



Social Media, Culture and the Childfree Discourse: Indonesian and Indian Gen Z Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how childfree discourse is represented on social media and how Generation Z participants in Indonesia and India articulate its cultural, familial, gendered, and socioeconomic meanings. A qualitative comparative design combined an analysis of 20 public posts – 10 Indonesian TikTok posts and 10 India-based Instagram posts – with a self-administered qualitative open-ended survey of 20 participants, 10 from each country. The two datasets were compared thematically rather than treated as a direct reception study. NVivo-assisted hybrid deductive–inductive thematic analysis was guided by Representation Theory, Discourse Theory, and Intersectionality. Findings revealed that Indonesian TikTok content primarily framed childfree choice in terms of living costs, financial readiness, parental capacity, and child welfare. Meanwhile, Indian Instagram posts frequently associated a childfree life with autonomy, self-fulfillment, resistance to intrusive questioning, and rejection of children as future security. Participant responses highlighted how traditional factors, such as family authority, religious beliefs, lineage, and 'respectable' ideals of adulthood, continue to shape reproductive choices. Simultaneously, practical concerns like gendered caregiving roles, bodily risks, career disruptions, and financial capacity heavily influence whether parenthood appears desirable or feasible. Ultimately, in these non-Western contexts, childfree discourse extends beyond a lifestyle preference, emerging as a digitally visible negotiation of responsibility, autonomy, family belonging, and unequal reproductive expectations.

Keywords: Childfree discourse; Generation Z; social media; digital culture; gender; Indonesia; India; cultural study

1. INTRODUCTION

Childfree identity as a conscious decision not to have offspring is a critical social phenomenon that questions prevailing assumptions on family, gender, and reproduction. In most cases, discussions of childfree discourses are associated with personal autonomy, gender equality, and rejection of pronatalist norms

(Zulaikha, 2023; Adams Wooten, 2015). While much academic literature is devoted to childfree topics in Western countries, empirical research in Asian countries is rather scarce, especially in Indonesia and India, where marriage, reproduction, and lineage continue to be socially valued practices (Dutta, 2021; Chakravorty et al., 2021).

Previous research has established that cultural expectations impact childfree identity. For example, research conducted in the United States has revealed that childfree women construct their relationships differently compared to mothers (Volsche, 2017). The literature on Asian societies demonstrates that the concept of childfree identity varies across societies and depends on societal norms and values (Gietel-Basten & Yeung, 2023). In Indonesia, childfree choices are socially stigmatized and associated with more extensive negotiations of femininity, legitimacy, and social acceptability (Rismarini & Adira, 2024; La Viola & Prihantoro, 2024). Analogous results from other non-Western countries demonstrate the role of gender and culture in the construction of childfree identity (Mandujano-Salazar, 2019; Martinez Phillips, 2024).

These debates are highly connected to gender norms and familial norms. In Southeast Asia, reproductive duties remain largely the responsibility of women due to cultural, religious, and political pressures (Yeoh, 2016; Priyatna et al., 2019). In Indonesia, women's participation in the workforce remains limited due to their responsibilities for caring for others (Cameron, 2023); in India, new forms of family arrangements reveal contradictions between the traditional kinship system and new desires (Chakravorty et al., 2021). On the other hand, demographic transformations, the increasing availability of education, and economic uncertainties are changing the views of youth on marriage, reproduction, and family formation (Feng, 2021; Schmidt & Juijn, 2023). From this standpoint, intersectionality is useful for understanding the impact of gender, culture, and socio-economic position on people's decisions (Gillborn, 2015; Gunnarsson, 2017; Hackl, Märker, & Doblmaier, 2024).

Social media has become one of the most important platforms for discussion of these issues. Social media sites like Instagram and TikTok promote ideas related to autonomy, life choices, and reproductive choices in particular among younger users (Lin et al., 2023; Dervish, 2023). In the case of Generation Z, social media serves as a way not just of communicating but also of questioning and reevaluating ideas about marriage, parenthood, and family (Coleman & Lyons, 2023; Craig et al., 2025). Research conducted in Indonesia and India

indicates that economic factors, career goals, and contact with the world help form younger individuals' views on gender and reproductive choices (Games & Sari, 2023; Cameron, 2023). On the other hand, social media is capable of challenging and reinforcing dominant norms. Notwithstanding all these advancements, only a few pieces of work have explored the way young people in Indonesia and India perceive childfree discourse in terms of social media and culture. The former research revealed structural factors that affect the reproductive choice; however, little has been done in order to see how these factors are negotiated by means of the use of social media (Yeoh, 2016; Priyatna et al., 2019). Hence, the current research intends to fill in this gap and explore the representation of childfree discourse on social media and perception of it by Gen Z in Indonesia and India. In order to do that, Representation Theory, Discourse Theory, and Intersectionality will be employed.

Consequently, the research questions for this study are:

- (1) What are the ways that childfree discourse is portrayed via social media in Indonesia and India, and what cultural meanings emerge from such portrayals?
- (2) What influence do power dynamics, social norms, and family expectations have on childfree discourse in these societies?
- (3) In what ways do gender, culture, and socio-economic background intersect to affect how Gen Z perceive childfree discourse portrayed via social media?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Studies that have been conducted on childfree discourses have mostly considered autonomy, reproductive rights, and resistance against pronatalist ideology, specifically within Western contexts (Adams Wooten, 2015). Recent studies reveal that there is an increase in childfree discourse within non-Western societies, whereby family occupies a significant position in social identification. Public discourse about childfree people has increased in Indonesia as a result of social media influencer conversations and opinions, leading to polarized arguments between individuals both online and offline (Zulaikha, 2023). The discussions are related to issues of gender equality and autonomy, although cultures in

the region still relate women with motherhood (Priyatna et al., 2019). In India, childfree decisions are affected by factors such as population change and changing family dynamics from joint to nuclear families (Chakravorty et al., 2021).

