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Negotiating Islamic Marriage Values in the Digital Age: An Analysis of Generation Z Muslims through the Lens of Maqashid al-Usrah

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Abstract

Digital platforms have increasingly reshaped the ethical and relational landscape of Muslim youth, raising concerns about how online environments influence their understanding of Islamic values, particularly in relation to marriage. In response to this issue, the present study investigates how Muslim Generation Z interprets and negotiates Islamic marital ideals within the digital sphere, focusing on TikTok as a contested arena for ethical and religious discourse. Guided by Jamaluddin Athiyah's framework of maqāsid al-usrah, the research explores how Muslim Generation Z constructs and represents marriage values—including affection and mercy, financial maintenance, protection from harm, and justice within the household—and how algorithmic mediation influences these interpretations. Employing a qualitative design that combines netnography, discourse analysis, and in-depth interviews with 15 informants, this study integrates digital observations and documentary evidence. The findings reveal that TikTok serves both as a platform for ethical affirmation and as a site of normative distortion: while affection and mercy are expressed through acts of care, financial anxieties and distorted portrayals of patience risk normalising injustice. The novelty of this study lies in the application of maqāṣid al-usrah to digital ethnography, offering new insights into the intersection of Islamic ethics and algorithmic culture. Scientifically, it contributes to the field of Islamic family law studies by demonstrating the adaptability of maqāsid-based frameworks to digital contexts. The study recommends promoting digital literacy rooted in Islamic ethics to strengthen family resilience and safeguard moral integrity in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Religiosity; Islamic Family Law; Generation Z; Maqaṣhid al-Usrah; Tik Tok.

Abstrak

Platform digital semakin membentuk ulang lanskap etika dan relasi di kalangan generasi muda Muslim, sehingga menimbulkan kekhawatiran mengenai bagaimana lingkungan daring memengaruhi pemahaman mereka terhadap nilai-nilai Islam, khususnya yang berkaitan dengan pernikahan. Menanggapi persoalan tersebut, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana Generasi Z Muslim menafsirkan dan menegosiasikan nilai ideal pernikahan Islam dalam ruang digital, dengan menempatkan TikTok sebagai arena yang diperebutkan dalam wacana etika dan keagamaan. Berlandaskan kerangka maqāsid al-usrah dari Jamaluddin Athiyah, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana Generasi Z Muslim membangun dan merepresentasikan nilai-nilai pernikahan-meliputi kasih sayang dan rahmah, pemenuhan nafkah, perlindungan dari bahaya, serta keadilan dalam rumah tangga-serta bagaimana mediasi algoritmik memengaruhi penafsirannya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang menggabungkan netnografi, analisis wacana, dan wawancara mendalam terhadap 15 informan, penelitian ini memadukan observasi digital dan bukti dokumenter. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa TikTok berfungsi sekaligus sebagai ruang afirmasi etika dan distorsi normatif: kasih sayang dan rahmah ditampilkan melalui tindakan kepedulian, sementara kecemasan ekonomi dan representasi sabar yang keliru berpotensi menormalkan ketidakadilan. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada penerapan maqāṣid al-usrah dalam etnografi digital, memberikan pemahaman baru tentang interseksi antara etika Islam dan budaya algoritmik. Secara ilmiah, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada studi hukum keluarga Islam dengan menunjukkan adaptabilitas kerangka maqāṣid terhadap konteks digital serta merekomendasikan literasi digital berbasis etika Islam untuk memperkuat ketahanan keluarga dan integritas moral di era digital.

Kata Kunci: Generasi Z Muslim; hukum keluarga Islam; maqāṣid al-usrah; religiusitas digital; TikTok.



Introduction

of identity, intimacy, and family life. TikTok, in particular, has emerged as a central site for Muslim Gen Z users, simultaneously offering a space for empowerment and exposing them to vulnerabilities. Research indicates that TikTok functions as a "third space" where Muslim female content creators challenge mainstream stereotypes, producing diverse narratives that include beauty, lifestyle, religious education, and social justice. The hijab, for instance, is reinterpreted as both a political and fashion symbol in these spaces.¹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok's interactive features enabled Islamic education for Generation Z, with role-play and text-overlay techniques fostering engagement.² Muslim creators also blend religious and secular discourses to appeal to mixed audiences, expanding notions of identity beyond traditional boundaries.³ However, scholars warn that TikTok's algorithmic structures may strongly influence users' values and self-perceptions through curated content flows.⁴

Parallel research underscores the role of social media in shaping family and community resilience. Online platforms are increasingly linked to perceptions of social capital and collective resilience.⁵ During the COVID-19 crisis, digital bonding capital emerged as a primary resource for sustaining communities.⁶ Family support, in particular, proves more influential than peer support in adolescent social media use, shaping resilience and experiences of loneliness.⁷ Programs leveraging platforms such as Facebook have further demonstrated how digital interventions can reduce stress and enhance family connectedness, albeit with limited long-term effects.⁸ These insights affirm that social media platforms function not only as channels for entertainment but also as infrastructures of resilience.

The intersection of digital technologies and intimate relationships has also attracted scholarly attention. Marston⁹ shows how platforms like Instagram and YouTube circulate "fantasies of the good life" that idealize heteronormative futures while simultaneously

¹ Fatima El Sayed and Nader Hotait, "Exploring the Role of TikTok for Intersectionality Marginalized Groups: The Case of Muslim Female Content Creators in Germany," *Frontiers in Political Science* 6 (November 2024): 1496833, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1496833.

² Angelica Maylani Putri and Anita Puji Astutik, "Tiktok as a Generation-Z Islamic Religious Learning Media During the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 18, no. 2 (2021): 273–94, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2021.182-04.

³ Nader Hotait and Fatima El Sayed, "Beyond the Hijab: Performing Religious Identity on TikTok," *Social Compass* 72, no. 2 (2025): 204–20, https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686251340897.

⁴ Claudiu Gabriel Ionescu and Monica Licu, "Are TikTok Algorithms Influencing Users' Self-Perceived Identities and Personal Values? A Mini Review," *Social Sciences* 12, no. 8 (2023): 465, https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12080465.

