

# Hustle Culture in Social Media: Exploring the Imagined Success in the Modern Era

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**Abstract.** This study examines how the notion of success among modern Indonesian youth, particularly the millennial generation, is constructed through the hustle culture trend on social media. With social media playing a significant role in shaping the aspirations and lifestyles of young individuals, the study centers on the hustle culture trend due to its strong promotion of values such as hard work, ambition, and productivity as integral to their way of life. Data was collected from various platforms including Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, comprising textual, visual, and multimedia content related to hustle culture and the modern urban youth lifestyle in Indonesia. Additionally, interviews were conducted with six millennial respondents. The collected data is analyzed using the Ethnography Content Analysis (ECA) approach while reflecting on various theoretical concepts regarding youth, urban, social media, and hustle culture. The findings demonstrate that the hustle culture trend constructs an idealized image and lifestyle of modern urban youth, portraying them as modern, productive, and inspirational, thereby equating the social media image of success with actual success. This research provides a fresh perspective on understanding success among Indonesian youth in the modern era, specifically by examining the influence of social media practices in their daily lives.

**Keywords:** Hustle Culture, Millennials, Modern Indonesian Youth, Social Media, Success

## 1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, studies on the understanding of success and aspirations of Indonesian youth towards their lives and future have revealed a close connection with ‘relational success’ [1], which is influenced by Adat, communities, religion, or other conventional determinants like education, employment, and economic contexts. However, the significant development of technology, information, and digital media, particularly social media as “a very visible feature of everyday life” [2], provides a unique context for young modern people, including the millennial generation, to connect with broader spaces and communities beyond their closest environment. As such, social media plays a significant role in shaping the perceptions of modern youth regarding every day practices and their idealized way of seeing life, including their interpretation of imagined success. This opens up new opportunities to explore social media as a significant context that needs further discussion in understanding the aspirations of young people in the modern era of technology.

Millennials, also known as ‘Gen Y,’ ‘digital natives’ [3], were born and raised amidst the socio-economic conditions following the recession and the internet explosion, possess distinct characteristics in their understanding of work and life compared to their prior or following generations. The term “millennial” refers to their birth and upbringing spanning two different millennia, before and after the year 2000: pre-millennial and post-millennial [4]. While there is no precise timeframe for when this generation begins and ends, researchers generally consider them as individuals born in the early 1980s until around 2000 [3]. Growing up in a rapidly changing and challenging environment has shaped them into a flexible, innovative, adaptive, and resilient generation [5]. Hence, their view of work extends beyond mere financial gain, but also as a way to fulfill personal and emotional satisfaction within a neoliberal economic context that emphasizes passion and self-actualization narratives. As a result, they embrace a new spirit that emphasizes individualism and the pursuit of personal success [6][7].

Therefore, millennials tend to see work in individualistic terms through the lens of flexibility, where success and failure are seen as personal responsibility [7]. The concept of “choice” is mobilized within the context of neoliberalism to shift social responsibilities onto individuals for market’s interests [8]. Meaning, each individual

has the freedom to define and pursue their own version of success by choosing the type, style, or projects they want to pursue. [9]. Stemming from post-Fordist economic thinking, flexibility has become the key to meeting the ever-changing demands of the market and facing increasingly fierce competition [10]. Consequently, flexible labor market practices such as short-term contracts, project-based work, side hustles, freelancing, remote working, and the mobilizable gig economy have become increasingly common in the new economic landscape [10][11][12]. This neoliberal ideological project puts pressure on millennials to work harder amidst structural inequalities and increasing vulnerabilities.

Rather than prioritizing themselves as the primary focus in work, this discourse actually fuels a relentless and fast-paced daily life, lacking clear boundaries between life and work which leading to self-exploitation. These neoliberal characteristic views every aspect of life as an expanding market that is constantly valued and evaluated. Individuals are perceived and act as market participants, economic actors, and the 'homo-economicus' them selves [13]. As "an entrepreneur of the self" [14], individuals are expected to produce in themselves what is needed for the market success, including self-images that are discursively idealized [15]. And those can be achieved by investing in education, skill development, and constructing a lifestyle that aligns with certain social standards.

The competitive environment, the illusion of individual freedom, and the individualistic perspective of success focused on productivity and personal accomplishments have led to the rise of a compulsive lifestyle known as hustle culture. This culture, characterized by excessive work and the pursuit of constant productivity, often neglects important aspects of life such as family, health, and social connections [16]. While sharing similarities with workaholism in terms of excessive work tendencies, hustle culture places a significant emphasis on social pressures [17]. The pressures of neoliberalism have internalized the idea in constant competition, whereas workaholism is driven by uncontrollable work desires or addiction [18][19][20]. In the ideology of hustle culture, success is seen as achievable only through relentless work, with bustle and productivity serving as key markers of success in contemporary urban society. This phenomenon is also characterized by romanticized narratives highlighting commitment, love, contribution, and pride [21][22]. The slogan "big city dreams that never sleep" also signifies the city as the ultimate symbol of success in the modern context.