There is ample literature suggesting that child-free identities are not universal but depend on local meanings and norms. As an illustration, Gietel-Basten and Yeung (2023) have demonstrated that in Hong Kong, the concept of being child-free carries different meanings across languages and cultures. In Indonesia, researchers have found that being child-free is viewed negatively due to the conflict between this identity and traditional perceptions of femininity, legitimate familyhood, and social obligation (La Viola & Prihantoro, 2024; Rismarini & Adira, 2024). Other comparative research conducted in non-Western contexts, such as Mexico and Japan, also emphasizes the influence of gender norms on the understanding of being child-free (Mandujano-Salazar, 2019). The literature in feminist studies situates child-free identity within the broader movement for autonomy and freedom (Martinez Phillips, 2024).

This topic is very much related to gender and family norms. Even in Southeast Asia, there is still pressure on women to care for and reproduce themselves despite greater educational opportunities and job openings (Cameron, 2023; Yoshida, 2012). In Indonesia, mass-media images still construct an ideal mother-woman but leave little room for other versions of femininity (Priyatna et al., 2019). In both Indonesia and India, there is a strong emphasis by religion and culture on marriage and childbearing as the key to adulthood, which makes reproductive issues strongly social but not personal (Dutta, 2021).

In India, a declining fertility rate, increased education, and new family types have transformed household structures, yet pronatalism has retained its importance (Chakravorty et al., 2021; Feng, 2021). Here, intersectionality is helpful because reproductive behaviors are shaped by various forms of inequality, including gender and class inequalities (Gillborn, 2015; Gunnarsson, 2017; Hackl, Märker, & Doblmaier, 2024).

Social media becomes yet another dimension because it is an essential space for meaning-making about family and reproduction. Applications like TikTok and Instagram provide opportunities for youth to share their stories, promote diverse ways of living, and engage in digital activism (Lin et al., 2023).

Gen Z uses these applications not only for entertainment but also to develop their own identity and negotiate culture (Craig et al., 2025). Recent studies have demonstrated that Gen Z in Asia uses online representations to address contradictions between global and local cultures, often defying patriarchy while reinventing the role of family (Coleman & Lyons, 2023; Games & Sari, 2023). Nevertheless, social media may also contribute to the reproduction of prevailing norms through mechanisms of internalizing cultural norms (Dervish, 2023; Rivera, Logan, & Price, 2024).

Generally, from the literature review, childfree discourses are culturally and digitally constructed and also gendered. Nonetheless, most of the literature has focused on childfree identity, gender norms, and social media in isolation, without integrating them into a comparative study of how social media portrays childfree discourses and how Generation Z interprets them in cultures like Indonesia and India. The current study fills the research gap by comparing how the meanings of childfree discourses are portrayed in digital media and interpreted within a culturally constructed context.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative comparative design that combined social media content analysis with a self-administered qualitative open-ended survey. Qualitative surveys can generate rich, interpretive written accounts when they are designed in line with qualitative research principles and allow participants to respond in their own words (Braun et al., 2021). It compared public childfree representations with Gen Z accounts from Indonesia and India. As participants did not respond to the 20 sampled posts, the datasets were compared for thematic convergence and divergence, not as a reception study, using Representation Theory (Hall, 1997), Discourse Theory (Foucault, 1972), and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989).

Data Sources and Sampling

3.1.1 Preliminary Survey and Platform Selection

A preliminary survey using a purposive snowball sampling technique (66 Indonesian and 23 Indian respondents) identified TikTok and Instagram as the dominant platforms for childfree content in Indonesia and India, respectively (Figures 1 and 2), thereby informing subsequent platform selection.

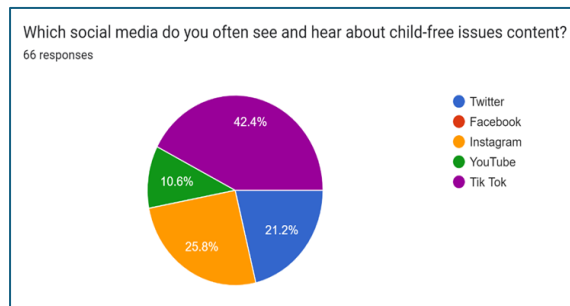


Figure 1. Preferred Social Media Platforms for Accessing Childfree-Related Content among Indonesian Gen Z Respondents

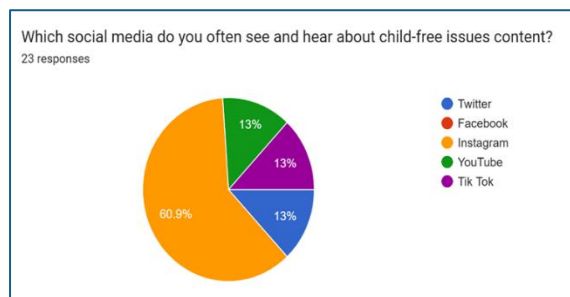


Figure 2. Preferred Social Media Platforms for Accessing Childfree-Related Content among Indian Gen Z Respondents

3.1.2 Participant Selection and Qualitative Open-Ended Survey

From this preliminary pool, 10 Indonesian and 10 Indian Gen Z participants (aged 18–25) were purposively selected based on response richness and varying personal intentions regarding childfree choices (Tables 1 and 2). Data were collected asynchronously via standardized open-ended Google Forms.

