

Representation of Sandwich Generation in the Film “Gampang Cuan”

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how the representation of the Sandwich Generation is portrayed in the film *Gampang Cuan* through John Fiske's semiotic approach. The film highlights the economic struggles of the main character who must support his younger siblings and his ailing mother, depicting the psychological and financial pressures typically faced by the sandwich generation. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, using John Fiske's three levels of semiotic codes: the level of reality, the level of representation, and the level of ideology. The researcher analyzes scenes in the film that illustrate the dual burden carried by the main character (Sultan), as well as the characters Bilqis and Aji, who further depict the socioeconomic conditions of lower-middle-class families in Indonesia. The findings reveal that *Gampang Cuan* represents the sandwich generation as a group trapped in economic pressure and layered responsibilities, often forced to appear successful, make risky financial decisions, and sacrifice personal time. The film also presents moral dilemmas and family relationships through visual symbols such as costume, facial expressions, lighting, and cinematographic techniques. At the ideological level, the film reflects values of neoliberal capitalism, societal pressure on material achievement, and patriarchal cultural expectations of men as family providers.

Keywords: *sandwich generation; representation; Gampang Cuan film; John Fiske's semiotics; capitalism.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the socioeconomic phenomenon known as the "Sandwich Generation" has gained increased visibility in both public discourse and academic inquiry. The term refers to individuals—typically within the productive age range—who find themselves simultaneously responsible for the financial and emotional care of both their aging parents and their dependent children. This dual burden places them in a unique and often overwhelming position, caught between two generations with differing and competing needs. The implications of this situation are far-reaching, influencing not only the economic well-being of individuals but also their psychological health, familial relationships, and

overall quality of life. In the Indonesian context, the Sandwich Generation is deeply shaped by cultural values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and filial piety, where providing support for one's family is regarded as a moral and social obligation. Various surveys, including those conducted by Kompas Research and Tirto.id, have shown that a significant portion of the Indonesian middle and lower-middle class identify as part of this generation, many of whom do not consider their financial responsibilities burdensome, but rather a form of familial devotion. Nevertheless, this enduring cultural expectation places many individuals at risk of psychological stress, financial insecurity, and emotional fatigue—issues that remain underexplored in mainstream media representations.

This research focuses on the 2023 Indonesian film *Gampang Cuan*, a comedy-drama that depicts the life of Sultan, a young man who, after the death of his father, becomes the primary provider for his mother and siblings. While the film employs a comedic tone, it also subtly explores the emotional and financial strains experienced by those in the Sandwich Generation. Through the characters of Sultan and his sister Bilqis, *Gampang Cuan* illustrates how individuals navigate societal expectations, economic uncertainty, and personal aspirations under the weight of intergenerational obligations.

The relevance of this topic to the field of communication studies lies in the intersection between media content, representation, and audience engagement. Media plays a crucial role in shaping societal understanding of complex social phenomena. As O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2016) suggest, representation is not a neutral reflection of reality, but a selective construction that carries ideological implications. By examining how *Gampang Cuan* represents the Sandwich Generation—both explicitly through narrative and implicitly through visual and emotional cues—this research interrogates the role of film in constructing, reinforcing, or challenging public perceptions.

The objective of this study is to critically analyze how the Sandwich Generation is represented in *Gampang Cuan* using a semiotic approach, specifically the theory of representation and social reality construction. It seeks to identify how media texts engage audiences in understanding economic pressure, family dynamics, and social expectations, and whether these portrayals offer a critical reflection or reinforce stereotypes. The study further investigates how symbolic elements within the film—such as dialogue, *mise-en-scène*, and character development—convey deeper meanings related to role conflict, emotional struggle, and identity negotiation.

This research is significant not only because it contributes to the literature on media representation in Indonesian cinema, but also because it engages with contemporary social issues affecting a large demographic. As a form of popular culture, film is a powerful medium for social commentary and public education. By focusing on a commercially accessible and widely distributed film, this study bridges academic inquiry and public discourse, fostering a deeper understanding of how media narratives influence collective attitudes toward intergenerational support and financial responsibility.

