Constructing Family Goals of Muslim Families on Social Media: Digital Representation and Marital Resilience

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Abstract

The phenomenon of family goals on social media has broadened the ways Muslim families represent marital harmony and an idealized family life within digital spaces. However, how such representations are constructed, interpreted, and negotiated, and how they relate to marital resilience, remains underexplored in the sociology of contemporary Muslim families. This study aims to analyze the construction of family goals content among Muslim families and its implications for marital resilience. Using a qualitative integrative literature review of peer-reviewed scholarly articles, it draws on Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality to examine externalization, objectivation, and internalization in digital family representation, and on Mead's symbolic interactionism to explain meaning-making, role-taking, the generalized other, and the negotiation between the I and the Me. The findings show that family goals are constructed through the digital display of relational, religious, role-based, economic, parenting, and family-resilience practices. Representations that are repeated and socially validated can become taken-for-granted references for the ideal Muslim family, thereby shaping marital expectations. The implications are conditional: family goals may encourage reflection, religious motivation, and constructive relational practices, yet may also trigger upward social comparison and marital dissatisfaction when curated online representations are treated as standards for everyday life. Marital resilience is mediated by couples' adaptive capacity, communication, role negotiation, and Islamic coping strategies. From an Islamic family law perspective, marital success is measured by sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah, not by online image. The study recommends a "Digital versus Performative Reality" module in premarital guidance.

Keywords: family goals, Muslim family, marital resilience, digital media literacy, social media

Introduction

Social media has become a stage on which couples and families show their private lives to a public audience. Posts tagged #familygoals, #couplegoals, or #relationshipgoals present togetherness as a model. A qualitative study of Australian adolescents found "Relationship Goals" and "Insta-Couples" trends widespread; participants knew the portrayals were partial, yet still felt pressure to display their own relationships (Taba et al., 2020). In Indonesia the same space has taken a religious form. #QuoteMuslimah content may foster authoritarian and

patriarchal families(Kurniawan & Rengkaningtias, 2019), digital da'wah helps shape how marriage is socially constructed(Vebrynda et al., 2026), and Muslimah influencers act as intermediaries between traditional teachings and modern lifestyles(Petriani, 2025).

The effects of such representations on marriage are uneven. An analysis of 3,270 Instagram posts found that 178 couples who posted photos with their partners also showed higher relationship quality(Sharabi & Hopkins, 2021). By contrast, a survey of 605 young adults found that perceiving romantic portrayals as positively biased was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction(Boeckxstaens et al., 2026), and a meta-analysis showed that partner phubbing erodes relationship and marital satisfaction (Ni et al., 2025). A systematic review also examines how communication technology affects family relationship quality(Tammisalo & Rotkirch, 2022). Among Muslim couples, heavy social media use is tied to household conflict, while digital fiqh knowledge dampens it (Muthmainnah & Rahayu, 2026).

Yet most of this evidence is psychological, quantitative, and non-Muslim. Studies of Muslim families lean toward conflict and divorce driven by social media (Hanafi et al., 2024). How the image of the ideal Muslim family is constructed, interpreted, and negotiated, and how it relates to marital resilience, has received little integrated attention in the sources we gathered.

We use *family goals* to mean a portrait of a couple or family posted on social media and framed, through hashtags, captions, or public comments, as a model worth imitating. Marital resilience refers to a couple's capacity to maintain the quality of their relationship and to restore it under stress. Both are working definitions; resilience is kept apart from satisfaction, which most reviewed studies measure.

Three lenses are read together. Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social construction of reality treats social reality as the product of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. A family post is externalization; a format repeated and validated by audiences becomes objectivated; using it as a yardstick for one's own household is internalization. Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism explains meaning-making through role-taking, the generalized other (on social media, audience and platform), and the dialogue between the *I*, the spontaneous response, and the *Me*, the internalized norm. Social comparison theory(Festinger, 1954) explains why the resulting standards may affect satisfaction, as research on jealousy and comparison on social networking sites shows (Frampton & Fox, 2018; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). Linking the three is our own reading, not an established theory, and needs testing.

Normatively, marriage aims at a household that is *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* (Republic of Indonesia, 1991), in line with Q.S. Ar-Rum [30]: 21 (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). These terms are evaluative benchmarks for RQ4, not measured variables.

The review maps how family goals are constructed in Muslim contexts, how audiences interpret them, and what follows for marital resilience and Islamic family law. It asks four questions: (RQ1) how are the family goals of Muslim families constructed on social media; (RQ2) how are these representations interpreted and negotiated; (RQ3) what do they imply for marital resilience; and (RQ4) how does Islamic family law assess the practice, and what follows for premarital guidance?