Concurrently, a social media corpus of 20 public posts (10 Indonesian TikToks and 10 India-based Instagram posts published between 2022 and 2024) was purposively sampled based on explicit relevance, thematic variation, and substantive textual or verbal content (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 1. Characteristics of Indonesian Participants in the Final Analytic Sample

Participant Code	Personal Childfree Intention After Marriage	Support for Others' Childfree Choice
IDN01	Does not intend to be childfree	Supportive
IDN02	Does not intend to be childfree	Not supportive
IDN03	Does not intend to be childfree	Not supportive
IDN04	Intends to be childfree	Supportive
IDN05	Does not intend to be childfree	Supportive
IDN06	Intends to be childfree	Supportive
IDN07	Intends to be childfree	Supportive
IDN08	Does not intend to be childfree	Not supportive
IDN09	Does not intend to be childfree	Supportive
IDN10	Intends to be childfree	Supportive

Table 2. Characteristics of Indian Participants in the Final Analytic Sample

Participant Code	Personal Childfree Intention After Marriage	Support for Others' Childfree Choice
IND01	Does not intend to be childfree	Supportive
IND02	Does not intend to be childfree	Not supportive
IND03	Does not intend to be childfree	Supportive
IND04	Does not intend to be childfree	Not supportive
IND05	Does not intend to be childfree	Not supportive
IND06	Intends to be childfree	Supportive
IND07	Intends to be childfree	Supportive
IND08	Intends to be childfree	Supportive
IND09	Undecided	Supportive
IND10	Intends to be childfree	Supportive

3.1.3 Social Media Content Sampling

The social media corpus comprised 20 purposively selected public posts: 10 Indonesian TikTok posts and 10 India-based Instagram posts published from 2022 to 2024. Selection considered explicit relevance, public accessibility, substantive verbal or textual content, thematic variation, and engagement. The sample included supportive, critical, and ambivalent framings of financial readiness, family expectations, autonomy, gender roles, child welfare, and fulfillment. Units of analysis

included captions, spoken statements, on-screen text, and relevant visual-textual context. Engagement metrics were recorded

descriptively during data collection to indicate visibility, not audience agreement. Tables 3 and 4 present the sampled posts.

Table 3. Sampled TikTok Content on Childfree Issues in Indonesia

No.	Account/Creator	Content Summary	Publication Date	Engagement
1	@fara.olivia	Discussion of the growing childfree discourse among Indonesian Gen Z, emphasizing rising living costs and the financial burden of raising children.	March 2024	680 likes, 30 comments, 98 shares
2	@va.nath	Couple-based conversation about hesitation toward a permanent childfree choice, focusing on personal fears and social expectations surrounding family.	February 2024	22,200 likes, 91 comments, 131 shares
3	@yosefinechristi	Personal argument that individuals without financial security or higher education may reasonably choose not to have children.	January 2024	93,800 likes, 1,936 comments, 898 shares
4	@morlykhan2.0	Reflective commentary questioning whether having children may lead parents to become a financial burden on them in later life.	July 2024	99,600 likes, 5,244 comments, 5,963 shares
5	@chersann	Reaction video critiquing the belief that having more children brings greater fortune and prosperity from financial and emotional perspectives.	January 2024	64,200 likes, 5,074 comments, 2,570 shares
6	@evetessia	Critical discussion of how poverty in rural Indonesia shapes childfree attitudes, linking child labor, education costs, and structural inequality.	April 2024	914,900 likes, 6,925 comments, 62,300 shares
7	@vanessalv	Comparative discussion of childfree discourse in the United States and Indonesia, highlighting limited support for mothers and high childcare costs.	February 2024	77 likes, 4 comments, 1 share
8	@lulu.sweme	Argument against having children in financially unstable conditions, emphasizing long-term consequences for children's well-being and quality of life.	June 2024	11,400 likes, 2,436 comments, 822 shares
9	@jerrytrader	Financial advice encourages young couples to delay parenthood until they reach greater economic stability.	July 2024	5,684 likes, 1,533 comments, 504 shares
10	@sastra.silalahii	Comedic parody of stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding childfree discourse, using humor to critique social pressure to have children.	February 2023	1,200,000 likes, 6,843 comments, 17,800 shares

Table 4. Sampled Instagram Content on Childfree Issues in India

No.	Account/Creator	Content Summary	Publication Date	Engagement
1	@childfreetamil	Humorous meme post reflecting the decision to remain childfree and mocking social pressure to have children.	July 2024	1,685 likes, 21 comments, 688 shares
2	@childfreetamil	Reaction reel discussing comedian Nikki Glaser's childfree stance and presenting it as a form of freedom and empowerment.	August 2024	919 likes, 34 comments, 394 shares
3	@childfreetamil	Personal narrative about embracing a childfree life while confronting social pressure and judgment.	August 2024	718 likes, 10 comments, 167 shares
4	@childfreetamil	Infographic-style post outlining practical considerations to reflect on before deciding to have children.	August 2022	885 likes, 60 comments, 533 shares
5	@childfreetamil	Critical discussion of the belief that children function as a retirement plan, emphasizing alternative views of financial independence.	September 2024	300 likes, 6 comments, 78 shares
6	@childfreekerala	Video celebrating the joy, freedom, and personal satisfaction associated with a childfree life.	February 2024	171 likes, 11 comments, 27 shares
7	@childfreekerala	Reel addresses persistent social pressure to have children and emphasizes personal autonomy in reproductive decisions.	June 2024	146 likes, 3 comments, 65 shares
8	@childfree_mumbai	Video affirming the legitimacy of diverse reasons for remaining childfree and calling for respect toward individual choice.	September 2024	21 likes, 4 shares
9	@childfree_india	Post challenges the belief that having children is necessary to complete one's life, emphasizing self-fulfillment instead.	June 2023	1,381 likes, 48 comments, 76 shares
10	@wearechildfree	Testimonial video presenting a woman's joy in living childfree and inviting reflection on the meaning of childfree identity.	August 2024	867 likes, 93 comments, 4 shares

