



# Modern Masculinity in Popular Culture: Symbols and Interactions of Male Fashion Users in Mataram

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**Abstract:** Popular culture disseminated through social media has driven a transformation in masculine values within urban communities, particularly among men who use fashion and skincare products. This study aims to examine the shift in masculinity values from traditional to modern and to analyze the social interaction processes among male fashion users in Mataram. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected via in-depth interviews with twelve male informants actively engaged with fashion and skincare. Analysis was conducted using phenomenological reduction techniques, along with source and time triangulation. The findings indicate that traditional masculinity centered on physical strength and dominance has shifted toward a more flexible, reflective, and self-care-oriented modern masculinity. Social interactions occur directly through peer groups and indirectly via social media, which serves as a platform for exchanging new masculine symbols and identities. These findings highlight the importance of reconstructing understandings of masculinity within the context of popular culture and digital technology, offering theoretical contributions to gender, media, and cultural sociology studies.

**Keywords:** Fashion; Masculinity; Men; Popular Culture; Symbolic Interaction

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, Indonesia's urban society has experienced significant transformations in social values, including those related to gender constructs and expressions of masculinity.<sup>1</sup> A prominent phenomenon is the increasing involvement of men in self-care routines and the consumption of fashion products.<sup>2</sup> In Mataram, for example, there has been a noticeable rise in young men who use skincare products, coordinate their attire, and actively present their self-image on social media. This trend aligns with global patterns in which masculinity is no longer rigidly traditional but has expanded in meaning to embrace reflexivity, emotional awareness, and aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> Popular culture mediated through digital platforms has accelerated this shift by showcasing male public figures who appear well-groomed, fashionable, and open to self-care. Locally, this development challenges old stereotypes that define masculinity primarily in terms of firmness, authority, and physical resilience.<sup>4</sup> This transformation is much more than a matter of personal expression; it also signifies a broader social change in a patriarchal society that is gradually embracing diverse male gender identities.

Several prior studies have addressed transformations in masculine values about popular culture and consumption practices. Diniyah et al. explored motivations behind men's use of cosmetics, finding that self-care represents a form of new masculinity.<sup>5</sup> Fathinah et al. revealed how Korean cosmetic advertisements portray men as gentle, well-groomed, and emotionally expressive, deviating from rigid traditional constructions.<sup>6</sup> Utami and Demartoto documented that metropolitan university students adopt a metrosexual lifestyle, emphasizing cleanliness, appearance, and body care as manifestations of contemporary masculinity.<sup>7</sup> However, most of these studies concentrate on consumer behavior and media representations, without examining how social and symbolic interactions contribute to the formation and internalization of new masculine values. Moreover, local

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<sup>1</sup> Pam Nilan, "Contemporary Masculinities and Young Men in Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 37, no. 109 (November 2009): 327–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639810903269318>; Dharma Setiawan Negara and Rafadi Khan Khayru, "Transformations of Masculinity and Femininity in Modern Society: Dynamics and Implications," *Journal of Social Science Studies*, vol. 2, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Elfi Elfi, "Analyzing Gender-Related Factors Toward the Purchase Intention of Male Skincare Products in Indonesia," *Jurnal Nomosleca* 9, no. 1 (May 1, 2023): 48–66, <https://doi.org/10.26905/nomosleca.v9i1.9333>; Rhey Tyas Ferry and Rifelly Dewi Astuti, "Analysis of Urban Male Consumers Attitude and Behavioral Intention Towards Skincare Product in Indonesia," 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.210522.017>; Teguh Dwi Putranto, "Skincare Shopping: Cultural Industry's Influence on Indonesian Metrosexual Body Discipline," *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi (Indonesian Journal of Communications Studies)* 8, no. 3 (November 26, 2024): 631–44, <https://doi.org/10.25139/jsk.v8i3.9008>.

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Feasey, *Masculinity and Popular Television* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Nico Nassenstein, "Tokooos! As a Linguistic Fashion: The Recontextualization and Appropriation of Lingala Youth Language," *Linguistics Vanguard* 6, no. 4 (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Hamidsyukrie ZM, Syafruddin Syafruddin, and Nurlaili Handayani, "The Impact of The Idea of Ranga (Masculinity) Towards Domestic Violence in The Maja Labo Dahu Culture: Study of Sociology and Social Sciences Education," *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Agama* 14, no. 2 (December 30, 2022): 631–48, <https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v14i2.3604>.

