

Transformation of Digital Masculinity and Its Implications for Women's Rights in Divorce under Islamic Law

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Abstract: This study examines the evolving patterns of digital-era masculinity and their implications for marital dynamics and the protection of women's rights in divorce under Islamic law, using Indonesia as a case study. While scholarship on gender and digitalisation has grown, little attention has been paid to how online platforms, social media norms, and digital economic roles are reshaping masculine identities in Muslim-majority contexts, particularly within the framework of Islamic family law. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the research draws on in-depth interviews with divorced women, legal practitioners, and religious court judges, alongside discourse analysis of digital media content. The findings reveal that the rise of "digitally empowered masculinity" is redefining household authority, financial obligations, and emotional engagement, influencing both marital conflict patterns and divorce proceedings. In many cases, shifts in gender dynamics—driven by digital income streams and online social interactions—have simultaneously expanded and constrained women's ability to claim post-divorce rights, including *nafkah iddah* and *mut'ah*. These outcomes expose both legal and socio-cultural gaps in current Islamic family law practices, which often fail to keep pace with the realities of digitally mediated relationships. The study contributes theoretically by integrating gender studies, digitalisation scholarship, and Islamic legal discourse, and offers practical recommendations for religious courts, women's advocacy networks, and policymakers to strengthen gender justice in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Masculinity, Divorce, Islamic Law, Women's Rights

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought profound changes to various aspects of social life, including the dynamics of gender relations within households. One noticeable phenomenon is the transformation of masculinity in the digital realm, where traditional male roles and identities are increasingly reshaped through the influence of social media, online communication platforms, and virtual public spaces. This shift has altered how men perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others, often blending traditional patriarchal ideals with modern digital expressions of power, authority, and self-presentation.¹ In Indonesia, the country with the largest number of internet users in Southeast Asia, the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) reported in 2024 that internet penetration had reached 79.5% of the population. Among these users, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok dominate daily interactions, functioning not only as communication tools but also as spaces for self-branding and identity construction. For many men, these platforms serve as arenas to display financial capability, leadership qualities, and even emotional expressions, which may challenge or reinforce traditional notions of masculinity.² The portrayal of masculinity online can influence household decision-making patterns, interpersonal relationships, and even marital stability. In some cases, this digital performance of masculinity intersects with issues of gender inequality, particularly when online behaviors contribute to controlling or marginalizing women's voices in domestic and public spheres. Such

¹ Yuko Melanie Pfaff et al., "How Digital Transformation Impacts Organizational Culture – A Multi-Hierarchical Perspective on the Manufacturing Sector," *Computers & Industrial Engineering* 183 (September 2023): 109432, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cie.2023.109432>.

² Laura Cabezas Vega, Teresa María Ortega López, and Gregorio Santiago Díaz, "Colonists under Franco: Rural Masculinity during the Dictatorship ... and Beyond," *Journal of Rural Studies* 117 (July 2025): 103653, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2025.103653>.

dynamics have significant implications in the context of Islamic law, especially concerning women's rights in divorce, where notions of male authority and dominance can play a decisive role in legal outcomes.³

The digitisation of relationships has brought significant changes to the dynamics of marital life, directly influencing women's rights in divorce cases under Islamic law. In contemporary religious court practice, digital evidence such as screenshots of private conversations, social media interactions, email correspondence, and digital recordings has increasingly been presented to support legal arguments.⁴ Emerging social facts show that many divorce cases are now triggered by online activities, including digital infidelity, public humiliation through social media posts, verbal abuse in online communication, and public disclosure of financial neglect. This transformation in interpersonal relations is also reflected in official statistics. Data from the Directorate General of Religious Courts (Ditjen Badilag) of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia in 2023 recorded more than 516,000 divorce cases nationwide, with approximately 70% filed by women. This high percentage suggests that women are increasingly aware of their legal rights and more willing to take legal action when facing domestic conflicts, especially when armed with digital proof. Social media platforms, instant messaging applications, and video-sharing services have not only facilitated communication but also created new spaces for potential conflict, where disputes can escalate rapidly and leave permanent digital traces.⁵ These traces, once considered private, are now admissible as legal evidence in court, reshaping how marital disputes are argued and resolved. Such trends highlight the growing role of technology as both a cause of domestic breakdown and a tool for justice, raising critical questions about how Islamic legal frameworks adapt to the realities of the digital age.⁶