Methods

Research Design

This study is a qualitative integrative literature review with thematic synthesis. The unit of analysis is the scholarly article, not a couple or a social media account, so the findings are read as patterns in the literature. Source selection aimed to map conceptual patterns rather than to be exhaustive, so searching and screening were iterative, guided by substantive relevance.

Source Identification and Selection

Sources were collected purposively through keywords in six clusters: representation (*family goals*, *couple goals*, *relationship goals*); social comparison; marital communication and satisfaction; Muslim families and digital da'wah; resilience and Islamic coping; and normative studies. Each candidate was checked on the publisher's page, and its metadata, DOI, design, sample, and main findings were entered in a verification matrix. An entry was graded A when read on the publisher's page and A2 when cross-checked against another record. Entries with incomplete metadata were not cited.

Eligible records were peer-reviewed English or Indonesian articles, mostly from 2019–2026, on social media and couples, families, or marriage, social comparison, marital quality or resilience, or Islamic perspectives. Older works were kept only when they supplied a mechanism newer ones lacked; theses and popular articles were excluded. Of 54 articles in the matrix, 51 were graded A or A2, one had incomplete metadata, and two were held in reserve. Of the 51 eligible entries, 36 were cited, 29 published since 2019. Study quality was not rated with a standard instrument; design and sample size are reported instead.

Data Analysis

Data were extracted into a coding matrix and coded deductively with Berger and Luckmann's and Mead's concepts, with inductive codes allowed for family goals dimensions and resilience factors. Codes were grouped into themes by thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The six dimensions of family goals (relational, religious, role-based, economic, parenting, and family resilience) and four groups of resilience resources (communicative, goal alignment, religious-spiritual, digital literacy) are the authors' analytical framework. Theoretical mapping is reported in the Discussion rather than in the Results.

Credibility and Ethics

We kept an audit trail through a synthesis matrix and a web-based source verification log. To limit publication bias, negative case analysis was used to find studies reporting null findings or opposite patterns. The second author cross-validated a pre-coding framework drawn from abstract scans and matrix notes. This is double verification, not independent coding, so inter-coder reliability is not reported. The study uses only secondary documents and no human participants, so it is exempt from ethical clearance. Generative AI was used only to help verify publisher metadata; all interpretation, evaluation, and scholarly responsibility rest with the authors.

Results

Corpus Characteristics

The corpus holds 36 verified sources, eleven of them national journal articles. Non-Muslim studies come from North America, Europe, Australia, Türkiye, and China and use surveys, meta-analyses, or interviews; Muslim-context studies, mainly Indonesian, rely on

qualitative designs, netnography, and normative analysis. No source applies the *family goals* label directly to Muslim families, so RQ1 evidence comes largely from national studies and research on relationship portrayals in general.

How Family Goals Are Constructed

The literature suggests that family goals are built by displaying six groups of practices (Table 1). The relational dimension is best documented: couple photos and partner responses to posts are associated with relationship quality(Sharabi & Hopkins, 2021), and relationship-oriented Facebook activity has been studied in relation to belonging needs (Seidman et al., 2019). Religious practice appears in digital da'wah that frames marriage (Vebrynda et al., 2026), in the Muslimah identity micro-celebrities construct (Dewi et al., 2024), and in influencers' religious authority(Petriani, 2025). Role-based practice shows in content on spiritual motherhood(Petriani, 2025) and in the discourse on husband–wife relations in #QuoteMuslimah (Kurniawan & Rengkaningtias, 2019). On parenting, an analysis of 40 videos from four YouTube channels identified three types of sharenting content: documentary (75 scenes), emotional (47), and commercial (30) (Ar Rasyid & Ahsan, 2026). WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok are also reported to have changed Muslim family communication (Rasi et al., 2024).

Table 1 Dimensions of Family Goals in the Literature

Dimension	Indicators in the literature	Sources
Relational	Couple photos and videos, public affection, engagement with relationship content on platforms	Sharabi & Hopkins (2021); Seidman et al. (2019); Taba et al. (2020)
Religious	Da'wah narratives on marriage, Muslimah identity, influencer authority	Vebrynda et al. (2026); Dewi et al. (2024); Petriani (2025)
Role-based	Division of husband–wife roles, spiritual motherhood	Kurniawan & Rengkaningtias (2019); Petriani (2025)
Economic	Financial stability, lifestyle, family holidays	No direct source (analytical category)
Parenting	Parent–child communication, sharenting	Rasit et al. (2024); Ar Rasyid & Ahsan (2026)
Family resilience	Narratives of getting through conflict; patience and gratitude as image	Hopipah (2025), indirect

The economic and family-resilience dimensions lack direct sources, so the six dimensions are a framework to be tested, not a finding.