In contemporary social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, hustle culture has become a popular trend with various hashtags and inspirational quotes. It is depicted as a modern lifestyle for young individuals, promoting the pursuit of success through glamorous discourses of "young success" and passion. This trend is not only visually appealing to the younger generation but also normalized through content that reinforces hustle culture. Hashtags like #riseandgrind, #workhardplayhard, and their Indonesian counterparts; #kerjakerasbagaikuda; #budakkorporat; #pantangpulangsebelumterang; showcase multitasking, tips for early success, earning from side hustles, and romanticized depictions of enjoyable urban work routines. Inspirational quotes, including Elon Musk's famous call to 'work like hell,' continue to inspire success-oriented aspirations among today's youth.

Through social media's hustle culture trend, urban millennials in Indonesia construct an imagined understanding of success through creatively produced, modern, and 'cool' depictions. Representation is a constitutive of an event [23]. Thus, in this case, these representations not only promote work and competition as a way of life but also present an attractive lifestyle suitable for urban youth, particularly millennials and Gen Z. These representations create a modern identity for young urban workers who are productive and hard-working in their pursuit of success, showcasing trendy fashion, popular lifestyles, mobility, and access to technology and social facilities. As economic and social development centers, Jakarta and Tangerang city represent 'big city dreams' in Indonesia, making the hustle culture trend on social media in Indonesia closely related to the representation of these cities as important urban attributes to explain the modern experience of hustle culture.

The hustle culture trend on social media, when critically examined, reveals its potential influence on shaping and producing the understanding of success among modern Indonesian youth, particularly millennials. By connecting it to the neoliberal agenda, this research analyzes the case of hustle culture on social media platforms Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok to investigate how it internalizes the notions of success and productivity among modern Indonesian youth. It also examines the role of this trend in shaping the identity and lifestyle of urban Indonesian youth, specifically the millennial-urban generation in Jakarta and Tangerang. The emphasis on hustle culture in social media is chosen since it strongly promotes hard work, ambition, and productivity as a lifestyle for these young individuals. By placing social media within the context of everyday life practices, this research aims to provide insights into the aspirations of modern youth in the internet era influenced by neoliberal values. These findings serve as a starting point for understanding and mapping contemporary youth aspirations.

## 2 Method

This research examines social media platforms Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok as a "corpus of statements" [24] with texts, images, and videos as the primary data. Data collection is conducted using a digital ethnography

approach, as well as keyword searches and hashtags to discover and observe online conversations related to the representation of hustle culture or the modern urban workstyle on Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The digital ethnography approach is required to observe and study digitally mediated cultures through the use of digital technologies [25], such as the internet, which is multispatial in terms of location, temporality, and mobility. Therefore, in this context, social media platforms are understood as a “field” of data that researchers need to follow flexibly, to its specific features like comment, quotes, and others. Additionally, data collection through interviews with social media users and respondents was conducted to obtain more comprehensive data both online and offline. Social media observations were conducted by the researcher from April 2022 to November 2022, with data spanning from 2019 to 2022. The interviews took place from 19 February 2023 to 27 February 2023, and involved 6 millennial respondents from various age groups and professional backgrounds.

The collected data was analyzed using Ethnography Content Analysis (ECA), while considering the intertextuality between social media platforms [26]. ECA, also referred to as “reflexive analysis of documents” [27], examines media narratives as symbolic environments that shape attitudes, beliefs, identities, and behaviors [28][29]. In this study, I believe that these narratives contribute to the production of youth subjectivity regarding the understanding of modern success in the social media era. Drawing upon various theoretical concepts related to youth, cities, social media, and hustle culture, this research employs a narrative analysis of hustle culture and the lifestyle of urban millennial workers on social media, considering textual, visual, and multimedia aspects. The primary objective is to explore how the understanding of success among urban millennial workers is constructed based on the narratives and representations of hustle culture and contemporary urban workstyle trends circulating on social media.

### 3 Result

#### 3.1 Hustle Culture in Social Media

Before delving into the concept of modern success in Indonesia in its relation to the hustle culture trend on social media, it is important to understand the main themes present in hustle culture contents. There are four common types of content observed in posts related to hustle culture on social media: 1) the hustle bustle, 2) achievements and income, 3) lifestyle, and 4) motivation. Each type of content provides distinct ideas about the perspectives and approaches of modern Indonesian youth towards work and life on social media. These findings are important to better understand the role of social media in everyday practices, particularly in shaping the expectations and perceptions of success of urban-modern Indonesian youth regarding employment and work practices.

##### 3.1.1 The Hustle Bustle

Hustle culture offers a mindset to working excessively and being overly productive throughout the day, as if never stopped, thus creating an “always on” lifestyle [30]. The posts showcasing the hustle and productivity while working or manifestations of such constitute the first type of content commonly found on social media in representing hustle culture in Indonesia. On social media, hustle and productivity are not only represented through dedication or the amount of time invested in work but also by the number of tasks or activities being performed simultaneously (see Figure 1).