3.3 Data Collection and Preparation

Google Forms responses were screened for eligibility, completeness, and analytic relevance. Direct identifiers were removed, and participants were assigned country-based codes (IDN01 to IDN10; IND01 to IND10). The social media dataset included platform, country, publication date, account, captions, spoken and on-screen text, and contextual descriptions. Indonesian materials were translated into English for reporting. Participant quotations retained their original wording, with only minor editorial corrections. Ellipses indicate omissions, and brackets indicate translations or brief clarifications.

3.4 Data Analysis: NVivo-Assisted Hybrid Deductive-Inductive Thematic Analysis

Written responses and social media records were imported into NVivo 12 and organized by country and source. Following Braun and Clarke (2008), the analysis combined theory-informed and data-driven coding, drawing on Representation Theory, Discourse Theory, and Intersectionality, along with additional inductive codes. NVivo supported coding, retrieval, and visualizations but did not determine themes. For RQ2 and RQ3, extracts were analyzed for family authority, pronatalism, religious and cultural obligations, social pressure, resistance, caregiving, career,

questions, and contrasting positions, and then compared across countries and between participant and social media datasets. Five themes were finalized: economic pressures; personal fulfillment and freedom; social pressures and cultural expectations; gender roles and women's agency; and children as economic and emotional responsibility. Figure 3 summarizes the analytical process.

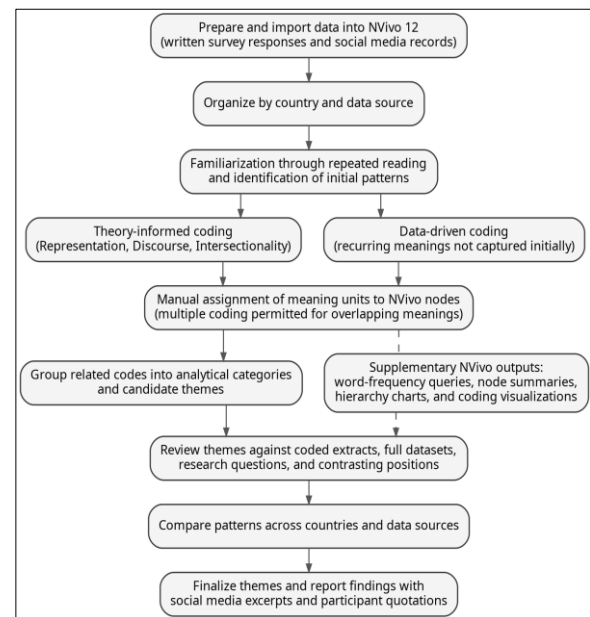


Figure 3. NVivo-Assisted Analytical Process

Table 5. Coding Framework and Theme Development

Initial Codes	Developed Categories	Final Themes
Living Costs; Minimum Wages; Education Costs; Financial Readiness; Unstable Employment	Childrearing Affordability; Responsible Planning; Material Insecurity	Economic pressures
Bodily Autonomy; Career Goals; Freedom; Self-Development; Rejection Of Compulsory Motherhood	Alternative Life Trajectories; Autonomy; Self-Fulfillment	Personal fulfillment and freedom
Family Pressure; Marriage Expectations; Lineage; Religious Obligation; Ideal Adulthood	Pronatalist Norms; Kinship Obligation; Moral Expectations	Social pressures and cultural expectations
Unequal Caregiving; Bodily Risk; Career Interruption; Motherhood Burden	Gendered Reproductive Responsibility; Women's Agency	Gender roles and women's agency
Emotional Readiness; Child Welfare; Inability To Provide Adequate Care; Children As Future Caregivers	Emotional And Material Consequences Of Parenting	Children as economic and emotional responsibility

socioeconomic constraints, family expectations, and agency. Related codes were grouped into categories and candidate themes, as summarized in Table 5.

Candidate themes were reviewed against coded extracts, complete datasets, the research

3.5 Trustworthiness and Coding Consistency

Trustworthiness was addressed through cross-source comparison, retention of contrasting perspectives, transparent NVivo documentation, and presentation of original evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility was strengthened by

examining convergence and divergence between the two datasets without treating them as equivalent or causal. Dependability and confirmability were supported by retaining nodes, coded references, word-frequency outputs, node and hierarchy charts, and by checking coded passages against source materials. These records document how extracts were organized and interpreted.