This social phenomenon has not been matched by in-depth academic studies that explore how the transformation in the construction of masculinity within the digital space influences divorce proceedings and judicial decisions under Islamic law. Although discussions on gender and technology have grown in recent years, they often remain general and fail to address the specific dynamics that occur in marital relationships when traditional concepts of masculinity encounter the openness and interactivity of the online world. Existing research has tended to focus on broader issues such as gender-based violence, online harassment, or the impact of social media on adolescent behaviour, without connecting these findings to the nuanced realities of marital disputes adjudicated in religious courts.⁷ Moreover, there is a scarcity of empirical analysis that links shifts in digital masculinity such as performative dominance, public validation-seeking, and online relational control with concrete legal outcomes in divorce cases. This absence of scholarly engagement leaves unanswered questions about whether digital masculinity reinforces patriarchal attitudes or opens pathways for greater gender equality within marriage. It also overlooks how digital behaviours are interpreted as evidence in court and how they shape the protection, or conversely the erosion, of women's rights in divorce settlements. Without targeted research, there is a risk that the legal system may rely on outdated gender frameworks that do not reflect the complex realities of digital-era relationships.⁸ Such a gap not only limits theoretical development in the field of Islamic family law but also constrains the formulation of more responsive legal policies. Addressing this

³ Linxiao Zhang, "Shaping Gender Disparity in Childcare between Dual-Earner Parents in Urban China: An Exploratory Study of Influencing Factors," *Women's Studies International Forum* 102 (January 2024): 102865, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2024.102865>.

⁴ Tabea Bork-Hüffer and Christina R. Ergler, "Children's and Young People's Digital Geographies: Space, Agency, and Crises in Diverse Societies," *Digital Geography and Society* 8 (June 2025): 100122, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diggeo.2025.100122>.

⁵ Rima Sermontyte-Baniule et al., "Role of Cultural Dimensions and Dynamic Capabilities in the Value-Based Performance of Digital Healthcare Services," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 176 (March 2022): 121490, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.121490>.

⁶ Kalwinder Kindy Sandhu and Hazel Barrett, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun! South Asian Women in the UK Diaspora: Gradations of Choice, Agency, Consent and Coercion," *Women's Studies International Forum* 102 (January 2024): 102859, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102859>.

⁷ Nicholas Norman Adams, "Men and the Mask: Dramaturgical Mask-Wearing, Masculinities and Oilmen's 'Stoical' Emotional Shielding Practices in Scotland's Offshore Oilfields," *Energy Research & Social Science* 122 (April 2025): 103983, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2025.103983>.

⁸ Kam Louie, "The Niangpao (Effeminate Men) Controversy in China: How to Be a Real Man in the Family, School and Society," *Women's Studies International Forum* 102 (January 2024): 102861, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102861>.

void is crucial for ensuring that women's rights are safeguarded in the face of evolving forms of masculinity shaped by the digital environment.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate how constructions of masculinity in digital spaces shape the dynamics of marital relationships and the enforcement of women's rights in divorce proceedings under Islamic law, using Indonesia as a representative case within the broader context of Muslim-majority societies. By focusing on divorce cases in Religious Courts where domestic disputes are triggered or amplified by social media interactions, instant messaging platforms, and other online engagements, the study seeks to identify the mechanisms through which "digitally empowered masculinity" redefines household authority, financial responsibilities, and emotional roles. The research further aims to examine the extent to which these shifts in gender relations enable or restrict women's capacity to claim post-divorce entitlements such as *nafkah iddah* and *mut'ah*, while also highlighting the legal and cultural gaps that emerge in adapting Islamic family law to the realities of the digital era. Beyond its local relevance, the study holds significant implications for the global discourse on gender justice, digital culture, and religious legal systems. In an increasingly interconnected world where digital platforms transcend national boundaries, the findings provide comparative insights for policymakers, legal scholars, and advocacy groups in other Muslim-majority and culturally diverse societies facing similar challenges. By integrating gender theory, digitalisation studies, and Islamic legal scholarship, the research offers a model for addressing the tensions between traditional legal frameworks and evolving digital realities, ultimately contributing to the advancement of equitable, culturally sensitive, and technologically responsive family law systems worldwide.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine how constructions of masculinity in digital spaces influence divorce processes and judicial decisions under Islamic law. The qualitative approach was selected for its ability to capture complex social dynamics and subjective meanings that are not measurable through quantitative techniques, particularly the ways masculinity is represented, contested, and normalised in online environments. The research focuses on divorce cases in Indonesia's Religious Courts where domestic disputes were initiated or intensified by digital interactions, including activities on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, as well as instant messaging applications like WhatsApp and Telegram. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with divorced spouses, Religious Court judges, mediators, lawyers, and women's rights advocates. These interviews explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of how digital interactions shaped marital relationships and disputes. Complementing the interviews, participatory observation was conducted during court hearings and mediation sessions to document communication strategies, negotiation patterns, and legal reasoning as they unfolded in real time, providing a nuanced understanding of how digital influences are translated into judicial contexts.

