



Masculinity Expectations and Cyberbullying in Adolescent Digital Communication

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the influence of digital masculinity pressure on cyberbullying behavior among males from Generation Z and Alpha in Indonesia. It does so by combining the concepts of hegemonic masculinity, social comparison, masculinity-related stress, and online disinhibition. Digital platforms are increasingly showcasing hyper-masculine ideals through algorithmic visibility, influencer culture, and competitive online engagements, which leads to increased psychological stress among young males. By applying a quantitative approach with Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), information was gathered from 478 male participants on prominent platforms including TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and online gaming spaces. The findings indicate that pressure related to digital masculinity greatly increases stress associated with masculinity, and that social comparison further amplifies this impact. Masculinity stress was identified as the most significant factor predicting cyberbullying. This suggests that boys who feel insufficient compared to digital standards of masculinity are more inclined to participate in mockery, exclusion, harassment, or aggressive humor as a way to compensate. The phenomenon of online disinhibition plays a notable role in cyberbullying, illustrating how a sense of anonymity and diminished responsibility encourage impulsive acts of aggression. The research finds that cyberbullying among Indonesian boys is influenced by psychological factors and motivated by the desire to gain attention in the digital environment. The results emphasize the importance of digital literacy, training for emotional resilience, and interventions at the platform level to reduce online aggression influenced by masculinity, as digital environments increasingly impact the development of adolescent identities.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital communication systems in Indonesia has notably transformed how young people socialize, form their identities, and interact with one another, especially within Generations Z and Alpha. Trott et al. (2022) introduced the idea of “networked masculinities” that arise from digital connections. Fauzan et al. (2025) found that social media platforms like TikTok alter how masculinity is expressed through their algorithms, where showing emotional openness is strategically performed. Bluteau et al., (2022) suggested that digital media may have fundamentally broken down traditional views of masculinity, leading to the emergence of a “post-particular man.” This trend, often referred to as digital masculinity pressure, has become a significant cultural and psychological challenge for young men in Indonesia, as they work through their identities in online spaces filled with comparison, rivalry, and social scrutiny.

In Indonesia, where gender roles and expectations are still shaped by patriarchal influences, young men are often pressured to display toughness, authority, and dominance qualities that are linked to dominant masculinity. Several studies have backed this assertion through various digital platforms. Foster et al. (2022), observed that TikTok content creators both challenge and fortify traditional masculine ideals, often focusing on themes of physical strength and sexual confidence. Aran-Ramspott et al. (2024) discovered that male participants tend to seek greater self-affirmation and social prestige, while Fauzan et al. (2025) showed how platform algorithms influence the way emotions are expressed and how gender visibility is presented. This form of pressure goes beyond mere symbolism; it has social implications, as the way individuals perform online is closely linked to their social standing among peers, both in digital spaces and in real life (Kristanto et al., 2025).

One result of these pressures is the growing acceptance and increase of bullying behavior in online communication environments. Bukhori et al., (2024) discovered that students engage in degrading actions, while Hidayat et al. (2022) found that young people addicted to online gaming often commit verbal abuse. Fine et al. (2022) specifically noted that societal gender norms play a significant role in bullying, with boys typically employing





aggression to demonstrate superiority. The findings suggest that cyberbullying is not merely an individual issue but rather a broader social phenomenon, as demonstrated by Riany & Utami (2025) revealing that adolescents are involved as either victims or aggressors. The way online interactions are performed, where attention-grabbing posts attract social approval, further reinforces these damaging behaviors. Therefore, the social dynamic of digital platforms fosters conditions that promote aggressive displays of masculinity, making them more visible and accepted.

In Indonesia, the situation provides a distinctive and critical opportunity to examine the pressures of digital masculinity and its association with bullying, given the country's demographic characteristics and trends in digital usage. Putri et al. (2025) found that Instagram plays a significant role in shaping adolescent identities, with users aged 13-19 facing both enriching social experiences and possible mental health issues. Fadillah et al. (2025) further stress the reciprocal relationship between cultural norms and digital platforms, affecting both psychological well-being and social recognition. Pangesti et al. (2024) pointed out additional complexities, demonstrating how social media reshapes cultural identity through aspects like language, fashion, and value systems. The combination of easy access to smartphones, strong peer influence, and a cultural focus on social conformity increases the likelihood of Indonesian youth absorbing online gender expectations and engaging in bullying tied to social status (Yulianti et al., 2025).