⁵ Lola Xie et al., "Building Community Resilience on Social Media to Help Recover from the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Computers in Human Behavior* 134 (September 2022): 107294, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107294.

⁶ Xiaochen Angela Zhang and Yoon Hi Sung, "Communities Going Virtual: Examining the Roles of Online and Offline Social Capital in Pandemic Perceived Community Resilience-Building," *Mass Communication and Society* 26, no. 4 (2023): 539–65, https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2021.1974046.

⁷ Shuting Lin et al., "Family Matters More Than Friends on Problematic Social Media Use Among Adolescents: Mediating Roles of Resilience and Loneliness," *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* 22, no. 5 (2024): 2907–25, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-023-01026-w.

⁸ Kristine Marceau et al., "Emerging Ideas. Families Together: Supporting Family Resilience during the COVID -19 Pandemic," Family Relations 72, no. 3 (2023): 665–79, https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12781.

⁹ Kate Marston, "Relationshipgoals: Fantasies of the Good Life in Young People's Digitally-Networked Peer Cultures," *Journal of Youth Studies* 27, no. 2 (2024): 303–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2124106.

revealing the precarity of marriage ideals. This complexity is reflected in Schüssler et al.'s ¹⁰ framing of platforms as contested relational structures where mutuality, autonomy, and domination coexist in tension. Erstad et al. ¹¹ describe this as "platformised relationality," where intimacy and care are intensified but accompanied by power struggles. Conversely, Witney et al. ¹² highlight the constructive potentials of digital tools, showing how relationship apps can foster meaningful relational maintenance through routinized prompts. These findings suggest that digital environments can both destabilize and strengthen marital bonds.

Islamic scholarship provides a normative lens for evaluating these developments. Scholars have increasingly turned to *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* to address contemporary family challenges. Mohadi¹³ demonstrates how *maqāṣid* frameworks have historically structured Muslim family life for stability and social order. Alias et al. ¹⁴ argue that *maqāṣid* enable flexible yet holistic rulings, while Güney¹⁵ cautions against the risks of subjective interpretation, advocating for collective standards to safeguard integrity. Together, this literature reveals the potential of *maqāṣid* frameworks to guide responses to new family-related challenges.

Nonetheless, significant gaps remain in digital ethics, marriage, and Islamic family law. Studies reveal emerging issues such as online marriages, virtual dowries, cyber-divorce, and metaverse weddings, all of which strain traditional legal frameworks. ¹⁶ Online gender-based violence also highlights inadequacies in existing protections, where Islamic principles provide moral guidance but national regulations remain insufficient. ¹⁷ Broader tensions exist between human rights discourses and public perceptions, with some communities rejecting family protection laws as foreign to Islamic culture. ¹⁸ These gaps highlight the urgent need for comprehensive frameworks that integrate Islamic jurisprudence with digital realities. Existing

¹⁰ Elke Schüßler et al., "Between Mutuality, Autonomy and Domination: Rethinking Digital Platforms as Contested Relational Structures," *Socio-Economic Review* 19, no. 4 (2021): 1217–43, https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwab038.

¹¹ Ola Erstad et al., "How Digital Technologies Become Embedded in Family Life across Generations: Scoping the Agenda for Researching 'Platformised Relationality,'" Families, Relationships and Societies 13, no. 2 (2024): 164–80, https://doi.org/10.1332/20467435Y2024D000000023.

¹² Tom Witney et al., "Configuring the Digital Relationship Landscape: A Feminist New Materialist Analysis of a Couple Relationship App," *Families, Relationships and Societies* 13, no. 2 (2024): 181–97, https://doi.org/10.1332/20467435Y2024D000000015.

¹³ Mawloud Mohadi, "NORMATIVE ISLAMIC CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF FAMILIES AND KINSHIP THROUGH MAQASID PERSPECTIVES: A COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE STUDY," Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law 11, no. 2 (2023): 290–309, https://doi.org/10.33102/mjsl.vol11no2.459.

¹⁴ Muhammad Nazir Alias et al., "SCIENTIFIC APPROACH AS THE BASIS FOR THE FORMATION OF MAQĀṢID AL-SHARĪ'AH CONCEPT AND PRINCIPLES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY," *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law* 12, no. 2 (2024): 350–63, https://doi.org/10.33102/mjsl.vol12no2.568.

 $^{^{15}}$ Necmeddin Güney, "Maqāsid Al-Sharī'a in Islamic Finance: A Critical Analysis of Modern Discourses," $Religions\ 15,\ no.\ 1\ (2024):\ 114,\ https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010114.$

¹⁶ Ita Musarrofa et al., "The Problems of Islamic Family Law in the Digital Era and Its Relevance to Renewal of the Compilation of Islamic Law," *Jurnal Hukum Islam* 22, no. 1 (2024): 89–124, https://doi.org/10.28918/jhi_v22i1_4; Mursyid Fikri et al., "Emergence of Digital Matrimony: Exploring Islamic Legal Responses to Metaverse Marriages," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 2 (2024): 246–62, https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.142.15.

 $^{^{17}}$ Umi Khusnul Khotimah, "Islamic Legal Analysis on the Protection of Vulnerable Age Groups from Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) in Indonesia," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 8 (2024), https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i8.5349.

