH, CC, F, G, H, I, J	CC, F, G, H, I, J
Watch pornography content on TikTok	AM		CC, F, G, H, I, J
Share pornography content			CH, CC, AK
Discuss pornography content		CH, CC, AR, RG, AM	AK, F, G, H, I, J

Discussion
Media messages consist of a structured interplay of symbols, signs, and embedded meanings, where the producer typically encodes a preferred reading. However, as Stuart Hall emphasizes, audiences may decode these messages differently based on their individual, cultural, or ideological frameworks (Song, 2024). Stuart Hall outlines three possible positions audiences may adopt when interpreting media texts: the dominant-hegemonic position, in which the message is accepted as intended; the negotiated position, in which parts of the message are accepted while others are contested or reinterpreted; and the oppositional position, in which the message is entirely rejected.

Findings from this study, which explored the perceptions of adolescents aged 18–23 in both Greater Jakarta (Indonesia) and Klang Valley (Malaysia), illustrate the relevance of Hall's model in the context of pornographic content on social media. The data revealed the presence of all three reception positions among participants. Seven out of ten respondents adopted a negotiated position: while they acknowledged exposure to and occasional viewing of pornographic content, which they often cited as adolescent curiosity regarding sexuality, and they deliberately chose not to imitate or endorse such behaviors. Their resistance stemmed from a commitment to cultural norms and religious teachings, particularly within Islamic frameworks, that prohibit the public display and consumption of sexually explicit content.

In contrast, three informants demonstrated an oppositional stance, expressing strong disapproval of pornography on social media. These individuals viewed such content as inappropriate and potentially harmful, particularly for younger viewers, and argued that it should not be publicly accessible on platforms frequently used by adolescents. The findings underscore the nuanced and culturally grounded ways in which youth in Indonesia and

Malaysia interpret sensitive media content.

Adolescents in Southeast Asia are increasingly exposed to a wide range of content on social media, including sexually explicit or pornographic material, due to the pervasive and relatively unregulated nature of online platforms. This study applies Stuart Hall's (Song, 2024) reception analysis theory to understand how young audiences interpret such content. The research focuses on a comparative qualitative study involving ten participants aged 15–19 from two urban, multicultural regions: Greater Jakarta (Indonesia) and Klang Valley (Malaysia). These locations represent socio-religious contexts in which Islamic values strongly influence cultural norms and attitudes toward sexuality.

Hall's reception theory holds that audiences do not passively consume media messages but instead interpret them through their own cultural and ideological frameworks. He identifies three interpretive positions: (1) the dominant-hegemonic position, where audiences fully accept the preferred reading encoded by the media producer; (2) the negotiated position, where audiences accept parts of the message but resist or reinterpret others based on personal beliefs; and (3) the oppositional position, where the encoded meaning is directly rejected (Song, 2024).

The findings show that 7 out of 10 respondents engaged in negotiated reading. These individuals acknowledged the presence and even normalization of pornographic content on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, but they consciously rejected mimicking or endorsing such content in their own behavior. Their reasoning often cited religious belief and cultural expectations around modesty and morality. One Indonesian participant noted, "I see those videos on my timeline sometimes, but I don't want to be like that. It's not how I was raised. It doesn't align with my values."

This negotiated stance reflects a significant degree of critical media literacy, in which young audiences are not merely passive recipients of media content but actively engage in evaluating and interpreting what they encounter online. Critical media literacy involves analysing media messages, understanding the underlying values or ideologies they convey, and making informed judgments based on one's own social, cultural, or moral framework (Livingstone, 2019). For adolescents in culturally conservative societies like Indonesia and Malaysia, this literacy often manifests as a conscious filtering of explicit or controversial content, particularly pornography, based on internalized religious teachings, family expectations, and community norms.

What makes this negotiation even more noteworthy is the pervasive nature of algorithmic exposure in today's social media landscape. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter operate on algorithmic recommendation systems that prioritize content likely to generate engagement, often regardless of its ethical, moral, or cultural appropriateness (Bucher, 2018). This means that adolescents can be unintentionally exposed to sexually explicit content even if they do not seek it out. A 2021 report by the UK-based 5 Rights Foundation found that social media algorithms frequently expose children and adolescents to harmful content, including sexualized imagery and pornography, due to engagement-driven design, even on accounts registered with users under 18.

Despite these systemic pressures, the adolescents in this study demonstrate media agency by negotiating their engagement with such content, acknowledging its presence, but consciously refusing to adopt the behaviors or attitudes it promotes. As argued by Alvermann and Sanders (2019) that digital media with its potential to disseminate content through the internet is integral to adolescents' construction of identity in both formal and informal spaces.

Therefore, meaning making is constructed through their use of digital media. Such agency challenges the often-simplistic assumption that exposure equals acceptance, and instead reveals a more complex process of active meaning-making shaped by socio-cultural contexts.