Ultimately, this study aims to advance our understanding of how popular media in Indonesia contributes to the social construction of generational roles and challenges, particularly within the framework of the Sandwich Generation. It also highlights the importance of integrating media analysis into broader discussions of social welfare, economic policy, and mental health—areas that are deeply intertwined with communication practices and cultural narratives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Film

In *Melampaui Film: Film, Manusia, dan Kebudayaan* (2024), Nurman Hakim asserts that film should not be viewed solely as a technical or aesthetic artifact, but rather as a discursive form intricately woven into the social, cultural, and political fabric of society. He emphasizes that film is a cultural text that both reflects and constructs reality, functioning as a site where ideological struggles and societal transformations are articulated and negotiated. Hakim argues that beyond its surface role as a medium of entertainment, film operates as a powerful vehicle for the expression and contestation of values, norms, and identities. It has the capacity to reinforce dominant ideologies or challenge existing power structures, particularly in relation to issues of gender, race, religion, and class.

Through narrative structure, character development, and visual symbolism, films can serve as a form of social commentary—prompting viewers to reflect critically on both historical legacies and contemporary conditions. In this sense, film acts not only as a mirror of prevailing cultural realities but also as a catalyst for change, capable of shaping new ways of seeing and understanding the world. Hakim underscores the importance of engaging with film through a critical cultural lens, recognizing its role in the ongoing construction of national identity and collective memory. Furthermore, he draws attention to the industrial and institutional dynamics that influence film production, noting that creative expression in cinema is often shaped by market forces and political interests.

Ultimately, Hakim positions film as a key domain of cultural discourse—both a product of its time and a force that can influence the direction of societal thought. As such, film must be studied not merely for its artistic merit, but for its function as a cultural artifact that encodes, disseminates, and potentially subverts dominant ideologies. By adopting a critical approach, audiences and scholars alike can uncover the layers of meaning embedded in cinematic texts and appreciate the medium's potential to inform, question, and transform collective consciousness.

Representation

Stuart Hall views representation as a crucial process in the production of meaning within society. In his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), Hall asserts that representation is not merely about depicting reality, but rather an active process of creating meaning through language, symbols, and images. This implies that

the media do not simply “reflect” the real world but actively shape the way we understand it. According to Hall, representation functions through a system of signs and language (semiotics), which are used to convey meaning. Meaning does not inherently reside in objects or events, but is constructed through processes of symbolization—for example, how colors, images, or particular words are interpreted within specific cultural contexts. Here, the role of social context and ideology becomes vital, as the meanings produced can vary greatly depending on who produces the message and who receives it. Hall also developed the encoding/decoding model, in which he argues that the meaning of a media text is not entirely determined by the message producer (encoder), but is also subject to interpretation by the audience.

In *Media and Society* by Michael O’Shaughnessy and Jane Stadler (2016), representation is described as a process through which media shapes, selects, and interprets reality, thus influencing how individuals and society perceive the world around them. The authors emphasize that representation is not an objective mirror of the real world but a social construction produced through various mechanisms such as selection, emphasis, editing, and omission of certain aspects of an event or social group. In this sense, the media does not simply present reality as it is, but actively constructs meaning through the discourse it promotes. O’Shaughnessy and Stadler also highlight that media representation plays a significant role in shaping the dominant ideologies within a society. The media can reinforce certain stereotypes—a concept explained by Richard Dyer as an oversimplified portrayal of a group that, through repetition, becomes accepted as “social truth”—or alternatively, it can challenge them by presenting more complex and inclusive narratives. Moreover, the concept of symbolic annihilation, developed by George Gerbner and later adopted by feminist media scholars such as Gaye Tuchman, points to how the absence or marginal presence of particular groups in media equates to their erasure from public consciousness.

