

Marriage Is Scary and Gen Z's Marriage Readiness: A *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* Perspective

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Abstract

The Marriage Is Scary phenomenon among Generation Z has emerged as a socially constructed perception shaped by continuous exposure to digital narratives surrounding marriage. This phenomenon has contributed to an increasing tendency to postpone marriage, which, at the societal level, is reflected in the declining marriage rate observed in recent years. However, such postponement should not be interpreted as a rejection of marriage; rather, it represents a cautious and reflective process through which young people seek to ensure their psychological, emotional, and social readiness before entering marital life. This study examines the influence of the Marriage Is Scary phenomenon on Generation Z's marriage readiness through the lens of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* as a normative framework in Islamic law. Employing a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, the study draws on interviews with university students living in two contrasting social environments: an open environment characterized by intensive social media exposure and an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) environment where social media use is more closely regulated. The findings reveal that the Marriage Is Scary phenomenon primarily affects psychological and social dimensions of marriage readiness without fostering anti-marriage attitudes. Among Generation Z raised in religious environments, the phenomenon is instead internalized as a means of cultivating prudence and strengthening preparedness for marriage. From the perspective of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'*, the phenomenon can be understood as a condition requiring preventive management to avoid potential social harm (*mafsadah*) while simultaneously promoting the realization of marital welfare (*maṣlahah*) in accordance with the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*). Consequently, this perspective encourages Generation Z to develop greater readiness to navigate the challenges of married life and to establish families founded upon social values and the Islamic ideal of a *sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah* marriage.

Keywords: Marriage Is Scary phenomenon; Generation Z; Marriage Readiness; *Sadd al-Dharā'i'*.

Introduction

Marriage constitutes a fundamental social and religious institution that plays a pivotal role in preserving the moral, cultural, and spiritual values of Indonesian society. From an Islamic perspective, marriage is understood as a sacred covenant that embodies both an act of worship (*'ibādah*) and a profound moral responsibility, as reflected in the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "*Marriage is part of my Sunnah, and whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not of me*" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim). Beyond its religious significance, marriage is regarded as a means

of attaining psychological tranquility, fostering social harmony, and ensuring the continuity of future generations. Within the Indonesian cultural context, marriage extends beyond a contractual union between two individuals; it represents a social commitment deeply rooted in religious values, collective responsibilities, and emotional bonds. Nevertheless, rapid social transformation has substantially reshaped both the perception and practice of marriage, particularly within contemporary society.

According to data released by Indonesia's National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) in 2023, marriage rates have steadily declined in recent years, particularly among individuals aged 20–24 years—a demographic that largely represents Generation Z—with an average annual decrease of approximately 2.3% since 2020. This decline should not be interpreted as evidence of an outright rejection of marriage; rather, it reflects an increasing tendency among young people to postpone marriage. In this study, Generation Z refers to individuals born between 1995 and 2012, who were between 13 and 30 years old in 2025. As the first generation to mature within the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0, Generation Z has experienced unprecedented integration of digital technologies into virtually every aspect of social life (Sutrisno, 2018; Irwansyah, 2019; Rahmawati, 2025). Consequently, social media has become the primary platform through which they acquire, interpret, and construct knowledge. The rapid, instantaneous, and fragmented nature of digital information consumption has significantly influenced Generation Z's perceptions of various aspects of life, including marriage (Tapscott, 2009; Prensky, 2010). Continuous exposure to digital content portraying marital conflict, divorce, and failed intimate relationships has contributed to the social construction of marriage as an institution characterized by uncertainty, vulnerability, and risk (Hidayati, 2021). Previous studies have demonstrated that Generation Z individuals who experience intensive social media exposure tend to report higher levels of marriage-related anxiety than those raised in environments where social media use is more carefully regulated (Sari, 2022; Rahmawati & Aziz, 2023; Putra & Lestari, 2023). Within Indonesia's socio-religious context, religious educational institutions such as *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) also function as important spaces for value formation and normative guidance in digital media consumption, thereby encouraging a more reflective and cautious understanding of marriage among young people.

