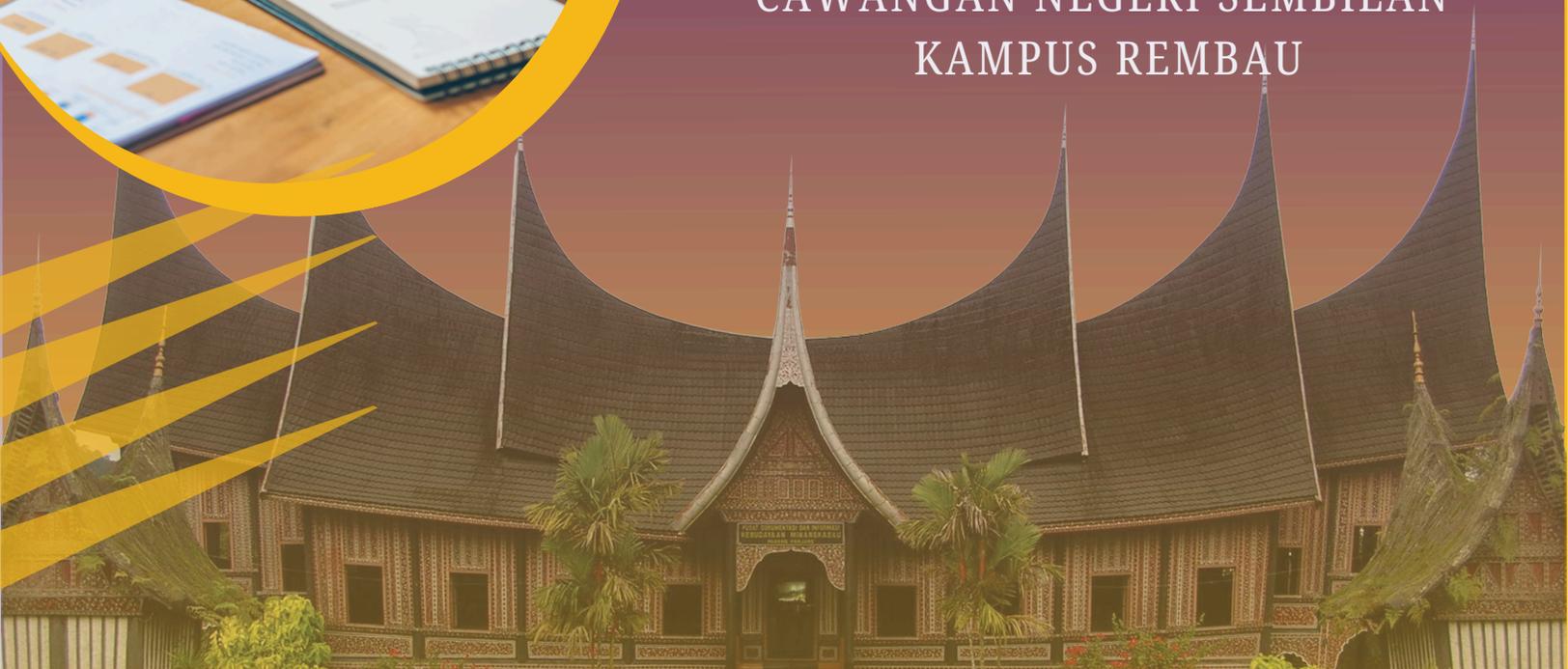


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THE “SOFT LIFE” PHENOMENON AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE: LIFESTYLE OR ESCAPE?

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If you scroll through TikTok or Instagram today, chances are you’ll come across countless videos of people enjoying what looks like an effortlessly perfect lifestyle such as slow mornings with lattes, spontaneous weekend getaways, skincare routines, and a general “no-stress” vibe. This is the so-called “soft life”, a lifestyle that focuses on ease, comfort, and the avoidance of unnecessary stress. For many young people, especially Gen Z and millennials, it represents a sharp contrast to the relentless hustle culture that has dominated for decades (Clark et al., 2014; Han, 2015).

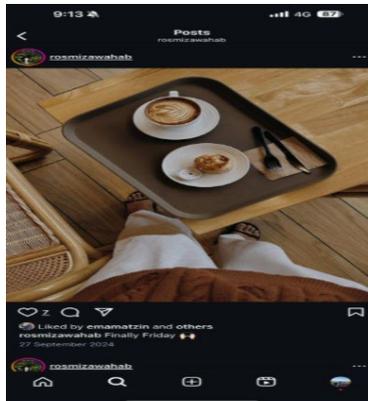


Figure 1. A soft life moment represented by a calm morning coffee and pastry.



