



Marriage Anxiety Among Gen-Z Students: Examining Family Harassment Content Through the Lens of Islamic Family Law

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of the digital trend “Marriage Is Scary” on pre-marital anxiety among Generation Z students and explores their coping mechanisms from the perspective of Islamic Family Law. The study is motivated by the widespread circulation of algorithm-driven digital content portraying domestic violence, infidelity, and dysfunctional family relationships, which increasingly shape young adults’ perceptions of marriage. Despite growing scholarly attention to digital culture and family issues, limited research has examined how digitally induced anxiety interacts with Islamic Family Law in shaping attitudes toward marriage. This research employs an empirical legal method with a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with 16 senior students at UIN Malang. The findings reveal two levels of anxiety based on Stuart’s classification: mild anxiety, which encourages self-reflection and marriage preparation, and moderate anxiety, characterized by fear, legal skepticism, and concerns about family stability arising from financial uncertainty, personal experiences, and digital cognitive dissonance. Students respond through adaptive strategies, including digital content filtering and cognitive reframing. This study contributes to the development of Islamic Family Law by demonstrating how digital environments reshape contemporary legal culture and underscores the importance of cyber-based pre-marital education and digital literacy to strengthen Muslim family resilience.

Keywords: Gen-Z; Marriage Readiness; Digital Literacy; Islamic Family Law.

Introduction

Marriage in Islam is positioned as a sacred institution that encompasses spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. Its purpose is to build a family based on *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (love), *warahmah* (affection) as the foundation for social harmony. State regulations under Law Number 1 of 1974 and the Sakinah Family guidelines emphasize that marriage is a physical and spiritual bond that creates a happy, lasting family grounded in divine values (Agama, 1999). However, this ideal faces challenges in the digital age, when social media increasingly shapes young

people's understanding of relationships. Information about marriage is more readily absorbed through digital public opinion and visual narratives than through religious references and direct social experiences (Majid, 2023).

Generation Z, as the largest group of internet users in Indonesia, lives in a fast-paced flow of information curated by digital platform algorithms. APJII data (2024) shows that 31.4% of internet users are from Generation Z, with a strong preference for Instagram and TikTok ((APJII), 2024). In this context, there has been a rise in family harassment-themed content that sensationalizes domestic violence, infidelity, and marital conflicts, accompanied by digital campaigns such as "Marriage Is Scary," which positions marriage as a source of emotional stress (Ardiningrum & Fatgehipon, 2024). Such digital narratives shape young people's perceptions of the institution of marriage and contribute to the emergence of pre-marital anxiety in early adulthood.

National research shows a correlation between exposure to domestic violence content on social media and increased pre-marital anxiety, particularly among women and students (Clarisa, 2024). Social media contributes to the construction of social constructs regarding gender roles and family dynamics, even shifting perceptions of marriage from a sacred space to an image of potential psychological suffering (Hasanah, 2022). However, previous studies have focused more on psychological dimensions or gender issues without linking them to the framework of Islamic family law or the theological meaning of marriage as a form of worship. In addition, research that specifically uses the phenomenon of family harassment as a variable that causes anxiety among Muslim students is still very limited, thus opening up space for interdisciplinary research that combines the perspectives of Islamic law, psychology, and media studies.

Theoretical studies on marriage anxiety among Generation Z students resulting from exposure to content depicting domestic conflict, as well as its examination within the scope of Islamic Family Law, have been addressed by national academics through several partial research clusters. The primary focus in previous literature has largely examined the psychological dynamics of Gen-Z individuals experiencing pre-marital anxiety due to past trauma or social media consumption; however, most studies have neglected a legal-normative analysis of how Islamic law provides systemic safeguards against such phenomena (Nurhayati & Wahid, 2023). On the other hand, sociological research on Islamic family law tends to center on the normative and the resolution of disputes in religious courts, without specifically examining how the glorification of violent content and family harassment in digital spaces deconstructively influences young people's perception of the sacredness of the *miṣāqan*

galīzan (the sacred contract) (Sholihuddin, 2022). Furthermore, several scholarly articles that attempt to link the psychosocial impacts of social media to marriage readiness generally remain trapped in dry sociological generalizations and have not yet succeeded in integrating Islamic family law theories, such as the principle of *Sadd al-Ẓari'ah* (to curb destructive content or the strengthening of the *Khitbah* (engagement) institution as a preventive-educational tool) (Nasution K. , 2019). As a result, there is a clear research gap in the national academic literature, as the formulation of integrative solutions that address Gen Z's mental health, the impact of exposure to the digital media landscape, and the reconstructive provisions of Islamic Family Law has not yet been examined in a systematic, in-depth, and comprehensive manner (Huda, 2024). Building on an analysis of the limitations of prior literature, this study introduces an academic novelty by explicitly integrating a multidisciplinary approach that combines digital psychology, youth sociology, and Islamic family law.