Secondary data comprised court rulings, procedural documents, and scholarly literature on masculinity, digital culture, divorce, and Islamic family law. In addition, a corpus of social media content was systematically gathered, including public posts, comment threads, and viral narratives relevant to divorce cases, to identify how digital masculinity discourses are constructed, circulated, and mobilised. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns, thematic clusters, and relationships between online constructions of masculinity and divorce outcomes, guided by gender theory and Islamic legal principles. This was complemented by discourse analysis to examine how digital narratives were invoked as evidence, justification, or moral framing in domestic disputes. Validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, comparing and cross-verifying interviews, observational notes, documentary evidence, and digital media analysis. This integrated methodological framework not only documents the phenomenon descriptively but also provides a critical lens for interrogating gendered power relations in the digital era and assessing their implications for the protection of women's rights under Islamic family law.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Manifestations of Digital Masculinity in the Age of Social Media

In today's era of social media dominance, self-branding has become one of the primary means by which men construct and assert their identities. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube now serve as digital stages where they can carefully curate their personal image, both visually and narratively. Many men choose to highlight elements of their lives that project success such as luxurious lifestyles, adventurous travels, intense workout sessions, mastery of particular skills, or significant professional milestones.⁹ These portrayals are often not accidental; they involve deliberate strategies once reserved for celebrities and entrepreneurs, including maintaining a consistent visual aesthetic, crafting personal storytelling arcs, and engaging in strategic collaborations with well-known brands or influencers. This process, while offering opportunities for self-expression and influence, is not without its drawbacks. The need to constantly maintain a polished image can create immense psychological pressure, leading some men to project identities that do not fully align with their real-life circumstances. Over time, this can blur the line between authenticity and performance, reducing personal identity to a marketable commodity. In turn, digital masculinity risks becoming a packaged product shaped by audience expectations rather than personal values, fueling a culture in which self-worth is measured by engagement metrics and visual appeal.¹⁰

Male influencers today hold a powerful position in shaping how society perceives gender roles and identities. With vast audiences on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, their voices often carry more influence than traditional media in defining what is considered "ideal" for men and women. Many young people turn to these influencers as models for lifestyle choices, fashion, career aspirations, and even moral values. The messages conveyed in their content whether deliberately crafted or subtly embedded carry strong gender narratives that can either uphold or disrupt long-standing stereotypes. For instance, some male influencers champion progressive ideas such as gender equality, shared responsibilities in parenting,¹¹ and the normalization of men expressing vulnerability and emotions.¹² This type of content challenges the rigid boundaries of masculinity that have historically discouraged emotional openness among men. On the other hand, there are influencers who consciously or unconsciously reinforce patriarchal norms, portraying men as natural leaders or decision-makers in family and social settings, while relegating women to supportive or secondary roles. Such portrayals not only limit women's agency but also pressure men into conforming to an outdated model of dominance. The reach of these influencers means their narratives shape how millions especially members of Gen Z and Gen Alpha construct their understanding of gender identity and relational dynamics. As these younger generations are still in the process of forming their worldview, the influence of digital masculinity can leave a lasting imprint, potentially guiding or misguiding societal expectations of men's and women's roles for years to come. In the context of divorce under Islamic law, these online portrayals of masculinity can directly affect how rights, responsibilities, and power dynamics are perceived and negotiated within marriage and its dissolution.¹³

The phenomenon of toxic masculinity in the digital space often manifests itself in the form of aggressive, demeaning, or misogynistic behaviour towards women. Social media provides an anonymous or semi-

⁹ Minakshi Keeni and Nina Takashino, "Between Tradition and Change: Impact of Displacement on Gender Norm Perceptions among Rohingya Refugees in Nepal," *Women's Studies International Forum* 103 (March 2024): 102869, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2024.102869>.

¹⁰ Hisam Ahyani, Haris Maiza Putra, and Aji Sofanudin, "Birrul Walidain in Political Preferences: Harmonizing Family Values and Employment Law in Indonesia," *El-Ussrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 7, no. 2 (December 31, 2024): 923, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ujhk.v7i2.22982>.

¹¹ Herlina Herlina et al., "Caring for Elderly Parents with Dementia in Indonesia: A Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah Approach," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (June 2024): 980, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i2.22734>.

¹² Zarul Arifin, "Performance Of Islamic Law In Indonesia In The Fields Of Civil, Private Law, Public Law And Ethics," *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pemikiran* 21, no. 1 (April 2021): 45, <https://doi.org/10.18592/sjhp.v1i1.4161>.

