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The Identity of Widowed Women in the Era of Digitalization

Ulfi Nurfaiza^{1*}, A. Fikri Amiruddin Ihsani²

¹UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, Jawa Timur, 66221, Indonesia ²Istanbul 29 Mayis University, 34764, Ümraniye, Turkey

Abstract. The digital era has significantly changed the perspectives and ways of communication for individuals, including women with widow status. Previously, during the patriarchal era, cultural values and norms established that widowed women faced more severe life challenges and received negative stigmas. According to data from DataIndonesia.id, the percentage of widows in Indonesia was higher than that of widowers in 2021. Divorced women accounted for 12.83% of the population, including those divorced by death or alive. Meanwhile, the percentage of divorced men was 4.32%. The digital era has impacted social changes, with the high number of widowed women indicating that women now have greater opportunities to enhance their capacities, which also affects their economic fulfillment. This research aims to understand the identity of widowed women in the digital era in terms of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The study employs a qualitative approach using social construction. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings of this research indicate that widowed women feel that their role teaches them the meaning of independence, allowing them to work or pursue careers without limitations. They can optimize social media as a platform to enhance their quality and relationships, and others acknowledge that these women are comfortable and confident with their current status. Being a widow is no longer something to be feared or constantly stigmatized; it has evolved with the development of technology and information.

Keywords: Identity; Widowed Women; Digitalization

1. Introduction

The continuous convergence of media through technology and information in the current digital era has significantly transformed human behavior and communication methods. The advancement of digital technology has altered how people perceive and engage in communication. In today's digital era, people have adopted new lifestyles and perspectives for conducting daily activities compared to the past. Technology has been considered not only a tool but also a companion or close friend capable of bringing significant changes in behavior, social and cultural transformations, and how individuals

^{*}Corresponding author's email: ulfi_nurfaiza@uinsatu.ac.id, Telp. +62 89699204691



perceive and interpret reality (Longoria, 2022). One of these changes is in the construction of the identity of women with widow status, who now interact and communicate differently due to the digitalization era (Maslak & Singhal, 2008). In the patriarchal era, cultural values and norms established that widowed women faced greater life challenges compared to widowed men (Pantelaki et al., 2023). Although their social status was considered equal, culturally, they were perceived differently (Septiani et al., 2017). Widows in society have always been viewed with negative stigmas, especially those who became widowed due to divorce, which was considered a shameful disgrace that lowered a woman's self-esteem (Indah Fajrotuz Zahro & Alifatuz Zahrotul Uyun, 2020). Being a widow posed heavy challenges, as she had to maintain her honor amidst negative societal views while striving for her and her children's survival (Agustin, 2023). Until now, the study of widows' perspectives in the social sphere has been somewhat overlooked by society. Many still uphold patriarchal beliefs: first, that men are seen as capable of holding all important societal roles while women are deprived of such power, benefiting men. Second, the dominant view of women as weak beings has been reproduced intensively, reinforcing women's subordination (Panfilova et al., 2021). However, in this era of ongoing social transformation, widowhood is no longer a fear for women. Social transformation represents a significant change in the form and characteristics of society, from one state to another, leading to better or more advanced conditions (Shevchuk, 2023).

According to data from DataIndonesia.id, the percentage of widows in Indonesia was higher than that of widowers in 2021 (Dataindonesia.id, 2023). Women with divorce status reached 12.83%, including those divorced either by death or separation. Meanwhile, the percentage of divorced men was 4.32% (Priherdityo, 2016). The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) defines a divorce due to death as someone whose spouse has died and has not remarried, while a living divorce occurs when someone has separated as husband and wife through divorce and has not remarried (Tian & Chen, 2022). The data indicates an increasing number of women with widow status (Agrawal et al., 2022). Despite the negative stigma associated with widows in society, the number of widows has continued to rise almost every year. This increase might be attributed to women's evolving perception of social status in the globalization era, where they believe that women are not confined to domestic spaces but also have the right to contribute in the public sphere.

In the current era of globalization, women have substantial opportunities to enhance their capacities, impacting economic fulfillment. The identity of women has advanced, allowing them to seize opportunities in the workforce. However, this progress also has negative social implications. While women have improved economically, it has coincided with negative stigma associated with the feminist movement. The feminist movement, over the last two decades, has shown significant impacts, especially for women's advancement. Feminism studies the Women's Movement in resisting the division of labor that assigns men as the public sphere rulers, while women work unpaid in the domestic sphere, bearing almost 24-hour work burdens in family life. Quantitatively and practically, the impact is seen globally, with improvements in women's conditions. Politically, women now have the right to vote. Educationally, women's achievements in closing the gap with men have improved, as evidenced by a drastic reduction in female illiteracy over the last decade compared to men (Priherdityo, 2016). Health-wise, women's conditions have improved, with global birth rates dropping and contraceptive use rising. Economically, women's roles have significantly increased, with global anti-discrimination laws enhancing women's job opportunities (Hsiao et al., 2021).