The ability to critically assess media messages is especially important in regions where public discourse around sex and sexuality is often restricted or moralized. Without comprehensive sex education, many youths turn to digital media for answers, making critical media literacy not just beneficial but essential for healthy development (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, negotiated readings are not merely acts of resistance; they are also forms of cultural survival in the face of conflicting global and local narratives.

Three participants demonstrated an oppositional reading, where they rejected both the presence and the intended messages of pornographic content. These participants articulated discomfort, anger, and concern about the normalization of explicit sexual behavior in public digital spaces. One Malaysian respondent emphasized, "It's against my religion. It's not just uncomfortable, it feels like the platform allows moral corruption to happen." These oppositional readings reflect heightened moral resistance and ideological dissonance, often grounded in a strong religious identity and community-based value systems (Paasonen, 2021).

Notably, none of the participants adopted a dominant or hegemonic position. This suggests that in both Indonesian and Malaysian urban youth populations, there is a strong resistance to fully accepting the permissive sexual values often promoted by global media platforms. This absence may be attributed to Islam's dominant influence on shaping moral frameworks and behavioral expectations.

The findings reaffirm the relevance of Hall's encoding/decoding model in today's social media ecosystem. In digital environments, messages are often user-generated, algorithmically amplified, and consumed across borders. Yet, interpretation remains local and deeply contextual. Media texts that might be interpreted liberally in Western contexts can encounter sharp resistance or nuanced negotiation in Southeast Asia, where religion, family structure, and collectivist norms mediate how meaning is constructed. This context-specific resistance also highlights the limitations of platform governance. Social media companies often operate under Western liberal frameworks that prioritize individual expression and freedom. However, such frameworks clash with users' communal and moral priorities in places like Indonesia and Malaysia, where government regulation and community standards advocate stricter content controls. The inconsistency in platform enforcement has led adolescents to be routinely exposed to material that violates national laws and religious values.

Based on the findings, several important recommendations emerge: (i) in contexts where formal sex education is lacking or considered taboo, the family becomes the primary site for learning about sexuality. Parents must be empowered to have open, age-appropriate conversations with their children about sex, consent, and online behavior. Pradikto et al. (2022) note, youth in Indonesia who receive clear, values-based sexual education from parents show healthier attitudes and reduced confusion when encountering sexual content online. (ii) Despite having anti-pornography laws (Indonesia's Law No. 44/2008 and Section 292 of Malaysia's Penal Code), both countries struggle with enforcement, particularly in the digital domain. In this situation, governments must invest in more effective technological tools to detect and report explicit content and impose meaningful penalties for violations. Importantly, policy efforts should balance enforcement with public education to foster critical digital literacy rather than relying solely on censorship.

Furthermore, (iii) educator Engagement and Supportive School Environments: Educators should be trained not only in academic subjects but also in providing emotional support and guidance related to media literacy and sexuality. Schools must become spaces where students can discuss sensitive issues without fear of moral judgment or punishment. Paasonen (2021) emphasizes that moral panic alone does not protect youth; instead, structured education and open dialogue do. (iv) Adolescents need tools to understand and deconstruct the content they encounter online. Media literacy programs must be grounded in the local cultural and religious contexts to be effective. In multicultural societies, culturally competent media education can help bridge the gap between global media content and local norms, allowing youth to navigate conflicting messages critically and responsibly (Livingstone, 2019). Other than the three recommendations given, the anticipated actions should include filtering, socializing the negative effects of pornography, supervision from family and schools, active coordination between schools with parents, strengthening religious values, consultation, and addition activities that students can participate (Hafiar et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study reinforces the idea that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages, but active interpreters whose cultural and religious backgrounds strongly influence how they engage with content. The youth in Greater Jakarta and Klang Valley, though exposed to the same global social media platforms, interpret pornographic content in ways that align with their values and belief systems. The absence of dominant-hegemonic readings among all ten respondents suggests a strong resistance to unfiltered acceptance of Western sexual norms embedded in online content. By employing Hall's reception analysis in a contemporary digital context in Southeast Asia, this research contributes to the growing field of media reception studies, demonstrating that decoding practices remain contextually bound, especially when sensitive moral topics are at stake. It also underscores the importance of holistic, culturally sensitive approaches to education, policy, and parental involvement in addressing youth media consumption in the digital age.

BIODATA

Nur Kholisoh is an associate professor of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Universitas Mercu Buana, Jakarta 11650, Indonesia. Her areas of interest are media, cultural and political studies. Email: nur.kholisoh@mercubuana.ac.id

Melly Ridaryanthi is a lecturer at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Universitas Mercu Buana, Jakarta 11650, Indonesia. Her research interests include intercultural communication, cultural adaptation, and media studies. Email: melly@mercubuana.ac.id

Sabariah Mohamed Salleh is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Research in Media & Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor. Her area of expertise is media and information literacy. Email: sabariah@ukm.edu.my

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