The phenomenon has become widely recognized through the expression *Marriage Is Scary*, which reflects Generation Z's fear of marriage shaped by digital narratives and shared social experiences. This apprehension encompasses concerns about marital failure, financial burdens, post-marital social expectations, the perceived loss of personal freedom, as well as anxieties surrounding patriarchal culture and the complexities of spousal relationships (Khafsoh, 2025). The *Marriage Is Scary* discourse not only reinforces negative perceptions of marriage but also has the potential to

weaken Generation Z's confidence in marriage as a sacred and meaningful institution (Syafiq, 2024). Nevertheless, this phenomenon should not be interpreted as a rejection of marriage itself. Rather, it reflects a growing tendency among young people to approach marriage with greater caution, often resulting in the deliberate postponement of marriage as a process of self-reflection and personal preparation (Adhani & Aripudin, 2024).

Marriage readiness is a multidimensional construct encompassing psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. Psychologically, it involves emotional maturity, effective stress management, and interpersonal communication skills. Socially, it includes financial independence, preparedness to assume family responsibilities, and the ability to adapt to new social environments. From a spiritual perspective, particularly within Islam, marriage is regarded as an act of worship (*'ibādah*) that requires moral consciousness, personal responsibility, and a long-term commitment to family life (Wulandari, 2024; Syafiq, 2024). Deficiencies in any of these dimensions may increase the likelihood of marital conflict and relational instability, thereby undermining broader social cohesion.

Within the framework of Islamic law, marriage is understood not merely as a social contract but also as an act of worship intended to safeguard human welfare (*maṣlahah*). Consequently, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon warrants examination through a normative legal framework capable of assessing the relationship between means and consequences. One of the most relevant approaches within *uṣūl al-fiqh* is the doctrine of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'*, a method of Islamic legal reasoning (*istinbāt*) that seeks to prevent actions or means (*dharī'ah*) likely to lead to harm (*mafsadah*) (Al-Qarafi, n.d.). This doctrine was developed primarily within the Mālikī and Ḥanbalī schools of Islamic jurisprudence and is grounded in the principle of *i'tibār al-ma'ālāt*, namely, the consideration of the foreseeable consequences of human actions (Ibn Qayyim, 2003; Al-Zuhaili, 1986). Viewed through this perspective, digital narratives surrounding the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon may function as a *dharī'ah* capable of undermining the moral and social significance of marriage if left unregulated. When fear-based narratives are consumed uncritically and without normative guidance, they may evolve into pathways leading to broader social harm, particularly by diminishing marriage readiness and undermining the objectives of Islamic law in preserving lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*) and human dignity (*ḥifẓ al-'ird*) (Munawaroh, 2022; Salsabila, 2025). Accordingly, this study investigates the impact of the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon on Generation Z's marriage readiness while examining its implications through the perspective of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* as a preventive framework within Islamic legal thought.

Against this background, the present study addresses two interrelated research questions. First, it examines how the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon influences the marriage readiness of Generation Z, a generation that has grown up in a highly

digitalized environment and is continuously exposed to marriage-related narratives through social media. This inquiry seeks to understand the extent to which these narratives shape Generation Z's attitudes, perceptions, and orientations toward marriage as a social institution. Second, the study explores the phenomenon through the perspective of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* as a preventive approach in Islamic law, assessing its potential to prevent pathways leading to social harm (*mafsadah*) while reinforcing the values of public welfare (*maṣlahah*) embedded in the institution of marriage. By integrating empirical findings with Islamic legal theory, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Generation Z perceives marriage and to propose a normative framework for restoring the positive meaning of marriage within contemporary society.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical design to examine the impact of the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon on Generation Z's marriage readiness through the perspective of the *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* doctrine. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study seeks to explore meanings, perceptions, and social constructions surrounding marriage among Generation Z rather than to quantify causal relationships or behavioral patterns. The analytical framework was informed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's theory of social construction, which conceptualizes reality as a dialectical process consisting of externalization, objectification, and internalization. Within this framework, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon is understood as a socially constructed reality emerging from Generation Z's interaction with digital narratives, collective social experiences, and the normative values embedded in their respective social environments.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling following the approach proposed by Sugiyono. The study involved twelve undergraduate students from Al-Qolam University, Malang, aged between 19 and 23 years. To examine the influence of different social environments on perceptions of marriage, participants were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of six students residing in relatively unrestricted social environments characterized by intensive social media exposure, while the second group comprised six students living in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), where social media use is subject to greater institutional regulation. This classification was not intended to distinguish between active and passive social media users in absolute terms but rather to explore how different social contexts shape perceptions and attitudes toward marriage.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted both face-to-face and online via WhatsApp and Instagram. The interview data were complemented by field observations and documentary evidence to enrich contextual