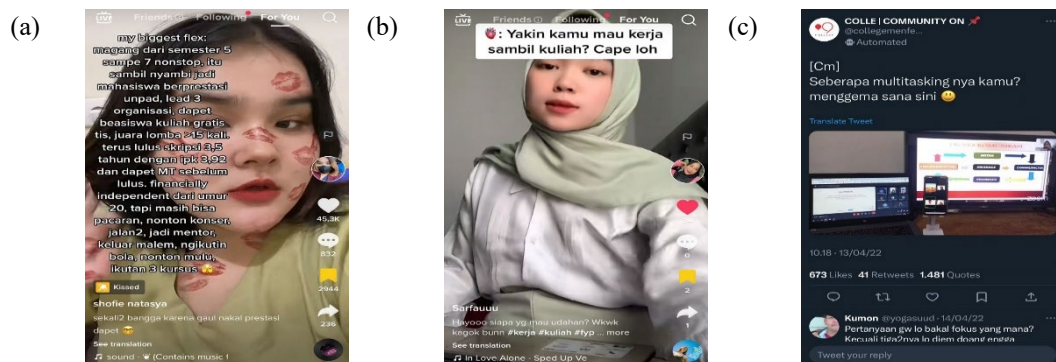


Figure 1. A set of images from @istrialturnerrr (a), @sarfauuu (b) TikTok video, and @collegemfess (c) tweet

Figure 1 (a), (b), (c) illustrate a similar message that all three have various responsibilities and activities in both their studies or work. This implies a sense of pride in their ability to efficiently fulfill these roles. The TikTok video post by @istrialecturnerr (a) has garnered widespread praise. Many netizenz praised her time management abilities, exclaiming, “so cool!” In contrast to the praise shown to @istrialecturnerr (a), the comments from @collegemenfess (c) has drawn criticism from other Twitter users. They argue that attending three meetings at the same time is not an ideal situation and may interfere concentration, stating, “Please reconsider work ethics and prioritization scale in work” (@direktoridosen, 2022). Although both posts (a) and (c) convey the idea of the capability to handle multiple tasks or activities at once, @istrialecturnerr's (a) post receives more praise because it includes her achievements and accomplishments, whereas the Twitter post by @collegemenfess (c) only depicts excessive work with no context.

To engage in multiple activities alongside other responsibilities has become a common phenomenon in today's increasingly competitive environment. In the context of work practices, the term “side hustle” is often used to refer to additional activities undertaken aside the main primary job; small businesses; part-time jobs; or side projects to gain extra income [31] or pursue personal interests and hobbies—passions [32]. These activities adding more value and worth to oneself, which is consistent with the spirit of neoliberal flexibility that serves the needs of capital by developing more skills. For some of the respondents I interviewed, Pamungkas and Yosef, side hustle serves as a middle ground that adds value to personal passion as an alternative to the routine of the workplace. This not only benefits capital but also allows individuals to pursue self-actualization and personal fulfillment.

Furthermore, these contents also represent the idea of hard-working individuals by showcasing productive activities. Moments of hard work, packed schedules, and efforts in achieving success serve as representations of the values embedded within hustle culture, where productivity and hustles are significant factors indicating one's success. Within the landscape of social media, appearing productive conveys an image of an accomplished and diligent individual. Lintang, one of the respondents I interviewed, acknowledged that his peers perceive productivity as superior. This is evidenced by the display of their activities and packed schedules on social media platforms, as he illustrates: “Oh, minggu produktif, nih. Produktif ini berarti kerja terus nih dalam seminggu itu.” (“Oh, what a productive weekend! It indicates they worked hard that week.”). This kind of attitude is often praised and celebrated on social media, creating a positive feedback loop, and again, hard-working images.

Aside from showcasing a multitude of activities done, another pattern of content that represents hustle culture in this theme is the demonstration of dedication to work anywhere at anytime under any circumstances (see Figure 2).

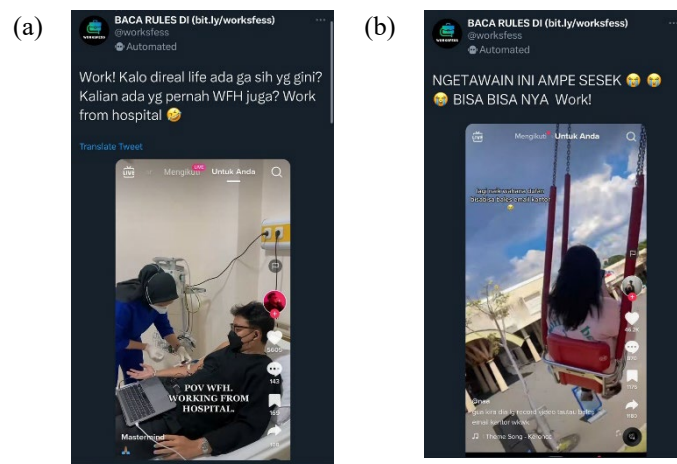


Figure 2. A set of images from @worksfess twit (a) dan (b)

The examples (a) and (b) provided highlight how urban-modern youth in Indonesia have internalized the hustle culture mentality, leading them to prioritize work over personal needs and desires. The range of impressions and affirmations towards such posts also illustrates how similar issues have become a common phenomenon among young workers in Indonesia. The rapid development of information and technology have transformed traditional work culture [33] and facilitated a mobile and flexible work culture, significantly brings in a new era of hustle culture [16]. This idea aligns with Colbert et al.'s who found challenges in creating an ideal workflow within a technologically connected workspace [34]. Thus, the flexibility discourse initially embraced by the younger generation ironically traps them in an imbalanced work-life situation.