No statistical intercoder coefficient was calculated because the study used an interpretive thematic design rather than coding-reliability analysis. Consistency was supported through a common theory-informed framework, repeated contextual checking, and transparent links between codes, categories, themes, quotations, and excerpts (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Detailed sampling and contextual description supported transferability.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participant identifiers were excluded from reporting and replaced with anonymized codes. Social media analysis was restricted to public posts; private messages and comments were not collected. Public creator handles are retained in Tables 3 and 4 and in brief Results excerpts for source transparency. Screenshots reproduce only analytically necessary frames from the archived dataset, without commenter identities or private interactions. Reporting followed contextual integrity, data minimization, and responsible internet-research principles (Franzke et al., 2020).

4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings and discussion, which are divided into three: Section 4.1 discusses the findings from Indonesian TikTok content and Indian Instagram content; Section 4.2 and 4.3 report the written survey. Participant quotations are presented using pseudonyms referring to their respective country. Quotations from Indonesian participants are translated to English from Indonesian, while quotations from Indian participants are written verbatim.

4.1 Social Media Representations of Childfree Discourse in Indonesia and India

The first question that this study aims to answer is on how childfree discourse is represented on Indonesian and Indian social media and what cultural meanings are

constructed from these representation. Findings from Indonesian TikTok content shows that economic realism, responsible planning, parental capacity, and child welfare are the main frames used to talk about 'childfree'. Meanwhile Indian Instagram content uses the frames of autonomy, self-fulfillment, resistance to intrusive questioning, and rejection to the idea that children are future security.

From the Indonesian TikTok corpus, creator @fara.olivia, for instance, discusses the relation between raising a child and economic power in Indonesia, stating that *"the cost of living continuously increases while our minimum wage moves up very slowly. It does not make sense of having children anymore, even with double incomes."* Meanwhile creator @evetessia expresses her disagreement with the cultural perspective that sees children as 'investment' while criticizing the effects of having many children in lower-income households, which include stunting, school dropout, child labor, and domestic violence. In line with this, creator @lulu.sweme similarly criticizes the decision of having many children when one struggles economically when she said, *"poverty is not a crime. What is wrong is knowing that you cannot provide adequate food, clothing, housing, and education for a child, yet still insisting on having many children"* [translated from Indonesian].

The screenshots of Indonesian TikTok content shown in Figure 4 illustrate how this economic and ethical framing were communicated. The selected panels combine creator-centered delivery with text-centered argumentation, making the discourse simultaneously personal, conversational, and morally evaluative.

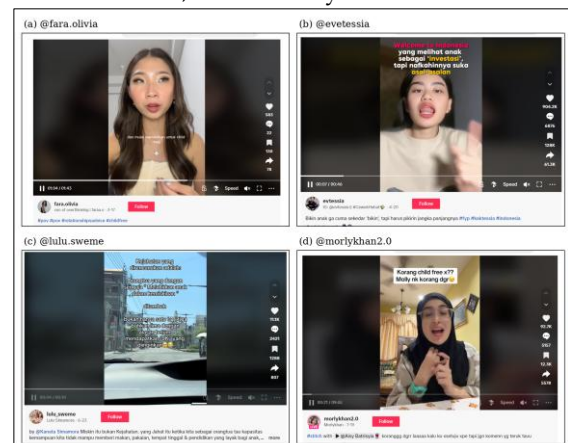


Figure 4. Selected Visual Excerpts from Indonesian TikTok Content

Note. Panels show public posts archived in the research dataset: (a) @fara.olivia, (b) @evetessia, (c) @lulu.sweme, and (d) @morlykhan2.0. The screenshots are reproduced for analytical illustration only.

Panels (a) and (b) show that the creators address viewers directly, using personal speech as explanatory testimony. Creator @evetessia uses bright-colour captions to highlight her points that in Indonesia children are considered as ‘investment’, while the parents do not take care of this ‘investment’ well.

In panel (c), user @ lulu.sweme places dense moral commentary over everyday street imagery, shifting attention from the creator’s personality to the argument that parenthood should be evaluated through parents’ capacity and child welfare. In panel (d), creator @morlykhan2.0 challenges parents with a question on why they impose obligations to children in line with the belief shared by pronatalist that children bring fortune to the family.

In comparison to the Indonesian content, the Indian Instagram content uses a more explicit language and discusses a concept of an alternative adulthood.

Creator @childfree_mumbai stated, “Every reason is a valid reason,” while presenting an argument that the decision not to be parents can be linked to the conscious decision to not repeat poverty and generational trauma. Creator @childfreekerala challenges the common imperative that couples should bear children, when she said “Stop asking when we’re having kids,”.

Her other post is captioned “Life is so good without kids.” Creator @childfreetamil challenges the notion that children should secure their parents’ future, when she stated “Kids aren’t your pension plan; they’re tiny humans with their own lives, dreams, and ... absolutely no obligation to become your personal retirement package.” Figure 5 presents four screenshots from Indian Instagram that visually reinforce autonomy, resistance to compulsory parenthood, and the ethical recognition of children as independent persons.

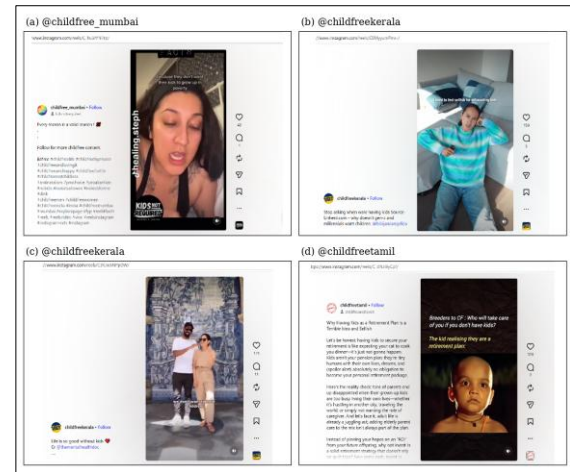


Figure 5. Selected Visual Excerpts from India-Based Instagram Content

Note. Panels show public posts archived in the research dataset: (a) @childfree_mumbai, (b) and (c) @childfreekerala, and (d) @childfreetamil. The screenshots are reproduced for analytical illustration only.