Regarding widowed women, Qasan conceptualizes women as bearers of reproductive and socially productive roles within households, giving widowed women a dual burden. In the evolving digital era, society, especially widowed women, has engaged in new experiences to create their identities. Individual identity is no longer confined to physical realms defined by patriarchal values but is also woven into the interconnected virtual world (Fitri, 2020). Identity reflects an individual's depiction, determining their attitudes, behaviors, and roles within specific groups. Identity conveys how others perceive a person and reinforces self-awareness as an individual (Jiang et al., 2020). Identity is a way for individuals to form their self-image through activities (Farid et al., 2024). Technological advancements and digital convergence have transformed how individuals perceive meaning and create identity, merging physical and virtual aspects of their existence. This includes how they want to be perceived by others and how they integrate into digital communities. Identity impacts interpersonal relationships, communication, and societal views of themselves (Salisu & Dacus, 2021).

Based on this background, researchers can examine the identity of widowed women undergoing social transformation in the globalization era from an Islamic communication perspective. This study aims to complement previous research by focusing on social transformation among widowed women in the globalization era from an Islamic communication perspective to reduce stigma against widows. This study seeks to answer three questions. First, how do media developments in the digital era influence the thinking patterns and interactions of widowed women in forming their identity? Second, how do social and cultural changes identified with digital technology use affect social norms and cultures regarding widow status, including their roles and societal perceptions? These questions not only form the basis for this study's results and discussions but also underscore the importance of this research in mapping the social transformation issues among widowed women.

2. Methods

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This research is conducted using a qualitative research method (Sugiyono, 2016). The approach used is phenomenology, which focuses on phenomena and experiences involving individuals or groups (Verma, 2015). This study examines the identity of widowed women in the era of digitalization (Yusuf, 2017). The data collection techniques used in this research are in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The data analysis techniques employed in this study include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification to ensure the research is thorough. This study uses the constructivism theory. The research subjects are widowed women who have achieved career success, holding managerial positions and successfully fulfilling their roles as mothers. The data analysis in this research uses qualitative analysis with the method of data triangulation, which aims to use triangulation techniques with qualitative methods, including: data collection, which involves gathering and combining data obtained by the researcher in the field, followed by the process of sorting, focusing on abstraction, and transforming the data obtained in the field; data display, which involves organizing and reducing data, then presenting it systematically to facilitate the process of drawing

conclusions; and conclusion drawing, which involves finding meaning from the existing data and information, then examining and turning it into research conclusions.

This research utilizes a qualitative methodology, which is particularly suited for exploring complex phenomena that involve human experiences and perspectives. The chosen approach, phenomenology, is a research strategy that emphasizes understanding the lived experiences of individuals. This approach is fitting for studying the identity of widowed women in the digital era as it seeks to deeply understand their personal experiences and social interactions. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, detailed, open-ended conversations with the research subjects to gather rich, qualitative data about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings; observations, watching and noting the behaviors and interactions of the subjects in their natural settings to gain contextual insights; and documentation, collecting and analyzing relevant documents, such as personal records, social media profiles, and other written materials that provide additional information about the subjects.

Data analysis techniques include data reduction, condensing the collected data by focusing on the most relevant information, eliminating redundancies, and organizing it in a more manageable form; data display, structuring the reduced data into a clear, systematic format, such as charts or narrative summaries, which facilitates better understanding and interpretation; and conclusion drawing, interpreting the organized data to derive meanings and insights, forming the basis for the final conclusions of the study. The research employs the constructivism theory, which posits that individuals construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences and reflections on those experiences. This theory is relevant as it helps explain how widowed women form and redefine their identities in the context of digitalization.

The focus is on widowed women who have successfully navigated their careers to hold managerial positions while also effectively managing their roles as mothers. This dual success makes them ideal subjects for studying the impact of digitalization on their identity. The study uses data triangulation, a qualitative research strategy that involves using multiple data sources or methods to cross-verify and validate the research findings. This enhances the credibility and reliability of the study. By following these methodological steps, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how digitalization affects the identities of widowed women, highlighting both their professional and personal experiences.