Experiencing exhaustion or even getting sick in the journey for success also seems to be an idea that represents the idea of hustle culture on social media. This depiction serves as a kind of need and pride to

showcase on social media, implying a busy work lifestyle in pursuit of success. In this context, hustle culture is represented by the image of high loyalty and dedication to work, resulting in a new identity for young urban workers who are constantly busy working anytime, anywhere, and under any conditions, such as responding to emails outside of working hours as a symbol of excessive work demands [34] as illustrated in (b). This creating a culture that blurs the boundaries between work and non-work domains [34][35][36].

Although the majority of comments on both posts affirm the reality of “work from hospital” or “work from Dufan,” other users recognize and condemn such content as romanticizing labor: “Don't glorify this kind of thing, there's nothing great or good about it. A good workplace will have systems that protect the rights of its employees and treat them as human beings” (@NoonaNabia, 2022). Beside depicting the romanticization of work, this content is also seen as concerning, as another user expressed, “That's kinda sad. They should be relaxing instead of still worrying about work” (@senyom, 2022). This polarity demonstrates that views on hustle culture in Indonesia are not all similar and need to be examined from various perspectives to unravel the complexity of the issue. From these contrasting comments, issues of work vulnerability, employee rights and well-being, and physical and emotional health are revealed. Safiya, for example, expresses her doubt about the excessive of work and its impact on “what has been entrusted,”:

*Why is it that our youth cannot be enjoyed properly (due to excessive work)? Even though we have to pursue our livelihood, don't we also have an obligation to take care of what has been entrusted to us?*

The term 'what has been entrusted' here can refer to both physical and spiritual aspects as blessings or potentials possessed by each individual. The culture of excessive work often leads individuals to neglect their needs, balance, and quality of life in pursuit of success. In this context, Safiya's religious aspect emerges as a foundation of values that reminds us not only to focus on seeking for the living but also to care for and appreciate what has been given by God. Grounded in gratitude and a sense of responsibility, Safiya emphasizes the importance of not only viewing life and work from a material or external success perspective but also from a spiritual standpoint that values and nurtures 'what has been entrusted' by God.

### **3.1.2 Achievement and Salary**

The sharing of achievements and salary income also serves as a prominent theme in hustle culture trend on social media. Such content allows users to envision the success of others and, in some cases, compare it to their own accomplishments. Discussions pertaining to these topics are particularly prevalent on Twitter, given the platform's text-based nature complemented by the ability to comment and quote retweet, facilitates the exchange of ideas and opinions in a concise format. Such conversations serve as a lens through which to examine societal values, aspirations, and the impact of digital platforms on the perception and construction of success in contemporary society.

One tweet that circulated and went viral on Twitter (see *Figure 3*) stated: “Age 22: Graduated from college, started working with a 4 million salary. Age 23: Salary doubled. Age 26: First 100 million, started investing. Age 27: Got married, owned a house and a car. Age 30: First 1 million. Age 32: Resigned. How about that?” (@investorgabut, 2022) (a). Ending with the question “How about that??” this tweet reflects confidence in extraordinary achievements and shapes the perception of ideal success for young individuals. It encompasses the imagined success of young individuals and influences their views on an ideal career and future; immediate job placement after college, career advancement, increased income, marriage, financial stability, and the ability to retire comfortably. This tweet also highlights the challenging goal of earning one million by the age of 30, emphasizing the need for exceptional effort or favorable circumstances to attain such success.

However, this tweet showcases not only the impressive work experiences and achievements shared by users, but also highlights the struggles faced by other workers in navigating their careers and lives. As instance: “Age 22: Extended my studies for 3 years until 2019 due to lack of funds. Age 23: Graduated, still earning below the standard wage in Jogja. Age 26: *Alhamdulillah*, my salary is now at the Jogja standard. Age 27: Haven't been able to get married because of the economic impact of COVID, lost my job. Age 28: I want to punch you. How about that??” (@nsrailway16, 2022). Presented in a similar format with a sarcastic tone, this comment highlights issues of class inequality and challenges the notion of success portrayed on social media. It demonstrates that the seemingly fantastic success portrayed on social media often does not reflect reality. Not as simple as presenting a “timeline of success” with impressive achievements and numbers.

Other than the discussions about remarkable achievements on Twitter, content discussing salary figures of certain companies or individuals also triggers many dialogues on social media. One example is the TikTok account @felicia.tjisaka (b), which interviews young female employees in the insurance industry, showcasing their high earnings and monthly expenses. This video motivates netizens to pursue similar paths, expressing their aspirations for success; “@ranianoviardi: I want to run into the insurance business”; “@xjessyv2: Amazing women who make me really want to succeed.” From the comments provided on this video, obtaining a job with a high salary becomes one of the dreams of success for the younger generation. Social media serves as a

platform for “imagined success” by today's modern youth—to envision or imagine the achievements or success that one hopes to attain through representations or portrayals of success built by other individuals through content on social media.

The video also highlights an intriguing aspect: all the respondents played dual roles as both mothers and workers. In an economic system dominated by neoliberal values, successful women have become symbols of individualism and flexibility that represent an important neoliberal identity for the economy [37][38][39]. However, it is important to critically address this view, as not all working mothers have the same opportunities, lifestyles, and successes. Gender studies in the neoliberal landscape reveal that the “feminization of labor” with its agenda of flexibility and the transformation of more adaptive workforce trends adds pressure and difficulties for women who have to juggle the dual demands of childcare and earning a living. It also normalizes forms of uncertainty that have ideological effects on young women, especially those in the middle class who face various physical and emotional challenges [40].

