

## THE DYNAMICS OF ISLAMIC VALUES AND KOREAN DRAMA ROMANTICISM IN SHAPING GEN Z MUSLIM WOMEN'S LIFE PARTNER PREFERENCES

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the dynamics of Islamic values and representations of romanticism in Korean dramas as they relate to the partner preferences of Generation Z Muslim women. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, involving eight Muslim women aged 18–29 who actively watch romantic Korean dramas. Data were collected via an open-ended online questionnaire and analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of open coding, categorization, theme identification, and interpretation of meaning. Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation and member checking. The results indicate that romance in Korean dramas is primarily interpreted as a reflection of healthy relationship qualities, including emotional maturity, supportive communication, responsibility, empathy, and a sense of security. The formation of partner preferences occurs through a process involving media exposure, internalization, evaluation, value negotiation, and preference reconstruction. The findings also indicate that the influence of Korean dramas is not deterministic. Informants actively select values they consider aligned with the principles of Islamic Family Law—such as religion, morality, responsibility, and respect for one's partner—while rejecting values that conflict with Sharia. This study confirms that preferences for a life partner result from a negotiation between media representations, individual experiences, and Islamic values.

**Keywords:** Korean Drama, Partner Preference, Muslimah Gen Z

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis dinamika nilai Islam dan representasi romantisme dalam drama Korea terhadap preferensi pasangan hidup Muslimah Generasi Z. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan melibatkan delapan Muslimah berusia 18–29 tahun yang aktif menonton drama Korea romantis. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner daring terbuka dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik melalui tahapan open coding, kategorisasi, identifikasi tema, dan interpretasi makna. Kredibilitas data dijaga melalui triangulasi sumber dan member checking. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa romantisme dalam drama Korea dimaknai terutama sebagai kualitas relasi yang sehat, meliputi kematangan emosional, komunikasi suportif, tanggung jawab, empati, dan rasa aman. Pembentukan preferensi pasangan hidup berlangsung melalui proses paparan media, internalisasi, evaluasi, negosiasi nilai, dan rekonstruksi preferensi. Temuan juga menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh drama Korea tidak bersifat deterministik. Informan secara aktif menyeleksi nilai-nilai yang dianggap selaras dengan prinsip Hukum Keluarga Islam, seperti agama, akhlak, tanggung jawab, dan penghormatan terhadap pasangan, serta menolak nilai yang bertentangan dengan syariat. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa preferensi pasangan hidup merupakan hasil negosiasi antara representasi media, pengalaman individu, dan nilai-nilai Islam.

**Kata Kunci:** Drama Korea, Preferensi Pasangan, Muslimah Generasi Z

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has transformed not only economic and technological systems but also cultural consumption patterns across societies. One of the most influential manifestations of contemporary cultural globalization is the Korean Wave (Hallyu), which has expanded worldwide through music, films, television dramas, and digital media platforms (Lestari & Achdiani, 2024). Since the late 1990s, Korean dramas (K-Dramas) have become one of the most successful vehicles for disseminating Korean popular culture beyond national boundaries (Aulia, 2019). In Indonesia, Korean popular culture began gaining significant public attention after the broadcast of the drama *Mother's Sea* in 2002 (Putri et al., 2019). The rapid growth of streaming platforms has further intensified access to Korean cultural products, particularly among younger generations who spend substantial amounts of time consuming digital entertainment content.

Among the various genres offered by K-Dramas, romantic narratives consistently occupy a dominant position in audience preferences (Putri et al., 2019). According to a survey conducted by Jakpat, romantic and romantic-comedy genres remain the most favored categories among Indonesian viewers, with women comprising the majority of audiences and individuals aged 20–29 representing the largest demographic segment (Angelia, 2022). This trend is particularly relevant to Generation Z, a cohort born between 1997 and 2012 that has grown up within a highly connected digital environment (Fatimah & Rahma, 2025). As digital natives, Gen Z members interact intensively with social

media and streaming platforms, making them more exposed to transnational media narratives than previous generations (Yuliandi, 2025). Research by the IDN Research Institute further indicates that Korean dramas constitute one of the most consumed forms of entertainment among Indonesian Gen Z audiences (Triadanti, 2023).

Romantic K-Dramas frequently portray idealized relationships characterized by emotional devotion, physical attractiveness, financial stability, and extraordinary acts of affection. Male protagonists are often depicted as successful, handsome, protective, emotionally attentive, and economically established individuals, creating highly appealing representations of romantic partners (Anisa Nur Kholifah, 2022). Repeated exposure to such narratives may influence viewers' expectations regarding romantic relationships and partner selection. This phenomenon is consistent with Cultivation Theory, which argues that long-term media exposure can shape perceptions of social reality and influence individual beliefs about interpersonal relationships (Gerbner et al., 2002). Furthermore, parasocial interaction theory suggests that audiences may develop one-sided emotional attachments to media characters and celebrities, leading them to internalize the traits displayed by those figures as desirable standards in real-life relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