The novelty of this paper lies in an epistemological reconstruction that positions Islamic Family Law not merely as dry, formalistic fiqh (jurisprudence) dogma, but as an adaptive ethical-methodological instrument for responding to the psychological anxiety of Gen-Z resulting from exposure to radical family-rassment content on social media (Islam, 2022). This study aims to uncover the root causes of resistance to marriage among university students and to formulate a conceptual framework for pre-marital mental and spiritual protection by optimizing universal Islamic Sharia values. By contextualizing progressive legal principles within contemporary society's digital behavior, this research offers a fresh theoretical contribution to the development of family law studies in Indonesia. Through this formulation, it is hoped that a new paradigm will emerge, restoring the institution of marriage to its sacred essence while providing concrete legal and psychological protections for the younger generation as they embark on domestic life in the modern era (Mustafa, 2023).

Research Method

This study employs an empirical, qualitative research design to gain a holistic, in-depth understanding of social realities in the field (Creswell, 2014). The empirical method was chosen because this study is grounded in objective facts and focuses on direct experiences, observations, and real-world interactions with subjects, rather than relying solely on abstract conceptual or theoretical constructs (Babbie, 2021). Through a qualitative approach grounded in post-positivist philosophy, the researcher serves as a key instrument to capture participants' subjective meanings, depth of thought, and emotional expression naturally, without intervening or making rigid statistical generalizations

(Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). In this context, a combination of empirical and qualitative methods is applied to fully describe how Generation Z students at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University (UIN) in Malang process, interpret, and experience pre-marital anxiety resulting from accumulated exposure to family harassment content on social media.

The data in this study were classified into two categories: primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through direct verbal interactions and authentic narratives from informants using a purposive sampling procedure (Judijanto & dkk, 2024). The number of informants was strictly set at 16 senior students (enrolled in semesters 7, 8, and 9) at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, with a sociologically proportional gender distribution: 4 males and 12 females. This composition argues that, psychologically, female students exhibit greater emotional sensitivity and vulnerability in responding to social pressures and domestic anxieties. In contrast, the inclusion of male students serves as a comparative instrument to ensure a balanced gender perspective. All informants fall within the early-adulthood age range characteristic of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) and are drawn from two distinct disciplinary fields—the natural sciences and the social sciences—to capture variations in reasoning across disciplines.

To strengthen internal validity, the selection of these 16 informants was based on their meeting five strict social media exposure indicators, including being active students at UIN Malang of all genders, falling within the Generation Z age range, being in their final semester of study, having a high intensity of social media use by actively accessing Instagram and TikTok every day, and consciously recognizing and having been exposed to visualizations of negative narrative trends surrounding marriage, such as the digital campaign “Marriage Is Scary,” content on domestic violence (DV), infidelity issues, or family dysfunction. Meanwhile, secondary data sources were collected through documentation methods, including screenshots of text units or comments on viral family-harassment content, as well as supporting literature, such as methodology books, national Islamic family law journals with DOIs, and relevant scientific articles, to strengthen the theoretical framework (Neuman, 2014).

Primary data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Berg, 2020). The interviews were conducted in a conducive research setting on the UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang campus, in person (offline), with online teleconferencing as an alternative in the event of situational constraints. Before the interviews began, the researcher formally implemented an informed consent procedure to ensure the confidentiality of the informants’ identities (anonymity), to explain the research objectives, and to obtain written consent from the

informants without coercion. The interview instrument was guided by a systematic yet flexible set of questions, designed to explore three main aspects: the informants' digital media consumption patterns, the psychological burden leading up to marriage, and their perceptions of the sacredness of the marriage contract in Islam. Each interview session lasted 15-25 minutes per informant to maintain focus, depth of information, and participants' psychological comfort.

Once all field data had been fully collected, the data management and analysis were carried out in five systematic stages using interactive qualitative analysis techniques. The first stage began with the editing process, in which the researcher reviewed the raw interview recordings to identify linguistic errors and then converted them into complete, coherent, and easily understandable written transcripts (Arifuddin & dkk, 2025). The second stage is classification (data display), which involves data reduction and grouping field findings into thematic clusters related to the impact of family harassment content on informants' anxiety levels, and then presenting the results in a descriptive matrix (Fadilla & Wulandari, 2023). The third stage involves data validation using the member checking method, in which the researcher revisits informants to verify that the narrative transcripts accurately reflect their original intentions and to ensure the data are valid and accurate before further analysis.