In recent decades, social changes have driven the media to present more diverse representations, challenging previously dominant hegemonic concepts. However, media is not neutral. Through the concepts of framing and agenda-setting, media does not only determine which issues are deemed important but also shapes how society thinks about those issues. In this way, the media can reinforce certain ideological dominations or open space for counter-discourses. Representation in media is also polysemic, meaning it holds multiple meanings that can be interpreted differently by audiences depending on their social background, culture, and personal experience. This closely relates to Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation, which explains how individuals are “hailed” or recognized by ideology through media, making them subjects within a particular social system. Nonetheless, audiences are not always passive; through the process of negotiating meaning, they may accept, reject, or reinterpret the representations presented in media according to their own interests and identities.

Analyzing the theory of media representation is essential in understanding how meaning is constructed and how these representations affect our perceptions and social

interactions. Repetitive representations in media can shape collective societal understanding of particular groups or phenomena, ultimately influencing public policy, social behavior, and even power structures within society. Thus, the study of representation is not only significant for academics and communication researchers but also vital for the wider public who wish to become critical media consumers—aware of the ways in which reality is mediated and manipulated by dominant narratives that are continuously produced.

Sandwich Generation

The Sandwich Generation refers to individuals who simultaneously shoulder the responsibility of caring for their aging parents while also supporting their own children. Coined by Dorothy Miller in 1981, the term captures the position of adults—typically between the ages of 30 and 50—who are metaphorically “sandwiched” between two dependent generations. These individuals often face overlapping demands that are emotional, financial, and physical in nature, which can lead to considerable strain on their mental health, economic security, and ability to maintain work-life balance. In the Indonesian context, psychologist Rosdiana Setyaningrum (2024) notes that members of the Sandwich Generation frequently feel overwhelmed by the need to fulfill multiple family roles, including providing care not only for their parents and children, but also for siblings or extended relatives.

To further conceptualize this phenomenon, Carol Abaya, a U.S.-based aging specialist, proposed three subcategories within the Sandwich Generation. The Traditional Sandwich Generation includes those caring for both aging parents and dependent children. The Club Sandwich Generation encompasses two distinct groups: adults in their 50s or 60s who are responsible for elderly parents and adult children or grandchildren, and those in their 30s to 40s who are raising young children while simultaneously supporting aging parents. Lastly, the Open-Faced Sandwich Generation includes individuals who may not be primary caregivers but still offer consistent emotional or financial support to older family members.

The growing prevalence of the Sandwich Generation is fueled by demographic and societal trends, such as increasing life expectancy, delayed marriage and childbearing, and the prolonged financial dependency of young adults. Additionally, changes in family structure—such as smaller family sizes or the migration of other potential caregivers—have intensified the burden placed on fewer individuals. As a result, the Sandwich Generation is becoming a focal point in discussions of intergenerational care, gender roles, economic resilience, and mental health, particularly in cultures where family support is regarded as both a moral and social duty. Understanding this generation is vital in the fields of communication, media representation, and public policy, as their struggles and identities are increasingly reflected in popular narratives and societal discourse.

Semiotics

Semiotics, or the study of signs, is a discipline that examines how signs and symbols are used to convey meaning across various cultural and communicative contexts. In her book

Semiologi: Simbol, Makna, & Budaya (2018), Putu Kerti Nitiasih explains that semiotics stems from two main traditions: semiology, introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure, and semiotics, developed by Charles Sanders Peirce. Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, viewed the sign as a combination of the signifier and the signified. The signifier refers to the physical form of the sign, such as a word or image, while the signified is the concept or meaning represented by the sign. Saussure emphasized that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, meaning there is no natural connection between them; the relationship is determined by social and cultural conventions. For instance, the word *pohon* in Indonesian and *tree* in English both refer to the same object, but the forms differ due to linguistic conventions.