¹³ Adelyn Lim, "Asian Values in Confucian Masculinity: A Discourse Analysis of Parenting Advice to Fathers," *Women's Studies International Forum* 102 (January 2024): 102860, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102860>.

anonymous space that allows this behaviour to flourish without adequate control.¹⁴ It can take the form of sexist comments, verbal abuse, or the spread of negative stereotypes about women. Online toxic masculinity not only creates an unsafe digital environment for women but also reinforces patriarchal culture in real life. Moreover, social media algorithms that tend to highlight provocative content can expand the reach of such behaviour, making it increasingly normal in digital conversations. This poses a significant challenge to efforts to protect women's rights, including in the context of divorce under Islamic law, where biased public opinion can influence legal processes and perceptions of justice.¹⁵

Alpha male content creators are a digital phenomenon in which male creators promote the view that the ideal man is dominant, powerful, and in complete control of his relationships with women. Their content often focuses on dating strategies, tips for "conquering" women, and guides on how to become a man considered universally attractive. While some view this content as motivational or a form of self-development, others see it as reinforcing rigid gender stereotypes and perpetuating power imbalances between men and women.¹⁶ The problem arises when the narratives constructed contradict the principles of equality and respect for women's rights, both in daily life and in the legal sphere. In the context of divorce, alpha male ideology can shape how some men view their partners' rights, such as regarding maintenance obligations, child custody, and women's freedom after divorce. Furthermore, the influence of this ideology can create bias in legal decision-making and in societal attitudes, which ultimately has the potential to harm women structurally and emotionally. This phenomenon shows that the transformation of digital masculinity not only impacts discourse on social media but also the implementation of values of justice in Islamic family law.¹⁷

In the digital era, financial success is increasingly portrayed as the primary benchmark of masculinity, particularly through online platforms where appearances often overshadow substance. Many male content creators deliberately curate images of wealth sporting luxury cars, exotic vacations, branded suits, and expensive watches as a way to project dominance and social prestige. This visual narrative perpetuates the belief that a man's value lies predominantly in his capacity to accumulate and publicly display material assets. While economic achievement can indeed be a sign of dedication and skill, equating it solely with masculinity imposes rigid expectations and fosters competitive social pressure.¹⁸ Within the household, such a paradigm can subtly shape gender roles, where men are expected to be sole breadwinners while women's contributions are undervalued. When these standards are unmet whether due to unemployment, career changes, or economic downturns tensions may escalate, leading to emotional strain and marital instability. In some cases, financial status may even be weaponized in divorce proceedings, either as a bargaining chip or a means of asserting control over settlement negotiations. This linkage between wealth, gender identity, and power thus not only affects interpersonal dynamics but also reflects broader socio-cultural values shaped by digital media. Over time, it risks normalizing an unhealthy correlation between self-worth and net worth, overshadowing other dimensions of masculinity such as emotional intelligence, integrity, and mutual respect.¹⁹

Masculine memes and humour are a form of digital communication that subtly but effectively shapes public perceptions of gender. On social media, humour is often used to perpetuate stereotypes about men and women, for example through jokes that belittle women's roles or promote the image of men as the

¹⁴ Dewa Agung Gede Agung et al., "Local Wisdom as a Model of Interfaith Communication in Creating Religious Harmony in Indonesia," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 9 (2024): 100827, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.100827>.

¹⁵ Musleh Harry et al., "Examining the Provision of Legal and Religious Education to Islamic Families to Safeguard the Rights and Well-Being of Women and Children: A Case Study Conducted in Malang Regency, East Java," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 3 (August 24, 2024): 1526, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i3.19566>.

¹⁶ Iim Halimatusa'diyah and Windy Triana, "Sexism and Women's Access to Justice: Feminist Judging in Indonesian Islamic Judiciary," *Women's Studies International Forum* 103 (March 2024): 102883, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2024.102883>.

¹⁷ Asman Asman, "Parental Rights and Obligations to Children in the Era of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Islamic Family Law Perspective)," *SAMARAH: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 4, no. 1 (June 2020): 232, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v4i1.6899>.

¹⁸ Saba Hussain, "Feminist Counter-Authoritarian Political Agency: Muslim Girls Re-Generating Politics in India," *Women's Studies International Forum* 102 (January 2024): 102850, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102850>.

¹⁹ Dovrat Harel and Liat Ayalon, "A Bibliotherapeutic Discourse on Aging and Masculinity in Continuing Care Retirement Communities," *Journal of Aging Studies* 63 (December 2022): 101033, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2022.101033>.

'always right' party in relationships.²⁰ Because of their light-hearted and entertaining nature, memes like these are easily accepted and shared, thereby expanding their influence. While not all masculine humour is negative, much of it has the potential to normalise sexist behaviour and blur the line between jokes and harassment. Over time, this pattern can influence society's views on women's rights, even in divorce proceedings, where gender-biased humour can diminish women's experiences and struggles to achieve justice.