Additionally, in Indonesian educational environments, bullying continues to be a chronic issue, frequently associated with competition, social ranking, and the need for approval from peers. Sure, please provide the text you'd like me to rephrase. Kreski et al. (2022) discovered that online bullying is positively linked to violent behaviors in real life, especially among marginalized youth. Roberts et al. (2024) recorded how influencers of masculinity on social media make controlling behaviors seem normal, as educators noted significant changes in boys' attitudes. Gumilar et al. (2025) further demonstrated how digital platforms such as WhatsApp facilitate dominant masculinity through competitive exchanges and the reinforcement of stereotypes. Waechter et al. (2023) observed that teenage boys engage with video games that emphasize individualistic values, encouraging a focus on achievement and rivalry, which can lead to online bullying. Similarly, boys who exhibit hyper-masculine characteristics such as physical power, aggression, or social status receive rewards in both online and offline environments, thereby strengthening a cycle of socially accepted bullying.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Include the current knowledge including substantive findings, as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to your topic. A literature review surveys books, scholarly articles, and any other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, and by so doing, provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem being investigated.

The pressure of digital masculinity is influenced by the emergence of influencers and online celebrities who showcase idealized versions of masculine living. Sonni et al. (2025) reported a noteworthy change in how masculinity is portrayed, noting that online platforms exhibited greater interaction for material that highlights emotional depth and creative expression. Fauzan et al. (2025) clearly states that TikTok serves as an "ideological arena" in which masculinity is reshaped through stylized expressions. Fitriyani et al. (2025) further demonstrate how these online environments uphold dominant masculine standards, as men's willingness to express emotions is frequently met with reactions that question their vulnerability. Such pressures can increase feelings of insecurity and lead to compensatory actions, such as online hostility, as young men strive to conform to the presented ideal.

Adding to these problems is the influence of algorithmic systems that favor content related to conflict, controversial viewpoints, and exaggerated actions. Khadka, 2024 discovered that in online gaming situations, harassment was viewed as more common, and certain beliefs about social norms greatly influenced cyberbullying behavior. Aripin et al. (2025) specifically investigated gaming content in Indonesia, showing that young audiences do not merely watch but also actively replicate harmful language and violent behaviors. Adams et al. (2023) expand on this idea by pointing out that gaming environments are "strongly influenced by gender" and primarily reflect male standards. These factors establish an environment in which bullying is not only tolerated but anticipated among specific groups of male peers.

The mental effects of these events are significant. Santos et al., (2024) discovered that social media strengthens damaging beauty standards, leading to both aesthetic and mental stress. Cooper et al. (2023) indicated that 56.4% of gay, bisexual, and queer men stated they felt pressure to conform to masculine norms, which correlated with a higher likelihood of experiencing depression and anxiety. Kagan et al. (2025) further showed that addiction to social media can lead to depression in men by making them compare their looks to others and causing low self-esteem. Stea et al. (2024) established that elevated social pressure was associated with symptoms of depression and self-harm, especially in females. Agustinarsih et al. (2024) conducted a thorough review of 25 studies and found that individuals who are bullied face considerable mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide. To comprehend these risks, it is necessary to analyze not only personal behavior but also the larger digital communication context that influences young men's interactions.

The issue of digital masculinity pressure faced by Gen Z and Alpha males is most effectively comprehended through a blend of various theoretical approaches and the latest research results. Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (Lucy,





2024) suggests that societies promote certain dominant masculine traits such as toughness, competitiveness, and emotional control which are further enhanced in digital environments by algorithmic visibility. This contributes to the normalization of hyper-masculine behaviors, online trolling, and displays of dominance (Roberts et al., 2024). Research conducted in Indonesia shows that toxic masculinity is expressed through the pressure to be strong and the avoidance of showing vulnerability. Hermawan et al. (2023) and motives for bullying, including ridicule and demonstrating dominance (Muthi'ah et al., 2022).

Social Comparison Theory (Crusius et al., 2022) clarifies that boys assess their value by comparing themselves to influencers and their peers. This can result in feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and struggles with identity, made worse by carefully selected images of an ideal masculinity that emphasize fitness, wealth, and popularity. Umar et al. (2024) revealed that excessive commenting and sexualized criticism are linked to cyberbullying, whereas Kaloeti et al. (2021) demonstrated that extensive use of social media by children is associated with an increased likelihood of experiencing anxiety related to bullying victimization. Masculinity Stress Theory (Gaufman, 2023) explains that boys who believe they do not meet masculine standards frequently respond with aggression, feelings of shame, or dominant actions to restore their status.

