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**An Audience Reception of the 'Ideal Standards' of Male Characteristics in the Romance Manhwa Daytime
Star Among Gen Z Readers in Indonesia**
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ABSTRACT

This study examines audience reception of the webtoon *Daytime Star* in relation to the rise of soft masculinity in contemporary romance media, drawing on Sonia Livingstone's audience reception theory, and Sun Jung's concept of soft masculinity. Using a qualitative thematic analysis, it explores how six Indonesian informants (three women, three men) interpret the male lead's soft masculine traits– emotional maturity, devotion and integrity, success and competency, and the *momjjang* body. Findings show informants defining masculinity broadly, as compassionate and interpersonal rather than dominant or provider-centric, and consistently viewing soft masculinity as an appealing ideal, though not uncritically: female informants tend to read the male lead as an aspirational "green flag" partner, while male informants treat him as a benchmark for self-reflection, with both groups weighing the fictional ideal against Indonesia's persistent hegemonic norms. The study contends that Daytime Star is perceived not merely as a romantic narrative, but as a cultural resource that prompts audiences to contemplate gender ideal standards and relational dynamics, rendering soft masculinity a debated yet more prominent ideal in Indonesian digital romance culture.

Keywords: *Audience Reception, Romance Manhwa, Soft Masculinity, Daytime Star, Gender Representation. Ideal Standards*