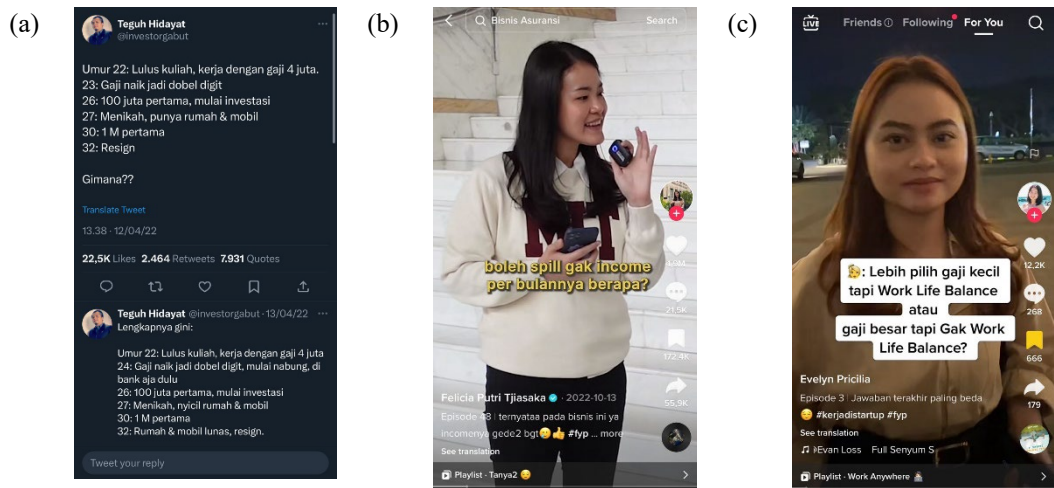
It is worth noting that alongside the affirmations expressed in the previous comments, some users also expressed skeptical attitudes. For instance, one user stated, “It's highly entertaining for my poverty” (@restysity, 2022), while another offered a critique, stating, “Behind their impressive salary, we don't know the work pressure they face. So, for us, let's focus on our own progress” (@lapahgawoh, 2022). These skeptical attitudes may arise from feelings of insecurity and the competitive pressures that influence individuals' perception of others' success. Even in the comment “It's highly entertaining for my poverty” by user @restysity, there is an underlying sense of sadness and loneliness that reflects a feeling of alienation amidst a competitive atmosphere on the journey towards success. Expressing difficulties and emotional pressures on social media often garners less popularity compared to the romanticization and celebration of work achievements. Safiya herself experiences similar pressures, which lead her to compare her own abilities:

*Sometimes I feel inferior, like, wow, it's amazing how someone can reach that level. They're so cool and blessed, why am I not as cool as them? What do I have to accomplish to reach that level? That's what makes me feel insecure, perhaps.*

These discussions about salary are also often accompanied by questions about work-life balance. In a TikTok video by @evelynpricilia (c), interviews were conducted with colleagues born between 1995-1998, asking the question, “Would you prefer a small salary with work-life balance or a high salary without work-life balance?” (@evelynpricilia, 2022). The average responses indicated a preference for a high salary, even if it meant sacrificing work-life balance, with each person providing their own reasons. One interesting response stated, “I would choose a small salary without work-life balance but have a business outside of work with a large turnover.” The video sparked various comments from netizens expressing their aspirations regarding the choice between a high salary and work-life balance. One comment even shared the individual's own experience, which did not fall into the provided answer choices: “My reality is that I have small salary and no work-life balance” (@tintin.in, 2022).

The debate surrounding work-life balance and salary always seems to present a binary choice, as if individuals can only choose between a high salary or achieving a balance between their personal and professional lives. This issue creates a dilemma for young workers who seek to strike a balance between a successful career and a personal life. Flexibility can serve as a solution to this limited choice by innovatively selecting the type, style, and timing of work that aligns with their desired success or achievement in both career and life [9]. For example, one respondent in the interviews chose a small salary with work-life balance while having a side business. In other words, the millennial generation is creating their own paths that best suit their desires, needs, and individual characteristics.

However, work-life balance and salary are not always directly correlated. In reality, work-life balance is not solely determined by a small or large salary but is also influenced by other factors such as low wages provided to workers or the difficulty of earning a decent income in an increasingly uncertain economic climate. One comment, for instance, stated, “My reality is that I have small salary and no work-life balance” (@tintin.in, 2022). These economic disparities arise from neoliberal policies that prioritize flexibility over fair wages for the poor and the working class [41]. This highlights the imbalance between the contributions of workers and the rewards they receive, driven by efficiency and capital gain. The glorification of hustle culture on social media often fails to address these issues, as not everyone has the same freedoms or choices, contrary to the popular discourse of work-life balance versus high salary.