Figure 2: Objects of leisure often associated with the soft life aesthetic

The appeal of this shift is clear. In a world where job markets are unstable and living costs continue to rise, traditional ideas about success such as studying hard, working harder, and eventually securing financial stability feel less convincing than they once did (Rochow, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic also played a role in shaping this outlook. With routines disrupted and health concerns at the forefront, many realized the importance of rest, balance, and mental well-being (Schønning et al., 2020). At the same time, social media has amplified the soft life, spreading curated portrayals of relaxation, luxury, and freedom while shaping new cultural standards for what it means to live well (Tirocchi, 2024).

Advocates of the soft life point to its many benefits. It encourages young people to push back against the unhealthy glorification of overwork, helping them set healthier boundaries between work and personal life (Han, 2015). It also emphasizes self-care, rest, and mindful digital habits such as “detoxing” from technology, practices that align with the growing movement toward digital well-being (Arenas-Escaso et al., 2024). At the same time, rejecting toxic workplace expectations reflects a broader generational demand for healthier values around labor and life (Khalaf et al., 2023). In this sense, the soft life is not just indulgence, it is an effort to reclaim autonomy over time, energy, and mental health.

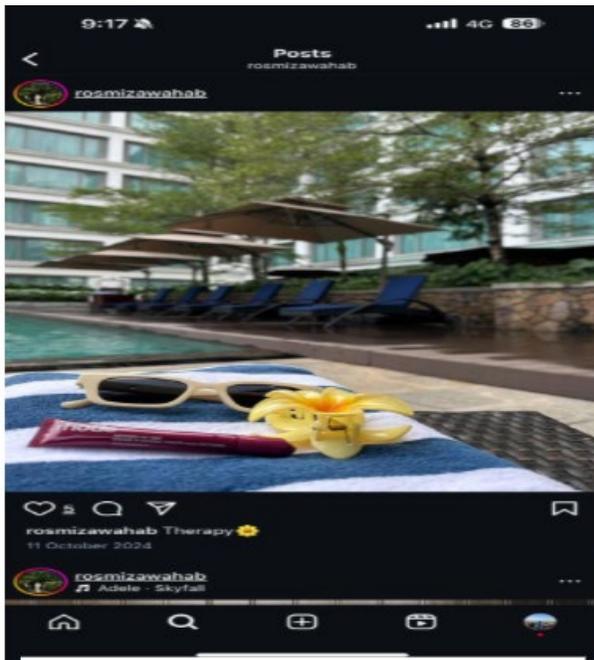


Figure 3: Poolside relaxation as a symbol of the soft life lifestyle.



Figure 4: Leisure and escape represented through beachside calm and sunset views.

Yet the soft life also invites criticism. For some, it risks becoming financially unsustainable, especially when tied to consumerist displays of luxury without careful planning (Rochow, 2024). Others see it as a form of escapism, where short-term

comfort is prioritized over long-term growth or responsibility (Khalaf et al., 2023). The digital world further complicates matters. Because much of the soft life is presented online through highly curated highlight reels, young people may struggle to separate image from reality. This often leads to anxiety, social comparison, and dissatisfaction (Schønning et al., 2020; Gudka et al., 2021). What begins as a lifestyle promoting peace can, ironically, create new pressures when filtered through social media.

Interestingly, the same platforms that glamorize the soft life can also help support healthier living. Research on digital well-being highlights practices such as mindful technology use, digital detoxing, and “positive computing,” all of which can reduce harmful behaviors like doom-scrolling and constant comparison (Büchi, 2021; Sharma et al., 2021). In this way, technology itself can either reinforce escapism or serve as a tool to promote genuine flourishing and long-term well-being (Calvo & Peters, 2014; Zhu et al., 2016).

The truth is that the soft life is neither entirely good nor entirely bad. It reflects a cultural shift in how younger generations are redefining success, no longer tied only to wealth or career status but increasingly connected to balance, autonomy, and mental health. At its best, the soft life is a conscious rejection of toxic overwork and a step toward sustainable well-being. At its worst, it risks becoming an excuse to avoid responsibility or a digitally fueled illusion of happiness.

Ultimately, the challenge for young people is not to choose between ambition and comfort but to blend them. The soft life, lived with awareness and responsibility, shows that it is possible to build stability while still carving out peace. Perhaps the lesson is simple: work hard enough to grow, and live softly enough to enjoy the journey.

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