The fourth stage is in-depth analysis (coding and theme development) through an inductive coding process to identify specific themes related to the influence of social media cognitive psychology on the decline in readiness for marriage. These empirical findings are then integrated into a normative theoretical framework by contextualizing them within the principles of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law), *hifz al-nafs wa al-nasl* (the protection of life and lineage), and the prohibition of domestic violence to evaluate the alignment of contemporary students' perceptions with Sharia values (Majid, 2023). This methodological framework concludes with a fifth stage that draws substantive conclusions to address the research question concisely, succinctly, and clearly regarding the psychosocial impact of the digital landscape on the future of the Muslim family institution.

Result and Discussion

Gen-Z Students' Anxiety toward Family Harassment Content on Social Media

The exposure of content themed around family harassment on social media significantly affects the psychological condition and perceptions of Generation Z students at UIN Malang. Based on interviews with sixteen informants, daily usage varies from moderate (5-7 hours), where informants noted, "I check social media as soon as I wake up... I spend

about 5 hours or more on it every day" (IAM, 2025) (RWF, 2025), to high (7-9 hours) where they spend 7-8 hours just to "viewing someone's posts or life updates" (AF, 2025), and a very high category exceeding 10 hours daily, where informants admitted, "battery life can exceed 10 hours" (AAM, 2025). The high intensity on TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp means students are exposed to viral negative content, such as domestic violence, infidelity, divorce, and family conflicts, almost every day. Ultimately, these platforms serve not only as communication and entertainment but also as digital spaces where students form, shape, and interpret their views on social reality, including future marriage and family life.

Table 1. Gen-Z Social Media Usage Intensity Categories

Category	Duration	Intended Use
Moderate	5-7 hours/day	Communication, light entertainment, general information
High	7-9 hours/day	Entertainment, life updates, social trends
Very High	>10 hours/day	Organizational activities, digital publishing

Source: Results of personal interviews with the interviewees

Repeated exposure to content themed around domestic violence elicited various emotional and psychological reactions in students. Most informants described feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, and even anger, with some admitting that the content reveals a dark side of marriage that makes them feel "I just feel a little scared because marriage is supposed to be a happy occasion" (DS, 2025). These reactions show that students are not merely passive viewers, but active subjects who often worry about their own future, wondering "Will I be like this when I get married" (SKJ, 2025) or feeling anxious about the possibility of unexpected conflicts, stating "It makes me anxious and wonder what would happen if that happened to us in the future, once I'm married" (SSA, 2025). This continuous exposure also triggers anger and deep concern about why violence can occur in a marriage that was initially based on love (IAM, 2025). Consequently, female students tend to show stronger emotional responses than males, accompanied by empathy for the victims and deep concern about the possibility of experiencing something similar after marriage.

Field findings show that the level of anxiety experienced by Generation Z students can be categorized based on Gail W. Stuart's (2007) classification, which divides anxiety into four levels, namely mild anxiety, moderate anxiety, severe anxiety, and panic. In the context of this study, only two levels were found, namely mild anxiety and moderate anxiety.

Seven students, or about 43.7 percent, showed mild anxiety, while nine students, or 56.3 percent, experienced moderate anxiety. No symptoms of severe anxiety or panic were found among the informants. Students with mild anxiety tended to be able to manage their emotions adaptively. They were aware of the negative aspects of domestic violence content. Still, they tried to use their exposure to it as material for reflection and learning to strengthen their mental health and prepare themselves for future married life, as expressed by one informant, *"With content like that, I can just focus on the positive side... because it can be useful in the future"* (AAM, 2025). Students in this category demonstrated good reflective abilities and strong spiritual awareness in reevaluating the meaning of marriage as a sacred institution. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by excessive fear, they remained vigilant while maintaining an adaptive perspective, noting, *"Actually, I'm not overly worried, but we still have to be careful... For now, I'm focusing on my career first."* (NNR, 2025).

Meanwhile, students with moderate anxiety levels showed more intense and persistent emotional reactions. They described strong feelings of fear about the risks of marriage, such as domestic violence, infidelity, and divorce. For instance, informants explicitly shared how viewing these conflicts makes them feel heavily anxious and afraid of facing similar risks after marriage, stating *"It often makes me anxious. I'm afraid that after I get married, I'll face the same problem"* (SKJ, 2025) or feeling *"a fairly strong concern... fear of facing similar risks after marriage"* (DS, 2025). This condition is in line with Stuart's theory, which explains that individuals with moderate anxiety tend to experience narrowed perceptions and difficulty thinking rationally, thus preferring to avoid situations that are considered threatening. This is evident in the attitude of students who worry about future infidelity or domestic abuse, admitting *"That content makes me worried and afraid that something similar might happen in my own household someday"* (IAN, 2025), which ultimately pushes them to delay marriage to strengthen their mental, emotional, and financial readiness. They also become more selective in forming relationships and cautious in choosing a life partner, indicating that the anxiety they experience is not only emotional but also influences their behavior and thinking patterns towards the institution of marriage.