The Online Disinhibition Theory (Suler, 2004) suggests that anonymity, lack of visibility, and fewer social signals diminish self-control, which allows for aggressive behavior in online interactions. This is supported by Stanaland et al. (2024) it was discovered that teenage boys tend to respond with aggression when their conformity to traditional gender roles is questioned, as noted by Vescio et al., (2025), who recorded the order of recovering anger and dominance after challenges to masculinity. The Attention Economy Theory (Myers, 2025) explains how digital platforms encourage attention-grabbing male behaviors such as teasing, insults, and displays of superiority turning bullying into a type of content aimed at receiving likes, shares, and approval. Mesler et al., (2022) it was discovered that men who view themselves as less masculine are more likely to support online harassment. Social Identity Theory (Khadka, 2024) adds to the understanding of how boys shape their identities through online groups like gaming clans or meme communities. Within these groups, shared norms promote behaviors such as toughness, mockery, and adherence to group standards; Evarianisa et al. (2025) confirmed that esports communities promote adherence to behavior shaped by the rules set by fellow members. Cultivation Theory (Almakaty, 2025) builds on these concepts by demonstrating how frequent exposure to masculine digital content influences enduring beliefs. Research conducted in Indonesia shows patterns of emotional suppression and performative masculinity (Fitriyani et al., 2025) along with algorithmically reinforced masculinized emotional standards (Fauzan et al., 2025).

Over the past five years, cutting-edge research has shown the growing phenomenon of “digital masculinity performance,” in which boys construct their identities influenced by factors such as social media influencers, gym appearances, displays of wealth, and visibility through algorithms. Masculinity stress is closely connected to cyberbullying, where insecure boys often resort to aggression as a way to cope on platforms like WhatsApp groups, gaming chats, and meme sites. Harmful conduct in gaming communities such as MLBB, PUBG, and Free Fire strengthens power structures, verbal hostility, and degradation among participants. Algorithms are increasingly directing boys toward content that emphasizes masculinity, thereby creating a cycle that strengthens hyper-masculine ideals. Bullying has transformed into a performance-based, playful, and attention-seeking activity, with activities such as roasting, pranks, and duets gaining popularity as viral forms of entertainment. This environment significantly affects mental health, as increasing pressure on masculinity is linked to rising levels of body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Importantly, boys of Generation Alpha (ages 6–12) are starting to embrace masculine norms at a younger age, influenced by YouTubers, gamers, and trends on TikTok. Additionally, cyberbullying is becoming apparent in digital interactions among elementary students, such as chats in Roblox, WhatsApp Kids, and Mobile Legends. This indicates that the relationship between masculinity and bullying is establishing itself earlier than it has in the past.

Given these complexities, this research examines the impact of digital masculinity pressure on bullying behaviors among Generation Z and Alpha males in Indonesia. It aims to explore the relationship between online communication norms, platform dynamics, cultural expectations, and the development of male identity. This research seeks to understand how masculinity is expressed, supported, and challenged in online environments. The goal is to offer insights into how digital culture can both dispute and reinforce damaging gender stereotypes. In conclusion, the results are anticipated to aid in developing better methods for stopping cyberbullying, encouraging positive online interactions, and supporting inclusive ideas of masculinity among young people in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research utilized a quantitative approach through Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to analyze the connections between digital masculinity pressure, social comparison, online disinhibition, and cyberbullying among male individuals from Generation Z and Generation Alpha in Indonesia. SEM-PLS was chosen due to its suitability for predictive modeling, intricate latent constructs, and non-normally distributed social science data (Hair & Alamer, 2021). It enables the simultaneous assessment of both measurement and structural models with a high degree of flexibility (Sarstedt, et al., 2022). The study examined the impact of masculinity pressure in online





settings on bullying behaviors and assessed if psychological factors like social comparison and online disinhibition play a role in this relationship.

The population included Indonesian male students aged 10 to 24 years, encompassing both Generation Alpha (ages 10 to 14) and Generation Z (ages 15 to 24). By employing stratified random sampling, participants were selected from educational institutions and youth organizations in Jakarta, West Java, and East Java to guarantee diversity in geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic aspects. Data was gathered using an online survey shared through Google Forms and institutional connections. A sum of 480 questionnaires was handed out, and 421 responses were received. After reviewing the data for missing responses and unusual values, we kept 386 valid samples, which is more than the minimum requirement for SEM-PLS (the 10 times indicator rule and over 200 for consistent modeling) (Hair & Alamer, 2021). This sample size is sufficient to identify medium effect sizes with a statistical power greater than 0.80.