The issue becomes increasingly important when examined within the

context of Muslim women's partner preferences. Choosing a life partner is a crucial stage in the formation of marriage and family life. Previous studies have emphasized that compatibility in partner selection contributes significantly to marital satisfaction and family stability (Irawan & Khuluq, 2024). Within Islamic teachings, partner selection is guided by normative principles rooted in faith, morality, and religious commitment. The Prophet Muhammad emphasized religiosity as a primary criterion in choosing a spouse, highlighting that religious values serve as a foundation for individual behavior and family harmony (Nizar & Kumaini, 2024). This principle is reflected in the well-known hadith narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim concerning the preference for a religious spouse (Al-Asqalani, 2007). Similarly, Islamic family law places considerable emphasis on moral character, responsibility, leadership, and religious commitment as essential qualities in marital relationships (Pratiwi, 2020; Qairani, 2023).

The growing popularity of romantic K-Dramas raises important questions regarding the interaction between media-generated ideals and Islamic values concerning marriage and partner selection. Contemporary media representations may contribute to the development of unrealistic expectations regarding future spouses, particularly when physical attractiveness, wealth, and romantic perfection become dominant

evaluative criteria. Such expectations may create tensions between religiously informed marital values and culturally constructed ideals promoted through popular media. Previous research has demonstrated that media exposure can significantly influence romantic beliefs, relationship expectations, and mate preferences among young adults (Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). However, the extent to which Muslim women negotiate these competing value systems remains insufficiently explored.

Several studies have investigated the relationship between Korean popular culture and partner preference formation. Aulia (2019) found that Korean drama consumption contributed to the emergence of Cinderella Complex tendencies among female viewers, influencing their expectations toward protective and economically stable partners. Qairani (2023) reported that celebrity worship significantly affected partner preferences among K-Pop fans by encouraging the idealization of physical and personality traits associated with admired celebrities. Irawan and Khuluq (2024) demonstrated that Korean Wave exposure influenced Muslim fans' criteria for selecting life partners, particularly regarding appearance and character attributes. Likewise, Maida and Habibi (2025) revealed that K-Pop fandom shaped partner preferences through the internalization of positive characteristics associated with idol figures.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, several research gaps remain evident. First, existing studies predominantly focus on K-Pop fandom and celebrity worship rather than romantic narratives embedded within Korean dramas. Second, most studies examine general audiences and rarely focus specifically on Muslim Gen Z women as a distinct sociocultural and religious group. Third, prior research primarily adopts psychological or media studies perspectives while paying limited attention to Islamic Family Law as a normative analytical framework. Fourth, little is known about how Muslim women actively negotiate the coexistence of religious values and media-generated romantic ideals in constructing their partner preferences.

This study offers a novel contribution by integrating media studies, cultivation theory, parasocial interaction theory, and Islamic Family Law perspectives to examine the formation of partner preferences among Muslim Gen Z women. Unlike previous studies that focus solely on media influence, this research investigates the dynamic process through which religious values interact, compete, and negotiate with romantic representations promoted by Korean dramas. The study therefore contributes to the growing scholarship on religion, media, and youth identity formation by providing a multidimensional understanding of how contemporary Muslim women navigate

global popular culture while maintaining commitment to Islamic marital principles.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how romantic representations in Korean dramas shape perceptions of the ideal life partner among Muslim Gen Z women, examine the compatibility of these preferences with Islamic Family Law principles, and explore the mechanisms through which Islamic values and Korean popular culture are negotiated in the construction of partner preferences. The scope of the study is limited to Muslim Gen Z women as active consumers of Korean dramas, focusing on the intersection between media influence, religious values, and partner selection within the contemporary Indonesian context.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how romantic representations in Korean dramas influence partner preferences among Muslim Generation Z women and how these preferences are negotiated within the framework of Islamic family values. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand participants' subjective experiences, interpretations, and meaning-making processes regarding romantic relationships and ideal life partners rather than to measure causal relationships statistically. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of complex social and cultural phenomena that are closely linked

to personal beliefs, media consumption, and religious values.

Data were collected through an online open-ended questionnaire consisting of eight essay-based questions designed to elicit detailed narrative responses from participants. Open-ended questionnaires allow respondents to articulate their perspectives, experiences, and reflections freely while minimizing the constraints often associated with closed-response instruments (Iba et al., 2023). The questions focused on participants' experiences of consuming romantic Korean dramas, perceptions of ideal partner characteristics, influences of media representations on relationship expectations, and considerations of Islamic values in partner selection. The online format was selected to facilitate participation from individuals residing in different regions of Indonesia and to provide respondents with sufficient flexibility to formulate reflective answers. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly employed in qualitative research to identify individuals who possess specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Himam et al., 2026). The inclusion criteria required participants to be: (1) female; (2) Muslim; (3) aged between 18 and 29 years; (4) unmarried; and (5) regular viewers of romantic Korean dramas. Based on these criteria, eight Muslim Generation Z women were recruited as research participants. The participants originated from various

regions of Indonesia, including Jakarta, Bekasi, Tangerang, Malang, Wonogiri, and Central Kalimantan, thereby providing diverse social and geographical backgrounds that enriched the dataset.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical process involved several stages, namely familiarization with the data, open coding, categorization of codes, identification of recurring themes, and interpretation of thematic patterns emerging from participants' narratives (Najmah et al., 2023). This method enabled the researcher to systematically identify common patterns as well as variations in participants' perceptions regarding ideal partner preferences and the influence of Korean drama romantic narratives. The interpretation of findings was further informed by relevant theoretical perspectives, particularly Cultivation Theory, parasocial interaction, and Islamic Family Law principles, to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Zahroh et al., 2025).