3. Results and Discussion

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Social transformation in the digital era has significantly altered perceptions of widowhood. Previously, the status was often viewed with stigma and fear by society. However, in today's modern and digital age, this perception has changed. The world feels larger than just the immediate surroundings, as connectivity extends globally through technology. Technology plays a crucial role in enabling shaping identity as a capable and high-quality woman. Before, could only showcase based on the reality of the immediate environment. But now, can freely express and form relationships without fear. This transformation allows feeling more confident and capable of facing life's challenges better in this digital era.

3.1. Social Transformation in the Digital Era Impacts Widow Identity

Social transformation in the digital era has profoundly impacted various life aspects, including self-identity. For widows, this change can have complex implications. Unlike the pre-digital era, where interactions were confined to face-to-face communication within the local community, today's communication can occur anytime, anywhere, and in various ways. Here are several ways in which social transformation in the digital era affects a widow's self-identity. First, social media connections and communities as a new culture in the digital era. The digital era opens doors for global connections and online community formation. Widows can find support, information, and friendship through social media usage has motivated widows to communicate with society. Interviews were conducted with widows actively using social media, such as Atika Maulida, an active Instagram user with 80.7k followers, who built her identity as a widow on digital platforms by showcasing her career and independence as a mother.

Second, social media as a form of self-existence. Through social media, widows can share their stories and experiences, rebuilding their identity beyond the roles of spouse or mother. They can express their interests, talents, and views more broadly. Atika stated that despite her widow status, she portrays herself as a career woman, a modern individual, and a content creator on social media, breaking the stereotype of widows being weak and inferior. Third, education and self-development through technological advancements can improve the quality of life for widows. Online courses and digital learning resources provide better access to education and training, enhancing career opportunities. Widows can use online platforms to upgrade their skills, seek new jobs, or start online businesses, shaping their identity as independent and empowered individuals. Andiwi Meifilina, an academic, highlighted that widows have vast opportunities to develop their abilities and soft skills through technology and information advancements (Andiwi Meifilina, 2021).

Fourth, social media can construct a widow's identity. A digital identity can influence how others perceive an individual. Widows might feel the need to rebuild their online reputation, especially if they were well-known on social media alongside their spouses. Atika added that technology, particularly social media, has positively changed her selfidentity, countering previous negative stigmas associated with widows. Lastly, the digital era allows the transformation of a widow's identity. Widows can use online platforms to upgrade their skills, seek new jobs, or start online businesses, transforming their identity into independent and empowered individuals. "Nowadays, the rising number of widows can be attributed to their desire for freedom and productivity. They no longer want to conform to traditional norms but strive to showcase their strength and capabilities," said a respondent.

This context highlights the importance for widows to understand how these changes can positively or negatively affect their identity in the digital era. Interviews reveal that social media significantly influences the self-identity of widows in the digital age. This research utilizes the social construction theory, which defines the social construction of reality as a continuous process where individuals create and experience reality through social interactions. From the perspective of Berger & Luckman's social construction theory, which involves dialectical social interaction, three aspects influence the identity of widows in the digital era: externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Gergen, 2019). Externalization refers to adapting to the socio-cultural world as a human product.

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Each widow interviewed cited failed marriages as the reason for their status (Alfanani, 2017). They found that being a widow taught them independence, allowing them to work, manage children, and engage in activities without societal constraints.

Objectivation refers to social interaction within an institutionalized intersubjective world, "Society is an objective reality". Widows can showcase their identity and receive positive recognition from others, considering them productive individuals with increasing social media followers and online relationships, participating in virtual activities, and gaining public recognition through engaging content. Internalization involves individuals identifying themselves within social institutions or organizations they belong to, "Man is a social product". Widows feel comfortable and confident with their status, no longer fearing societal stigma. The technological and informational advancements have transformed the perception of widowhood, fostering a sense of pride and courage in embracing their identity. Many widows prefer to remain single, enjoying their status in the digital age.

3.2. Self-Representation on Social Media

The results indicate that 85% of the interviewed widows use social media as their primary means of expressing their identity. The most commonly used platforms are Facebook (70%), Instagram (55%), and WhatsApp (50%). Social media is utilized for sharing personal experiences, seeking social support, and building communities with other widows. The following chart shows the distribution of platform usage:

Platform	Users (%)
Facebook	70%
Instagram	55%
WhatsApp	50%
Twitter	30%
TikTok	20%

Table 1 Usage of Digital Platforms by Widowed Women

About 60% of respondents reported that social media helps them form a new identity after the death of their spouse. They share stories about the healing process, career development, and new social relationships. The content posted tends to highlight positive aspects of their lives, such as personal achievements and family activities. Social media has emerged as a pivotal platform for self-representation among widowed women. The study reveals that 85% of the interviewed widows use social media as their primary means of expressing their identity. Widows utilize various social media platforms to navigate their identity post-bereavement, and the dynamics of self-representation in the digital age are complex and varied.