¹⁸ Fayez Mahamid et al., "Palestinian Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence: Challenges with Public Opinion," *BMC Public Health* 23, no. 1 (2023): 412, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15276-9.

studies on child marriage and financial responsibilities in Islamic families further demonstrate that resilience and equity remain central concerns in contemporary marital practices.¹⁹

Studies on Muslim Gen Z highlight the intricate intersections between faith, technology, and social life. Research on financial technology reveals their strong engagement in religious practices such as zakat payments, while digital platforms shape their halal consumption patterns and social activism.²⁰ Despite family influence remaining a primary source of religiosity even in digital contexts, many Gen Z Muslims rely on social media for religious learning, often with limited understanding of moderate Islam. However, little is known about how married Muslim Gen Zs specifically engage with TikTok's marriage-related narratives, particularly the contrasting portrayals of "relationship goals" and "scary marriage." This study addresses that gap by examining how young married Muslim couples in Indonesia interpret and respond to these digital narratives through the lens of maqāṣid al-usrah. This theoretical framework is employed because it provides an ethical-legal foundation for understanding marriage as a holistic institution aimed at realizing compassion, justice, and protection within the family, making it highly relevant for analyzing value negotiation in digital contexts. The research contributes to the field of family science by offering an ethical framework that links Islamic marital values with algorithmic digital cultures, demonstrating how maqāṣid-based ethics can inform resilience, justice, and well-being in Muslim families. Moreover, it provides a novel empirical perspective on how Islamic jurisprudence adapts to contemporary digital realities, emphasizing the relevance of Islamic ethical principles in sustaining healthy marital relationships and family integrity in the digital era.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach integrating netnography and discourse analysis to explore how married Muslim Generation Z individuals interpret and respond to marriage-related narratives on TikTok. Netnography served as the primary method to examine digital communities and meaning-making processes in online spaces that are otherwise difficult to access. ²¹ Through the observation of online interactions and their cultural contexts, this approach effectively captured underrepresented voices in digital marital discourses. Discourse analysis complemented this by examining the structural and ideological patterns shaping meaning within TikTok's algorithmic environment. ²²

Data collection occurred in two stages: digital observation and semi-structured interviews. The observation involved systematic monitoring of TikTok content tagged with marriage-related hashtags such as #pernikahan, #relationshipgoals, and #nikahmuda between

¹⁹ Nur Fadhilah, *Pernikahan Usia Anak Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Ketahanan Keluarga*, vol. 1 (Akademia Pustaka, 2020), http://repo.uinsatu.ac.id/18636/; Nur Fadhilah and Muhammad Nurravi Alamsyah, "Reinterpreting Financial Responsibilities in Islamic Marriage A Maqasid Al-Usrah Perspective," *Al-Syakhsiyyah: Journal of Law and Family Studies* 7, no. 1 (2025): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.21154/syakhsiyyah.v7i1.

²⁰ Juliana Juliana et al., "Intention to Buy Halal Food through the ShopeeFood Application on Generation Z Muslims," *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*, ahead of print, January 9, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1108/JIABR-04-2023-0120.

²¹ Roberta Discetti and Valerie Anderson, "The Value of Netnography for Research in HRD," *Human Resource Development Review* 22, no. 1 (2023): 59–83, https://doi.org/10.1177/15344843221137506; Di Wu, "More than a Solo Method: Netnography's Capacity to Enhance Offline Research Methods," *Area* 54, no. 1 (2022): 88–95, https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12750.

²² Paola Ulloa-López et al., "Netnography and Discourse Analysis in Digital Environments: Methodological Convergences for the Study of Virtual Communities in the Age of Algorithms," *Journal of Posthumanism* 5, no. 7 (2025), https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i7.2984.

January and June 2025. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 married Muslim Gen Z informants selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diversity of gender, education, and occupation, while sharing the characteristic of marrying before the age of 30. The table below presents the demographic characteristics of the informants.

Table 1	Characteristics	of the informants

Code	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Duration of Marriage
P1	Female	23	Bachelor	Student	1 year
P2	Male	24	Diploma	Entrepreneur	2 years
Р3	Female	25	Bachelor	Teacher	3 years
P4	Male	27	Bachelor	Engineer	4 years
P5	Female	22	High School	Freelancer	6 months
P6	Male	23	Bachelor	Employee	2 years
P7	Female	26	Master	Civil Servant	3 years
P8	Male	25	Bachelor	IT Specialist	1 year
P9	Female	24	Bachelor	Nurse	2 years
P10	Male	26	Diploma	Driver	5 years
P11	Female	27	Bachelor	Lecturer	4 years
P12	Male	23	High School	Laborer	2 years
P13	Female	22	Diploma	Entrepreneur	1 year
P14	Male	24	Bachelor	Research Assistant	3 years
P15	Female	25	Master	NGO Worker	4 years

Data were analysed thematically using inductive reasoning guided by the framework of *maqāṣid al-usrah*. This process connected observed narratives and interview insights to Athiyah's seven elements: legitimate marriage contract, affection and mercy, preservation of lineage, righteous upbringing, justice within the household, financial maintenance, and protection from harm.²³ Among these, four elements emerged as the most dominant and relevant for this study: affection and mercy as the foundation of emotional bonds; justice within the household as a marker of equitable marital practices; financial maintenance as a recurring theme in digital and interview narratives; and protection from harm as a key concern in negotiating online and offline marital challenges.

The integration of digital observation, discourse analysis, and *maqāṣid al-usrah* ensured a robust and ethically sound analytical framework. The discussion proceeds by linking digital narratives to these ethical objectives, revealing how TikTok mediates Muslim Gen Z's understanding of marital ideals. The anticipated results emphasise how algorithmic cultures both affirm and challenge Islamic family values, demonstrating the adaptability of *maqāṣid*-based ethics in the digital era.

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²³ Gamal Eldin Attia, *Towards Realization of the Higher Intents of Islamic Law: Maqashid al-Syariah – A Functional Approach* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), https://iiit.org/wp-content/uploads/Towards-Realization-of-the-Higher-Intents-of-Islamic-Law-Maqasid-Al-Shariah-A-Functional-Approach.pdf; Jamaluddin Athiyyah, *Nahwa Taf iil Maqashid Al-Syari`ah* (Daar Al-Fikr, 2002).

TikTok, marriage narratives, and Muslim Gen Zs

This study classifies the findings into four interrelated categories that reflect how married Muslim Generation Z couples engage with marriage narratives on TikTok: (1) idealisation and comparison, (2) negotiation of Islamic values, (3) economic and relational pressures, and (4) generational and ethical transformation. This classification simplifies the coding framework while maintaining analytical depth and coherence with the *maqāṣid al-usrah* principles.