Panel (a) uses direct testimony from the camera and the statement “Every reason is a valid reason” to construct the choice to be childfree as an experience that needs validation instead of suspicion. In panel (b), the statement about the intrusive question being asked about an individual is placed on an everyday domestic scene, thus bringing into view the idea of social pressure as something that is a normal part of life. The statement “Life is so good without kids” appears on a couple in panel (c) in order to construct the idea of being childfree as a relational, happy, and fulfilled experience rather than a lonely one.

The discussion of being child-free in both national corpora thus appeared within the same broad range of themes but with different accents. The Indonesian sources tended to frame the topic using the vocabulary of affordability, responsibility, and child well-being, while Indian sources spoke explicitly about autonomy, alternative adulthood, and resistance to pronatalism. Table 6 below outlines these differences in relation to the five themes that were identified during the NVivo-guided analysis.

Table 6. Comparative Representation of Childfree Discourse on Social Media

Analytical Theme	Indonesia (TikTok)	India (Instagram)	Comparative Interpretation
Economic pressures	Living costs, minimum wages, education expenses, and financial readiness are foregrounded by @fara.olivia, @evetessia, and @lulu.sweme.	Costs appear in posts such as @childfree_mumbai and @childfreekerala, but are usually embedded within broader claims about autonomy and future planning.	Economic reasoning is central in Indonesia and supportive, but less dominant, in the India-based corpus.
Children as economic and emotional responsibility	@evetessia, @lulu.sweme, and @morlykhan2.0 question inadequate provision, children as investment, and expectations of future repayment.	@childfreetamil rejects children as a pension plan and emphasizes their independent lives and aspirations.	Both corpora challenge instrumental views of children, although the Indonesian posts emphasize inadequate care more strongly.
Social pressures and cultural expectations	Posts question “many children, much fortune,” social pressure, and the assumption that parenthood should follow marriage.	@childfreekerala and @childfree_mumbai challenge intrusive questions and the expectation that women and couples must justify non-parenthood.	Both platforms contest pronatalist norms while demonstrating their continuing social authority.
Gender roles and women’s agency	Women creators discuss maternal support, readiness, and caregiving burdens, although these concerns often remain linked to economic capacity.	Bodily autonomy, compulsory motherhood, and women’s right to prioritize personal goals are more explicit.	Gendered agency appears in both contexts but is more directly articulated in the India-based posts.
Personal fulfillment and freedom	Freedom appears as a secondary frame, often mediated through preparedness, emotional well-being, or satire.	@wearechildfree and @childfreekerala present childfree life as joyful, complete, and self-directed.	Alternative adulthood is more explicitly normalized in the India-based Instagram corpus.

Note. The table summarizes qualitative patterns identified through manual coding and comparison of relevant NVivo nodes. It does not report statistical prevalence.

4.2 Power Dynamics, Social Norms, and Family Expectations Shaping the Childfree Discourse

The second research question explored the ways in which power dynamics, social norms, and family expectations influenced the discourse on childlessness. The written data revealed that reproduction was discussed in relation to family dynamics, religion, adult life, kinship, and expectations about care in old age. There were differences in the weight of these factors: for some, there was moral guidance, for others, there would be persuasion from older people, and for some, supportive families but societal pressure.

Regarding the Indonesian participant data set, the clearest depiction of family control is provided by IDN05 who said that he comes from a “very religious family” where “marriage and hav[ing] child(ren) is a must, and it is part of ibadah [worship].” The same participant mentioned that while friends were very supportive, family was quite conservative on such matters as not getting married or not having kids.

“My mom told me that I should never repeat that question again in the future, and told me to seek forgiveness (from God).”

This answer illustrates how reproductive norms were enforced through religious rhetoric, parental control, and emotional sanctions, rather than any coercive means. However, not all Indonesian participants experienced any form of pressure. IDN04 admitted that she never discussed the matter with friends and did not experience any form of pressure; while IDN01 considered being childfree to be the minority position which is not very visible in society. Such different answers suggest that normative power can function through explicit correction, implied disapproval, silence, or lack of public discussion of the matter at hand.

Similar ideas are expressed by Indian respondents, although the tension between persuasion and culturally accepted pattern of life is more pronounced. Thus, for example, IND07 says, “It is hard to convince elders in the family, and they might be the strong reason if the decision is changed.” Moreover, IND07 points out that there is some pressure on married

couple “after certain years of marriage.” IND08 clearly expresses what is the norm for many: *“For most of them, having children is the end all, and they want others to follow their path,” while at the same time emphasizing “it’s your life above all, so it’s your decision in the end.”*

Unlike IND09, there was a different pattern of social life where immediate relations were supportive but society continued to regulate: “Friends and family are supportive; there is no pressure. But society might have another perspective.” In IND04, a positive stance on parenthood was shown to explain why pronatalism is still appealing. Children were linked to “happiness and fulfillment,” becoming “daddy,” family heritage, and knowing that “someone will take care of you when you are old.” This response relates parenthood to emotional purpose, heritage, and caring, demonstrating that opposition to the childless life choice could be done not only as a prohibition but also through cultural representations of family succession. Table 7 shows the main types of normative power and resistance found in Indonesian and Indian writings.