Interpretation and Negotiation

Lower relationship satisfaction predicts a stronger tendency to compare one's relationship on social networking sites (Gursoy & Oner Ozkan, 2023). These sites can provoke jealousy, depending on self-esteem, and people with low self-esteem tend to build idealized images (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). Comparison and uncertainty also feed retroactive jealousy (Frampton & Fox, 2018). In the Indonesian Muslim context, #MarriageIsScary and #MarriageIsNotScary frame marriage, respectively, as a risky institution and as a conscious choice grounded in readiness and spiritual maturity (Vebrynda et al., 2026). The standard of the "ideal Muslim" is itself constructed through rules against posting one's own photos, achievements, and wealth (Aini et al., 2023).

Implications for Marital Resilience

The negative evidence is considerable. Perceiving romantic portrayals as positively biased is negatively associated with satisfaction (Boeckxstaens et al., 2026). So is social media addiction among 461 married individuals in Türkiye (Ayhan et al., 2026), and so is phubbing (Zhang et al., 2026). Social media jealousy predicts lower life satisfaction, with communication

skills as a mediator (Kovan, 2023). A longitudinal study links social media jealousy and electronic partner surveillance to lower satisfaction a year later (Métellus et al., 2025). Passive use strengthens the negative relation between time online and satisfaction, whereas active use buffers it (Quiroz & Mickelson, 2021). Two further studies, cited only at topic level, examine demand–withdraw patterns as a mediator of partner phubbing and satisfaction (Mosley et al., 2025), and marital quality as a moderator of upward comparison and depression (Wang et al., 2020).

Constructive evidence is thinner. Engagement with relationship content on Instagram is associated with higher relationship quality, although the correlational design leaves the direction open (Sharabi & Hopkins, 2021). Among Muslim couples, digital fiqh knowledge dampens the link between social media intensity and conflict ($\beta = -0.173$, $p < .05$) (Muthmainnah & Rahayu, 2026). Muslim literature names *sabar* (patience), *tawakkal* (trust in God), good communication, and shared responsibility as pillars of resilience (Hopipah et al., 2025). Spirituality has been studied in the marital harmony of six Indonesian Muslim couples (Mariyani et al., 2026), and interviews with 20 devout Muslim couples in the United States yielded themes of Islam as a way of life and a unifying force (Alghafli et al., 2014). Shared goals relate to relationship satisfaction ($r = .23$), most strongly when goals are aligned ($r = .43$) (Toma et al., 2023).

Normative Review

Table 2 maps the normative materials, including the Compilation of Islamic Law (Kompilasi Hukum Islam, KHI), against which family goals practices can be measured. A maqasid-based study read social-media-driven marital conflict through *sakinah*, *hifz al-'ird* (protection of honor), and *hifz al-nasl* (protection of lineage) (Rosli et al., 2025). A qualitative study of 12 working couples found face-to-face communication remains foundational and recommended communication agreements and digital literacy (Yanis et al., 2025). A study on children's privacy proposed cautionary guidelines for sharenting (Ar Rasyid & Ahsan, 2026), and marriage guidance is judged to revitalize premarital courses despite implementation obstacles (Prayogi & Jauhari, 2021).

Table 2 Normative Materials for Family Goals Practices

Aspect	Source	Relevance
Purpose of marriage	Q.S. Ar-Rum [30]: 21; KHI Arts. 3 and 77 (Republik Indonesia, 1991)	An inner measure, not an image
Proper conduct between spouses	Q.S. An-Nisa [4]: 19; Law No. 1/1974, Art. 33 (Republik Indonesia, 1974)	Propriety, not performance
Consultation and roles	Q.S. Asy-Syura [42]: 38; KHI Art. 79	Roles as agreement
Marital secrets	Hadith no. 1437 (Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, 1998); Rosli et al. (2025)	Protecting secrets and honor
Children's privacy	Law No. 27/2022, Arts. 2(2), 4(2)(e), and 25 (Republik Indonesia, 2022)	Specific data category; parents' public posts open to interpretation
Media ethics	MUI Fatwa No. 24/2017 (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2017)	Forbids spreading improper personal content

Discussion

From Posts to Standards

The findings suggest that family goals are not mere documentation but a process of constructing reality. Couples choose which moments deserve display (externalization); repeated, validated formats come to look like social facts about the ideal family (objectivation); and audiences then measure their own households against them (internalization). Mead adds

that platforms bring in a generalized other who is absent yet constantly weighed, so the *Me* fills with anonymous expectations while the *I* becomes a space of resistance, as in adolescents who are critical yet still pressured (Taba et al., 2020). This is our reading, not that study's finding. It implies that resilience should be measured separately from visibility: couples who rarely show themselves are not necessarily less resilient, and couples who look harmonious on screen are not necessarily *sakinah*.