understanding. The interview protocol explored participants' perceptions of the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon, the factors contributing to its emergence, their motivations for marriage, and their perceived readiness to enter married life.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The empirical findings were interpreted through the combined analytical lenses of Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory and the preventive legal reasoning embodied in the *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* doctrine, particularly its emphasis on preventing *mafsadah* (social harm). To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source and methodological triangulation by comparing data obtained from participants representing different social environments.

Result and Discussion

The interview findings were analyzed through the lens of Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, revealing that the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon among Generation Z develops through three interrelated dialectical processes: externalization, objectification, and internalization. During the externalization stage, most participants reported that they first encountered the *Marriage Is Scary* discourse through social media platforms and interactions with their peers. This finding supports previous studies demonstrating that intensive engagement with digital media significantly reinforces perceptions of marriage-related fear among Generation Z.

The objectification stage was characterized by the emergence of a shared social narrative in which marriage is increasingly portrayed as a risky and burdensome institution. Interview data indicate that the widespread circulation of digital content depicting financial pressures, marital conflict, divorce, and post-marital trauma has transformed individual experiences into collectively accepted social realities. As these narratives are repeatedly reproduced through digital platforms and interpersonal interactions, they become normalized and shape common understandings of marriage among young people.

At the internalization stage, these socially constructed narratives are absorbed into participants' personal value systems and influence their attitudes toward marriage. This process was reflected in respondents' expressions of hesitation, greater selectivity in choosing a life partner, and a tendency to postpone marriage until they perceived themselves to be psychologically, socially, and economically prepared. Rather than fostering outright rejection of marriage, the internalization of the *Marriage Is Scary* discourse encourages a more cautious and reflective approach to marital commitment.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the social construction of the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon emerges through the dynamic interaction between digital media exposure, social environments, and individual processes of internalization. These interconnected processes collectively shape Generation Z's perceptions of marriage, influence their attitudes toward marital commitment, and affect their level of marriage readiness.

Table 1. Interview Findings from Six Generation Z Participants Living in High Social Media Exposure Environments.

Participant (Age)	Study Program		Externalization (How Participants First Encountered the Marriage Is Scary Phenomenon)	Objectification (Collective Framing of the Marriage Is Scary Narrative)	Internalization (Personal Attitudes and Marriage Readiness)
Anggun Putri Rahayu (22)	Islamic Religious Education		Became familiar with the <i>Marriage Is Scary</i> trend through TikTok. The phenomenon portrays marriage as both frightening and meaningful, containing both negative and positive messages.	The trend has significantly influenced perceptions of marriage, highlighting that marriage becomes frightening only when entered with the wrong partner.	Feels apprehensive about marriage but does not reject it. Prefers to postpone marriage in order to achieve greater personal preparedness.
Siti Aliyatul Maulidia (23)	Islamic Law	Family	Learned about the phenomenon through social media. Interprets <i>Marriage Is Scary</i> as fear of marriage while recognizing both its negative and positive implications.	Believes the trend should encourage Generation Z to learn from others' experiences and strive to build healthy and successful marriages.	Does not feel particularly anxious about marriage because current priorities remain education and career development.
Rifada Sagna Firdausi (22)	Mathematics Education		Encountered the trend through TikTok. Perceives that negative portrayals of marriage greatly outweigh positive ones.	Acknowledges that the trend influences perceptions of marriage but believes marriage will not be frightening when shared with the right partner.	Does not fear marriage. Views the phenomenon as motivation for self-improvement in preparation for finding an equal and compatible spouse.
M. Malik Anwar (23)	Islamic Law	Family	Recognized the widespread social media discourse portraying marriage as frightening due to numerous reports of marital problems, while acknowledging some positive aspects.	Considers marriage a lifelong partnership requiring cooperation and careful preparation in multiple aspects of life.	Chooses to postpone marriage while deepening knowledge about marriage and engaging in personal reflection and self-development.
Muh. Amir Amrulloh (19)	Islamic Law	Family	Learned about the trend through various social media platforms. Believes fear of marriage largely arises from exposure to negative	Views marriage as a serious commitment that requires comprehensive preparation. Believes the trend should encourage Generation Z to think	Does not fear marriage. Believes economic readiness should be demonstrated through responsibility and