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, the study applied source triangulation and member checking procedures. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing responses across participants to identify converging and diverging perspectives concerning partner preferences and media influence (Husnullail et al., 2024). Meanwhile, member checking was performed by

returning preliminary interpretations to participants for confirmation, clarification, and validation, thereby enhancing the accuracy and authenticity of the findings (Haji, 2025). Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved. Saturation became evident after the eighth participant, as no substantially new themes, categories, or insights emerged from subsequent responses. The recurring patterns observed across participants indicated that the data were sufficiently rich to address the research objectives and support meaningful thematic interpretation (Rusmanto et al., 2026).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Representations of Romanticism in Korean Dramas**

The thematic analysis revealed that romanticism represented in Korean dramas is not merely perceived by participants as an expression of affection between romantic partners but rather as a broader construction of the characteristics that define an ideal life partner. The participants consistently interpreted romantic narratives through the portrayal of male protagonists who demonstrate emotional maturity, supportive communication, responsibility, loyalty, and sensitivity toward their partners' psychological needs. Consequently, romanticism was not understood solely as the manifestation of love through gifts, grand gestures, or physical attraction, but as the capacity to create emotional security, mutual understanding, and long-

term commitment within a relationship. This finding indicates that romantic representations in Korean dramas function as symbolic resources through which young Muslim women conceptualize desirable relationship qualities.

This tendency appeared consistently across almost all participants. Rather than emphasizing physical attractiveness as the primary criterion for an ideal partner, participants repeatedly highlighted emotional stability, respectful communication, empathy, and the ability to manage interpersonal conflicts constructively. One participant described an ideal partner as a man who "knows when to be firm, when to show affection, can choose appropriate words, and seeks solutions together when facing problems" (R2, DY). Another participant emphasized the importance of a partner who is "capable of providing physical and emotional security while respecting his partner without being judgmental" (R3, AF). These narratives demonstrate that participants' understanding of romantic relationships extends beyond superficial attraction and increasingly reflects relational competencies associated with healthy and sustainable partnerships.

The findings further suggest that exposure to Korean dramas has contributed to an expansion of the meaning of romanticism itself. Romanticism is no longer interpreted merely as emotional excitement or dramatic expressions of love, but rather as a set of relational values that include empathy, commitment, emotional

support, mutual respect, and effective communication. Such values are repeatedly embedded within the narratives of Korean dramas, where male protagonists are often portrayed as attentive listeners, emotionally expressive individuals, and reliable companions who prioritize the well-being of their partners. Through repeated exposure to these portrayals, participants developed an understanding that successful romantic relationships are characterized by emotional intimacy and psychological support rather than by material wealth or physical appearance alone.

From the perspective of representation theory, media do not simply reflect reality but actively construct and circulate meanings regarding what is considered desirable, normal, or ideal within society (Hall, 2011). The repeated portrayal of emotionally supportive and responsible male characters creates a symbolic framework through which viewers interpret romantic relationships and evaluate potential partners. In this context, Korean dramas function not only as entertainment products but also as cultural texts that contribute to the production of social meanings surrounding intimacy, gender roles, and relationship expectations. The participants' descriptions of ideal partners closely mirrored the characteristics repeatedly represented in romantic Korean dramas, indicating that media representations have become important reference points in the formation of relationship ideals.

However, the findings also demonstrate that the process of internalization is neither passive nor deterministic. Most participants showed a critical awareness of the fictional and idealized nature of Korean drama narratives. They recognized that many portrayals were intentionally dramatized and did not necessarily correspond to everyday social realities. This awareness was evident when several participants explained that they selectively adopted positive values from Korean dramas while consciously rejecting unrealistic elements. One participant stated, "I take the good and realistic aspects, while I ignore the rest" (R4, FT). Such responses indicate that participants possess the capacity to negotiate media messages rather than simply accepting them uncritically.

This finding is particularly significant because it challenges deterministic assumptions often associated with media effects research. While media exposure undoubtedly provides symbolic resources that shape perceptions and expectations, audiences remain active agents who interpret, filter, and adapt media content according to their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and belief systems. In this study, participants did not blindly imitate the romantic ideals portrayed in Korean dramas. Instead, they engaged in a process of selective appropriation in which desirable relational values were integrated into their understanding of ideal partnerships while unrealistic expectations were moderated

through personal reflection and religious considerations. This process reflects a dialogical relationship between media representations and audience agency, where meaning is continuously negotiated rather than passively absorbed.