<sup>5</sup> Ngafiatut Diniyah, Farida Hanum, and Sasiana Gilar Apriantika, "Transformasi Nilai Maskulinitas Laki-Laki Pengguna Kosmetik," *Dimensia: Jurnal Kajian Sosiologi* 12, no. 1 (May 20, 2023): 61–72, <https://doi.org/10.21831/dimensia.v12i1.58087>.

<sup>6</sup> Ezzah Fathinah, Aquarini Priyatna, and Muhamad Adji, "Maskulinitas Baru Dalam Iklan Kosmetik Korea: Etude House Dan Tonymoly," *Patanjala: Jurnal Penelitian Sejarah Dan Budaya* 9, no. 2 (2017): 213–28.

<sup>7</sup> Clara Mega Utami and Argyo Demartoto, "Gaya Hidup Mahasiswa Metroseksual Sebagai Representasi Maskulinitas Baru (Studi Kasus Pada Mahasiswa Metroseksual Di Universitas Sebelas Maret)," *Journal of Development and Social Change* 5, no. 1 (2022).

contexts like Mataram, which blend rich traditional culture with modern influences, have received limited attention in masculinity studies. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by exploring the transformation of masculine values through a phenomenological investigation of social interactions among male fashion users.

The objectives of this study are to describe the shift in masculine values from traditional to modern experienced by male fashion users in Mataram, and to identify and analyze how social interaction processes, both direct (through peer groups) and indirect (via digital media), contribute to shaping the meanings and symbols of modern masculinity. Focusing on individuals' subjective experiences and the meanings embedded in their social actions, this study is expected to make theoretical contributions to gender studies, particularly masculinity, within the realms of popular culture and digital society.

This research is grounded in the assumption that masculinity is a social construct shaped through symbolic interaction processes. Drawing upon George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism, men's choices regarding dress style, skincare use, and self-presentation are understood as forms of social communication rich with symbols, meaning, and identity. This process involves the construction of meaning through symbolic exchanges during social interactions, both in real-world and digital environments. Symbols such as clothing style, color preferences, skincare routines, and bodily gestures become means through which modern masculinity is negotiated and represented.<sup>8</sup> Thus, masculinity is no longer viewed as a purely biological attribute but as the product of dynamic social negotiation influenced by cultural context, technology, and evolving social relations.

## 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using phenomenology to understand the subjective experiences of male fashion users in interpreting their masculinity. The phenomenological method was chosen for its ability to uncover hidden meanings behind social actions as seen from the perspective of the social actors themselves.<sup>9</sup> The primary focus of this approach is to reveal the awareness and firsthand experiences of participants regarding the social realities they encounter amid shifts in masculine values. This research is not intended to generalize findings but rather to deeply explore the symbolic and social dynamics occurring within the study's subjects in the local context of Mataram.

Participants include twelve men aged 17 to 30, residing in Mataram and actively using fashion and skincare products. This age range was selected because this young cohort is more open to popular culture and tends to engage in identity exploration through appearance.<sup>10</sup> Purposive sampling was used, with inclusion criteria as follows: (1) men who actively use skincare and follow fashion trends, (2) social media users who showcase their dressing style, and (3) willingness to participate in in-depth interviews. Additional informants were drawn from their

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Raho, *Teori Sosiologi Modern (Edisi Revisi)* (Maumere: Penerbit Ledalero, n.d.); Vina Nahdiyah Wahyuningtyas and Navi Dwi Agustiana, "Resepsi Mahasiswa Terhadap Maskulinitas Melalui Fashion Idol Kpop. Jurnal Komunikasi, Masyarakat Dan Keamanan," *Jurnal Komunikasi, Masyarakat Dan Keamanan* 2, no. 1 (2020): 32-47.

<sup>9</sup> Lexy J Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif (Edisi Revisi)* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Diniyah, Hanum, and Apriantika, "Transformasi Nilai Maskulinitas Laki-Laki Pengguna Kosmetik."

social circles, such as peers or members of fashion communities, serving to triangulate perspectives.

Data were collected via unstructured in-depth interviews designed to allow room for personal narratives and spontaneity. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was conducted face-to-face at a mutually agreed-upon location. The interview guide covered topics such as views on masculinity, experiences using fashion/skincare, and social interactions in both real and digital spaces. All interviews were audio-recorded (with participant consent), transcribed verbatim, and analyzed qualitatively. In addition, limited observations of clothing style and nonverbal behavior were conducted to enhance the data.