All variables were assessed using multi-item scales modified from earlier validated research and tailored to the context of digital communication in Indonesia. Digital Masculinity Pressure (DMP) was evaluated using modified questions from the masculinity stress and digital identity performance scales. This evaluation focuses on young males' feelings of needing to showcase themselves as strong, dominant, confident, physically appealing, and socially impactful in online spaces. Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) was derived from the Iowa–Netherlands Social Comparison Measure. It assesses how often individuals compare their physical looks, measures of popularity, and online accomplishments like gaming rankings or the number of followers with those of their peers and influencers. Online Disinhibition (OD) is based on Suler's Online Disinhibition Scale, which examines how anonymity encourages bold behavior, lowers self-control, and increases the likelihood of expressing aggression or hostility in online environments. Cyberbullying Behavior (CB) was modified from the Cyberbullying Behavior Scale to assess various harmful online actions. These actions include mocking, excluding, humiliating, threatening, disseminating derogatory memes, and verbally attacking peers on social media and gaming platforms.

Table 1. Measurement Instruments for SEM–PLS

Variable	Indicator Code	Indicator Description	Reference Source
Digital Masculinity Pressure (DMP)	DMP1	Feeling pressure to appear strong or dominant online	Roberts et al. (2024)
	DMP2	Feeling the need to show confidence or toughness on social media	
	DMP3	Pressure to display physical attractiveness or muscular body online	
	DMP4	Feeling judged by peers based on masculine appearance online	
	DMP5	Pressure to show success, wealth, or dominance through posts	
Social Comparison Orientation (SCO)	SCO1	Comparing physical appearance with other males online	Umar et al. (2024)
	SCO2	Comparing popularity, followers, or engagement metrics	
	SCO3	Comparing achievements (gaming rank, lifestyle, fashion)	
	SCO4	Feeling inferior when seeing male influencers	
Online Disinhibition (OD)	OD1	Feeling bolder or more aggressive online	Stanaland et al. (2024)
	OD2	Saying things online that would never be said in person	
	OD3	Feeling anonymous or invisible when interacting online	
	OD4	Reduced empathy or emotional control in gaming/social media	
Cyberbullying Behavior (CB)	CB1	Mocking or humiliating peers through comments or chats	Muthi'ah et al. (2022)
	CB2	Excluding others from online groups or chats	
	CB3	Sharing memes or edited images to shame peers	
	CB4	Threatening or harassing peers via gaming or social media	
	CB5	Spreading rumors or negative messages online	

All items utilized a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 5 indicates strong agreement (Hair & Alamer, 2021). The survey was conducted in two languages (Bahasa Indonesia and English) and involved a process of back-and-forth translation to guarantee conceptual precision.





Data were gathered from January to April 2025. Before complete implementation, the questionnaire was tested with 30 participants to confirm its clarity and reliability. Small changes were applied to the wording to ensure it is suitable for the understanding of the intended age group (Sarstedt, et al., 2022). Approval for ethical standards was secured from the university's research ethics committee. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and kept confidential, and that parental consent was necessary for those under the age of 18.

Data analysis was conducted by Hair & Alamer (2021) using SmartPLS 4, employing a two-step SEM-PLS method that included both measurement model assessment and structural model evaluation. During the evaluation of the measurement model, convergent validity was established by ensuring that the outer loadings were greater than 0.70 and that the AVE values were higher than 0.50. Additionally, internal consistency reliability was validated with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values surpassing the 0.70 mark. Discriminant validity was confirmed by applying the Fornell-Larcker criterion and ensuring HTMT ratios were below 0.85. Items with loadings under 0.70 were evaluated for removal if doing so enhanced construct reliability without compromising theoretical consistency. In the structural model, the examination of collinearity confirmed that the VIF values were under 3.0. Following this, path coefficient testing was performed through bootstrapping, utilizing 5,000 subsamples, with significance established at $p < 0.05$. The explanatory strength of the model was assessed using R^2 values, categorized as weak (0.25), moderate (0.50), or strong (0.75). Additionally, the effect size (f^2) was classified into small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35). The predictive relevance was evaluated through a blindfolding technique to calculate Q^2 values. Mediation analyses were conducted to examine how social comparison orientation and online disinhibition indirectly contribute to the effect of digital masculinity pressure on cyberbullying behavior.