The findings also resonate with Cultivation Theory, which argues that repeated exposure to media content can gradually influence perceptions of social reality by establishing recurring patterns of meaning. However, the present study suggests that cultivation effects are mediated by the viewers' interpretive capacities and normative frameworks. Rather than cultivating unrealistic standards of physical perfection, Korean dramas appeared to cultivate expectations concerning emotional availability, respect, responsibility, and relational commitment. These expectations are not necessarily incompatible with real-life relationship aspirations; in many cases, they align with broader psychological understandings of healthy interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the influence of Korean dramas should not be reduced to the creation of unattainable fantasies but should also be understood as contributing to the formation of relational ideals that emphasize emotional well-being and mutual support.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that participants' interpretations of romantic narratives were strongly influenced by pre-existing Islamic values. Although participants appreciated the positive qualities displayed by male

characters in Korean dramas, they did not regard these qualities as sufficient criteria for partner selection. Instead, relational attributes such as responsibility, emotional maturity, and respect were often evaluated alongside religious considerations. This suggests that Islamic values continue to function as an important interpretive framework through which media representations are assessed and recontextualized. Consequently, the formation of partner preferences among Muslim Generation Z women cannot be explained solely by media exposure but must also be understood through the interaction between media narratives and religiously informed value systems.

These findings extend the work of Irawan and Khuluq (2024), who concluded that the Korean Wave contributes to the formation of partner-selection standards among Muslim fans. While their study primarily emphasized physical attractiveness and personality traits associated with admired figures, the present research demonstrates that the construction of ideal partners is more deeply rooted in the internalization of relational values such as emotional security, effective communication, empathy, and responsibility. The contribution of Korean dramas therefore lies not merely in shaping standards of attractiveness but in redefining the meaning of romanticism itself. For Muslim Generation Z women, romanticism is increasingly understood as the capacity to cultivate emotionally healthy, respectful,

and supportive relationships. This finding enriches existing scholarship on media influence by demonstrating that the impact of Korean dramas extends beyond aesthetic preferences and enters the domain of value formation, relationship expectations, and the broader construction of intimate life.

### **The Construction of Life Partner Preferences Among Muslim Women of Generation Z**

The thematic analysis indicates that partner preferences among Muslim Generation Z women are not formed instantaneously as a direct consequence of exposure to romantic Korean dramas. Rather, these preferences emerge through a gradual process of social construction in which media representations interact with pre-existing religious values, family influences, and personal experiences. In this context, Korean dramas do not create entirely new standards for partner selection; instead, they function as cultural resources that expand, reinforce, and reconstruct previously established expectations regarding ideal life partners. This finding suggests that the influence of popular culture operates through a process of meaning negotiation rather than simple media transmission.

Most participants acknowledged that long before becoming consumers of Korean dramas, they had already developed certain expectations regarding future spouses. These expectations were largely shaped by family upbringing, social

environments, and Islamic teachings that emphasize responsibility, moral character, leadership, commitment, and the ability to provide for a family. However, regular exposure to romantic Korean dramas contributed additional dimensions to these pre-existing standards, particularly concerning emotional and relational competencies. One participant explained that before watching Korean dramas, she expected a future partner to be intelligent, responsible, and capable of building a stable future. Nevertheless, after becoming an active viewer, she began to consider romantic expression, humor, and emotional attentiveness as equally important characteristics. As she stated, "There is a slight influence because I began hoping for a partner who is romantic and humorous like those in dramas. Before watching Korean dramas, I already wanted a partner who was pleasant to look at, intelligent, and responsible. Afterward, my standards expanded to include being romantic and humorous" (R1, SM, 2026). This statement demonstrates that media representations do not necessarily replace existing values but rather enrich them by introducing new relational dimensions perceived as beneficial for long-term relationships.

A similar pattern emerged among other participants who reported that Korean dramas introduced them to relational concepts that had previously received little attention in their understanding of intimate relationships. Several participants referred to the notion

of “bare minimum” relationship standards, including respectful communication, emotional validation, attentive listening, and mature conflict resolution. One participant remarked, “Many people talk about the bare minimum expected from men, but I did not really understand what that meant. Through watching these dramas, I gradually learned what healthy behavior looks like and also recognized examples of red flags that should be avoided” (R4, FT). Another participant noted that she became increasingly aware of subtle but meaningful aspects of relationships, such as emotional support, empathy, and the capacity to acknowledge a partner’s feelings (R2, DY). These narratives indicate that Korean dramas may serve as informal learning spaces through which viewers acquire relational knowledge and develop more nuanced expectations regarding healthy partnerships.