		marital although lessons also exist.	content, positive	more critically before marrying.	effort rather than becoming overwhelmed by fear.
Afiq Irhan Basya (22)	Islamic Communication and Broadcasting	Encountered the trend through Instagram, TikTok, and X. Perceives marriage as often falling short of expectations, with predominantly negative portrayals despite some positive messages.		Acknowledges that the discourse generates fear among Generation Z but believes it should motivate young people to prepare for marriage rather than focus exclusively on negative narratives.	Does not fear marriage. Considers postponing marriage a rational decision that allows greater personal maturity and readiness before entering married life.

The interview findings indicate that the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon among Generation Z is largely shaped by intensive exposure to social media, particularly through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X. The dominant narratives portrayed on these platforms frequently depict marriage as an institution characterized by challenges, uncertainty, and risk. Although these narratives also convey positive messages emphasizing the importance of psychological, emotional, and social preparedness before marriage, negative representations remain considerably more prevalent. As a result, Generation Z has developed a shared understanding that a successful marriage cannot be achieved without adequate preparation and the presence of a compatible life partner.

At the stage of internalization, these narratives do not necessarily foster anti-marriage attitudes. Instead, they encourage Generation Z to adopt a more critical and reflective perspective toward marriage. Many participants expressed a preference for postponing marriage in order to prioritize self-development, higher education, career advancement, and a deeper understanding of the responsibilities and meaning of marital life. These findings suggest that, rather than discouraging marriage altogether, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon functions as a mechanism through which Generation Z cultivates greater awareness, prudence, and preparedness in approaching marriage as a long-term commitment.

Table 2. Interview Findings from Six Generation Z Participants Living in Environments with More Regulated Social Media Use

Respondent (Name and Age)	Study Program	EXTERNALIZATION (Classification of the Process through Which Generation Z Forms Its Perceptions of the "Marriage Is Scary" Issue)	OBJECTIFICATION (Classification of the Social Narrative Framing Pattern of Generation Z Regarding "Marriage Is Scary")	INTERNALIZATION (Classification of the Process of Value Internalization and Attitude Formation of Generation Z toward the "Marriage Is Scary" Phenomenon)
Afida Rahma Shintiya (22 years old)	Islamic Family Law	Learned about the trend through TikTok. <i>Marriage Is Scary</i> is perceived as a depiction of marriage as frightening, with so many negative portrayals	Marriage should be built upon faith rather than pressure or social demands. The fear generated by this trend should encourage	Not afraid, but uncertain that marriage may not meet expectations. Therefore, the trend serves as a medium for