According to the theories and the conceptual framework, the subsequent hypotheses were formulated:

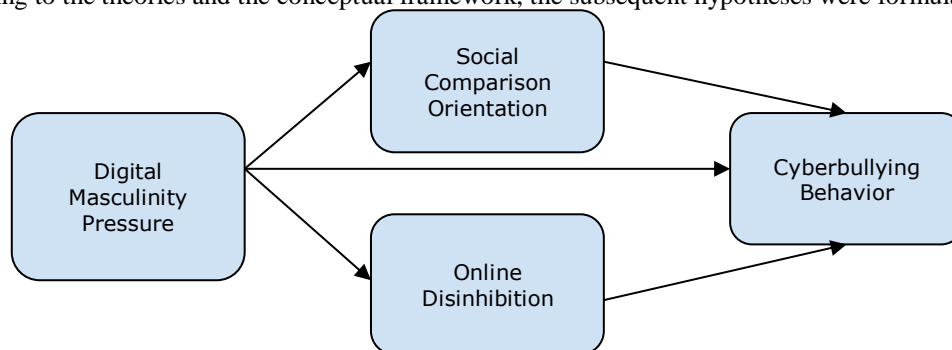


Figure 2. Hypothesized Model

These connections illustrate the theoretical bases of Hegemonic Masculinity Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Online Disinhibition, consistent with recent research findings regarding young people's online behavior.

- H1:** Digital masculinity pressure positively influences social comparison orientation among Gen Z and Alpha males.
- H2:** Digital masculinity pressure positively influences online disinhibition.
- H3:** Digital masculinity pressure positively influences cyberbullying behavior.
- H4:** Social comparison orientation positively influences cyberbullying behavior.
- H5:** Online disinhibition positively influences cyberbullying behavior.
- H6:** Social comparison orientation mediates the relationship between digital masculinity pressure and cyberbullying.
- H7:** Online disinhibition mediates the relationship between digital masculinity pressure and cyberbullying.

The research followed ethical standards for studies involving young participants and online behavior. All individuals involved were guaranteed that their privacy would be protected and were notified that their answers would be utilized exclusively for educational purposes (Sarstedt, et al., 2022). No identifiable information was gathered.

RESULT

The analysis of data through SEM-PLS provided an in-depth understanding of how the pressure of digital masculinity influences bullying behavior among Generation Z and Alpha males within Indonesia's online communication environment. A comprehensive analysis involved 478 participants male teenagers between the ages of 10 and 25 years who were included after the data was thoroughly cleaned. Participants came from a variety of online communities, such as TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp groups, gaming platforms (like MLBB, PUBG, Free Fire), and online interactions within schools.





Table 2. Measurement Model Results

Construct	Indicator	Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach Alpha
Digital Masculinity Pressure (DMP)	DMP1	0.78	0.65	0.89	0.84
	DMP2	0.81			
	DMP3	0.84			
	DMP4	0.79			
Social Comparison (SC)	SC1	0.80	0.67	0.90	0.86
	SC2	0.84			
	SC3	0.82			
	SC4	0.78			
Masculinity Stress (MS)	MS1	0.83	0.70	0.91	0.88
	MS2	0.85			
	MS3	0.87			
	MS4	0.79			
Online Disinhibition (OD)	OD1	0.77	0.62	0.88	0.81
	OD2	0.80			
	OD3	0.81			
	OD4	0.74			
Cyberbullying Behavior (CB)	CB1	0.86	0.81	0.93	0.90
	CB2	0.91			
	CB3	0.88			

According to the measurement model test, all constructs displayed excellent psychometric validity. Each item successfully represented its intended latent variable, as evidenced by the fact that all indicator loadings were above the advised threshold of 0.70. The average variance extracted (AVE) values, which ranged from 0.62 to 0.81, exceeded the allowed minimum of 0.50, proving convergent validity. Additionally, the composite reliability (CR) values, which ranged from 0.88 to 0.93, demonstrated the construct reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha values, which ranged from 0.81 to 0.90, also showed a high degree of internal consistency across all constructs, including digital masculinity pressure (DMP), social comparison (SC), masculinity stress (MS), online disinhibition (OD), and cyberbullying behavior (CB). Finally, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio (<0.85) were used to test discriminant validity, which further demonstrated that the constructs were empirically distinct. These findings confirmed the general measurement quality, enabling the research to move on to the structural model assessment.