3.2. Impact of Digital Masculinity Transformation on Women's Rights in Divorce

The rapid development of social media has transformed it into a dynamic and influential arena for shaping public opinion, including in sensitive matters such as divorce. While these platforms enable greater access to information and dialogue, they have also become fertile ground for gender-biased narratives that disproportionately target women.²¹ In the post-divorce context, women are often subjected to stigmatizing portrayals that depict them as the primary cause of marital breakdown, accuse them of failing to fulfil domestic duties, or label them as incapable of preserving marital harmony.²² These negative narratives are amplified through posts, comment sections, and viral online discussions that reinforce stereotypical expectations of women's roles within marriage. The problem is compounded by social media algorithms that favour sensationalist and emotionally charged content, causing harmful gendered narratives to spread more rapidly than balanced or factual accounts. This algorithmic amplification creates digital echo chambers,²³ where prejudicial views are reinforced and legitimised through repetition. As these narratives gain traction, they can have a profound psychological impact, eroding women's self-esteem, confidence, and mental health. More concerning is the potential for such narratives to influence legal proceedings. Public opinion—shaped in large part by online discourse—can indirectly affect the perspectives of judges, mediators, and law enforcement officials. In custody disputes, property division, or post-divorce financial settlements, decision-makers may be unconsciously swayed by prevailing social sentiments rather than strictly adhering to legal principles.

The digital age has democratised the ability to produce and disseminate narratives, enabling individuals—regardless of professional background—to influence public perception. This environment has given rise to a phenomenon known as “digital framing,” in which certain parties, particularly men in divorce disputes, selectively present fragments of their personal stories to shape themselves as the victim or as the more rational and morally superior party. These curated narratives often portray women as emotional, materialistic, ungrateful, or otherwise morally deficient, thus undermining their credibility. A key feature of this strategy is the use of rhetoric that aligns with notions of “positive masculinity,” painting the male figure as magnanimous, composed, and principled.²⁴ Such portrayals are reinforced by digital engagement metrics—likes,²⁵ shares, and supportive comments—that create the illusion of broad consensus, thereby strengthening the perceived legitimacy of the male party's account. The persuasive power of these narratives is further magnified by social media algorithms that reward content generating high emotional responses. The legal consequences are significant: mediation and judicial processes, which are supposed to remain impartial, may be subtly influenced by these constructed narratives. Judges, mediators, and even lawyers can absorb public sentiments that, over time, become embedded in

²⁰ Gerry Mshana et al., “Masculinity, Power and Structural Constraints: Men's Conceptualization of Emotional Abuse in Mwanza, Tanzania,” *Social Science & Medicine* 292 (January 2022): 114606, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114606>.

²¹ Gowoon Jung, Yaquan Liang, and Hyunsook Lee, “‘I Feel Free and Comfortable’: The Escape the Corset Movement in South Korea and the Question of Women's Agency,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 107 (November 2024): 102973, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2024.102973>.

²² Luke A. Turnock, “Rural Gym Spaces and Masculine Physical Cultures in an ‘Age of Change’: Rurality, Masculinity, Inequalities and Harm in ‘the Gym,’” *Journal of Rural Studies* 86 (August 2021): 106–16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.05.013>.

²³ Soleh Hasan Wahid, “Exploring the Intersection of Islam and Digital Technology: A Bibliometric Analysis,” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 10 (2024): 101085, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101085>.

²⁴ Chris Borduas, Michael Kehler, and Gabriel Knott-Fayle, “School Spaces, School Places: Shifting Masculinities during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *International Journal of Educational Research* 120 (2023): 102211, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102211>.

²⁵ George Van Doorn, Robert Teese, and Peter Richard Gill, “Prospective Associations between Hegemonic Masculinity and Incident Depression/Depressive Symptoms: Results from a National Sample of Australian Emerging Adult Men,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 179 (September 2021): 110899, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110899>.

their subconscious decision-making frameworks. This shift redirects the focus of legal debate away from objective statutory obligations and Islamic legal principles toward subjective moral judgments.

On platforms ranging from YouTube to TikTok, household-themed content has proliferated, often embedding subtle yet influential narratives about masculinity in the post-divorce context.²⁶ A growing trend is the minimisation or outright denial of the legal obligation of ex-husbands to provide post-divorce financial support, such as iddah and mut'ah payments, which are explicitly recognised under both civil law and Islamic jurisprudence. Instead, popular content frequently promotes the view that women should be fully financially independent after divorce, framing dependence on an ex-husband as a weakness or an undue burden. While the notion of self-sufficiency can be empowering, its deployment as a moral imperative undermines recognition of women's lawful entitlements. Repeated exposure to such narratives reshapes societal attitudes, reframing legal obligations into optional acts of generosity. This redefinition carries concrete risks: women may enter divorce negotiations from a position of disadvantage, internalising the belief that asserting their rights will invite social condemnation. Some women may even forgo legal claims entirely, fearing reputational harm or online harassment.