		that its positive aspects are almost invisible.	Generation Z to become more selective and wise in preparing for marriage.	self-reflection before choosing a life partner.
Wirda Jamillatun Nisa' (19 years old)	English Language Education	The narrative of fear of marriage is widespread across social media. Its influence is predominantly negative due to the abundance of stories about marital problems, although the trend also has positive aspects.	The trend is intimidating and strongly influences marriage readiness. It encourages individuals to become more prepared and self-aware before entering married life.	Afraid, but not to the extent of rejecting marriage altogether. Marriage should take place when it aligns with Islamic teachings and receives parental approval.
Indana Zulfa (22 years old)	Mathematics Education	The fear of marriage narrative spread through social media after observing numerous household problems. Nevertheless, the trend also contains positive aspects.	Marriage is indeed frightening, as reflected in the <i>Marriage Is Scary</i> narrative, but this also signifies that marriage requires comprehensive preparation in every aspect of life.	Afraid, and therefore intends to postpone marriage until fully prepared in every aspect. She also chooses to avoid unclear romantic relationships to prevent ending up with the wrong partner, as is often portrayed among today's generation.
Nur Yaqin Zakaria (22 years old)	Islamic Family Law	The fear of marriage narrative is widely circulated across social media. Its influence is largely negative because of the many reported marital problems, although it also offers positive lessons.	Marriage is not something easy. Therefore, the <i>Marriage Is Scary</i> trend should reshape Generation Z's mindset so they become better prepared to enter marriage based on the principles of Islamic law.	Not afraid, and plans to marry when fully prepared both physically and spiritually, so that the marriage can be carried out in accordance with contemporary social realities while remaining guided by Islamic principles.
Maulana Saufil Ula (20 years old)	Sharia Economic Law	The narrative of fear of marriage is widespread across social media. Although it is dominated by negative stories about marriage, the trend also contains valuable positive lessons.	Marriage is a relationship that requires careful and thorough preparation. This trend teaches people to focus on its positive aspects so they can prepare more maturely for married life.	Not afraid, because the trend encourages greater personal readiness. Delaying marriage due to insufficient preparation is considered a wise decision.
M. Jibran Hakim (21 years old)	English Language Education	Learned about the trend through the X platform. <i>Marriage Is Scary</i> reflects fear of marriage due to the prevalence of negative narratives, but individuals should focus on its positive lessons instead.	The narrative may make Generation Z feel afraid of marriage, but it should instead encourage them to broaden their perspective, prepare themselves for marriage, and avoid focusing solely on its negative aspects.	Not afraid, because the trend motivates greater personal preparedness. Postponing marriage until one is truly ready is viewed as a wise choice in today's context.

Based on the interview findings, it can be concluded that the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon does not foster fear of marriage among Generation Z participants living in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) environments. Although the respondents were familiar with the *Marriage Is Scary* discourse through social media, their exposure was relatively limited and predominantly consisted of negative narratives surrounding marital life. Nevertheless, the religious values, normative guidance, and strong foundation in Islamic family jurisprudence (*fiqh al-usrah*) cultivated within the *pesantren* environment enabled participants to interpret these narratives critically. Rather than perceiving them as reasons to reject marriage, participants regarded them as reminders of the importance of adequate preparation before entering married life. Consequently, most respondents expressed no fear of marriage; instead, they preferred to postpone marriage until they considered themselves both psychologically and spiritually prepared in accordance with Islamic teachings. These findings suggest that, within the *pesantren* context, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon functions primarily as a catalyst for self-reflection and enhanced marriage readiness rather than as a factor contributing to anti-marriage attitudes.

A comparative analysis of the findings presented in Tables 1 and 2 demonstrates that the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon among Generation Z is socially constructed through exposure to digital narratives, regardless of whether individuals reside in environments characterized by intensive social media exposure or in settings where digital media use is more carefully regulated. While differences in social environments influence both the intensity of media exposure and the interpretation of marriage-related narratives, they do not produce fundamentally different attitudes toward marriage itself. Participants living in environments with high levels of social media exposure reported more frequent encounters with negative portrayals of marriage, leading them to develop more critical and reflective attitudes that encouraged caution and the postponement of marriage until adequate personal readiness had been achieved. In contrast, participants residing in *pesantren* environments interpreted similar narratives more selectively due to the influence of religious values, normative guidance, and a stronger understanding of Islamic family law. Although these differing social contexts shaped the process of internalization in distinct ways, both groups ultimately shared a common orientation: neither rejected marriage as an institution. Instead, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon served as a mechanism for cultivating greater awareness, prudence, and preparedness, encouraging Generation Z to approach marriage with both rational consideration and religious responsibility.

The Impact of the *Marriage Is Scary* Phenomenon on Generation Z's Marriage Readiness

The *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon has a direct influence on the formation of marriage readiness among Generation Z, particularly across the psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. The interview findings indicate that negative narratives surrounding marriage circulated through social media contribute to the development of cautious attitudes and an increasing tendency to postpone marriage among young people. However, this influence does not translate into a rejection of marriage. Instead, it encourages the reinterpretation of marriage as a serious, long-term commitment that requires comprehensive psychological, emotional, social, and normative preparedness (Putra & Lestari, 2023).