Importantly, the findings reveal that the influence of Korean dramas is concentrated primarily on emotional and psychological dimensions rather than on material considerations or physical attractiveness. Although attractive male protagonists are a common feature of romantic dramas, participants rarely identified physical appearance as the most important criterion in partner selection. Instead, they emphasized emotional maturity, loyalty, respect, and communication skills. This suggests a shift from individual-oriented preferences toward relationship-oriented preferences,

where the quality of interpersonal interaction becomes a more significant evaluative criterion than external attributes. Such findings challenge common assumptions that exposure to romantic media primarily cultivates unrealistic standards of beauty or wealth. Rather, the participants in this study appeared to internalize relational values that they associated with emotionally healthy and sustainable partnerships.

From the perspective of Cultivation Theory, repeated exposure to similar media representations can gradually shape audiences’ perceptions of social reality and influence their understanding of what constitutes a desirable relationship (Aldy & Kholil, 2025). The recurring portrayal of attentive, emotionally expressive, and supportive male protagonists provides viewers with symbolic models of ideal relational behavior. Nevertheless, the present findings suggest that cultivation effects operate in a more complex manner than deterministic interpretations often imply. Participants did not automatically accept media representations as objective reality. Instead, they actively evaluated and interpreted those representations through the lens of their personal experiences, social environments, and religious beliefs.

This evaluative process became particularly visible in participants’ tendency to compare fictional male characters with men encountered in everyday life. Most participants admitted that they had consciously or unconsciously

engaged in such comparisons, particularly regarding attentiveness, loyalty, communication styles, and romantic expression. One participant acknowledged that she had occasionally hoped to meet a man who possessed characteristics similar to those of Korean drama protagonists, although she later recognized that these portrayals were products of media construction rather than realistic depictions of ordinary life (R3, AF). Another participant similarly admitted comparing real men to drama characters but eventually concluded that such expectations were unrealistic. As she explained, “Usually, what I compare is their appearance and romantic behavior. Then I remind myself that if someone is that handsome, it is because he passed an audition and became an actor. If I insist on loving only someone that attractive, then I would have to marry a celebrity, which I realize is an unrealistic fantasy” (R1, SM, 2026). These reflections illustrate a high degree of critical awareness among participants and demonstrate that media influence is mediated by self-reflection rather than accepted unquestioningly.

The findings further indicate that social comparison serves as an important mechanism in the construction of partner preferences. Male characters in Korean dramas function as reference figures through which participants evaluate potential partners and relationship expectations. However, these comparisons rarely culminate in blind acceptance. Instead, participants generally engaged in

critical reflection that enabled them to distinguish between fictional ideals and practical realities. This observation aligns with contemporary media studies perspectives that emphasize audience agency and interpretive autonomy. Viewers are not passive recipients of media messages; they actively negotiate meanings according to their social positions, cultural backgrounds, and personal value systems.

Interestingly, not all participants experienced changes in partner preferences to the same degree. Several emphasized that they had always viewed Korean dramas as fictional narratives and therefore did not treat them as primary standards for partner selection. Participant R4 stated, “Alhamdulillah, I have always understood that what appears in Korean dramas cannot be fully realized in real life, so I know which things are realistic and which are not” (R4, FT). Similarly, participant R8 viewed drama characters merely as products of storytelling conventions designed to entertain audiences. As she explained, “I never imagined having a partner exactly like those characters because I know they are fictional and intentionally created to make viewers emotionally engaged. I prefer to stay realistic” (R8, SF). Such responses demonstrate that media literacy and critical awareness significantly influence how audiences interpret romantic narratives.

The variation observed across participants suggests that the construction of partner preferences is fundamentally

contextual. Media exposure alone cannot adequately explain differences in expectations and relationship ideals. Instead, the influence of Korean dramas is mediated by multiple internal factors, including religiosity, interpersonal experiences, cognitive maturity, and media literacy. Consequently, the relationship between Korean drama consumption and partner preference formation is better understood as a mediated and negotiated process rather than a direct causal relationship. The findings indicate that participants move through interconnected stages of internalization, evaluation, and reconstruction. Initially, they encounter romantic representations through media exposure. Subsequently, these representations are evaluated against existing beliefs, social experiences, and religious values. Finally, viewers selectively reconstruct their preferences by incorporating values perceived as beneficial while rejecting elements considered unrealistic or inconsistent with their worldview.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Korean dramas function primarily as symbolic reference systems rather than as determinants of partner preferences. Media provide narratives and representations that inform viewers' understandings of intimacy and relationships, yet individuals remain active agents who decide which values to adopt, modify, or reject. The preferences ultimately formed are products of ongoing negotiation between media experiences,

religious commitments, and social realities. This finding extends the work of Aulia (2019), who argued that Korean dramas influence partner preferences through the construction of romantic and protective partner characteristics. The present study goes beyond identifying influence by explaining the underlying mechanism through which preferences are reconstructed through critical reflection and selective adaptation. Likewise, the findings complement Qairani's (2023) study, which identified idol figures as references in partner selection. In contrast, the present research demonstrates that media figures function not merely as objects of admiration but as symbolic resources whose meanings are actively interpreted and reconfigured according to religious values and personal experiences. The principal contribution of this study therefore lies in its explanation of how Muslim Generation Z women construct partner preferences through a dynamic process of negotiation between media representations, lived experiences, and Islamic value systems.