On the other hand, Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher and logician, developed a triadic model of signs, consisting of three main components: the representamen (the sign itself), the object (the reference or the thing being represented), and the interpretant (the understanding or meaning produced in the mind of the sign's receiver). Peirce also categorized signs into three main types: icon, index, and symbol. An icon is a sign that has a direct resemblance to its object, such as a photo or image. An index is a sign that has a causal or existential connection to its object, such as smoke indicating the presence of fire. A symbol is a sign whose relationship with the object is based on convention or agreement, such as words in language or mathematical symbols. Understanding signs cannot be separated from the cultural context in which they are used, as culture provides the framework for interpreting the meaning of signs (Nitiasih, 2018). Culture influences how signs are created, understood, and interpreted by members of society. For example, the color white may symbolize purity or weddings in Western cultures, but it can represent mourning in some Asian cultures. Thus, semiotics not only studies the structure of signs but also how these signs are interpreted and reinterpreted by society in various communicative situations.

Furthermore, semiotics plays an important role in media analysis and mass communication. By understanding how signs and symbols function, we can analyze how messages are conveyed and received by audiences, and how meaning is shaped and influenced by factors such as ideology, power, and technology. For example, in advertising, the use of colors, images, and text all function as signs designed to influence consumer perception and behavior. By analyzing these elements through a semiotic lens, we can uncover implicit messages that may not be immediately apparent. In the context of digitalization and globalization today, semiotics faces new challenges and opportunities. Signs and symbols now move across cultural boundaries with unprecedented speed, creating possibilities for misinterpretation or reinterpretation. Therefore, understanding semiotics becomes increasingly important in navigating cross-cultural communication and global interaction.

John Fiske's Semiotics

In his book *Cultural and Communication Studies: Sebuah Pengantar Paling Komprehensif* (2012), John Fiske, a prominent communication scholar provides a comprehensive overview of semiotics as a method for analyzing how meaning is produced and circulated in society. Fiske emphasizes that signs are not limited to words or images but include anything that represents something else and is understood through shared cultural conventions. Drawing from Charles Sanders Peirce, he classifies signs into three categories: icons (signs that resemble their referents, such as portraits or maps), indexes (signs that have a causal connection to their referents, like smoke indicating fire), and symbols (signs with meanings based on social agreements, such as language). Fiske explains that these signs are interpreted through a semiotic triangle, which illustrates the relationship between the sign, its referent (object), and the interpreter (the meaning constructed by the audience). He further outlines three levels of codes that shape how meaning is formed in communication. The level of reality involves social codes such as dress, behavior, or accent—that convey identity and status. The level of representation pertains to the techniques used in media, including camera work, editing, and sound, which shape how reality is mediated. Lastly, the ideological level reflects deeper societal values and belief systems, such as patriarchy, capitalism, and nationalism, which inform how individuals perceive the world and their role within it. Through this framework, Fiske demonstrates that meaning is not produced solely by signs themselves, but by the social and cultural contexts in which they operate. This understanding encourages a more critical engagement with media, as it reveals how messages are constructed and how they can both reflect and reinforce dominant ideologies. Thus, Fiske's approach to semiotics provides a powerful analytical tool for examining the role of media in shaping social reality.

Neoliberal Capitalism

Neoliberal capitalism is a modern reconfiguration of classical capitalism that became globally dominant from the late 20th century, especially following the 2008 global financial crisis. Characterized by deregulation, privatization, market liberalization, and austerity, it extends market principles into nearly all spheres of life, including education, healthcare, and public policy. As Wendy Brown (2015) argues, neoliberalism is not merely a set of economic policies, but a governing rationality that redefines individuals and institutions as market actors driven by competition, profit, and efficiency. This rationality displaces democratic citizenship with consumer identity, narrowing the meaning of freedom to market participation and marginalizing values like solidarity and social justice. Joseph Stiglitz (2024) further critiques this system by exposing how neoliberalism, under the guise of promoting freedom, in fact limits real choice and agency through corporate monopolies, technological dominance, and economic inequality. He argues that genuine freedom can only be achieved through a strong, democratic state that protects public interests and promotes social equity. Together,

these critiques highlight how neoliberalism shapes not only economic structures but also cultural norms and individual subjectivities, making it essential to analyze as both a material system and a symbolic regime of power.