Among Generation Z participants living in environments characterized by intensive social media exposure, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon appears to reduce psychological readiness in the short term. Continuous exposure to digital narratives portraying marital conflict, divorce, and failed relationships generates feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and concerns about personal inadequacy. Nevertheless, these emotional responses do not remain confined to fear alone. Rather, they evolve into a process of critical self-reflection that motivates participants to strengthen their psychological readiness, enhance emotional maturity, and exercise greater discernment in selecting a life partner before entering marriage (Wulandari, 2024).

From a social perspective, the phenomenon also reshapes how Generation Z understands the responsibilities associated with marriage, particularly with regard to economic preparedness, financial independence, and the capacity to fulfill family roles. Marriage is increasingly perceived as an institution that demands careful planning and the ability to navigate the complexities of family life. Consequently, postponing marriage is viewed as a rational strategy for minimizing the risks of marital conflict and relationship failure, which are frequently highlighted in digital media narratives (Nasution & Putri, 2022).

In contrast, among Generation Z participants living in environments where social media use is more carefully regulated—particularly within *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) communities—the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon exerts a considerably weaker influence on marriage readiness. The religious environment functions as a normative filter through which digital narratives are critically evaluated and transformed into opportunities for self-reflection rather than sources of fear. Within this context, marriage readiness is understood as part of one's religious devotion (*ibādah*) and moral responsibility under Islamic law. Consequently, concerns about marriage do not develop into excessive anxiety but instead serve as motivation to prepare oneself physically, emotionally, spiritually, and morally in accordance with Islamic teachings (Khafsoh, 2025).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the principal impact of the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon lies not in fostering anti-marriage attitudes but in reshaping

Generation Z's orientation toward marriage readiness. Rather than discouraging marriage, the phenomenon encourages young people to approach marriage with greater awareness, selectivity, and maturity. Its influence, however, varies according to the intensity of digital media exposure and the normative characteristics of individuals' social and religious environments. Accordingly, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon can be understood not as a deterrent to marriage but as a catalyst for cultivating more deliberate and responsible preparation for married life (Rahmawati & Aziz, 2023).

Examining the *Marriage Is Scary* Phenomenon Through the Doctrine of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'*

From the perspective of the *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* doctrine, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon among Generation Z may be understood as a *dharī'ah* (means) that has the potential to lead to *mafsadah* (social harm) if left unmanaged and without appropriate normative guidance. The widespread circulation of fear-based narratives about marriage on social media is, in principle, *mubāh* (permissible), as it represents personal experiences, individual opinions, and collective reflections on contemporary marital life. However, when such narratives become predominantly negative and gradually shape collective perceptions that undermine confidence in marriage as a sacred institution, they may function as a *dharī'ah* leading to broader social harm. Such harm includes the erosion of the sacred value of marriage in Islam and a shift in young people's understanding of marriage from a religious commitment to a source of fear and uncertainty (Khafsoh, 2025).

Within the framework of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'*, legal evaluation is determined not only by the apparent nature of an act but also by its foreseeable consequences (*i'tibār al-ma'ālāt*). Continuous exposure to the *Marriage Is Scary* discourse without critical reflection or normative guidance may cultivate excessive pessimism toward marriage, heighten fear and anxiety, and encourage the disproportionate postponement of marriage. These consequences may ultimately undermine the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*), particularly the preservation of lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), family stability, and social order. Accordingly, although the *Marriage Is Scary* discourse does not explicitly discourage marriage, the predominance of its negative social consequences warrants its consideration as a *dharī'ah* whose harmful potential should be regulated and mitigated (Ibn Qayyim, 2003; Al-Zuhaili, 1986).

Classical discussions of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* classify means according to the probability and predominance of the harm they are likely to produce. Within this framework, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon may be categorized as a *dharī'ah* that *ghāliban* (predominantly) tends toward harm when the narratives surrounding marriage remain unbalanced and are not accompanied by a comprehensive understanding of marriage from the perspective of Islamic teachings. This tendency is

reflected in the emergence of marriage-related anxiety and growing skepticism toward marriage among some members of Generation Z, often outweighing efforts to cultivate constructive readiness for married life. Consequently, the doctrine of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* calls for normative intervention aimed at limiting or regulating such pathways before their harmful consequences become more pervasive and socially systemic (Salsabila, 2025).