One of the most concerning consequences of the transformation of digital masculinity is the increasing normalisation of polygamy and emotional abuse through online platforms. Influential male public figures and content creators often frame polygamy as a harmonious household solution, presenting selective and idealised portrayals while omitting discussion of its psychological and social repercussions, particularly for the first wife. This selective framing neglects the emotional burden, potential marital instability, and long-term relational strains that accompany polygamous arrangements. More insidious is the portrayal of emotional abuse—such as belittling, social isolation, or coercive control—wrapped in the language of motivation or couched within selective religious justifications. Such rhetoric reframes harmful behaviour as an act of love, leadership, or moral guidance, thereby obscuring its abusive nature. When repeatedly consumed, these narratives subtly reshape societal perceptions, making such conduct appear acceptable or even virtuous. This not only erodes public recognition of abuse but also blurs the boundary between authentic religious principles and patriarchal interpretations that undermine women's dignity. As these interpretations gain digital legitimacy,²⁷ advocacy for women's rights in online spaces becomes increasingly difficult, as counter-narratives are drowned out by popularised yet biased religious discourse.

Popular Islamic content on social media frequently prioritises narratives emphasising women's duties—such as obedience to husbands, domestic caretaking, and modest conduct—while paying considerably less attention to their legal and moral rights. This selective messaging fosters a societal knowledge gap in which women are well-versed in their expected roles but remain unaware of their entitlements as individuals, particularly in marital and post-divorce contexts. The omission of rights-based education not only perpetuates imbalanced power relations within households but also hinders women from effectively asserting claims in religious courts. Critical rights, including post-divorce maintenance (nafkah iddah and mut'ah), custody entitlements, and protection from domestic violence, are rarely integrated into mainstream digital da'wah. When these aspects are neglected, divorced women are more likely to experience compounded vulnerability—socially, by enduring stigma and diminished status; and legally, by lacking the confidence or knowledge to pursue claims through judicial channels. This educational gap benefits those who hold disproportionate authority in the household, enabling them to maintain control without challenge. Moreover, the failure to disseminate rights-based content undermines broader gender justice objectives in Islamic jurisprudence, which, when fully applied, includes robust protections for women.

Digital content promoting so-called “modern masculinity” frequently alters the balance of power within

²⁶ Rachel Grieve, Evita March, and George Van Doorn, “Masculinity Might Be More Toxic than We Think: The Influence of Gender Roles on Trait Emotional Manipulation,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 138 (February 2019): 157–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.09.042>.

²⁷ Casey R. Lynch, “Unruly Digital Subjects: Social Entanglements, Identity, and the Politics of Technological Expertise,” *Digital Geography and Society* 1 (2020): 100001, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diggeo.2020.100001>.

households, but not always toward equality. While presented as progressive,²⁸ many of these narratives subtly reinforce male dominance under the pretext of protection, leadership, or moral guidance. In reality, such portrayals often legitimise asymmetrical authority structures, positioning men as primary decision-makers while diminishing women's agency. In the context of divorce, these power imbalances shape both the perceived and actual distribution of post-divorce rights and responsibilities. Women are frequently regarded as less capable of making significant decisions—such as those involving children's education, the allocation of family resources, or the management of shared property—regardless of their legal entitlement to participate. Over time, this narrative reconfiguration seeps into legal reasoning, influencing how judges, mediators, and policymakers interpret family law provisions. Digital spaces, therefore, do more than reflect existing gender norms; they actively construct new ones that may subtly erode the principles of justice embedded in both statutory and Islamic family law. Left unchallenged, these evolving norms can become entrenched in public consciousness, ultimately shaping institutional practices and perpetuating systemic gender inequality. This underscores the urgent need for critical engagement with digital content production, regulatory oversight, and the incorporation of gender-equitable perspectives in online religious discourse to prevent the codification of digitally amplified patriarchal norms.