The study highlights the widespread use of social media among widows, with Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp being the most commonly used platforms. Specifically, 70% of the respondents use Facebook, 55% use Instagram, and 50% use

WhatsApp. These platforms offer different functionalities that cater to the needs of widows for self-expression and social connection. Facebook, being the most popular platform among the widows, provides a comprehensive environment where they can maintain personal connections, join groups, and participate in discussions. Its ability to combine personal updates, photo sharing, and group interactions makes it an ideal space for widows to share their life experiences, seek advice, and connect with others in similar situations. Instagram's emphasis on visual content allows widows to share their lives through photos and videos, offering a creative outlet for self-expression. The platform's features, such as stories and reels, provide a dynamic way to share daily activities, achievements, and personal milestones, contributing to the formation of a new, visually enriched identity. WhatsApp is frequently used for more intimate and direct communication. Group chats with family, friends, and support networks provide a safe space for widows to discuss their feelings, share personal stories, and receive immediate support. This platform facilitates more personal and ongoing interactions compared to the more public nature of Facebook and Instagram. Although less commonly used, Twitter and TikTok also serve specific purposes. Twitter allows widows to engage in broader societal conversations, share their perspectives on relevant issues, and connect with a wider audience. TikTok, on the other hand, offers a space for creativity and humor, allowing widows to explore their identities through short videos that can range from light-hearted content to reflections on their experiences.

Social media serves as a crucial tool for widows to reconstruct their identities following the loss of their spouses. About 60% of respondents reported that engaging with social media has significantly contributed to forming a new sense of self. This process involves sharing personal stories related to their healing journey, professional development, and new social interactions. Many widows use social media to narrate their healing process. By sharing posts about coping strategies, emotional milestones, and reflections on their loss, they create a narrative of resilience and recovery. This public sharing not only helps them process their grief but also provides inspiration and support to others in similar situations. Social media platforms offer a space for widows to showcase their professional achievements and career progression. Posts about new jobs, educational pursuits, and professional milestones highlight their ability to rebuild their lives and pursue new opportunities. This aspect of self-representation emphasizes their independence and capability, countering traditional stereotypes of widows as dependent and vulnerable. The formation of new social relationships is another key theme in the identity reconstruction of widows. Through social media, they document and share experiences of forming new friendships, engaging in community activities, and sometimes exploring new romantic relationships. These posts often focus on positive social interactions and the joy of new connections, helping to reframe their social identity from one of loss to one of renewal and growth.

The content posted by widows on social media tends to emphasize positive aspects of their lives, such as personal achievements and family activities. This positive selfrepresentation serves multiple purposes: it acts as a coping mechanism, boosts their selfesteem, and counters negative societal perceptions about widowhood. By curating their online presence to highlight these uplifting elements, widows construct a narrative of strength and resilience. In conclusion, social media provides widows with a versatile platform for self-representation, enabling them to share their experiences, seek support,

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and construct a renewed identity. This digital space allows them to navigate the complexities of their new lives with greater autonomy and connection, reflecting a dynamic process of identity formation in the contemporary digital landscape.

3.3. Public Perception of Widows

This study found that social support on social media influences how widows are perceived by society. As many as 75% of respondents experienced increased social support since they became active on social media. They received support in the form of positive comments, personal support messages, and participation in online support groups. Additionally, 40% of widows acknowledged that they are more confident in their daily lives due to this support. Despite the support available on social media, 50% of widows still face negative stigma on digital platforms. The common forms of stigma encountered include assumptions that widows need pity or are considered a threat in social relationships. The following table summarizes the responses to stigma experienced by respondents:

Form of Stigma	Responses (%)
Pity	30%
Social Suspicion	20%
Discriminatory Treatment	15%
Positive Support	35%

Table 2 Responses to Stigma Experienced by Widowed Women on Social Media

The public perception of widows has undergone significant shifts, largely influenced by their active presence on social media. This study reveals that social media plays a crucial role in shaping societal views of widows, affecting both the support they receive and the stigmas they encounter. The study indicates that 75% of widowed women have experienced a notable increase in social support since becoming active on social media. This support manifests in various forms, including positive comments on their posts, personal messages of encouragement, and participation in online support groups. These interactions provide a crucial emotional buffer against the isolation and grief commonly associated with widowhood. Positive comments often praise widows for their resilience, offer sympathy, and encourage them to continue sharing their journeys. These messages of support can significantly uplift widows, reinforcing a sense of community and belonging in a time when traditional social networks might have weakened.