Patriarchy

Patriarchal ideology is a foundational system of belief that privileges men and masculinity while subordinating women and femininity across multiple spheres of life. It is rooted in historical, cultural, and institutional frameworks that normalize male authority and marginalize women's roles, agency, and voices. In essence, patriarchy functions as a structural system of gendered power relations that perpetuates male dominance and female subordination through both overt practices and subtle ideological reinforcements. It manifests in various forms, including unequal access to education and employment, legal discrimination, control over women's bodies, and the societal expectation that men are natural leaders while women are inherently nurturing and passive. One of the key mechanisms through which patriarchy operates is the assignment of rigid gender roles—men are expected to be assertive, rational, and economically productive, while women are relegated to the domestic sphere and emotional labor. This binary view limits the potential and identity of all genders, reinforcing a hierarchy that privileges masculinity while devaluing femininity.

Sylvia Walby (2011) identifies six interlocking structures that sustain patriarchy: the household, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. These domains work in concert to maintain male power, for instance, through women's disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic labor or systemic barriers to leadership in politics and business. Patriarchal ideology is also internalized and perpetuated through what Louis Althusser calls ideological state apparatuses—education, religion, media, and the family—which reproduce dominant norms and reinforce compliance without the use of force (as cited in Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2007). In modern societies, patriarchy does not always present itself through overt exclusion but through more insidious mechanisms like the "glass ceiling," the "motherhood penalty," and media stereotypes that shape public perception of gender roles. For example, women in leadership positions are often judged more harshly than their male counterparts or are expected to display masculine traits to be taken seriously.

In the context of Indonesia and other Southeast Asian cultures, patriarchal norms are deeply intertwined with traditional values and religious interpretations that reinforce gendered expectations. These include the assumption that women must prioritize familial responsibilities over professional ambitions, which not only limits their socio-economic mobility but also reinforces the notion that their primary identity lies in motherhood or domesticity (Blackwood, 2015). Even in urban and educated populations, patriarchal logic persists through the glorification of male breadwinners and the stigmatization of financially independent or unmarried women. Furthermore, the media often reinforces patriarchal values by portraying women in subordinate or sexualized roles, while positioning men as decision-makers or protectors—creating what Laura Mulvey termed the "male gaze" in

cinematic representation. This results in a cycle where cultural products both reflect and reproduce patriarchal norms, shaping societal attitudes toward gender in subtle yet powerful ways.

Understanding patriarchal ideology is crucial in communication studies because it reveals how power, identity, and representation are constructed and contested in cultural narratives. Films, advertisements, and digital media are not merely entertainment but are also ideological tools that communicate societal values, often reinforcing the very hierarchies they portray. By examining how patriarchal norms are embedded within media content, researchers can uncover how gender inequality is maintained through representation and discourse. This opens pathways for counter-narratives that challenge dominant norms and advocate for more equitable forms of gender identity and social organization. In doing so, the study of patriarchal ideology contributes not only to academic discourse but also to the larger struggle for gender justice and social transformation.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using semiotic analysis to examine how the phenomenon of the sandwich generation is represented in the Indonesian film *Gampang Cuan* (2023). The analytical framework is grounded in John Fiske's semiotic theory, which conceptualizes meaning-making through three interconnected levels: reality, representation, and ideology. This tripartite model provides a systematic method for interpreting the signs and codes embedded within audiovisual texts and their cultural implications.

The choice of semiotics as the methodological foundation is based on its relevance to unpacking layered meanings in visual media. As Fiske (1987) argues, media texts are polysemic, allowing multiple interpretations depending on the cultural, social, and ideological positions of both producers and audiences. In this study, the film is treated as a complex cultural artifact that encodes social realities and ideological narratives related to intergenerational responsibility, economic precarity, and societal expectations.