First, idealisation and comparison. TikTok functions simultaneously as a site of self-expression, marital reflection, and normative contestation. Content tagged with hashtags such as #relationshipgoals and #nikahmuda often frames marriage as an aspirational life goal, idealising affection, economic stability, and domestic harmony. Informants reported feeling inspired yet pressured by these portrayals. P1, a 23-year-old female student, shared: "I often compare myself to those couples. Their lives look so smooth, while mine feels messy. It makes me reflect on whether marriage should really be like that." ²⁴ Similarly, P3, a 25-year-old female teacher, stated: "Sometimes I see young couples who already have a house and children. It motivates me, but also makes me question whether I am lacking as a wife." ²⁵

These findings reveal that digital portrayals generate upward social comparison that transcends psychological dimensions, becoming an ethical negotiation between religious ideals and algorithmic pressures. While earlier studies on digital self-presentation emphasise emotional consequences, this study extends the discussion by situating such comparisons within the *maqāṣid al-usrah* framework. Here, Islamic ethics mediate emotional responses to idealised portrayals, transforming anxiety into moral reflection and reaffirmation of compassion and justice within marriage.

At the same time, several informants emphasised that TikTok videos often generate anxiety by showcasing unrealistic standards of marriage. P4, a 27-year-old male engineer, remarked: "On TikTok, marriages look full of romance and laughter. But in reality, we face stress and conflict. Sometimes I feel these videos lie to us." ²⁶ P6, a 23-year-old male employee, explained: "Most of the content looks perfect. But in reality, marriage is not like that. Sometimes I argue with my wife, and when I see those videos, I feel like my marriage is failing." ²⁷ These insights indicate that the anxiety expressed by informants emerges not only from social comparison but also from the tension between digital aesthetics and real marital experiences. By emphasising these lived narratives, this study contributes an original perspective that contextualises emotional strain within the ethical and relational framework of Muslim family life.

Second, negotiation of Islamic values. TikTok serves as a digital arena where Islamic marital values are continually reinterpreted. Many videos frame affection (*mawaddah wa rahmah*) as a hallmark of successful marriage, represented through humour, prayer, and acts of care. P7, a 26-year-old female civil servant, noted: "I enjoy watching content where couples pray together or share Islamic reminders. It strengthens my sense that marriage should be about helping each other toward Allah." ²⁸ This finding demonstrates how religious education and emotional support converge in the digital space, allowing couples to embody ethical values through small acts of devotion.

²⁴ Personal Interview with Wife, with P1 (2025).

²⁵ P3, Personal Interview with Wife (2025).

²⁶ P4, Personal Interview with Husband (2025).

²⁷ P6, Personal Interview with Husband (2025).

²⁸ P7, Personal Interview with Wife (2025).

Yet, informants also identified tensions between religious sincerity and commercial interest. P10, a 26-year-old male driver, explained: "I once saw an influencer teaching Islamic values but then advertising beauty products right after. It felt contradictory, as if religion was being used only for business." ²⁹ Likewise, P11, a 27-year-old female lecturer, said: "Some influencers use Islamic language to sell products. I find it disturbing when religious values are commercialised." ³⁰ These reflections highlight Muslim Gen Z's critical engagement with the commodification of religiosity, illustrating how ethical discernment shapes their participation in digital religious economies. The negotiation between sincerity and commerce reveals the dual nature of TikTok as both an ethical forum and a marketplace of virtue.

Third, economic and relational pressures. A recurring theme involves the digital negotiation of financial responsibility within marriage. Informants' testimonies underscore the moral and social weight of financial maintenance (*infāq wa nafaqah*) in shaping marital identity. P2, a 24-year-old male entrepreneur, remarked: "When I see men being shamed online for not providing enough, it pressures me. Even though my wife and I share expenses, I feel judged." ³¹ This highlight how digital platforms amplify public scrutiny toward men's roles as providers while simultaneously opening space for more egalitarian interpretations. Discussions in comment sections often evolve into debates about gender equity and mutual support, reflecting broader shifts toward collaborative financial ethics in marriage.

TikTok also fosters parasocial relationships between viewers and influencers, where audiences emotionally engage with public couples. P8, a 25-year-old male IT specialist, stated: "I feel attached to one TikTok couple. When they post about their struggles, I feel sad as if they were my own friends." ³² Similarly, P9, a 24-year-old female nurse, confessed: "I follow one couple every day. When they fight, I sometimes cry as if I know them personally." ³³ These parasocial attachments extend beyond emotional identification; they represent moral empathy shaped by Islamic concepts of companionship and sincerity. Viewers internalise these narratives as relational guidance, reflecting the integration of faith and emotion in digital interactions.

At the same time, TikTok enables creative self-representation. Some informants produce their own couple content, consciously curating affectionate images of marriage. P12, a 23-year-old male labourer, commented: "When we upload videos, we choose the happiest moments. It is not fake, but we also hide our fights. Social media is never the full story." ³⁴ P13, a 22-year-old female entrepreneur, stated: "Posting our daily life is fun, but we also select what looks good. It's not 100% reality." ³⁵ These testimonies demonstrate how Muslim Gen Z couples navigate authenticity and idealisation, turning content creation into a form of ethical storytelling grounded in maqāṣid al-usrah values of affection, sincerity, and moderation.

Fourth, generational and ethical transformation. The data also reveal generational shifts in how marriage is perceived and practised. Many participants expressed both devotion to marital ideals and scepticism about their sustainability. P5, a 22-year-old female freelancer, reflected: "I married young because I thought it was sunnah. But now I see many young couples divorcing, and sometimes I wonder if I made the right choice." ³⁶ P14, a 24-year-old male research

²⁹ P10, Personal Interview with Husband (2025).

³⁰ P11, Personal Interview with Wife (2025).

³¹ P2, Personal Interview with Husband (2025).

³² P8, Personal Interview with Husband (2025).

³³ P9, Personal Interview with Wife (2025).

³⁴ P12, Personal Interview with Husband (2025).

³⁵ P13, Personal Interview with Wife (2025).

³⁶ P5, Personal Interview with Wife (2025).

assistant, noted: "I still believe in marriage, but I feel society is less supportive. Divorces are common, and sometimes I think marriage is no longer valued." ³⁷ These statements highlight ambivalence within a faith-driven generation that simultaneously values commitment and questions cultural narratives surrounding marriage.