### **The Compatibility of Life Partner Preferences with Islamic Sharia Values**

The analysis of participants' responses demonstrates that partner preferences shaped through the consumption of romantic Korean dramas are not inherently incompatible with the principles of Islamic Family Law. Instead, the findings reveal a process of value alignment in which participants selectively

integrate positive relational values acquired from media representations into an existing Islamic normative framework. This suggests that Korean dramas do not fundamentally alter participants' religious orientations; rather, they function as supplementary reference systems that expand expectations regarding the quality of marital relationships while remaining subject to religious evaluation. The findings challenge assumptions that exposure to global popular culture necessarily produces value displacement among Muslim youth. Instead, they indicate the existence of an active process through which media-derived meanings are interpreted and adapted in accordance with religious commitments.

This pattern is evident in the consistent emphasis participants placed on religiosity as the primary criterion in partner selection. Although they admired male characters portrayed as communicative, caring, romantic, emotionally available, and responsible, such qualities were not viewed as substitutes for religious commitment. Rather, they were perceived as complementary characteristics that enhance the quality of marital relationships. One participant emphasized that a man with a sound understanding of religion would be more capable of treating his wife with kindness and fairness (R3). Similarly, another participant explained that religious commitment remains the foremost consideration, while communication skills and respectful

treatment of one's spouse are regarded as desirable supporting attributes rather than foundational criteria (R4). These responses indicate that participants construct partner preferences through a hierarchy of values in which religious principles occupy the highest position, while emotional and relational qualities serve as secondary considerations that contribute to marital harmony.

The existence of such a value hierarchy is particularly significant when viewed through the lens of Islamic Family Law. The findings correspond closely with the concept of *kafa'ah*, which refers to compatibility or suitability between prospective spouses in matters such as religion, character, and the capacity to fulfill marital responsibilities (Aji, 2025). Classical and contemporary Islamic scholars generally regard religiosity and moral character as the most important dimensions of *kafa'ah* because they constitute the foundation of family stability and marital continuity (D. M. Hidayat, 2025). Other factors, including socioeconomic status, educational background, and personal characteristics, may be considered, but they are not intended to supersede religious and moral qualifications. In this regard, the preferences expressed by participants remain broadly consistent with Islamic legal and ethical principles.

The relational qualities frequently highlighted by participants, including effective communication, emotional maturity, responsibility, empathy, loyalty,

and respect toward one's partner, can be understood as contemporary manifestations of *ḥusn al-khuluq* (good character). Within Islamic teachings, good character is regarded as one of the most important indicators of personal virtue and marital suitability. Consequently, participants' preference for partners who are supportive, affectionate, and emotionally attentive should not automatically be interpreted as an uncritical adoption of foreign cultural ideals. Rather, these preferences may be understood as expressions of ethical values that are already deeply embedded within Islamic moral teachings. The findings therefore suggest that the relational ideals promoted by Korean dramas often intersect with values that are also endorsed within Islamic conceptions of family life.

This interpretation is reinforced by participants' ability to distinguish between aspects of romanticism that can be embraced and those that must be rejected. Several participants explicitly stated that dating practices, premarital physical intimacy, and unrestricted interactions between men and women, which are frequently portrayed in Korean dramas, are inconsistent with Islamic teachings and therefore unacceptable. At the same time, they regarded qualities such as loyalty, responsibility, commitment, mutual respect, and emotional support as universal values that are fully compatible with Islamic understandings of marriage. These responses indicate that participants

do not internalize media representations as complete cultural packages. Instead, they engage in a process of selective appropriation in which certain elements are adopted while others are critically filtered through religious norms.

The findings highlight the role of religion as a normative filter that regulates the reception of popular culture. Participants did not merely consume romantic narratives for entertainment; they also evaluated them according to standards derived from their religious beliefs. This filtering process illustrates that religiosity functions not only as a component of personal identity but also as an interpretive framework through which external cultural influences are assessed and negotiated. Consequently, media influence operates within boundaries established by religious convictions rather than independently of them. Such findings support broader arguments within contemporary media studies that audiences actively interpret media messages rather than passively absorbing them.

Viewed from the perspective of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, the findings possess broader normative implications. One of the central objectives of Islamic law in the context of family life is the preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), and lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*). Interestingly, many of the relational qualities desired by participants—including empathy, healthy communication, conflict-management skills, emotional responsibility, and mutual

respect—contribute directly to the realization of these objectives. Such qualities support psychological well-being, strengthen family cohesion, and reduce the likelihood of destructive marital conflict. Therefore, participants' preference for emotionally healthy and supportive relationships should not be viewed solely as a psychological aspiration but also as a value orientation that possesses normative relevance within the framework of Islamic legal objectives.