The anxiety that arises among Generation Z students does not stand alone but is shaped by a combination of interrelated factors (Ahmad, 2023; Amalia, 2023; Astaty, 2024). Based on field analysis, six main factors contribute to the emergence of anxiety due to exposure to family harassment content, namely financial, psychological, emotional, personal experience, socio-cultural, and digital environment factors (Azhari, 2025; Bai, 2025; Barkah, 2022; bondestam, 2020). Financial factors are the most dominant aspect. Most students associate readiness for

marriage with economic stability and the ability to provide for a family (Cantekin, 2024; Chandra, 2025; Curtis, 2019; Dafa; 2024). Economic uncertainty, high living costs, and concerns about not being able to fulfill financial responsibilities are the most frequently mentioned triggers of anxiety, leading some to view marriage as a secondary plan. This pattern is highlighted by an informant who noted, "During my internship, there were so many divorce cases every single day, and that made me even more afraid of getting married. marriage became a secondary concern" (IAN, 2025). This is consistent with Hurlock's (2018) opinion, which emphasizes that economic readiness is an important component of marriage readiness because it is directly related to a sense of security and social responsibility.

Psychological factors are related to cognitive maturity and stress management. Students feel they do not yet have sufficient mental capacity to handle the dynamics of family life (Daffa, 2024; Elkatmus, 2024; Hai, 2025; Hardy, 2025). Concerns about conflict and the inability to resolve differences of opinion often arise after they see depictions of domestic violence on social media, especially among female students who fear the unpredictable nature of their future partner's behavior, stating, "Because I'm a woman and I find it hard to imagine what my future husband will be like, I'm worried that something like that might happen to me" (AM, 2025). Emotional factors also play an important role, especially in an individual's ability to control their feelings (Harry, 2024; Hendarso, 2024; Hidayatunisa, 2021). Many students admit to worrying about losing control of their emotions or failing to understand their partner, as an informant admitted, "I still can't control that woman's feelings... I'll try again to figure her out" (ABH, 2025). Others worry about whether their partner can guarantee a violence-free future, questioning "Can the person I'm with right now guarantee they won't commit violence? ... I'm more worried about whether I'll be able to avoid becoming the perpetrator of that violence myself tomorrow." (SSA, 2025), indicating that anxiety stems from the fear of both becoming a victim and a perpetrator due to emotional immaturity (Hu, 2022; Ismail, 2025; Jailani, 2024; Kahsay, 2020; Lestari, 2024).

In addition, personal experiences also contribute to students' anxiety levels. Those who observe negative experiences or short-term relationship dynamics tend to be more easily influenced by digital content that depicts similar conflicts, raising critical questions about a partner's hidden traits, such as "We only get to know someone by their outward appearance... but once we're married, we finally get to see their true colors" (NTK, 2025). Socio-cultural factors also play a significant role (Liu, 2021; Mao, 2019; Martinez, 2023; Masril, 2025). In Indonesian society, there is still social pressure to marry at a certain age (Mustapha, 2024; Nabila,

2025; Nasohah, 2025; Nurafni, 2025; Paslan, 2024). Still, on the other hand, social media presents ideal standards that create a psychological dilemma, causing students to feel conflicted and “I’m confused about what kind of partner to look for... Should we stick to our own standards... or should we look for the kind of standards you see on TikTok so that cheating doesn't happen?” (FI, 2025). The last and most powerful factor is the digital environment itself. Social media openly displays household phenomena, often in sensationalized form (Preva, 2023; Putra, 2023; Sadeghian, 2025; Shehab, 2025). This negative representation causes cognitive dissonance, making students constantly anxious that the viral domestic problems of others will mirror their own future, repeatedly stating, “because I’m afraid that might happen to me in the future” (AF, 2025).

The results of the study show that Generation Z students' anxiety is multidimensional, namely a combination of emotional reactions, cognitive reflections, and social assessments (Srinivan, 2020; Tabkhi, 2025; Tirocchi, 2024). The higher the intensity of social media use and the more often they are exposed to negative content, the greater the likelihood of experiencing moderate anxiety (Tohan, 2025; Ulil, 2025; Umana, 2020). However, some students show adaptive abilities by turning anxiety into motivation to improve themselves and prepare for the future more thoroughly.