The primary data source is the film *Gampang Cuan*, directed by Rahabi Mandra and released in 2023. The film was selected due to its explicit thematic focus on familial economic pressure and multigenerational obligations—central themes to the concept of the sandwich generation. The analysis focuses on selected scenes that prominently depict the struggles of the main characters, particularly Sultan and Bilqis, in their roles as financial providers for both older and younger family members.

The analytical process involves three stages aligned with Fiske's model. First, at the reality level, the study examines the everyday appearances and behaviors of the characters, including their facial expressions, gestures, costume choices, speech patterns, and body language. These elements are analyzed as signs that reflect the psychological and emotional states of individuals facing structural pressures. This includes paying attention to nonverbal communication—such as sighs, posture, or eye contact—which often conveys deeper meanings than dialogue alone.

Second, at the representation level, the study investigates the formal elements of cinematography, including shot composition, camera angles, editing techniques, lighting, and sound design. These technical aspects are not merely aesthetic choices but serve to construct emotional atmospheres and convey narrative tension. For instance, the use of low-key lighting in emotionally intense scenes, fast-cutting sequences to simulate panic, and close-up shots to emphasize character vulnerability are all considered within their symbolic and cultural context.

Third, at the ideological level, the analysis explores how the film conveys broader messages about societal norms, economic systems, and power relations. It focuses on how neoliberal ideology and patriarchal expectations shape the characters' decision-making, sense of duty, and emotional burden. This level involves interpreting recurring motifs such as debt, performative success, and personal sacrifice, as well as the cultural narratives embedded in character interactions and narrative arcs. By doing so, the study uncovers the dominant ideological structures that the film critiques or reinforces.

To enhance the validity of the analysis, the study incorporates supporting academic literature on the sandwich generation, neoliberalism, visual culture, and Indonesian socio-economic conditions. It also references relevant psychological and sociological theories to contextualize character behaviors and audience interpretations. Citations are drawn from sources such as Bauman (2000), Goffman (1959), Mullainathan & Shafir (2013), and other works focusing on emotion, gender, and class.

The study does not seek generalizability but aims for analytic depth and cultural insight. As is typical in qualitative research, the findings are interpretive, focusing on the meaning within a specific cultural product rather than statistical representation. This methodology is appropriate given the aim to critically explore how complex social phenomena are encoded and represented through film in an Indonesian context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gampang Cuan (2023), directed by Rahabi Mandra, is a socio-comedic Indonesian film that highlights the economic struggles of a working-class family through the character Sultan, who bears the burden of supporting both his mother and younger siblings. Set in post-pandemic Jakarta and Sukabumi, the film explores the pressures of the "sandwich generation"—adults caught between caring for aging parents and supporting younger family members. Production-wise, the film is anchored in Sundanese culture with authentic language, costumes, and locations. Actors underwent dialect training to maintain authenticity. The film consulted financial experts to ensure realistic depictions of stock investment, debt, and economic risks, aligning with post-COVID economic realities.

This research examines the film *Gampang Cuan* (2023) through the lens of John Fiske's semiotic framework, which analyzes media texts across three interrelated levels: reality, representation, and ideology. Using this framework, the study uncovers how the film articulates the lived experiences, emotional labor, and ideological constraints of Indonesia's

sandwich generation—adults burdened with the dual responsibility of supporting both their parents and younger family members.

At the reality level, *Gampang Cuan* portrays Sultan, the eldest son, as a character who masks his financial hardship by performing an image of success in front of his family. This portrayal aligns with sociological observations that individuals under socio-economic stress often construct false impressions to avoid familial disappointment and societal stigma (Tangney, 2007; Fitriani, 2020). Sultan’s anxiety, avoidance of eye contact, and performative calmness—especially in scenes where he lies to his siblings or borrows a friend’s luxurious home to impress his mother—demonstrate the psychological toll of these emotional performances. His physical gestures (e.g., hunched posture, heavy breathing) and clothing (grey-toned, non-flashy outfits) become semiotic tools to signify internal turmoil, shame, and social invisibility (Madyanti, 2021). Such behaviors are emblematic of the sandwich generation’s emotional conflict: the need to uphold dignity while facing invisible economic burdens.