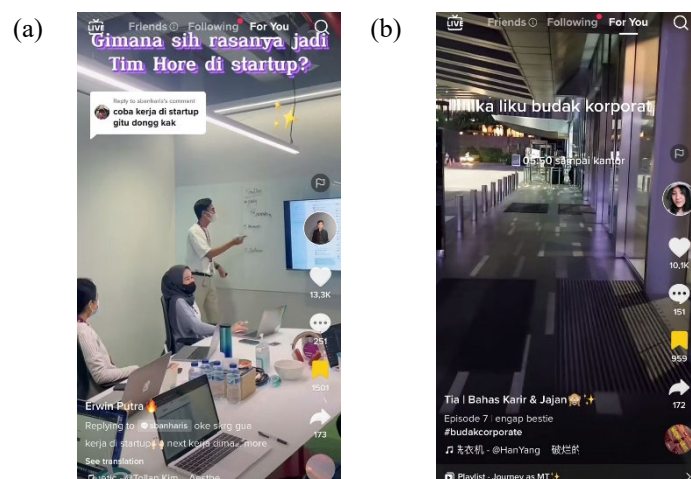


**Figure 3.** A set of images from @investorgabut twit (a), @felicia.tjiasaka TikTok video (b), and @evelynpricilia (c)

### 3.1.3 Lifestyle

One distinctive characteristic of the current hustle culture euphoria on social media is the idea that work can appear interesting and exciting with various urban attributes. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow users to share photos, videos, and multimedia formats, showcasing their daily lives and lifestyles. This romanticization of work practices and modern amenities is a prominent theme in hustle culture on social media. Specifically, TikTok features a trend called “Corporate TikTok” or “Corporate Tok,” where workers share content about their daily lives, office facilities, and even engage in games and challenges. These posts can come from individual workers or official company accounts on TikTok.

The content featuring the daily lives of workers, commonly referred to as “a day in my life” content, depicts a series of activities ranging from the initial preparation for work, the journey to the office, the activities performed during work, to the return home (see Figure 4). TikTok accounts @erwinptr (a) and @tiaandherissues (b) serve as examples, showcasing their daily routines in a chronological timeline. These videos portray workers employed in renowned companies, situated in modern buildings, presenting themselves in a neat, clean, and trendy manner. The specific video by TikTok user @erwinptr (a) highlights the work experience as an employee in a startup company, showcasing various supportive facilities that enhance the comfort and even enjoyment of the employees, such as pantry full with snacks, a pool table, and even gaming stations.

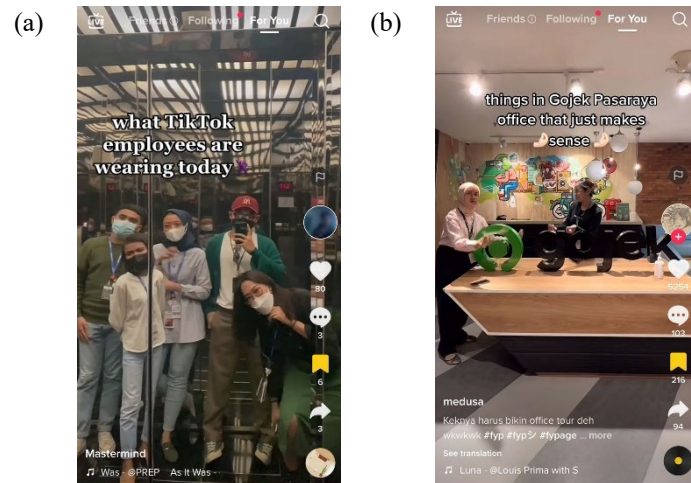


**Figure 4.** A set of images from @erwinptr (a) and @tiaandherissues (b) TikTok video

If we look closely at the TikTok video collections uploaded by @erwinptr and @tiaandherissues, we can see that they both frequently share contents about their jobs or daily life as employees. This phenomenon is common in social media as an effort to construct self-image or engage in self-branding. They consistently manage their image and identity as modern and productive workers, aiming to present their unique and

compelling personalities, skills, insights, and work achievements. This self-presentation is intended to build a positive professional image and enhance opportunities for better career prospects. For individuals like Safiya, watching such content assists in envisioning various types of jobs and the lives of other workers that she may not have encountered before.

Aside from showcasing workplace environments and depicting daily routines, there is also a category of “casual” content that portrays young professionals dressed in trendy, clean, and neat attire within luxurious and pristine office settings, complete with advanced facilities (see *Figure 5*).



**Figure 5.** A set of images from @gowithastronaut (a) and @urseaminoris (b) TikTok video

Both of these videos (a) and (b) show a glimpse into the lives of workers in prestigious startup companies that are highly desired by young millennials or Gen Z, such as TikTok and Gojek. In addition to showcasing the comfort and splendor of their workplace facilities, these videos also portray the “fun” aspects of the daily hustle and bustle of young urban workers, accompanied by upbeat music. In these brief 30-second clips, they demonstrate that the daily work activities are not as burdensome as one might imagine. The portrayal of the daily lives of modern young workers, with their neat and trendy appearance, holding a cup of coffee and enjoying exclusive office facilities, represents the lifestyle of urban workers in Indonesia. This representation attributes a sense of enjoyment and prestige to the hustle and bustle, where success is also measured by the lifestyle showcased on social media.