Analysis of Family Harassment Phenomena within the Framework of Islamic Family Law

The prevalence of family harassment content on social media contributes significantly to the emergence of negative perceptions among Generation Z students regarding the institution of marriage and family values from the perspective of Islamic Family Law (Alimudin, 2025; Annisa, 2021; Wilodati, 2025). In the contemporary era, social media is no longer just a space for entertainment or information exchange; it has become a complex arena for the formation of new social constructs about marriage, couple relationships, and family dynamics. In Islam, Marriage has a strong spiritual and theological foundation, as explicitly emphasized in the Qur'an (Alfina, 2025; Ardiningrum, 2024; Alulia, 2022). Ar-Rūm verse 21, which states that Allah created life partners to bring *sakīnah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (love), and *rahmah* (affection) (Kementerian Agama RI). This means that the vision of an ideal Islamic marriage is not only based on biological or socio-economic factors, but is also bound by a sacred, transcendental commitment, or *misqan galīzan* (sacred contract), as a form of worship. However, repetitive digital narratives that normalize emotional, verbal, and physical violence in the family obscure this theological foundation for students who do not yet have empirical experience in marriage.

An in-depth Islamic Family Law analysis of the field findings reveals that the digital normalization of household toxicity severely distorts the philosophical essence of *sakīnah*, *mawaddah*, *warahmah* (Carroll, 2009; Fadilah, 2023; Fatihah, 2026; Herawati, 2023). When Generation Z students are systematically bombarded with content depicting marital harassment, their cognitive schema shifts from viewing marriage as a sanctuary of *sakīnah* (emotional tranquility) to perceiving it as a source of psychological vulnerability (Herawati, 2026; Irvan, 2025; Krimono, 2025; Layyi, 2026). In Islamic jurisprudence, *mawaddah* (active, physical, and passionate love) and *rahmah* (spiritual, unconditional compassion) function as the psychological pillars that prevent domestic friction from escalating into abuse (Lestari, 2025; Mutiara, 2024; Najmudin, 2025; Nasri, 2025). However, viral social media narratives create a counter-discourse in which these concepts are viewed as utopian ideals impossible to achieve in modern relationships (Sulfinadia, 2025; Pratiwi, 2024; Widhyastuti, 2024). This gap between text and digital reality erodes students' confidence in the practical efficacy of Islamic family values, leading to widespread pre-marital skepticism. (Nasution K. , 2019)

Furthermore, the prevalence of family harassment directly violates the foundational Islamic principle of *mu'asyarah bi al-ma'ruf* (treating each other well), which legally and morally obligates spouses to interact with dignity, equity, and emotional gentleness (Aristoni & Abdullah, 2016). Normatively rooted in QS. An-Nisā' verse 19, this principle demands that husbands and wives navigate domestic conflicts through structural patience and *akhlāq al-karīmah* (noble character) (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). The primary field data indicate that the continuous display of verbal and physical aggression on screens causes students to perceive *mu'asyarah bi al-ma'ruf* as an outdated concept that is routinely abandoned in contemporary marriages (Zubaidah, 2025). By witnessing digital representations where toxic behavior is normalized, students experience a form of vicarious trauma that positions domestic conflict not as an anomaly, but as an intrinsic characteristic of marital life, thereby deconstructing the prophetic ideal that the best of believers are those who treat their wives with the greatest kindness.

From the statutory perspective, this digital phenomenon highlights a profound conflict between positive legal frameworks and the behavioral realities consumed online. In Indonesia, the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI), specifically Articles 77 through 84, legally codifies *mu'asyarah bi al-ma'ruf* by asserting that the relationship between husband and wife must be built on mutual love, respect, and the shared responsibility of maintaining the dignity of the household (Mahkamah Agung RI, 1991). This Sharia-derived framework is modernly reinforced by Law Number 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence (UU PKDRT), which

penalizes physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse within the domestic sphere (Republik Indonesia, 2004). Despite these rigid legal structures, the interview data reveal a severe sociological gap. While Generation Z students are fully aware that domestic violence is strictly prohibited by both KHI and UU PKDRT, the repetitive visualization of unpunished or sensationalized digital abuse makes legal protection seem ineffective. This legal skepticism compromises their perception of state and religious authority in safeguarding marital stability.