Image 2.1 Poster of “Gampang Cuan” Film

Source : [imdb.com](https://www.imdb.com)

Moving to the representational level, the film utilizes visual and auditory codes to reinforce these emotional dynamics. Cinematic techniques such as medium close-up shots, framing through doors or narrow spaces, and over-the-shoulder perspectives give viewers a sense of surveillance, confinement, and emotional vulnerability (Bordwell & Thompson, 2016). For example, scenes in which Sultan and Bilqis discuss their mounting debt or hide the truth from their youngest brother, Aji, are filmed with dim lighting and close-up angles to enhance the claustrophobic mood. Color palettes—grey, dull blue, and desaturated

tones—further evoke feelings of anxiety, monotony, and uncertainty. The use of non-diegetic music, with escalating tempo and dissonant melodies, mirrors the characters' rising panic and confusion, especially in sequences involving deception or confrontation.

Symbolically, the characters' physical environment also contributes to meaning-making. Sultan's humble boarding house contrasts sharply with Evan's modern home, which the siblings borrow to create a façade of prosperity. This dichotomy highlights the theme of symbolic consumption, where material appearances are leveraged to sustain social legitimacy (Goffman, 1959; Rahman, 2015). Moreover, the representation of everyday objects—such as Sultan's worn backpack or Bilqis' practical hairstyle—serves to communicate personal discipline, emotional labor, and the pragmatism of survival under pressure (Broch, 2023).

At the ideological level, *Gampang Cuan* offers a powerful critique of neoliberal individualism and the structural neglect of familial caregivers. The characters' descent into morally ambiguous behavior—considering insider trading, working as a rental girlfriend, or leveraging debt as capital—reflects the internalization of a neoliberal mindset that values outcome over process, and survival over ethics (Bauman, 2000; Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). The film does not romanticize these decisions; rather, it presents them as inevitable responses to an unforgiving economic system in which financial literacy, access to capital, and time for personal development are luxuries most working-class families cannot afford.

Furthermore, the film underscores the erosion of personal time among sandwich generation members. Sultan's inability to engage in meaningful financial education due to lack of time and energy exemplifies how structural pressure leads to short-term, high-risk decision-making. Similarly, Bilqis' eventual acceptance of a transactional relationship—despite moral discomfort—exposes how personal boundaries are compromised under economic strain. These narratives reflect real-world conditions where sandwich generation individuals are often forced into gig work, informal economies, or emotional labor, with little institutional support (Rachmawati & Puspita, 2020; Newman, 2006).

Debt plays a central narrative and symbolic role in the film. Sultan's obligation to repay IDR 300 million within a short timeframe becomes the primary driver of the plot, symbolizing the chronic indebtedness faced by many in Indonesia's urban lower-middle class. The normalization of debt—depicted in scenes of casual loan negotiations, pledging of personal belongings, and delayed repayments—highlights how survival often trumps stability. These financial dynamics reflect the broader structural failings of the post-pandemic economy, where informal borrowing, predatory lending, and financial desperation have become normalized coping mechanisms (Ramadhani & Syafitri, 2023). The cinematic representation of these realities—through dimly lit spaces, anxious facial expressions, and tight dialogue exchanges—underscores how economic vulnerability manifests as chronic emotional tension.

Crucially, *Gampang Cuan* does not portray its characters as irresponsible or immoral. Rather, it humanizes their struggle, illustrating how social expectations, familial duty, and

economic scarcity intersect to shape decisions that are often desperate but deeply empathetic. This perspective invites audiences to question the ideological framework that underpins such struggles. Why must personal sacrifice be normalized? Why are systemic safety nets absent for intergenerational caregivers? By situating these questions within the familiar and humorous language of popular cinema, the film becomes a vehicle for critical reflection on contemporary Indonesian society.