That idea confirms the findings of Poon and Shang [42] regarding the happiness of urban workers, which is characterized by their social status and lifestyle, explaining the authentic experience of enjoying urban cultural facilities. Therefore, in today's work culture, success is not only measured by productivity but also by the importance of representing oneself in prestigious and glamorous jobs, as well as the quality of life and recognition measured through the facilities and experiences gained in the work environment. The more modern the perceived facilities, the higher the social status and recognition granted. This idea also further affirms Bandinelli's findings that the younger generation always strives to participate in the “right” or “ideal” lifestyle according to market demands [43]. Thus, the capital not only entices the desires of modern youth through narratives of creativity, flexibility, or passion but also through modern facilities that are part of the ideal image of society and must be experienced by modern youth.

In relation to this phenomenon, Yosef, who works as a government employee with various side businesses, is also known as a TikTok celebrity who regularly shares funny videos about his daily life as a worker. For Yosef, these contents provide refreshing entertainment and offer alternative perspectives amidst the work fatigue experienced by him and other viewers. Through these contents, Yosef contributes to building a self-image of a worker who is optimistic, enjoyable, entertaining, yet responsible in the tasks he undertakes. TikTok helps him in producing this self-image.

While many comments express a desire to work in the same company, some skeptical comments highlight the potential challenges behind the seemingly “exciting” facilities and carefree activities; “Poor thing, working until late night, no wonder, it's a start-up” (@dion\_poltak, 2022), suggests a sarcastic tone, emphasizing the challenging nature of working in a start-up. Similarly, the comment “You can see it from the bags under their eyes, how “HAPPY” it is to work at Gojek” (@ztsrr, 2022), implies a contrasting interpretation of happiness, implying the potential unhappiness or fatigue experienced by Gojek employees, as evidenced by their dark under-eye circles. These comments demonstrate that workplace happiness or success is not solely determined by perceived amenities and lifestyle. Start-ups often offer a dynamic and flexible work culture, but with high job demands. The phenomenon of high start-up growth, including in Indonesia, aligns with the neoliberal project

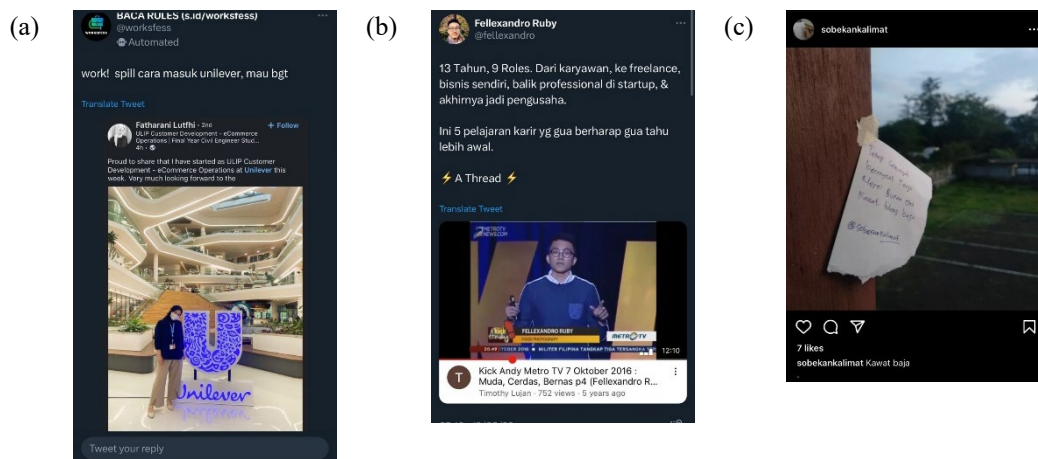


that promotes values of creativity, flexibility, and hard work [44]. Consequently, working in a start-up becomes a symbol of participating in the desired modern economic culture among today's youth.

However, the contents portraying the daily lives and work activities on social media are not always limited to pleasant and trendy depictions. There are also contents that depict the reality of workers' struggles, exhaustion, pressures, and conflicts. Among them are the “a day in my life” contents that showcase workers who have to travel and commute long distances to work, jostle with other urban workers in public transportation, work until they cry, and so on. These contents present unique and diverse experiences of workers, influenced by various underlying factors. They reveal a more complex reality and depict the physical, emotional, and mental burdens that workers may experience, which are not always comfortable and enjoyable.

### 3.1.4 Motivational Aspirations

From the imagined success, the hustle, and lifestyles portrayed in social media as mentioned earlier, it is therefore not surprising to see other young people trying to find ways to achieve similar success or have the same experiences showcased on the internet and social media. Another pattern of content that represents the hustle culture in the Indonesian social media landscape are motivational and inspirational contents that invite or support young individuals to become part of the depiction of modern young workers in the capital city. These contents are presented in the form of stories, tips and tricks for achieving success, as well as discussions about the dreams of young workers (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** A set of images from @worksfess (a) tweet, @fellexandro (b), and @sobekankalimat (c) Instagram post

Although offering different topics, these three posts share a common motivational tone that invites or comforts individuals in navigating their lives and careers. The @worksfess post (a) introduces an idea that motivates readers to take the initiative to find out how they can work at Unilever. On the other hand, @fellexandro's tweet (b) serves as an inspiring content that motivates readers to learn from his experience. He strategically shares his journey from being an ordinary employee to becoming an entrepreneur in just 9 years to other ordinary workers. Lastly, the Instagram post from the @sobekankalimat account (c) serves as a form of solace and encouragement for users to stay strong despite facing fatigue in their work. The use of figurative language, comparing muscles and bones to wires and steel, represents the meaning of strength itself.