In the context of legal sociology, the deep-seated skepticism among Generation Z students reflects a critical weakening of the "budaya hukum" (legal culture) aspect within Lawrence Friedman's structural framework. Although the legal substance (KHI and UU PKDRT) and legal structures (Religious Courts and women-protection agencies) are robust, the collective psychological barrier constructed by social media algorithms prevents students from trusting these instruments. Viral content creates a digital hyper-reality where victims of family harassment are portrayed as trapped in endless legal bottlenecks or facing social stigmatization when seeking divorce. This systematic exposure indirectly breeds a fatalistic legal perception among young adults, leading them to believe that neither state legislation nor religious ethics can guarantee full safety once a marriage contract is signed. Consequently, the digital sphere effectively deconstructs the protective image of Indonesian Islamic family law, replacing it with an algorithmic anxiety that actively discourages marital commitments (Sholihuddin, 2022).

This subversion of legal trust is further exacerbated by the operational limitations of traditional pre-marital structures, such as the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) and the Advisory Body for Marriage Preservation and Settlement (BP4). While these institutions formally provide guidance, the aggressive, hyper-interactive nature of social media platforms structurally outpaces their conventional and reactive outreach strategies. Generation Z students do not seek counsel from state or religious bureaucracies when coping with pre-marital anxiety; instead, they turn to virtual peer-support networks that often lack solid theological and legal foundations. This institutional detachment underscores the urgent need for a digital transformation within Islamic family law enforcement. Without integrating critical digital literacy and online mental health advocacy into state-sponsored pre-marital counseling programs, the fear-driven interpretations of marriage propagated by digital algorithms will continue to overshadow the normative values of family stability championed by Islamic institutions (Faiz & Hasanah, 2023).

When evaluated through the architectural lens of Maqasid al-Syarī'ah (the objectives of Islamic law), this digital phenomenon directly threatens three primary objectives of Islamic law in the context of family

sustainability: if al-nafs (the protection of life and mental health), if al-'ir (the protection of honor), and if al-nasl (the protection of offspring) (Fuad, 2019). Based on the in-depth interviews, several informants showed clear symptoms of pre-marital anxiety and existential doubt toward the institution of the family after being repeatedly exposed to family harassment content. This condition directly undermines al-nafs because it severely jeopardizes the emotional well-being and psychological readiness of the younger generation. Furthermore, the hyper-reality of domestic violence in the digital public sphere damages the sanctity and honor of the family as a social institution (al-i'r) and disrupts the family's structural function as the primary sanctum for instilling moral values in the next generation (al-nasl). Thus, social media algorithms have the potential to shift the normative structure of Sharia law, turning marriage from a space of spiritual tranquility into an image of a risk-laden institution.

Sociologically, this study underscores a profound paradigm shift and an epistemological tension among Generation Z students. While Islamic tradition positions the family as a source of emotional and spiritual stability, negative exposure on social media has reconstructed a new collective mindset regarding the high risks of marriage in the digital era. Domestic violence is visually and narratively presented through viral videos of couples arguing, victim testimonials, and recordings of verbal conflicts on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram (Ramadhani, 2022). According to the emotional contagion model, repeated exposure to these narrative-based emotions shapes viewers' internal cognitive schemas. Algorithmic recommendations further reinforce confirmation bias by repeatedly exposing students to negative portrayals of marriage without balancing them with narratives of healthy, functioning family relationships (Rochman & Farida, 2022). Consequently, digital narratives act as toxic cognitive filters that amplify conflict and normalize violence as a common aspect of household life. This negative representation causes a severe cognitive dissonance, a direct conflict between the ideal expectation of marriage as a sacred, worship-oriented institution in Islamic family law and the terrifying digital reality presented on screen (Sari & Wahyudi, 2021).

This digital mediation has broader social and legal implications, triggering what psychology defines as an emotional preventive response. Students experience a gradual development of anxiety, which begins as a temporary emotional worry and escalates into behavioral changes, such as a reluctance to discuss marriage, adopting defensive attitudes toward potential partners, or deliberately postponing marriage as a self-protection strategy (Lestari, 2020). Increasingly, there is a rise of digital-based self-justification that frames the decision to delay marriage using popular ideological frameworks such as "healing," "choosing yourself," and

"avoiding toxicity" (Nugraha & Salim, 2023). While these narratives support modern mental health advocacy, their misinterpretation without adequate religious grounding produces a fear-based rationality. Students begin to doubt whether the Islamic promise of *sakīnah* (tranquility) can truly be achieved in modern times. This shift shows that, unlike previous generations who regarded marriage as a natural phase of life and a religious duty, Generation Z approaches marriage through a highly calculative risk assessment grounded in emotional and financial competence.