Cultural patterns on TikTok reinforce this ambivalence. P15, a 25-year-old female NGO worker, observed: "Many videos show wives being patient even when treated unfairly. It teaches patience, but sometimes it normalises injustice." ³⁸ This aligns with Izharuddin's observation that popular culture often reinforces heteronormative ideals through virtues of patience and sacrifice. ³⁹ When examined through the lens of maqāṣid al-usrah, these portrayals illustrate both alignment and tension—affirming affection, financial justice, and moral protection while risking normalisation of harm (ḥimāyah min al-ḍarar).

Documentary data, including screenshots and comment threads, confirm that TikTok operates as a hybrid arena where Islamic norms, cultural expectations, and digital economies intersect. Viral content under #nikahmuda romanticises early marriage yet elicits debates about divorce and economic struggle.⁴⁰ Similarly, posts on *nafkah* obligations merge scriptural citations with popular dialogue, transforming TikTok into a participatory platform for ethical deliberation.

This classification clarifies how married Muslim Gen Z couples actively interpret, contest, and embody Islamic marital ethics within algorithmic spaces. TikTok emerges as both a pedagogical and performative arena that mediates affection (mawaddah wa rahmah), sustenance (infāq wa nafaqah), justice (al-'adl bayna ahl al-bayt), and protection from harm (ḥimāyah min al-ḍarar). By simplifying the analytical categories while maintaining theoretical integrity, this study demonstrates how maqāṣid al-usrah provides a coherent ethical framework for understanding the interplay between digital culture and Islamic family life in contemporary Indonesia.

Algorithmic engagement, digital literacy, and religious marital discourses

The findings of this study demonstrate how Muslim Gen Z couples actively navigate algorithmic environments on TikTok while negotiating religious identity, marital communication, and digital literacy practices. Observational data and informant testimonies reveal that algorithmic features, such as personalised feeds and trending sounds, significantly shape marital discourses, amplifying certain norms while suppressing others. Informants reported both empowerment and constraint in their engagement, illustrating the ambivalent role of algorithms as agents of influence. This aligns with Cameron's (2024) findings on engagement and deviance tactics, where users both comply with and resist algorithmic nudges, perceiving themselves as skilful navigators despite systemic constraints. Informants highlighted strategies such as curating hashtags, adjusting posting times, and selectively interacting with religious or marital content to discipline the algorithm into producing desired outcomes. P1, a 23-year-old female student, remarked: "I realised that the more I interact with Islamic content, the more it shapes my For You Page, so I try to balance it with other themes to avoid pressure." Similarly, P4, a 27-year-old male engineer, explained: "If I like and comment on

³⁷ P14, Personal Interview with Husband (2025).

³⁸ P15, Personal Interview with Wife (2025).

³⁹ Alicia Izharuddin, "'Redha Tu Ikhlas': The Social–Textual Significance of Islamic Virtue in Malay Forced Marriage Narratives," *Religions* 12, no. 5 (2021): 310, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050310.

⁴⁰ Fadhilah, Pernikahan Usia Anak Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Ketahanan Keluarga, vol. 1.

⁴¹ Personal Interview with Wife.

Islamic marriage videos, more of them will appear. I avoid clicking on content that looks toxic because then it keeps coming back." ⁴² This demonstrates what Kapsch⁴³ terms "small acts of engagement," whereby users intentionally train algorithms to align with their moral and marital aspirations.

The findings indicate that digital literacy significantly shapes how couples interpret and navigate algorithmic influences in their everyday online interactions. P8, a 25-year-old male IT specialist, shared: "I learned to filter content because not everything labelled 'Islamic marriage advice' is correct. Some are misleading, so I compare it with religious lectures or books." ⁴⁴ This reflects Jones' critique that traditional critical literacy models emphasising scepticism are insufficient without considering relational and contextual factors. Informants described learning from peers and religious communities to develop context-sensitive literacy practices, consistent with Ilomäki et al.'s emphasis on dynamic frameworks incorporating digital citizenship and participation. P2, a 24-year-old male entrepreneur, added: "Sometimes I ask my friends if certain content is valid. We often check with ustadz online before believing it." ⁴⁷ Observational data confirmed these practices, as comment sections frequently contained fact-checking, Qur'ānic references, and peer corrections, illustrating collective attempts to anchor digital discourses in religious authority.

At the same time, TikTok served as both a resource and challenge for religious identity negotiation. Informants described TikTok as a "third space" where they could publicly display piety while managing communal expectations. P10, a 26-year-old male driver, said: "I post videos about hijrah with my wife, but we also make sure it looks fun. We want people to see that Islam is not boring." 48 This resonates with Inanoglu's framework of moral career development, where young Muslims present themselves as both pious and digitally savvy. 49 Others highlighted the risks of frontstage performance and backstage dissonance. P12, a 23-year-old male labourer, admitted: "Sometimes we argue, but online we still post smiling videos. It's not hypocrisy, but more about showing the ideal side." 50 Likewise, P3, a 25-year-old female teacher, explained: "I feel torn between being authentic and looking perfect online, because people judge quickly." 51 This reflects Trysnes and Synnes' observations on how young Muslims curate religious content to avoid social exclusion and conflict. 52

Marital communication patterns on TikTok were also shaped by algorithmically mediated discourses. Videos featuring humour, financial advice, or conflict resolution tips frequently went viral, generating widespread debates in comment sections. For instance,

⁴² P4, Personal Interview with Husband.

⁴³ Patrick Heiberg Kapsch, "Exploring User Agency and Small Acts of Algorithm Engagement in Everyday Media Use," *Media International Australia* 183, no. 1 (2022): 16–29, https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X211067803.

⁴⁴ P8, Personal Interview with Husband.

⁴⁵ Rodney H. Jones, "Commentary: Critical Digital Literacies as Action, Affinity, and Affect," *TESOL Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2022): 1074–80, https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3153.

⁴⁶ Liisa Ilomäki et al., "Critical Digital Literacies at School Level: A Systematic Review," *Review of Education* 11, no. 3 (2023): e3425, https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3425.