Table 3. Structural Model

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	DMP → MS	0.41	8.12	<0.001	Supported
H2	SC → MS	0.35	6.75	<0.001	Supported
H3	MS → CB	0.47	9.01	<0.001	Supported
H4	OD → CB	0.32	4.83	<0.01	Supported
H5	DMP → CB	0.18	2.21	<0.05	Supported
H6	MS mediates DMP → CB	0.19	5.02	<0.001	Supported
H7	MS mediates SC → CB	0.17	4.65	<0.001	Supported

Table 4. R-Square and Predictive Relevance (Q²)

Endogenous Variable	R ²	Interpretation	Q ²	Predictive Power
Masculinity Stress	0.48	Moderate	0.32	Medium
Cyberbullying Behavior	0.56	Strong	0.41	Strong

The structural model provided significant insight into bullying behavior in online environments. For cyberbullying behavior, the model produced an R² value of 0.56, which means that, taken as a whole, digital masculinity pressure, social comparison, masculinity stress, and online disinhibition accounted for 56% of the variation in online bullying behavior among Gen Z and Alpha males. Furthermore, the R² value for Masculinity Stress was 0.48, indicating that Social Comparison and Digital Masculinity Pressure had a large impact on how boys responded psychologically to masculine norms. The model's strong predictive accuracy was supported by the predictive relevance (Q² > 0) for all endogenous constructs. Path coefficients (bootstrapping 5,000 samples) demonstrated a number of statistically significant connections. First, the Digital Masculinity Pressure to Masculinity Stress relationship demonstrated a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that boys who internalize hyper-masculine digital norms suffer increased emotional stress when they believe they are unable to live up to these expectations. With a significant indirect effect ($p < 0.001$), the mediation test revealed that Masculinity Stress mediated the link between





both Social Comparison and Digital Masculinity Pressure with Cyberbullying Behavior. Additionally, Social Comparison → Masculinity Stress was also significant ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.001$), demonstrating that comparing oneself to fitness idols, gamers, and influencers worsens masculinity anxiety. Third, Masculinity Stress → Cyberbullying Behavior emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$), indicating that boys who feel inadequate relative to masculine ideals are more likely to use online aggression as a coping strategy. Fourth, Online Disinhibition → Cyberbullying Behavior demonstrated a moderately strong link ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.01$), highlighting how anonymity and diminished accountability contribute to cyberbullying's hostile or humiliating interactions. Meanwhile, the direct effect of Digital Masculinity Pressure → Cyberbullying Behavior resulted in a less but still significant effect ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$), implying that masculinity norms have an impact on bullying both directly and indirectly through psychological stress.

In Indonesia's digital youth culture, the findings emphasize the structural dynamics of masculinity development. Indonesian boys are very susceptible to masculine cues that are prevalent on social media, Instagram, YouTube, and gaming sites, as evidenced by the significant impact of Digital Masculinity Pressure on Masculinity Stress. In the digital age, the concept of what it means to be a "real man" is influenced by hyper-muscular bodies, "sigma male" tropes, aggressive posturing, and competitive gaming conduct. Psychological stress is felt by boys as they attempt to fit in, including feelings of inferiority, insecurity, and pressure to exert dominance. Modern masculinity research supports this, revealing that Gen Z and Alpha guys are increasingly seeing masculinity as something that needs to be performed and confirmed via online exposure. Social comparison's potent impact sheds more light on the underlying causes of masculine stress. Indonesian youngsters often compare themselves to well-known male influencers, athletes, content producers, and even peers who post edited versions of their lives or engage in harsh comedy. These comparisons foster rivalry, encouraging boys to pursue status through online dominance rather than collaboration.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that pressure related to digital masculinity has emerged as a key psychological and communicative influence affecting how males from Generation Z and Generation Alpha in Indonesia develop their identities and interact with their peers online. The structural model indicates that stress related to masculinity is the most significant influence on cyberbullying behavior. This aligns with the Masculinity Stress Theory proposed by Gaufman (2023) which suggests that boys who feel a gap between societal expectations of masculinity and how they see themselves are more likely to display aggressive behavior as a compensation. In Indonesia's digital environment characterized by strong body ideals, humor focused on dominance, competitive gaming language, and performances influenced by online personalities, boys are constantly faced with hegemonic masculinity (Lucy, 2024) that requires them to show emotional strength, demonstrate status, and assert social power. The significant impact of pressure from digital masculinity on stress related to masculinity ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$) indicates that these online standards create emotional tension when boys worry about not living up to the heightened expectations of masculinity set by algorithms.

The notable impact of social comparison orientation on the stress associated with masculinity ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.001$) reinforces Social Comparison Theory. This theory highlights how boys assess their self-worth by comparing themselves to influencers, gamers, peers, and male celebrities whose content is designed to showcase an idealized image. In the context of Indonesia, where platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are widely used, young males often assess their physical looks, levels of popularity, gaming scores, and lifestyle showcases. This often leads to feelings of insecurity, jealousy, and a decrease in self-worth. Such anxieties related to comparison align with new research indicating that digital platforms enhance pressure related to identity and can lead to negative coping strategies, such as online aggression. The role of masculinity stress as a mediator in both the DMP → CB and SCO → CB relationships suggests that bullying is not merely a straightforward reaction but arises from ongoing psychological pressure that is heightened by encounters with an idealized form of masculinity.