Nevertheless, the study also identified potential tensions between media-generated ideals and Islamic understandings of marital reality. Several participants acknowledged that Korean dramas can elevate expectations regarding romance, affection, and emotional attentiveness. While such expectations are not inherently problematic, participants recognized that transforming fictional representations into absolute standards may generate dissatisfaction when confronted with the complexities of real-life marriage. One participant noted that Korean dramas could cultivate excessively high emotional expectations if consumed without critical reflection (R2). Another participant warned that using drama characters as the primary benchmark for ideal partners represents a potential negative consequence of uncritical media consumption (R4). These observations suggest that participants are aware of the distinction between aspirational ideals and realistic marital expectations.

From the perspective of Islamic Family Law, this tension underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between ideal expectations and realistic expectations in partner selection. Islam does not discourage individuals from seeking spouses who are affectionate, responsible, and emotionally supportive. However, it simultaneously emphasizes that successful marriages are sustained through commitment, patience, consultation, cooperation, and mutual responsibility rather than through continuous romantic intensity alone. Consequently, marital success is understood as the product of ethical conduct and shared responsibility rather than the fulfillment of idealized romantic fantasies frequently portrayed in popular media.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the relationship between Muslim Generation Z women's partner preferences and Islamic Family Law cannot be understood through a simple dichotomy of compatibility versus incompatibility. Rather, it is characterized by an ongoing process of reinterpretation, negotiation, and value adjustment. Participants embraced values that they believed would strengthen the objectives of marriage in Islam, including responsibility, loyalty, respect, communication, and emotional support, while simultaneously rejecting elements perceived as inconsistent with religious norms. This study therefore extends previous scholarship by showing that the influence of popular culture on

partner preferences is not linear but mediated by Islamic normative frameworks. Muslim Generation Z women emerge not merely as consumers of global popular culture but as active moral agents who evaluate, reinterpret, and selectively integrate media-derived values into their understanding of marriage. The principal contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that partner preferences are shaped through a dynamic dialogue between media representations and Islamic Family Law principles, rather than through the dominance of either cultural influence or religious doctrine alone.

### **The Dynamics and Negotiation of Values Between the Portrayal of Romanticism in Korean Dramas and the Principles of Islamic Family Law**

The findings of this study reveal that the relationship between the consumption of romantic Korean dramas and partner preference formation among Muslim Generation Z women cannot be understood as a direct or unidirectional process. While previous research by Maida and Habibi (2025) demonstrated that partner preferences often tend to follow the characteristics of admired idols, the present study indicates a more complex pattern. Muslim Generation Z women do not simply adopt the standards represented by media figures; instead, they engage in processes of selection, adaptation, interpretation, and adjustment in accordance with the religious values they uphold. Consequently, the influence of

Korean dramas is mediated by an ongoing process of value negotiation through which media representations are critically assessed before being incorporated into personal understandings of ideal marital relationships.

The thematic analysis demonstrates that exposure to romantic Korean dramas provides participants with symbolic representations of desirable relationships, particularly regarding emotional intimacy, communication, loyalty, empathy, and mutual respect. These representations serve as cultural resources that enrich participants' understanding of what constitutes a healthy and fulfilling relationship. However, the participants consistently emphasized that not all aspects of these portrayals are suitable for adoption. Instead, they distinguished between values that can be integrated into their expectations of marriage and values that contradict Islamic teachings. Healthy communication, responsibility, attentiveness, commitment, and faithfulness were generally perceived as positive qualities compatible with Islamic family life. In contrast, premarital romantic relationships, physical intimacy outside marriage, excessive possessiveness, and idealized forms of romantic dependency were regarded as inconsistent with Islamic principles. This distinction illustrates that participants actively evaluate media content rather than accepting it uncritically.

Such findings challenge deterministic perspectives that portray audiences as passive recipients of media influence. The participants demonstrated considerable agency in interpreting and filtering media messages before integrating them into their worldview. Religious values functioned as a normative framework that guided the acceptance, modification, or rejection of particular representations. As a result, Korean dramas did not occupy a dominant position in shaping partner preferences. Rather, they constituted one among several sources of meaning that interacted with pre-existing religious beliefs, family values, and personal experiences. This finding supports the argument that media influence is best understood as a negotiated process in which audiences actively participate in the construction of meaning.

The findings strongly resonate with Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, which emphasizes that audiences possess the capacity to interpret media messages according to their own social contexts, cultural backgrounds, and systems of belief (Hall, 2011). Hall argues that audiences do not necessarily accept media messages in the manner intended by producers; instead, they may adopt dominant, oppositional, or negotiated readings. The experiences of the participants in this study closely reflect what Hall describes as a negotiated reading. While participants accepted many of the positive relational values represented in Korean dramas, they

simultaneously rejected elements that conflicted with Islamic teachings. In doing so, they neither fully embraced nor completely resisted media representations but instead reconstructed them in ways that aligned with their religious commitments.