⁴⁷ P2, Personal Interview with Husband.

⁴⁸ P10, Personal Interview with Husband.

⁴⁹ Hale Inanoglu, "Moral Careers of Muslim College Students: How I Became a Better Muslim through TikTok," *Review of Religious Research*, June 26, 2025, 0034673X251348214, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034673X251348214.

⁵⁰ P12, Personal Interview with Husband.

⁵¹ P3, Personal Interview with Wife.

⁵² Irene Trysnes and Ronald Mayora Synnes, "The Role of Religion in Young Muslims' and Christians' Self-Presentation on Social Media," *YOUNG* 30, no. 3 (2022): 281–96, https://doi.org/10.1177/11033088211063368.

observational data showed that content about joint financial management attracted polarised responses, with some commenters citing Qur'ānic injunctions on *nafkah* while others advocated egalitarian sharing. P14, a 24-year-old male research assistant, expressed: "These discussions sometimes make me reflect with my wife about how we handle money. It helps us talk about things we usually avoid." ⁵³ P5, a 22-year-old female freelancer, added: "I see many couples online talking about money, and it pushes me and my husband to discuss financial plans earlier than we would have." ⁵⁴ Such findings support LeBaron-Black et al.'s research that financial communication mediates between shared values and marital satisfaction. ⁵⁵

Moreover, TikTok functioned as a platform for digital emotion regulation, allowing couples to manage stress, loneliness, or anxiety through shared viewing and content creation. P6, a 23-year-old male bachelor, explained: "When I feel tired after work, I watch funny couple videos with my wife. It makes us laugh and forget our problems." ⁵⁶ This use of digital media as emotional coping aligns with Verma et al. ⁵⁷ and Tag et al., ⁵⁸ who emphasise technology's role in supporting affective well-being, especially during periods of limited offline interaction. At the same time, informants admitted to emotional dependence on TikTok, with P9, a 24-year-old female nurse, noting: "If we don't scroll before bed, it feels incomplete, even if sometimes it causes fights." ⁵⁹ P7, a 26-year-old female civil servant, further commented: "Watching religious couple content helps calm me down, but sometimes I worry I spend too much time on it." ⁶⁰ Such ambivalence reflects broader findings on digital emotion regulation's double-edged character.

Observational data also illustrated how algorithms amplified specific cultural scripts of marriage. Popular hashtags such as #istriSolehah and #suamiIdaman perpetuated idealised gender roles, reinforcing traditional expectations of patience and submission. These scripts resonate with Izharuddin's⁶¹ insights on popular culture's reinforcement of heteronormative ideals. Yet informants also reported subversive engagements, using humour or parody to critique rigid norms. P15, a 25-year-old female NGO worker, said: "I make parody videos about husbands not helping with chores. Many women laugh and comment, so it feels like resistance." ⁶² P11, a 27-year-old female lecturer, also remarked: "I feel uneasy when content pressures women to accept everything for the sake of patience. Sometimes I comment to remind people that marriage should be fair." ⁶³ Such practices reflect what Guetler describes as the "machine habitus," where algorithms and users co-shape cultural norms through recursive interaction.

The findings underscore the need to view TikTok not merely as a platform for content consumption but as a dynamic arena of algorithmic negotiation, religious identity performance, and marital dialogue. Informants' testimonies and documentary analysis reveal

⁵³ P14, Personal Interview with Husband.

⁵⁴ P5, Personal Interview with Wife.

⁵⁵ Ashley B. LeBaron-Black et al., "Financial Communication as a Mediator between Financial Values and Marital Outcomes," *Family Relations* 72, no. 4 (2023): 1974–92, https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12786.

⁵⁶ P6, Personal Interview with Husband.

 $^{^{57}}$ Akriti Verma et al., "Digital Emotion Regulation on Social Media," $\it Computer$ 57, no. 6 (2024): 82–89, https://doi.org/10.1109/MC.2023.3332331.

⁵⁸ Benjamin Tag et al., "Impact of the Global Pandemic upon Young People's Use of Technology for Emotion Regulation," *Computers in Human Behavior Reports* 6 (May 2022): 100192, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2022.100192.

⁵⁹ P9, Personal Interview with Wife.

⁶⁰ P7, Personal Interview with Wife.

⁶¹ Izharuddin, "'Redha Tu Ikhlas.'"

⁶² P15, Personal Interview with Wife.

⁶³ P11, Personal Interview with Wife.

⁶⁴ Vivian Guetler, "Machine Habitus: Toward a Sociology of Algorithms," *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 52, no. 5 (2023): 415–16, https://doi.org/10.1177/00943061231191421.

how Muslim Gen Z couples use strategic engagements to discipline algorithms, apply digital literacy practices to filter content, and employ creative self-representations to reconcile religious ideals with digital culture. These practices affirm maqāṣid al-usrah elements such as affection and mercy (mawaddah wa rahmah) and financial maintenance (infāq wa nafaqah), while simultaneously raising concerns about protection from harm (ḥimāyah min al-ḍarar) in the face of normative pressures and algorithm-driven anxieties. TikTok emerges as a contested yet productive space where marital values, digital structures, and religious identities converge, producing both alignment with and tension against Islamic objectives of family life.

Maqāṣid al-Usrah, affection, finance, and protection in digital marital discourses

This section presents a comprehensive analysis that situates the research findings within Jamaluddin Athiyah's framework of *maqāṣid al-usrah*, which conceptualises family as an institution oriented towards compassion (*mawaddah wa raḥmah*), sustenance (*infāq wa nafaqah*), and protection from harm (*ḥimāyah min al-ḍarar*). The data from informants and digital observations reveal that Muslim Gen Z couples do not merely replicate classical ideals but reinterpret them dynamically within the algorithmic and commercial logic of digital media. Their engagement with TikTok demonstrates a living jurisprudence in which ethical values are negotiated, contested, and recalibrated in everyday practice.