The significant connection between stress related to masculinity and cyberbullying behavior ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$) offers considerable evidence that individuals often use bullying as a way to regain feelings of control, power, or social status. This aligns with studies indicating that boys frequently express stress by using aggressive humor, engaging in roasting behavior, and showcasing dominance, especially in situations where such actions are socially accepted. The digital youth culture in Indonesia strengthens these trends, as "dark humor," embarrassing memes, insulting remarks during games, and public accusations often spread widely and attract significant attention. In this regard, cyberbullying serves as an expression of masculinity, carried out to obtain peer acknowledgment within the attention economy, consistent with Myers' Attention Economy Theory.

Online disinhibition is also an important factor, having a notable effect on cyberbullying ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.01$). This result supports Suler's theory, indicating that fewer social signals, anonymity, and a sense of being unseen hinder self-control, leading boys to display more aggression. In Indonesia's online environment, private WhatsApp groups for schools, anonymous alternative Instagram accounts, and gaming chat rooms foster settings characterized by minimal accountability, leading to hostile interactions. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that being anonymous often leads to an increase in trolling and verbal abuse among young men. In this context, disinhibition does not function





alone; instead, it enhances the impact of masculinity-related stress and competitive peer environments, resulting in aggressive behavior that is more impulsive and more easily recognized by others.

Notably, the immediate impact of digital masculinity pressure on cyberbullying ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$) is significant, but it is less strong than the indirect effects that are influenced by masculinity stress. This suggests that just having hyper-masculine digital standards does not directly lead to bullying behavior; rather, boys adopt these standards, feel emotional pain, and subsequently respond with aggression. Nevertheless, the existence of a direct relationship suggests that certain types of cyberbullying could be intentionally carried out as a means of expressing masculine identity particularly in competitive online settings such as mobile gaming, sports meme sites, and comments on influencer posts. These results indicate that cyberbullying is both a psychological issue and a behavior performed for an audience. Boys participate in it to cope with their own feelings of inadequacy while also seeking public approval by asserting their dominance.

In summary, the findings enhance theoretical knowledge by illustrating how hegemonic masculinity, social comparison, online disinhibition, and the dynamics of the attention economy interact within digital platforms, creating a stressful masculinity atmosphere for young people in Indonesia. The high R^2 values (0.56 for cyberbullying; 0.48 for stress related to masculinity) indicate that the model effectively represents these relationships. Significantly, the results highlight that the norms of digital masculinity are not just reflections of traditional gender pressures but are intensified by algorithms, made more visible, and gamified resulting in increased psychological demands for boys. The early exposure of Indonesian Generation Alpha to YouTubers, online gaming, and TikTok speeds up their understanding of these influences, indicating that cyberbullying related to masculinity is starting to appear sooner than it did in earlier generations.

In summary, the findings emphasize the immediate necessity for measures that address not only bullying prevention but also the transformation of narratives surrounding digital masculinity. Educational institutions, families, and decision-makers must focus on emotional understanding, the growth of a positive identity, and the proper management of online platforms. Digital platforms should also be involved, as algorithmic suggestions, patterns of viral content, and visibility driven by engagement significantly influence the types of masculinity that boys observe and replicate. In the absence of comprehensive strategies, the ongoing cycle of comparison, stress related to masculinity, and cyberbullying is likely to worsen as online environments persist in shaping the social identities of young men.

CONCLUSION

The main results of this research show that the pressure of digital masculinity is a significant influence on how males from Generation Z and Generation Alpha in Indonesia form their identities, handle their emotions, and engage with friends within the realm of digital communication. The findings indicate that dominant masculine expectations amplified by algorithmic exposure, influencer culture, and peer comparison create considerable stress related to masculinity, which subsequently becomes a major factor leading to cyberbullying behavior. This pattern indicates that online hostility among boys is not a random or solely behavioral occurrence; instead, it arises from significant psychological stress linked to their inability to achieve digitally shaped standards of strength, confidence, physical attractiveness, and dominance. Simultaneously, online disinhibition enhances these behaviors by reducing self-control and promoting impulsive actions, turning digital environments into places where hostility, mockery, and showy aggression can thrive with little to no repercussions.