Furthermore, this change is closely intertwined with broader socio-economic dynamics. Labor market instability, rising living costs, and growing discourses on gender equality make Generation Z far more cautious. Field interviews show that students heavily view economic stability as a critical component of overall emotional readiness, as digital narratives frequently emphasize financial conflicts as the primary trigger for physical domestic abuse (Putri & Utama, 2023). This interaction between online representations and real-life worries demonstrates that digital culture has become the primary reference point for young adults, overshadowing traditional family advice or cultural expectations (Fadilah, 2023). To bridge this critical gap between the idealism of Sharia law and modern digital realities, Islamic Family Law must function not merely as a legal-formal framework governing marital rights and responsibilities, but actively operate as a proactive educational instrument.

Classical *fiqh* (jurisprudence) works, such as those by al-Ghazali and Ibn Qudamah, historically highlighted that emotional maturity, *akhlāq* (excellent character), and *ādāb al-ḥiwār* (communication ethics) are essential moral prerequisites for sustaining a harmonious marriage. Reconstructing the meaning of a healthy family in the digital age requires integrating these classical teachings with modern digital realities (Rais, 2021). Preventive legal and social strategies require urgent collaboration among religious institutions, universities, and legal organizations. This study strongly recommends a multilayered approach that combines critical digital literacy, Sharia-based pre-marital counseling, and the structural reinforcement of *mu'āsyaḥ bi al-ma'rūf* as an ethical basis (Aulia, 2022). By deploying interactive digital-based counseling and online pre-marital education, young Muslims can evaluate online content objectively—recognizing violent cases as structural legal anomalies requiring legal solutions under UU PKDRT and KHI, rather than accurate portrayals of marital life—thereby restoring the positive, sacred perception of Marriage among Generation Z (Rahmawati, 2021).

Gen-Z Adaptive Strategies in Managing Anxiety and Marriage Readiness

Although exposure to negative content on social media causes real anxiety, Generation Z students do not take a passive stance towards this phenomenon. They develop various strategies to manage anxiety and prepare for marriage, which can be analyzed using the Marriage Readiness Theory by Blood and Wolfe (1960) and Olson and DeFin (2003). This theory divides marriage readiness into four main dimensions: emotional readiness, social-communicative readiness, moral-spiritual readiness, and financial readiness (Puspitawati & Dariyo, 2020).

In terms of emotional readiness, students try to control their anxiety by reflecting on themselves and improving their emotional management skills. They emphasize that managing personal emotions and self-control are vital to avoid repeating the negative patterns seen online, stating, *“Try as much as possible to control yourself, especially your emotions and mental state, before getting married”* (IAM, 2025). This approach aligns with Gross's (2014) emotion regulation theory, which posits that adaptive emotion management can reduce the negative impact of exposure to disturbing stimuli (Tiffany, Clarisa, & dkk, 2024). Students also view anxiety not as something to be avoided, but as a psychological signal that indicates the need to prepare comprehensively, recognizing that entering marriage requires taking on real responsibilities and practical life skills, such as *“Being prepared to take control of yourself... managing your own finances, handling daily tasks like cooking... these things will become your own responsibility”* (SSA, 2025).

In the socio-communicative dimension, students emphasize the importance of communication skills and mutual agreement in romantic relationships. They understand that open and healthy communication is key to preventing conflict and strengthening emotional bonds. Many informants mentioned the need to maintain the privacy of relationships so that they are not easily influenced by public opinion on social media, resolving disputes internally *“in a civilized manner to prevent domestic violence or from venting on social media”* (MI, 2025). This awareness of privacy's importance indicates an increasing level of digital and relational literacy. To cultivate this, students deliberately enrich their knowledge regarding marital dynamics, aiming to *“gain more knowledge about household management, preparing mentally... achieved by studying household issues in class almost every day”* (IAN, 2025).

Moral and spiritual aspects are also important parts of the process of managing anxiety. Students interpret marriage as a form of worship and as a sunnah (path) of the Prophet Muhammad with a transcendental dimension. This understanding provides psychological peace because it places marriage not merely as a social contract, but as a form of devotion to God. The values of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* are seen as guidelines for building a harmonious household. This spiritual awareness

serves as a moral fortress that protects students from the negative influences of digital media and becomes a source of inner strength in managing anxiety.