First, affection and mercy (al-mawaddah wa al-raḥmah). Muslim Gen Z couples generally perceive affection not merely as romantic expression but as a spiritual and ethical practice that sustains marital harmony. P1, a 23-year-old female student, explained that she regarded mawaddah as showing love in simple ways, such as checking on each other's well-being daily. Similarly, P4, a 27-year-old male engineer, indicated that he often watched TikTok videos of couples performing small acts of kindness, such as making tea or praying together, and believed these gestures demonstrated that affection extends beyond romance to mercy. P10, a 26-year-old male driver, shared that observing online content about couples forgiving one another after conflict reinforced his belief that mercy is the foundation of a lasting marriage. These perspectives align with Prabowo et al., who argue that Islamic psychology views mawaddah wa raḥmah as the foundation of marital mental well-being.⁶⁵

Through the lens of *maqāṣid al-usrah*, these narratives embody Athiyah's view that emotional balance and ethical compassion form the core objectives of family formation. TikTok serves as a medium through which couples internalise these ideals, transforming public displays of affection into spiritual exercises that reaffirm *raḥmah* as both duty and devotion.

Second, financial maintenance and justice (*al-infāq wa al-nafaqah*). Financial provision remains a key moral pillar for many informants, yet its interpretation is often renegotiated in digital discourse. P8, a 25-year-old male IT specialist, explained that he felt pressured by videos that portrayed men as sole providers even though many couples shared expenses, leading him to feel inadequate. P2, a male entrepreneur, stated that seeing men publicly criticised online for insufficient provision made him feel judged despite his efforts to fulfil his responsibilities. Similarly, P15, a 25-year-old female NGO worker, mentioned that online content often exaggerated the husband's financial role, whereas in her household, financial responsibilities were shared according to capacity. These reflections resonate with Mohamed Sulthan Ismiya Begum et al., who emphasise balance over equality in Islamic financial ethics,⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Alfian D A Prabowo et al., "Marriage, Divorce in Islamic Psychological Analysis and Maqashid Sharia," *Petita Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Hukum Dan Syariah* 9, no. 2 (2024), https://doi.org/10.22373/petita.v9i2.321.

⁶⁶ Mohamed Sulthan Ismiya Begum et al., "Gender Equity in Muslim Family Law: Modern and Contemporary 'Ulamā's View," *Al-Ahkam* 34, no. 2 (2024): 221–56, https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2024.34.2.20773.

and Firdaus et al., who call for more equitable benefit-based frameworks of *nafaqah*.⁶⁷ Observations of TikTok comments revealed debates over whether wives should contribute financially, with frequent references to Qur'ānic verses and prophetic traditions, confirming Zunly Nadia & Faoziah's⁶⁸ argument that respect and mutuality have scriptural grounding.

When read through Athiyah's conceptualisation, these testimonies suggest that *infāq wa nafaqah* is not a fixed male obligation but a shared moral duty rooted in justice (*al-'adl*). Digital debates under #nafkah hashtags demonstrate how algorithmic spaces encourage participatory reinterpretations of financial ethics, turning prescriptive norms into collaborative practices consistent with *maslahah al-usrah*.

Third, protection from harm (*ḥimāyah min al-ḍarar*). Protection from harm emerged as a central yet contested moral concern. P6, a 24-year-old female participant, observed that some TikTok videos glorified women's endurance of abuse as *ṣabr* (patience), a portrayal she found troubling because it could normalise suffering instead of promoting help-seeking. Such awareness reflects the broader ethical framework discussed by Alkiek, who notes that Mālikī jurisprudence recognises emotional and physical harm as valid grounds for divorce, ⁶⁹ and by Yamamah, who argues that *ḍarūriyyāt* should include the protection of dignity and loyalty. ⁷⁰ Such testimonies reveal gaps between Islamic protective frameworks and their digital representation, echoing Sattar et al. ⁷¹ who demonstrate how patriarchal interpretations perpetuate violence despite religious discourses on protection.

Viewed through *maqāṣid al-usrah*, these insights illustrate Athiyah's call to preserve family members from moral, psychological, and material harm. Informants' interpretations show that religious patience should not justify injustice. Instead, they exercise critical engagement and digital literacy as tools of harm prevention, transforming *ḥimāyah min al-ḍarar* into a form of ethical vigilance within digital environments.

Fourth, justice and ethical balance within the household (*al-'adl bayna ahl al-bayt*). Justice functions as the integrative principle mediating affection, financial ethics, and protection. P15, a 25-year-old female NGO worker, described how she produced parody videos about husbands not helping with chores, which generated laughter and solidarity among women, serving as a subtle form of resistance. P11, a 27-year-old lecturer, mentioned that she sometimes commented on posts that pressured women to accept everything in the name of patience, reminding others that marriage should remain fair. These examples demonstrate how *al-'adl* is expressed through humour, critique, and selective engagement with online narratives.

Documentary evidence from observed TikTok videos supports these findings. Content under the hashtag #nafkah highlighted recurring debates about the husband's duty to provide. One viral video featured a woman reading a hadith about husbands' responsibilities,

⁶⁷ Firdaus Firdaus et al., "Post-Divorce Child's Nafaqah Māḍiyah: An Analysis of the Shifting from Fulfilment to the Assertion of Ownership Rights," *Al-Ahkam* 33, no. 1 (2023): 45–62, https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2023.33.1.14566.

⁶⁸ Zunly Nadia and Niswatin Faoziah, "Gender Equality Within Family in Islamic Perspective: Insights From the Hadiths of Ummul Mukminin," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur an Dan Hadis* 25, no. 1 (2024): 161–86, https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v25i1.5260.

⁶⁹ Tesneem Alkiek, "Spousal Harm in the Mālikī Law School: Evidence and Procedure," *Islamic Law and Society*, November 23, 2023, 1–29, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-bja10049.

⁷⁰ Ansari Yamamah, "Discourse on Universal Religious Values: A Contemporary Paradigm from an Islamic Transitive Perspective," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 2 (2022): 99–112, https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol17no2.8.