Conditionality and the Comparison Mechanism

The conflict between Sharabi and Hopkins (2021) and Boeckxstaens et al. (2026) may reflect the observer's position. Couples who display their relationship may already be satisfied, whereas audiences absorbing other people's portraits risk comparing upward (Festinger, 1954). Because low satisfaction predicts comparing (Gursoy & Oner Ozkan, 2023), a vulnerable loop is conceivable: dissatisfaction prompts comparison, and comparison deepens dissatisfaction. This is a theoretical conjecture drawn from correlational studies, not a causal claim.

The two literatures stress different things. Non-Muslim research emphasizes psychological moderators such as active versus passive use (Quiroz & Mickelson, 2021), while Muslim research emphasizes conflict and religious coping (Hanafi et al., 2024; Hopipah et al., 2025). Our synthesis bridges the two: the comparison mechanism may also operate on religious content, and religious framing adds a standard of how a pious family "should" look, which may heighten the pressure.

An Islamic Family Law Lens

The KHI sets the aim of marriage as a *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* household and says that spouses carry a noble duty to uphold it (Republic of Indonesia, 1991). The criterion is substantive, not visual. The command of *mu'asyarah bil ma'ruf* (Q.S. An-Nisa [4]: 19) demands quality in how spouses live together rather than performance, and consultation (Q.S. Asy-Syura [42]: 38) makes the division of roles an agreement instead of a script copied from another account. Maqasid scholarship links social-media-driven household conflict to the protection of honor (*hifz al-'ird*) (Rosli et al., 2025), in line with the prohibition on revealing the intimacies of married life (Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, 1998). Household privacy thus becomes an ethical line for family goals, and displaying perfection can be criticized as trading the aims of marriage for image.

For children, the law treats information about them as a specific category of personal data, and its processing requires parental consent (Republic of Indonesia, 2022). Whether parents' public posts fall under the exemption for personal or household activity (Art. 2(2)) remains open to interpretation.

Practical Implications: A "Digital versus Performative Reality" Module

The findings support a "Digital versus Performative Reality" module in premarital guidance with five components: (1) literacy in telling curated content from everyday life; (2) reflection on expectations and comparison habits, including aligning the couple's own goals instead of copying another family's, in line with evidence that goal alignment relates to satisfaction (Toma et al., 2023); (3) practice in communication and role negotiation, including agreements on social media use (Yanis et al., 2025); (4) strengthening Islamic coping such as *sabar* and *tawakkal* (Hopipah et al., 2025); and (5) household digital ethics covering privacy and the protection of marital secrets. The module could be built into premarital guidance, whose effectiveness is constrained by implementation (Prayogi & Jauhari, 2021), so facilitators need training.

Limitations and Future Research

This review is limited by the quality of the primary studies, the dominance of non-Muslim contexts, eleven national journal articles whose review standards may differ from international ones, and the diversity of designs and samples. If algorithms decide which posts are seen and replayed, they also help shape what counts as normal for an ideal family, which raises the question of who has the authority to define a good Muslim family. No source in the dataset addresses algorithmic selection of family content; this is an interpretive observation that opens a path for future research. Claims about how Muslim couples interpret family goals remain inferential. Future studies could combine netnography, couple surveys, and longitudinal designs to test causal direction.

Conclusion

This review indicates that the family goals of Muslim families on social media are constructed through the display of relational, religious, and role-based practices and, on thinner evidence, economic, parenting, and family-resilience practices. Repetition and social validation can turn these representations into taken-for-granted references, which audiences interpret and negotiate through role-taking, a digital generalized other, and the tension between the *I* and the *Me*. The implications for marital resilience are conditional. Family goals can prompt reflection and religious motivation, but they can also trigger upward social comparison when treated as a standard for everyday life. Communication, goal alignment, Islamic coping, and digital fiqh knowledge emerge as buffers.

For Islamic family law, the measure of a successful marriage remains *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*, not an image on a screen. In practice, we recommend a "Digital versus Performative Reality" module in premarital guidance. The article offers a conceptual framework linking social construction, symbolic interactionism, and Islamic family law; because its findings are interpretive, they should be tested with primary data.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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