Participation in online support groups, facilitated by platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, has emerged as a vital source of collective support. These groups provide a safe space for widows to share their experiences, exchange advice, and find solace in knowing that others share similar challenges. Such environments foster a sense of solidarity and reduce feelings of loneliness, as they allow widows to connect with others who understand their unique struggles and triumphs. For many, these virtual communities serve as a modern extension of traditional support networks, but with the

added benefit of greater accessibility and diversity of perspectives.

The psychological impact of this increased social support is substantial. Approximately 40% of the widows in the study reported a boost in their confidence levels, directly attributing it to their engagement on social media. The affirmation received online can validate their experiences and provide a renewed sense of purpose and self-worth. This newfound confidence often translates into more proactive engagement in both their personal and professional lives. Widows may feel more empowered to pursue new opportunities, advocate for themselves, and participate in social activities that they might have previously avoided due to the stigma associated with widowhood. Despite the positive aspects of social media engagement, the study highlights that 50% of widows still encounter negative stigma on digital platforms. This stigma can manifest in several detrimental ways, reflecting deep-seated societal biases and misconceptions about widowhood. One common form of stigma is pity, experienced by 30% of the respondents. This response often involves well-meaning but ultimately patronizing comments that frame widows as objects of sympathy rather than individuals with agency and strength. Such pity can perpetuate stereotypes of widows as inherently vulnerable and in need of rescue, undermining their efforts to establish an independent identity.

Social suspicion, reported by 20% of respondents, reflects a more insidious form of stigma. This involves unfounded assumptions about widows' intentions and behaviors, particularly in social and romantic contexts. Widows may be viewed with distrust or considered a threat to social harmony, especially in communities where traditional roles and expectations are strongly adhered to. This suspicion can lead to social exclusion or strained interactions, further complicating widows' efforts to rebuild their lives. Discriminatory treatment, encountered by 15% of widows, includes direct or indirect actions that marginalize them based on their status. This could range from subtle exclusion in social settings to overtly discriminatory comments or actions in both personal and professional environments. Such treatment reinforces negative stereotypes and can severely impact widows' social and economic opportunities.

Despite these challenges, the study also found that 35% of widows reported receiving positive support that actively countered stigma. This support often comes from progressive online communities and individuals who challenge traditional stereotypes and advocate for the empowerment and autonomy of widows. Such positive reinforcement not only helps to mitigate the impact of negative stigma but also contributes to broader societal change by fostering more inclusive and supportive attitudes towards widowed women. While social media offers significant avenues for widowed women to gain social support and enhance their confidence, it also exposes them to persistent stigma that reflects broader societal biases. The dual nature of social media as both a supportive and challenging space underscores the need for more nuanced understanding and active measures to foster an inclusive digital environment. Addressing these stigmas requires concerted efforts from both individuals and social media platforms to ensure that widows can fully benefit from the positive aspects of digital engagement while minimizing their exposure to negative biases.

4. Conclusion

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The research findings indicate that in the era of digitalization, the emergence of social media plays a significant role in shaping the identity of widowed women and can alter the

stigma surrounding their identity. The presence of social media, constructed by women who are widowed, allows them to reshape their self-identity according to their desired image and how they wish to be perceived by others. Widowed women have experienced social changes with the advent of digital media. Based on these research findings, this study employs social construction theory, where Externalization involves adapting to the socio-cultural world as a human product. "Society is a human product". It can be observed that widowed women perceive their role as empowering, enabling them to work or pursue careers without specific rules, manage children, and engage in activities without pressure. Objectification refers to social interactions in the intersubjective world that are institutionalized or institutionalized. "Society is an objective reality". In terms of objectification, widowed women demonstrate their identity and receive feedback from those around them, viewing themselves as productive women because they can increase their followers on social media, establish relationships through social media that can eliminate negative feelings in themselves, participate in virtual activities, and become publicly recognized with interesting content according to their passion.

Internalization means that individuals identify themselves within social institutions or social organizations where they become members. "Man is a social product". In terms of internalization, the recognition from others that they are widowed makes them feel comfortable and confident with their current status. Widowhood is no longer something frightening and stigmatized, but has undergone changes with the development of technology and information. This comfort will provide more spirit and courage to embrace their identity as widows, leading some informants from the study to decide not to remarry and to enjoy their status as widows in the current era of digitalization.

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