4.3 Intersections of Gender, Culture, and Socioeconomic Status in Shaping Gen Z's Perceptions

This brings us to the third research question, which explored how gender, culture, and

socioeconomic factors worked hand in hand to shape Gen-Z's perception. It must be noted that the answers did not see these three aspects separately from one another. Reproductive freedom was related to the risk to the bodies of women, care inequality, employment, family pressure, and the ability to offer security to the offspring.

In Indonesia, IDN05 saw an association between cultural values of motherhood and labor inequality. As she remembered the criticisms that were made of her sister after birth, she wrote:

“They always said, “It is the mother’s duty to take care of her child.” ... I once thought of being childfree ... just for the sake of not being “an underappreciated mother.””

She identified the gender-based duty to care as both something deeply personal and socially devalued care work. IDN05 also linked the choice to reproduce with increasing expenses:

“Land is costly, food is costly, schooling is costly, and even clothes are costly... that led me to realize, perhaps...being childfree could be an option, yeah?”

(IDN05, written survey response; translated from Indonesian). Economic uncertainty did not supersede cultural norms but rather added

Table 7. Power, Social Norms, and Family Expectations in Childfree Discourse

Dimension	Indonesia	India	Interpretive Significance
Family and religious authority	IDN05 linked marriage and children to ibadah and described parental moral correction.	IND07 anticipated persuasion from elders and possible changes to reproductive decisions.	Authority operates through everyday family discourse and culturally legitimate advice.
Social norms and sanctions	Direct pressure coexisted with silence and limited public discussion (IDN05; IDN01; IDN04).	Parenthood was described as the expected endpoint of adult life, particularly after marriage (IND08).	Norms are enforced through correction, anticipated judgment, and assumptions about respectable adulthood.
Negotiation and resistance	Support for childfree choice was often expressed through readiness, responsibility, and respect for individual circumstances.	Participants defended personal decision-making while acknowledging family and societal pressure (IND07; IND08).	Resistance is relational and negotiated rather than a complete withdrawal from family values.
Contrasting pro-parenthood positions	Some participants supported others’ choices while still personally intending to have children (IDN01; IDN05).	IND04 emphasized joy, family legacy, and care in old age as reasons to value parenthood.	Gen Z perspectives are heterogeneous and cannot be treated as uniformly pro-childfree.

Note. Participant codes correspond to the final analytic sample presented in Tables 1 and 2. The table summarizes qualitative patterns rather than frequencies.

to the negative consequences of adhering to them.

IDN04 stressed the intersection of parental ability and the welfare of children in his response: *“There are many parents who are not able to provide any emotional comfort to their child, which could affect the mental health of the child. And some parents could not provide anything for financial support.”* IDN01 provided a shorter version in terms of economy, by saying that *“some people might not have the money to afford a child right away.”* The theme of the childfree decision was evident here through the interplay among emotional, material, and responsible parenting.

Indian participants gave more explicit mention to the costs faced by women physically and professionally. IND08 said that:

employment interruption, but also for inadequate childcare, which means that economic dependency and moral judgment can go hand-in-hand for women in this case.

IND09 additionally showed that the gendered perception is not always identical, as she said: *“There are some men who like to be childfree as well with their saved money.”* In this way, the intersectional approach is expanded, since economic benefits and other preferences are not always feminine, whereas bodily risk and compulsory motherhood are definitely more gendered. In total, the data obtained from participants show that socio-economic status determines whether parenthood is viable. In contrast, culture and gender determine who must bear the burden of parenthood. Table 8 illustrates the intersection of these concepts in the participant stories.

Table 8. Intersectional Patterns in Gen Z Perceptions of Childfree Discourse

Intersectional Dimension	Indonesia	India	Interpretation
Gendered bodily and caregiving labor	IDN05 emphasized under-recognized maternal labor and the expectation that childcare is a mother's duty.	IND08 emphasized bodily risk, mental sacrifice, and unequal reproductive responsibility.	Childfree choice carries different stakes for women because reproductive and care labor are unequally distributed.
Career and occupational consequences	Caregiving burden and recognition were more salient than explicit career interruption in the Indonesian responses.	IND07 described pregnancy-related job loss, difficulty returning to work, and criticism of maternal care.	Employment consequences and moral judgment can operate together within gendered family structures.
Socioeconomic capacity and child welfare	IDN05 and IDN04 linked housing, food, education, emotional support, and financial provision to responsible parenthood.	Financial planning and career continuity appeared alongside autonomy and bodily risk in IND07 and IND08.	Autonomy is enabled or constrained by material resources and the perceived capacity to provide adequate care.
Culture, family, and agency	Religious family expectations and motherhood norms shaped how economic pressures were interpreted (IDN05).	Elder authority, compulsory parenthood, and expectations of motherhood shaped women's claims to autonomy (IND07; IND08).	Gender, culture, and socioeconomic position combine rather than operate as separate influences.

Note. The table reports intersectional qualitative patterns grounded in the cited written responses. It does not imply statistical generalization.

“Women have to risk and even sacrifice their body and mind and potential career for life to have children, while in general men have to just provide external support.”