Data analysis followed an interpretative phenomenological approach using Creswell's five-stage method: (1) organizing raw data, (2) reading full transcripts to gain holistic understanding, (3) conducting initial coding on units of meaning, (4) identifying main themes, and (5) constructing thematic narratives that capture the essence of participants' experiences.<sup>11</sup> Analysis was iterative and reflexive to ensure interpretive results remained anchored in participants' lived experiences. To ensure data credibility and validity, three forms of triangulation were applied: source triangulation (involving primary and additional informants), method triangulation (interviews and observations), and time triangulation (data collection at different times to confirm consistency). Member checking was also conducted by asking participants to verify transcripts and initial interpretations. Dependability was maintained through detailed documentation of the research process, while confirmability was ensured through transparent records of analytical decisions and interpretations.<sup>12</sup> The study adhered to ethical research principles. All participants received information about the study's aims, their rights, and assurances of confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained before interviews. Data were stored using anonymized codes and used solely for academic purposes.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. The shift in masculine values among male fashion users in Mataram

Preliminary findings from this research indicate a significant transformation in how young men in Mataram interpret masculinity. Where masculinity was once constructed around rigidity, physical strength, authority, and the rejection of feminine symbols, its meaning has been renegotiated in contemporary contexts. Men today are more open to self-care practices, experimentation with clothing styles, and emotional expression. This trend is evident in informants' narratives, which express comfort using skincare, wearing fashionable outfits, and engaging socially via media. Masculinity is no longer understood as domination but as a combination of appearance, emotional awareness, and social competence. In this context, traditional masculine values have shifted toward modern masculinity. Popular culture, social media, and the dynamics of social communities serve as key accelerants in reshaping

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<sup>11</sup> J. W. Creswell, *Penelitian Kualitatif Dan Desain Riset; Memilih Diantara Lima Pendekatan*, 3rd ed. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Linda Birt et al., "Member Checking," *Qualitative Health Research* 26, no. 13 (November 10, 2016): 1802–11, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>; Nancy Carter et al., "The Use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research," *Oncology Nursing Forum* 41, no. 5 (September 1, 2014): 545–47, <https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547>.

young men’s perceptions. These findings demonstrate that masculinity is not a fixed attribute but a social construct that evolves through everyday social and symbolic practices.

**Table 1.** Shifts in Masculine Values Among Male Fashion Users in Mataram

No.	Traditional Masculine Values	Modern Masculine Values
1	Indifferent to appearance; no skincare use	Appearance-conscious; regular skincare routines
2	Rough in speech	Firm yet polite, with attention to tone
3	Dominating decision-making	Demonstrating gender-equitable attitudes
4	Hiding emotions as a sign of weakness	Able to express emotions openly
5	Avoiding behaviors deemed feminine	Accepting feminine-associated behaviors like accessories or skincare
6	Uninterested in social venues	Actively visiting hangouts like cafes and fashion communities
7	Not following fashion trends	Following and adapting to current fashion trends

Source: Primary data, 2024

These findings illustrate that male fashion users in Mataram are constructing a more flexible and adaptive image of masculinity. They no longer reject elements traditionally associated with femininity; instead, they integrate them into their identities. Skincare, attention to color and style, and a neat appearance are no longer viewed as threats to masculinity but as components of it. Informants' narratives suggest that this transformation is conscious and serves as an affirmation of identity amid changing social expectations. What was once considered taboo for men, like skincare, is now accepted in Mataram’s society as part of social evolution. As a result, modern masculine values are defined not only by visual presentation but also by traits such as responsibility, sensitivity, and the courage to express oneself.

### 3.2. Social interaction processes and symbols of modern masculinity

In this study, social interactions among male fashion users occur in two primary forms: direct and indirect interaction. Direct interaction takes place within communities or peer groups, serving as spaces for discussing and recommending clothing styles, hangout spots, or skincare trends. Indirect interaction occurs through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Pinterest, which act as both sources of inspiration and avenues for self-representation. These interactions generate various symbols interpreted as components of modern masculinity—for example, wearing brightly colored clothing, selecting specific outfit styles, and using certain accessories. These symbols transcend mere aesthetics; they function as tools of social communication and identity construction. Through these symbols, men craft their self-image and convey specific values to their social environment. This process demonstrates that masculinity is constructed not only in internal spaces but is also significantly shaped by external social responses. Thus, symbols play a crucial role in bridging personal meaning and social meaning. This aligns with symbolic interactionism, where individuals use symbolic gestures to negotiate identity through social exchange.