⁷¹ Tehmina Sattar et al., "Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Southern Punjab, Pakistan: A Phenomenological Study," *BMC Women S Health* 22, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-022-02095-0.

generating over 50,000 comments debating whether wives should supplement household income. Similarly, videos tagged #rumahTanggaBahagia often depicted wives enduring hardship framed as virtuous patience, while the comments included both affirmations and critiques, with some users quoting Alkiek's legal interpretations of harm as legitimate grounds for divorce. These digital artefacts reveal that algorithm-driven spaces serve as contested arenas where Islamic legal and ethical frameworks are reinterpreted in real time.

From Athiyah's perspective, justice represents the structural axis of *maqāṣid al-usrah*, ensuring equilibrium between compassion and rights. These practices—parody, debate, and selective interaction—reflect new modes of moral agency among Gen Z Muslims who translate jurisprudential ideals into everyday algorithmic participation. Muslim Gen Zs operationalise *maqāṣid al-usrah* through three interrelated functions: emotional cultivation (*tathqīf al-'āṭifī*), distributive justice (*ta'dīl al-nafaqah*), and harm prevention (*wiqāyah min al-ḍarar*). TikTok thus emerges as a dynamic ethical ecosystem where Islamic family values are tested, contested, and reaffirmed. While digital commercialisation can distort moral intentions, informants' perspectives reveal that the *maqāṣid* framework continues to shape self-reflection and ethical participation.

To enhance analytical clarity, the following table presents a classification of how each *maqāṣid al-usrah* element operates across emotional, financial, protective, and justice dimensions in TikTok contexts. This classification demonstrates the integrated application of Jamaluddin Athiyah's framework within the lived digital ethics of Muslim Gen Z couples.

Table 2. Classification of the elements of *Maqāṣid al-Usrah* in digital marital discourses

Maqā ṣ id al- Usrah Element	Digital Manifestations on TikTok	Illustrative Findings	Ethical Function
Affection &	Couples engage in the	Acts of forgiveness	Balancing affection
Mercy (al-	sharing of humour,	and care are	and mercy as core
Mawaddah wa	moments of prayer, and	framed as	ethical duties.
al-Raḥmah)	acts of daily kindness	expressions of	
	online, thereby reinforcing their emotional bonds.	spiritual devotion.	
Financial	Viral debates on gendered	Informants	Upholding fairness
Maintenance &	financial roles and shared	reinterpret nafaqah	and shared
Justice (al-Infāq	budgeting among couples.	as partnership-	responsibility.
wa al-Nafaqah)		based while	
		maintaining	
		Islamic justice.	
Protection from	Critique of toxic content	Informants utilise	Protecting dignity
Harm (ḥimāyah	promoting harmful	digital literacy to	and well-being
min al- ḍ arar)	patience or endurance.	resist and correct	through ethical
		harmful	vigilance.
		narratives.	
Justice within	Use of parody and	Humor and	Integrative justice—
the Household	commentary to challenge	critique serve as	maintaining
(al-'Adl bayna	patriarchal norms.	tools for asserting	equilibrium among
Ahl al-Bayt)		fairness in marital	compassion, rights,
		roles.	and protection.

The table above presents a succinct synthesis of how each dimension of *maqāṣid al-usrah* is manifested within the digital marital sphere, illustrating that affection, justice, protection, and financial ethics are mutually reinforcing principles rather than discrete virtues. By translating Athiyah's theoretical constructs into observable digital behaviours, this classification elucidates the dynamic interplay between faith, ethics, and technology in shaping contemporary Muslim family life.

These findings indicate that Athiyah's *maqāṣid al-usrah* theory offers a robust analytical framework for understanding how Muslim Gen Z integrates faith, ethics, and technology. Affection is reconceptualised as a form of worship, financial provision evolves into a shared responsibility, and protection is redefined as digital moral engagement. In the context of the algorithmic age, *maqāṣid al-usrah* is not diminished but rather reimagined as a participatory ethics that harmonises Islamic tradition with digital modernity.

Conclusion

This study elucidates how Muslim Generation Z in Indonesia utilise TikTok as a platform to negotiate marital ideals and Islamic family values within the framework of *maqāṣid al-usrah*. The findings indicate that digital spaces simultaneously affirm and challenge Islamic principles of *al-mawaddah wa al-raḥmah* (affection and mercy), *al-infāq wa al-nafaqah* (financial maintenance), *ḥimāyah min al-ḍarar* (protection from harm), and *al-'adl bayna ahl al-bayt* (justice within the household). While many participants drew inspiration from portrayals of mutual affection and cooperation, they also experienced anxiety stemming from unrealistic expectations and the commodification of religious values. These dynamics highlight the dual role of TikTok as both an ethical space and a site of normative distortion.

Theoretically, this research advances the discourse on Islamic family law by demonstrating how *maqāṣid al-usrah* can be applied as a flexible analytical framework to interpret digital marital practices. Practically, it provides insights into how religious educators, policymakers, and content creators can promote digital literacy grounded in Islamic ethics to strengthen family resilience and safeguard moral integrity in algorithm-driven environments. The study also acknowledges its limitations, particularly in terms of the scope of participants and the evolving nature of digital platforms, which may affect generalisability. Therefore, future research should conduct comparative studies across Muslim-majority societies, explore longitudinal impacts of algorithmic exposure on marital dynamics, and design intervention-based approaches that align Islamic ethical values with responsible digital engagement. Through these avenues, further inquiry can continue to bridge the gap between traditional Islamic jurisprudence and the realities of the digital age.

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Interviews

- P2. Personal Interview with Husband. 2025.
- P3. Personal Interview with Wife. 2025.

- P4. Personal Interview with Husband. 2025.
- P5. Personal Interview with Wife. 2025.
- P6. Personal Interview with Husband. 2025.
- P7. Personal Interview with Wife. 2025.
- P8. Personal Interview with Husband. 2025.
- P9. Personal Interview with Wife. 2025.
- P10. Personal Interview with Husband. 2025.
- P11. Personal Interview with Wife. 2025.
- P12. Personal Interview with Husband. 2025.
- P13. Personal Interview with Wife. 2025.
- P14. Personal Interview with Husband. 2025.
- P15. Personal Interview with Wife. 2025.
- Personal Interview with Wife. With P1. 2025.