Applying the doctrine of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* to the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon should not be interpreted as advocating the suppression of public discussion about marriage. Rather, it seeks to guide public discourse in a manner that remains consistent with the objectives of Islamic law. This approach is grounded in the legal maxim *dar' al-mafāsid muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ* ("preventing harm takes precedence over promoting benefit"), which emphasizes that the prevention of harm should be prioritized over the attainment of benefit. Consequently, digital narratives that have the potential to normalize fear of marriage should be balanced through educational and normative initiatives that reaffirm marriage as an act of worship, a moral responsibility, and a means of establishing a family grounded in *maṣlahah* (public welfare) (Munawaroh, 2022).

In this regard, religious educational environments such as *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) may be viewed as practical manifestations of the *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* principle within contemporary society. In these settings, the *Marriage Is Scary* discourse is not internalized as a justification for rejecting marriage but is selectively interpreted as a reminder of the importance of entering marriage with adequate preparation. The findings demonstrate that strengthening religious values and normative guidance can effectively prevent the harmful potential of the same digital narratives, transforming them from possible sources of social harm into opportunities for self-reflection, personal development, and enhanced marriage readiness (Syafiq, 2024).

Overall, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon should be understood, through the perspective of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'*, as a contemporary social reality that requires preventive management rather than outright rejection or neglect. When these narratives are appropriately directed through educational, religious, and normative approaches, their potential harmful effects can be minimized while preserving the benefits and sanctity of marriage. This perspective is consistent with the Qur'anic injunction in Q. 17:32, "*Do not even approach unlawful sexual intercourse (zinā)*", which illustrates that Islamic law not only prohibits *zinā* itself but also seeks to prevent all pathways (*dharā'i'*) that may lead to it. In this context, excessive and unmanaged fear of marriage may itself become one such pathway by distancing young people from lawful marriage and increasing the risk of relationships outside the ethical framework of Islamic law. Therefore, managing the *Marriage Is Scary* discourse through the doctrine of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* represents a preventive strategy for safeguarding both human dignity (*ḥifẓ al-irḍ*) and lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), two essential objectives of the

maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. More broadly, these findings demonstrate the methodological adaptability of Islamic law in responding to contemporary digital phenomena while remaining firmly oriented toward the higher objectives of the Sharī'ah (Ibn Qayyim, 2003).

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon among Generation Z represents a socially constructed reality shaped by digital narratives surrounding marriage. Rather than fostering rejection of marriage, the phenomenon primarily reorients young people's understanding of marriage readiness. Continuous exposure to predominantly negative narratives encourages greater caution and contributes to the postponement of marriage as a means of achieving more comprehensive psychological, social, and spiritual preparedness.

The study further reveals that social context significantly influences how these narratives are interpreted. Generation Z individuals living in environments characterized by intensive social media exposure tend to develop more critical and reflective attitudes toward marriage, whereas those residing in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) environments interpret the same narratives through the lens of religious values and normative guidance. Consequently, the *pesantren* environment functions as a value-based filter that transforms fear-based digital narratives into opportunities for self-reflection and enhanced marriage readiness rather than anti-marriage attitudes.

From the perspective of the *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* doctrine, the *Marriage Is Scary* phenomenon may be understood as a contemporary *dharī'ah* (means) that has the potential to lead to *mafsadah* (social harm) if left unmanaged. Accordingly, preventive strategies grounded in normative education, digital literacy, and religious guidance are essential to ensure that digital discourse surrounding marriage remains aligned with the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*). These findings highlight the capacity of *Sadd al-Dharā'i'* to serve not only as a classical legal doctrine but also as a dynamic analytical framework for addressing contemporary socio-digital challenges affecting Muslim youth. By promoting a balanced understanding of marriage as both a moral responsibility and a meaningful lifelong commitment, this approach contributes to the realization of families characterized by *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (compassion).

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