In these posts, hustle culture is represented by romanticizing the exhaustion of work and the work itself as a proud achievement or a worthy struggle to be celebrated. This romanticization is celebrated with an inspirational and spirited tone. In other words, the idea of hustle culture penetrates without coercion, becoming an ideology that is “reasonably” even perceived as prestigious. These approaches, along with the nature of social media as “mass self-communication” engaged in everyday social routines [45], are capable of influencing public opinion and becoming a “soft power” that supports neoliberal agendas, which subtly prioritizes business and market interests by promoting success and well-being as individual burdens.

Furthermore, social media, as a “new information technology” [46], has been extensively utilized to build individual professional images, producing the so called “LinkedIn culture.” LinkedIn, as the world's largest professional networking platform, contributes to the neoliberal economy by supporting capital values and needs, characterized by its “social capital” characteristics [47]. I propose the term “LinkedIn culture” to explain the social media users’ tendency to share their professional experiences and achievements to construct a specific professional reputation. These contents represent the identity of workers who possess relevant understanding, can optimize technological advancements, and recognize their own marketable values. This trend extends

beyond the LinkedIn platform itself, evident on diverse social media platforms, as seen in tweets by @fellexandro and @worksfess discussing LinkedIn content. Consequently, a specific professional persona becomes a measure of success in the social media and technology era, with social media playing a crucial role in connecting these values to the markets.

### 3.2 Understanding Success Through Social Media in Indonesia

Throughout this research, I have observed the interconnection between the portrayal of urban-modern work lifestyle through the hustle culture trend and the contemporary concept of success as shaped by social media. To comprehend how young Indonesian workers perceive success in the internet and information age, this study emphasizes the role of social media as an inseparable part of their everyday lives. Social media provides a platform for individuals to construct and curate their self-image, carefully selecting and presenting elements that epitomize success, such as trendy urban lifestyles, academic achievements, career milestones, or productive pursuits. By shaping and sharing their narratives and identities through published content, Indonesian youth can project their own interpretations of success to the world. Analyzing the four types of content mentioned earlier has enabled me to delve into how modern Indonesian youth conceptualize success. I propose that “the image of success on social media” itself holds significance as a determinant of success in the contemporary context.

The trend also portrays Indonesian youth as “modern, productive, and inspirational,” that modern Indonesian millennials strive to project on social media. This representation encompasses showcasing a modern lifestyle, urban amenities, and social mobility, while embodying the image of hardworking individuals leading productive lives. This depiction aligns with the government's narrative of success, which promotes competition, individualism, and entrepreneurial skills [48]. In this regard, social media provides legitimacy to these expectations as it provides support and acceptance for the image of youth as “modern, productive, and inspirational” within the digital community. Drawing on the concept of youth constructing meaning through their relationships and sense of ownership in their lived spaces [1], modern youth in the internet era build meaning through their relationships and validation within the internet where they “share their lives” to seek recognition. Thus, social media becomes an imaginative space that represents the feeling of success itself. It is within this context that social media provides a specific framework for understanding the concept of success among modern Indonesian youth.

However, does “look” successful on social media truly represent the fixated definition of success for modern youth in Indonesia? For the modern metropolitan youth in my study, it is evident that the image of success portrayed on social media is not the sole determinant of how they perceive success. The respondents' understanding of success varies considerably but predominantly revolves around individualistic notions, encompassing the attainment of desired material possessions, personal achievements, and a fulfilling job and work environment. In contrast, family dynamics and a sense of community sharing are only considered significant by a minority. The understanding of success as a relational concept rarely emerged or was even neglected when I asked about the meaning of success among urban youth in my research. This suggests a shift away from traditional views of success towards more individualistic ideal, at least within the sample of urban youth in my study.

Flexibility, self-presentation, and debates about work-life balance are key elements consistently appearing in social media and interview results when studying the concept of success within the context of the hustle culture trend. These millennials understand their potential and desires regarding ideal work and life situations, and actively and creatively strategize to achieve them. Furthermore, the presence of social media provides a platform for them to manage and construct an image that portrays the desired success and lifestyle, adding value that is appreciated by the market. These three elements depict the distinct characteristics of modern youth who are adaptable in facing challenges and drastic changes. They create their own success amidst the competitive neoliberal economic context and uphold personal achievements by engaging personal aspirations and personalized values, including the self-representation on social media.

## 4 Conclusion

Cultural studies aim to explore the production of meanings within everyday practices. With the development of technology and information, social media, as an integral part of the daily lives of modern youth, has a significant influence in shaping their aspirations and ways of living, including their understanding of success. Social media depictions of success allow contemporary Indonesian youth to imagine an ideal success through contents demonstrating productivity, hustle and bustle, achievements, and modern lifestyles supported by specific social attributes. In this context, the “image of success on social media” becomes the success itself. While these findings may not fully explain the understanding of success among modern Indonesian youth, they offer relevant new perspectives on mapping the understanding of success in the modern era, particularly by emphasizing the practices of social media in everyday life.

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