In summary, the findings suggest that *Gampang Cuan* provides a nuanced, layered depiction of the sandwich generation in urban Indonesia. Through the semiotic levels of reality, representation, and ideology, the film critiques neoliberal economic structures, exposes the emotional labor of familial caretaking, and portrays the complex moral calculus of survival in a time of economic uncertainty. These representations are not only relevant to the Indonesian context but resonate globally, reflecting the shared struggles of intergenerational caregivers in precarious economic environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the representation of the Sandwich Generation in the Indonesian film *Gampang Cuan* using John Fiske's tripartite model of semiotic analysis: the levels of reality, representation, and ideology. At the reality level, the film constructs authenticity through visual and behavioral codes—such as the physical appearance of characters, everyday clothing, and colloquial dialogue—that reflect the psychological and financial stress faced by individuals sandwiched between generational responsibilities. These elements serve as cultural markers, enabling viewers to recognize the lived experiences of middle-class Indonesians who are navigating increasing socio-economic pressures.

At the representation level, the film employs cinematic techniques such as low-key lighting, melancholic background scores, and close-up shots to emphasize emotional tension, social anxiety, and internal conflict. These stylistic choices underscore the affective burden borne by the characters, particularly Sultan and Bilqis, who symbolize different facets of the Sandwich Generation. Sultan is portrayed as the dutiful eldest son, embodying the pressure to appear successful in public while privately grappling with job insecurity and mounting debt. Meanwhile, Bilqis represents the silent enabler—offering support yet receiving little recognition—highlighting the gendered dynamics that often accompany caregiving roles. Through *mise-en-scène* and audiovisual storytelling, the film accentuates how personal distress is magnified by familial and cultural expectations.

On the ideological level, *Gampang Cuan* critiques the structural conditions that produce and perpetuate the burdens of the Sandwich Generation. The narrative foregrounds how neoliberal values—such as individual responsibility, financial independence, and meritocracy—are internalized by the characters, compelling them to adopt quick-fix economic strategies and sacrifice personal well-being in order to uphold familial duties. This ideology, while promoting hard work and resilience, simultaneously obscures systemic failures such as inadequate social safety nets, unequal wealth distribution, and the persistent

influence of patriarchal norms. For instance, the nonverbal expressions of anxiety—such as Sultan’s downward gaze, fragmented speech, and avoidance behaviors—serve as symbolic articulations of suppressed emotions and identity conflict. These cinematic gestures invite audiences to question the normalization of self-sacrifice and emotional labor, especially among those occupying culturally feminized caregiving roles.

By positioning the struggles of the Sandwich Generation within a broader socio-political framework, the film functions as both a reflection of societal reality and a critique of dominant ideologies. It challenges the glorification of suffering as virtue and underscores how cultural narratives often romanticize familial obligation while ignoring the structural injustices that necessitate it. In doing so, *Gampang Cuan* not only humanizes an overlooked demographic but also calls attention to the urgent need for social reform.

From an academic standpoint, this study opens avenues for future research. Audience reception studies could provide insight into how different demographic groups interpret and emotionally respond to such representations. Comparative analyses across national or cultural contexts could also reveal how the experience of being in the Sandwich Generation varies based on socio-political systems and cultural expectations. Additionally, incorporating alternative theoretical frameworks—such as social role theory, feminist media theory, or media effects models—could enrich the analysis by offering multidimensional perspectives on caregiving, identity, and media consumption.

On a practical level, the findings underscore the necessity for policy interventions that address the real-world needs of multigenerational caregivers. These may include financial subsidies, mental health services, flexible work policies, and community-based support networks. Media campaigns and public education efforts should also be mobilized to foster greater empathy and awareness of the emotional and economic costs borne by this group. By spotlighting the Sandwich Generation through both academic inquiry and creative media, society can begin to dismantle harmful myths around self-sacrifice and acknowledge the collective responsibility required to support those navigating intergenerational care.

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