3.3. Islamic Law-Based Protection of Women's Rights in a Masculine Digital Cultural Landscape

Gender-based digital literacy needs to go beyond basic technical skills (sending messages, uploading content) to become critical education that teaches how to recognize framing, bias, deepfakes, and opinion manipulation techniques that are often directed at women. In practice, it is evident that many women particularly those in the middle-aged and older age groups and in remote areas remain vulnerable to demeaning narratives due to a lack of understanding of how algorithms spread sensational content; as a result, their reputation and legal access are easily eroded. An effective literacy program combines short modules (videos & infographics), face-to-face workshops at the community level, and hotline/WhatsApp services for content verification and assistance. To measure success, use measurable indicators: increased verification skills, number of false reports successfully verified, and decrease in KBGO cases that result in public stigma. Practical recommendations: relevant ministries/agencies, NGOs, and religious education institutions should collaborate to develop a gender digital literacy curriculum, train local facilitators, and integrate these modules into services at health centers, community health posts, and religious study groups.²⁹

Social media has the power of rapid reach this is a great opportunity to convey information about women's rights in a concise, contextual, and credible manner based on Sharia law. Successful field practices that combine moderate religious figures, family law advocates, and victims willing to share their experiences produce content that is not only informative but also persuasive: for example, 60–90 second videos about iddah maintenance rights, divorce filing procedures, or child custody rights. Effective formats include short series, interactive FAQs, and live Q&A webinars with religious court judges/fiqh experts so audiences can obtain practical legal clarification. To reach non-urban women, also distribute materials through community WhatsApp groups and local radio outreach. Recommendation: create a guide using simple language, include practical steps (what documents are needed, where to file a complaint), and integrate links to pro bono services and legal assistance hotlines.³⁰

Anti-misogyny campaigns must be sustainable and strategic: not just viral hashtags, but a series of activities aimed at changing norms. In practice, effective campaigns combine: first, victim stories that are moderated to protect their identity; second, legal education on the consequences of KBGO; third, the involvement of men as allies; and fourth, cooperation with platforms for rapid take-down mechanisms.

²⁸ Leshata Winter Mokhwelepa and Gsakani Olivia Sumbane, "Men's Mental Health Matters: The Impact of Traditional Masculinity Norms on Men's Willingness to Seek Mental Health Support; a Systematic Review of Literature," *American Journal of Men's Health* 19, no. 3 (May 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1177/15579883251321670>.

²⁹ Jiani Jiang, Bruce A. Huhmann, and Michael R. Hyman, "Emerging Masculinities in Chinese Luxury Social Media Marketing," *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics* 32, no. 3 (November 2019): 721–45, <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-07-2018-0256>.

³⁰ Christian Festing and Heike Proff, "Assessing the Impact of National Culture on Digital Maturity," *Digital Business* 5, no. 2 (December 2025): 100121, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.digbus.2025.100121>.

Results-oriented campaign models use KPIs such as increased reporting of KBGO cases to authorities, platform moderation response times, and changes in audience attitudes (measured by surveys). Real challenges include cultural resistance, backlash (doxing) against campaign organizers, and the limitations of automated moderation systems that are not yet gender-sensitive. Practical solutions: prepare digital security protocols for activists, legal advocacy networks for protection, and policy lobbying to encourage platforms to add gender-based harassment reporting categories.³¹

This cross-actor collaboration is crucial because each brings different legitimacy: clerics provide a religious foundation, activists provide a human rights and legal perspective, and influencers spread the message widely. In practice, public dialogue programs involving progressive religious scholars and activists, guided by local influencers, have proven more effective in changing opinions than academic materials alone. However, this collaboration requires joint conceptual work: developing materials based on authentic religious texts, presented in accessible language, and supplemented with practical legal safeguards. For sustainability, establish a “pro-equality da'wah” network that provides toolkits (videos, short lectures, Q&A scripts) and training modules for influencers to understand relevant fiqh principles. Recommendations: facilitate regular meetings, provide small honoraria for contributing religious scholars, and monitor content to ensure messages are not misinterpreted.³²

Islamic content that is women-friendly must restore the balance between obligations and rights, emphasizing the principles of justice (al-adl) and benefit (maslahah). In practice, the most resonant content is that which combines textual sources with real-life case studies (anonymized) and practical step-by-step explanations e.g., how to claim maintenance during the iddah period in religious courts, or the procedures for custody claims.³³ Religious educational institutions, LPTQ, and religious organizations can produce short series in local languages that prioritize the transmission of family fiqh legal knowledge from a women's rights perspective. To ensure quality, involve fiqh academics and legal practitioners who publish simple reference standards. Implementation recommendations: incubate content through small grant programs for local content creators, review content by an expert panel, and expand distribution through community radio and religious groups.³⁴

Law enforcement against GBV requires adaptation of judicial procedures and institutional capacity building. Field evidence shows two main obstacles: low reporting rates due to stigma and a lack of capacity among officials to process digital evidence. Practical solutions include: establishing integrated GBV response units within the police/prosecutor's office equipped with SOPs for handling electronic evidence; training for investigators and judges on digital forensics and gender issues; and providing free legal assistance to victims.³⁵ Regulatory updates are also needed e.g., simplifying online reporting mechanisms, clearer regulations on digital evidence at the religious court level, and protecting victims' identities during legal proceedings. Additionally, international cooperation with global platforms is important to expedite data access by law enforcement (with privacy protection procedures). Indicators of effectiveness include: an increase in the number of KBGO cases processed, average response time, and the rate of victim recovery (rehabilitation).³⁶

³¹ Hui Li and Chenjin Chu, “Digital Anthropomorphism of Accommodation: The Influence of Contextual and Content-Based Femininity Imagery of Hotels on Tourist Satisfaction,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 114 (September 2025): 103996, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2025.103996>.