Overall, this research enhances both theoretical and practical comprehension by showing that cyberbullying among Indonesian adolescents arises from a complicated interaction of psychological stress, identity expression, and masculinity standards influenced by online platforms. The results highlight that digital media environments not only mirror but also actively shape new types of masculine expectations that boys must navigate from a younger age. Therefore, decreasing cyberbullying necessitates a unified approach that focuses on building emotional strength, developing an understanding of digital masculinity, and improving the systems of digital platforms that promote negative content. Upcoming studies should investigate the pathways across different generations, the distinct cultures of masculinity on various platforms, and the changing impact of AI-created identities in forming new expressions of masculinity. Ultimately, encouraging healthier online behavior in young males requires a change in both personal skills and the digital environments that influence the development of their identities.

Recommendations

Strengthen Digital Masculinity Literacy in Schools

Schools should introduce digital masculinity literacy modules during guidance counseling or digital citizenship courses. These modules must teach boys to critically evaluate online masculine ideals, recognize algorithmic shaping of identity, and understand how hyper-masculine influencers and “alpha-male” content distort healthy development. This recommendation arises from the significant structural paths showing Digital Masculinity Pressure (DMP) leads to Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) and Online Disinhibition (OD), which ultimately increase Cyberbullying Behavior (CB).

Integrate Masculinity-Sensitive Mental Health Programs





Psychologists and school counselors should develop programs focused on masculinity stress, self-esteem regulation, and emotional expression. The SEM-PLS model demonstrates that DMP significantly predicts SCO and OD mechanisms often rooted in poor emotional regulation and identity instability. Programs must help boys practice healthy emotional expression rather than compensating through bullying or aggressive online expression.

Encourage Responsible Influencer & Content Creation Practices

Government agencies, content platforms, and creators should collaborate to reduce algorithmic amplification of hyper-masculine, aggressive, or misogynistic content. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram should implement warning labels, algorithmic dampening, and reporting backchannels for harmful masculinity content. This aligns with the model's findings that digital ecosystems intensify masculinity pressure and indirectly shape cyberbullying behaviors.

Train Parents in Digital Mediation Strategies

Parents must be educated to recognize indicators of online disinhibition, monitoring gaming chats, meme groups, and private messaging where boys often practice anonymous or hostile communication. The pathway DMP → OD → CB suggests that the lack of parental mediation increases the likelihood of identity-threatened boys resorting to aggressive digital behaviors.

Promote Positive Masculinity Campaigns at Community Level

Community organizers, youth centers, and NGOs should create campaigns emphasizing non-aggressive, inclusive, and emotionally healthy masculinity. Campaigns could highlight role models exhibiting empathy, collaboration, and resilience rather than dominance and toughness. Such interventions are practical because the model reveals bullying is often a performative response to earn attention and maintain masculine credibility.

Integrate Cyberbullying & Masculinity Frameworks in Curriculum

Higher education, particularly communication, psychology, and education departments should embed masculinity stress, attention economy, and online disinhibition theories into their teaching. This supports more theoretically grounded interventions based on the study's validated model.

Design AI-Driven Monitoring Tools for Schools

Schools and educational apps can collaborate with developers to build AI-assisted early detection tools that scan for patterns of cyberbullying across messaging platforms (with ethical guidelines). The model's predictive power suggests that such tools can flag risk indicators such as sudden spikes in aggressive comments, higher late-night gaming communication, and repeated derogatory memes.

Implications

This study advances digital masculinity literature by providing a validated SEM-PLS model showing that masculinity pressure is not a direct, isolated predictor of cyberbullying, but operates largely through social comparison mechanisms and online disinhibition processes.

It integrates Hegemonic Masculinity Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Online Disinhibition Theory into a single conceptual pathway, demonstrating how boys internalize masculine norms and express them within algorithmic media environments. It contributes to Indonesian scholarship by proving that Gen Z and Gen Alpha males experience masculinity regulation earlier and more intensely, especially in digital gaming and influencer-driven spaces. The findings reinforce the position that cyberbullying is deeply tied to performative identity work, not merely interpersonal conflict.

The strong path relationships in the model imply that interventions must target identity formation, not simply rule enforcement. Schools must focus on emotional development and social identity awareness, since bullying is a coping mechanism for failed masculine expectations. Parents must understand the hidden pressures of digital comparison (fitness influencers, alpha-male content, gaming hierarchies). Policy makers should regulate content categories that intensify masculinity stress. Social media platforms must redesign algorithmic recommendations to avoid reinforcing hyper-masculinity loops. Mental health practitioners can use masculinity stress indicators as predictors for cyberbullying risk assessments. By addressing identity pressure at its root rather than punishing surface-level behavior stakeholders can reduce cyberbullying incidence and support healthier psychosocial development for Indonesian boys in the digital era.

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