In terms of finances, students showed a realistic awareness of the importance of economic independence before marriage. Many of them chose to plan diligently, allocating separate funds and setting clear goals, noting, "Preparing for that involves having funds, setting goals like when to get married, and figuring out what to do after getting married" (ABH, 2025). They see financial stability as a shield against potential household conflicts and seek to enter a marriage completely "free of debt. All that, and my family has to approve" (RWF, 2025). This view aligns with Carroll et al.'s (2009) theory of financial readiness, which posits that economic stability is a key factor influencing readiness for marriage and household welfare. Thus, financial readiness is understood not only as material availability but also as the ability to plan wisely for the future.

In addition to these four primary dimensions, students also develop critical strategies rooted in digital literacy, career management, and cognitive reframing. In the context of digital literacy, students deliberately limit their social media screen time and filter their feeds. Instead of viewing marriage with sheer terror, some choose to delay their marital plans to prioritize their personal development, observing that mental readiness actively; "Marriage has taken a back seat – people now prioritize education and career, balancing them with marriage" (NTK, 2025). Cognitive reframing is subsequently utilized to cognitively re-interpret negative digital narratives into valuable life lessons, allowing them to balance their youthful ambitions before settling down, as an informant added, "I got married at age 28 because I wanted to prepare myself, and also because I still wanted to pursue my career and enjoy my youth" (SKJ, 2025). Students process the domestic conflicts displayed online as profound cautionary tales, driving them to be highly cautious, selective, and wise in choosing a future life partner and establishing relationships. The structured synthesis of these adaptive strategies and their specific impacts on anxiety reduction are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Gen-Z's efforts to manage anxiety and prepare for marriage

Aspects of Marriage Readiness	Gen-Z Efforts	Impact on Anxiety
Emotional	Self-reflection, emotion management, counseling, and discussion	Reducing moderate anxiety to mild anxiety
Social-Communicative	Improve communication, make pre-marital agreements, and	Reduce conflict and fear towards your partner.

	maintain relationship privacy.	
Moral-Spiritual	Strengthening worship, understanding the meaning of Marriage in Islam, and deepening the values of <i>sakinah-mawaddah-warrahmah</i>	Providing peace and positive meaning to marriage
Financial	Postponing marriage, working part-time, saving money	Reducing anxiety related to economic uncertainty
Digital	Filtering negative content, social media literacy, and managing usage time	Reducing exposure to anxiety-inducing stimuli

Source: Results of personal interviews with the interviewees

Overall, the strategies developed by Gen Z students demonstrate adaptive abilities and a high level of awareness of digital social dynamics. They are not merely victims of media exposure; they can use it to learn and engage in self-introspection. Thus, the anxiety that arises serves not only as a negative emotional reaction but also as a psychological mechanism to prepare oneself better. This illustrates that Generation Z has a different pattern of readiness for marriage than previous generations. They view marriage not as a social obligation that must be fulfilled immediately, but as an emotional, spiritual, and financial commitment that requires thorough preparation.

This article shows that exposure to social media, especially content themed around family harassment, plays a dual role in shaping students' perceptions. On the one hand, such content can cause anxiety and fear of marriage; on the other hand, it also raises awareness of the importance of self-preparedness and emotional management skills before starting a family. Thus, this phenomenon not only reflects the psychological challenges faced by the younger generation but also shows the process of social adaptation in the digital age, where individuals learn to balance idealism, reality, and responsibility in understanding the true meaning of marriage.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the digital trend *Marriage Is Scary* significantly shapes pre-marital anxiety among Generation Z students by creating an epistemological tension between the normative ideals of Islamic Family Law and algorithm-driven representations of marriage on social media.

Rather than merely generating fear, repeated exposure to digital narratives of domestic violence, infidelity, and family conflict reconstructs students' legal consciousness and influences their understanding of *sakinah, mawaddah, wa rahmah*, and *mu'āsharah bi al-ma'rūf*. The principal contribution of this study lies in integrating the perspectives of digital social construction, algorithmic confirmation bias, and Islamic Family Law to explain how digital environments reshape contemporary legal culture and marriage readiness among Muslim youth. These findings extend existing scholarship by demonstrating that media-induced psychological perceptions significantly affect the practical effectiveness of legal and religious norms, including the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) and the Domestic Violence Law (UU PKDRT). Practically, the study recommends the development of cyber-based pre-marital education, digital literacy, and mental health-oriented counseling programs through collaboration among universities, BP4, religious institutions, and policymakers to strengthen family resilience in the digital era. Nevertheless, this study is limited to a qualitative investigation involving Generation Z students at a single Islamic university. Future research should undertake comparative studies across secular and religious higher education institutions, incorporate gender-based analyses of digital vicarious trauma, and employ quantitative approaches to examine the relationship between patterns of social media exposure and marriage readiness, thereby enriching the development of Islamic Family Law in responding to emerging digital challenges.

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