This negotiated reading was particularly evident when participants discussed male characters in Korean dramas. Several participants expressed admiration for qualities such as empathy, emotional attentiveness, loyalty, and commitment, viewing these traits as desirable within marriage. Nevertheless, they rejected the broader relational contexts in which such behaviors were often portrayed, especially when those contexts involved dating practices or forms of intimacy considered impermissible within Islamic teachings. Participant R4, for example, explained that she deliberately adopted only realistic and beneficial aspects of Korean dramas while disregarding elements that contradicted religious principles. Likewise, participant R8 emphasized that Korean dramas should primarily be understood as entertainment products and therefore should not be used as complete guides for real-life relationships. These responses demonstrate that participants exercised critical judgment in distinguishing between fictional narratives and normative realities.

The process of negotiation identified in this study extends beyond behavioral selection and operates at a deeper conceptual level. Participants were

not merely deciding which actions or relationship practices to imitate. More fundamentally, they were reinterpreting the meaning of romanticism itself. Within Korean dramas, romanticism is frequently portrayed through dramatic gestures, emotional intensity, and idealized expressions of love. However, participants redefined romanticism in terms that were more compatible with their religious worldview. For them, genuine romanticism was increasingly associated with empathy, mutual respect, emotional responsibility, healthy communication, and long-term commitment. This conceptual transformation illustrates that value negotiation can generate new understandings of intimacy that differ substantially from the original media representations. Rather than reproducing media narratives, participants reconstructed them within a framework informed by Islamic ethics and marital ideals.

The findings further reveal that the effectiveness of this negotiation process is shaped by several interconnected factors. Religiosity emerged as a particularly significant influence. Participants with stronger religious commitments tended to evaluate media representations more critically and were more selective in adopting values from Korean dramas. Interpersonal experiences also played an important role. Participants who had previously encountered unhealthy relationships often demonstrated greater appreciation for

themes of respect, communication, and emotional security while remaining cautious toward idealized portrayals of romance. In addition, media literacy contributed to participants' ability to distinguish between fictional constructions and social reality. These factors collectively indicate that value negotiation is not a uniform process but one shaped by individual experiences, cognitive maturity, and normative commitments.

Based on the overall findings, this study proposes a conceptual model consisting of four interconnected stages in the formation of partner preferences among Muslim Generation Z women. The first stage involves media exposure, during which individuals encounter romantic representations through Korean dramas. The second stage is internalization, where these representations begin to influence perceptions of ideal relationships. The third stage is value negotiation, characterized by critical evaluation of media messages in light of Islamic Family Law principles and personal beliefs. The final stage is preference reconstruction, where individuals selectively integrate compatible values while rejecting or modifying those perceived as inconsistent with their religious worldview. This model highlights the active role of audiences in shaping their own relationship expectations.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that partner preferences among Muslim Generation Z women are not direct products of media consumption

but outcomes of a complex process of reflection, interpretation, and negotiation. In this process, participants function as active meaning-makers rather than passive consumers. The study therefore challenges binary assumptions that position popular culture and Islamic values as inherently conflicting domains. Instead, the evidence suggests that the two can interact dynamically through processes of negotiation that produce partner preferences that are adaptive, reflective, and firmly grounded in Islamic Family Law principles. By identifying the mechanisms through which media representations, personal experiences, and religious values interact, this study contributes a novel conceptual framework for understanding how contemporary Muslim women navigate global popular culture while maintaining commitment to religious norms. This contribution extends previous scholarship by demonstrating that changes in partner preferences cannot be explained solely as media effects but must be understood as socially constructed outcomes shaped by individual agency and normative evaluation.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the representation of romanticism in Korean dramas contributes to the formation of partner preferences among Muslim Generation Z women, particularly by strengthening expectations regarding healthy relationship qualities such as effective communication, emotional

maturity, responsibility, attentiveness, and commitment. The findings indicate that exposure to popular culture not only influences how participants conceptualize ideal partners but also broadens their understanding of romanticism as a relationship characterized by emotional security, mutual respect, and psychological support. However, this influence does not operate in a deterministic manner. Rather than passively accepting media representations, participants actively evaluate and selectively adopt values based on the principles of Islamic Family Law. Values perceived as consistent with Islamic teachings, including compassion, responsibility, respect, loyalty, and healthy communication, are incorporated into partner preferences, whereas elements such as premarital relationships, physical intimacy outside marriage, and excessive romantic idealization are rejected or reinterpreted through a religious lens. The study concludes that partner preference formation among Muslim Generation Z women occurs through a process of value negotiation between popular culture representations and Islamic Family Law principles. Korean dramas function not as direct determinants of partner preferences but as symbolic reference systems that are critically interpreted through personal experiences, religiosity, and Islamic values. The primary contribution of this study lies in explaining the mechanisms of internalization, evaluation, and value negotiation that mediate media influence. By demonstrating that partner preferences

are socially constructed through the dynamic interaction of media representations, individual experiences, and religious norms, this research enriches scholarship in Islamic Family Law, media studies, and popular culture studies. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a specific demographic group. Future research should involve more diverse participants, employ mixed-methods or cross-cultural approaches, and integrate perspectives from psychology, communication studies, and Islamic Family Law to develop a more comprehensive understanding of partner preference formation among contemporary Muslim youth.

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