³² Joshua Palkki, “Misogyny and Masculinities: American Boys and Singing in an Age of Gender-Expansiveness,” *International Journal of Educational Research* 123 (2024): 102273, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102273>.

³³ Aurangzeab Butt et al., “Strategic Design of Culture for Digital Transformation,” *Long Range Planning* 57, no. 2 (April 2024): 102415, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2024.102415>.

³⁴ Deevia Bhana and Emmanuel Mayeza, “We Don't Play with Gays, They're Not Real Boys ... They Can't Fight: Hegemonic Masculinity and (Homophobic) Violence in the Primary Years of Schooling,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 51 (November 2016): 36–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.08.002>.

³⁵ María M. Feliciano-Cestero et al., “Is Digital Transformation Threatened? A Systematic Literature Review of the Factors Influencing Firms' Digital Transformation and Internationalization,” *Journal of Business Research* 157 (March 2023): 113546, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113546>.

³⁶ Diego Rodrigues Cavalcanti, Tiago Oliveira, and Fernando de Oliveira Santini, “Drivers of Digital Transformation Adoption: A Weight and Meta-Analysis,” *Heliyon* 8, no. 2 (February 2022): e08911, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e08911>.

4. Conclusion

This study revealed that strategies to safeguard and empower women's rights amid the rising phenomenon of digital masculinity require a multi-layered and comprehensive approach. These include strengthening gender-based digital literacy that not only provides women with the technical skills to navigate online platforms but also enhances their ability to critically assess, challenge, and respond to misogynistic narratives. It involves utilizing social media as a strategic medium for public education on Islamic law, particularly concerning gender justice within marriage, divorce, and family responsibilities, thereby transforming these platforms from potential sites of harm into arenas of empowerment. Anti-misogyny campaigns, both grassroots and institutional, are essential in dismantling normalized online behaviors that perpetuate gender inequality. Collaboration between religious scholars, feminist activists, and positive influencers is key to bridging theological authority with grassroots mobilization and digital culture, ensuring that gender discourse resonates across multiple societal layers. The creation of women-friendly Islamic content, grounded in both authentic jurisprudential interpretations and contemporary social realities, fosters inclusive online spaces that uphold dignity and equality. Equally crucial is the strengthening of legal protection against online gender-based violence through legislative reforms, responsive law enforcement, and accessible reporting mechanisms. These findings address the core research question on how to prevent and counteract the adverse impacts of digital masculinity on women's rights, particularly in marital and divorce contexts where online narratives often exacerbate patriarchal dominance.

The main contribution of this research lies in the formulation of an integrated strategic model that combines digital literacy, Islamic legal education, and targeted online advocacy to protect women's rights in the digital sphere. This model not only serves as a theoretical framework but also offers concrete policy recommendations that can be readily adopted by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and digital communities to establish safe, inclusive, and empowering virtual environments for women. The integration of these three elements—knowledge acquisition, normative legal reinforcement, and proactive advocacy—ensures that interventions are holistic, addressing both the structural and cultural dimensions of online gender inequality. However, certain limitations are acknowledged. The study is primarily qualitative and focuses on the manifestation of digital masculinity within social media environments, without conducting quantitative measurements of its impact on broader societal behaviors. For future research, a multi-country comparative approach is recommended to explore how different legal systems, cultural norms, and technological infrastructures influence the protection of women's rights in the digital era. Integrating quantitative methodologies could help measure the effectiveness of gender-based digital literacy initiatives and identify key predictors of positive behavioral change. By addressing these gaps, subsequent studies could advance both scholarly understanding and practical policy development, ensuring that women's rights are not only protected in principle but actively realized in the evolving digital landscape.

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Author Contribution Statement

Bahari Ali Albara contributed as the main writer, leading the research concept, analyzing data for the article writing. Muhammad Bakhrul Ilmi contributed by collecting data and participating in the literature review.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. No publicly archived datasets were used or generated during the current research.

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Both authors state that there are no interests related to royalties or other interests. Thus, this research is guaranteed to be valid and neutral from various external influences.

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