IND07 offered an example that shows this interconnection: *“My aunt had to quit her work due to an unwanted pregnancy, and since then it has been difficult for her to resume her work after five years.”* She also described the family's criticism of the children's upbringing and the way *“she was such a bad mother.”* This example proves that a woman may be punished not only for the

5. Discussion

5.1 Platformed Representations and Cultural Meaning

Findings from this study have shown that childfree discourse is culturally contingent rather than a single global narrative. Indonesian TikTok content frames ‘childfree’ in terms of affordability, responsible planning, parental capacity, and child welfare, whereas Indian Instagram posts frame it in terms of autonomy, self-fulfilment, resistance to intrusive questioning, and rejection of children as future security. These patterns are in line

with previous research on the cultural specificity of childfree meanings (Gietel-Basten & Yeung, 2023; Mandujano-Salazar, 2019; Martinez Phillips, 2024).

From the perspective of Representation Theory, visual and textual elements of these social media content constructed moral meanings around parenthood and non-parenthood, rather than merely an expression of opinions (Hall, 1997). Indonesian content evaluated parenthood in terms of responsibility, while Indian posts presented childfree decision more positively. Agreeing to previous studies (Rivera et al., 2024; Zulaikha, 2023), while social media make 'childfree' discourse more prominent in the public sphere, the need to justify this choice in the narratives reflected the continued influence of pronatalist expectations.

5.2 Discourse, Family Expectations, and Cultural Power

The written responses indicated that family recommendations, religion, respectable maturity, lineage, and future caregiving considerations influenced the reproductive decisions. Using the Foucauldian perspective, the power functioned through daily communication practices such as the need to repent, the influence of older members of the family, and children guaranteeing the continuation of the lineage, rather than coercion (Foucault, 1972).

Indonesian respondents used readiness, responsibility, and child wellbeing to avoid parenthood without denying family membership. Indian respondents more explicitly supported their personal freedom of choice, but elder power still played an important role. Such results coincide with the current research on child-free stigma, gender legitimacy in the family, and continuous kinship expectations in Indonesia and India (Risamarini & Adira, 2024; Priyatna et al., 2019; Chakravorty et al., 2021). Pro-parenthood attitudes also viewed children as sources of affection, purpose, legacy, and reciprocal care.

5.3 Intersectional Negotiations of Gender, Culture, and Socioeconomic Position

These factors were intertwined through their effect on reproductive decision-making. The Indonesian respondents viewed the underrepresented maternal work in connection with increased expenses for housing, food, and

education. In contrast, the Indian respondents focused more on physical safety, discrepancies in responsibility, and career interruptions. In both cases, reproductive autonomy was connected with employment sustainability, resource availability, familial control, and gendered caregiving.

These results show how intersectionality views social positions and social structures as functioning in relation to one another (Crenshaw, 1989; Hackl et al., 2024). Physical autonomy was closely related to career security. In contrast, financial readiness to have a baby was associated with motherhood and family care, consistent with studies on the female labor force, caregiving, and gender norms in Indonesia and Asia (Cameron, 2023; Yeoh, 2016; Yoshida, 2012). The distinctions between the two countries need to be viewed as country-specific patterns in the sample, not as intrinsic characteristics. The lack of direct reception of social media content makes these similarities thematic, not causative.

5.4 Contributions and Implications of the Study

Theoretically, the research adds an understanding of childfree discourse as a process that is mediated, regulated socially, and intersectional by combining Representation Theory, Discourse Theory, and Intersectionality (Hall, 1997; Foucault, 1972; Crenshaw, 1989). Empirically, the research draws parallels between Indonesia and India, discovering common themes like responsibility and social pressure while distinguishing such issues as affordability and care for Indonesia and autonomy, risks to the body, and enforced parenthood for India. Methodologically, the comparison between social media data and surveys enabled finding the common themes without taking the participants as respondents to the sampled posts.

The conclusions made are helpful in terms of promoting balanced communication about reproductive choice. The educators, media professionals, social activists, and content providers should stop using stereotypes when discussing either childfree or parent populations. Such conversations, acknowledging consent, readiness, welfare of children, and inequality in caring for children are more likely to take into account the real-life context of young adults' decisions.

5.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The limitation of this study is that the study uses a purposive sample of 20 respondents and 20 posts on social media which cannot be generalized statistically. There is some degree of country and platform confounds in that Indonesian data was drawn from TikTok and Indian data from Instagram. The open-ended questionnaire allowed for personal introspection but did not allow many questions to be asked leading to varied depths of answers. Since this study is not a direct reception study, causation cannot be attributed to this study. While no statistical intercoder reliability coefficient was calculated, analysis consistency was ensured through common analytical framework, context check and transparency.

In future, studies should use larger and more diverse samples, a consistent design across platforms, interactive interviews, and direct reception studies using the same social media posts. Longitudinal studies can explore the role of economic conditions, social media platform culture and expectations of the family in shaping childfree discourse.

6. CONCLUSION

The current research illustrates that childfree discourse is formed through culturally specific but also interconnecting meanings. While Indonesian content on TikTok centered around the issues of affordability, parental readiness and child welfare, the India-based content on Instagram concentrated on the themes of freedom, alternative adulthood, and opposition to prying questions. Participants in this study also demonstrated that the role of family authority, religion, lineage, adult ideals and the need for care later in life were still playing a role in the reproduction decisions.

In conclusion, the results of this study demonstrate that childfree discourse is not just an individual choice, but a balance of responsibility, autonomy, identity and inequality of reproduction. Through comparing Indonesia and India, the research proves how similar issues can be discussed in different ways in two non-Western countries without imposing cultural homogeneity. While social media platforms make alternative family discourses more visible, their validity is still affected by the persisting factors of family, gender, religion and socioeconomics.

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