**Table 2.** Symbols of Modern Masculine Interaction Among Male Fashion Users

No.	Expression or Symbol	Social Meaning
1	Gentle tone of speech	Feminine identity and openness in communication
2	Mixing Indonesian and English	Representation of modernity and global identity
3	Accessories (bracelet, ring, hat)	Style enhancement and signifier of aesthetic sensibility
4	Pairing a blazer with jeans or chinos	Symbol of balance between formality and comfort
5	Regular skincare use	Representation of self-care and body awareness
6	Unique fashion style (vintage, minimalist, unisex)	Expression of identity freedom and detachment from traditional norms

Source: Primary data, 2024

The table above reveals that social interaction produces symbols that hold both collective and personal meaning among male fashion users. A gentle tone, color choices, and accessory use serve as non-verbal communication methods imbued with specific social values. These symbols are reinforced by social media as alternative public spaces, enabling men to express modern masculinity outside traditional normative pressures. Within virtual and real-world communities, these symbols function as tools for constructing desired self-images that are socially accepted. This symbolic interaction suggests a form of social learning in which men not only reproduce symbols but also reinterpret the meaning of masculinity. Therefore, symbols become integral to the transition from old to new masculine values and serve as negotiation tools between personal identity and fluid, adaptive social expectations.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Shift in masculine values: From traditional to modern

This study reveals a shift in masculine values among male fashion users in Mataram, transitioning from traditional to modern expressions. Traditional masculinity, often characterized by physical strength, dominance, emotional restraint, and avoidance of feminine symbols, has transformed toward a more flexible, reflective form that embraces self-care practices. These findings address the core question of how men reconstruct gender values within the realm of popular culture. Engaging in practices such as skincare use, following fashion trends, and openly expressing emotions exemplifies this new form of modern masculinity.

This value shift is driven by extensive exposure to popular culture via digital media, which introduces new images of masculinity into men’s personal spaces. Popular culture no longer promotes only the hegemonic masculine ideal; it now highlights alternative models that emphasize appearance, sensitivity, and self-care. Research by Diniyah et al. further supports this, showing that men who use cosmetics do not feel their masculinity diminished but rather experience a boost in self-confidence. Social perceptions of masculinity have been reconceptualized through media, professional environments, and peer communities.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Diniyah, Hanum, and Apriantika, “Transformasi Nilai Maskulinitas Laki-Laki Pengguna Kosmetik.”

This transformation unfolds through symbolic, social interactions experienced by men daily. Building on symbolic interactionism,<sup>14</sup> masculinity is continuously shaped and negotiated through symbols, meanings, and social actions. Skincare, hairstyles, and accessories are used not merely for appearance but as communicative tools within social contexts.<sup>15</sup> These findings align with Wahyuningtyas and Agustiana, who emphasize that young men's masculinity is influenced by media representations and K-pop idols, where style and character act as new masculine symbols. Such symbols are not passively adopted but are contextually reinterpreted to reflect personal needs, values, and aspirational identities.<sup>16</sup>

The implications of these findings affirm the view that gender is a dynamic social construct and that masculinity is not essentialist. Theoretically, this study enriches discussions in gender and performativity theory,<sup>17</sup> demonstrating that men can incorporate elements deemed feminine without losing their masculine identity. Practically, these results can inform more inclusive public policies, educational programs, and marketing strategies that resonate with a youth demographic open to expressive masculinities. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing literature on new masculinities in media and popular culture, complementing works by Diniyah et al.,<sup>18</sup> Fathinah et al.,<sup>19</sup> and Wahyuningtyas & Agustiana.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.2. Symbolic interaction and representation of masculinity in the digital social context

This study also demonstrates that social interaction plays a crucial role in shaping the symbols and values of modern masculinity. Direct interactions among men within peer groups serve as spaces for social validation, discussions about fashion trends, and the exploration of personal identity. In contrast, indirect interactions via social media platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Pinterest, become primary sources for style references and self-presentation. These two forms of interaction yield and reinforce emerging masculine symbols, such as bright clothing, blazer-casual combinations, and the use of accessories and skincare, which function not just aesthetically but as expressions of masculine identity.

This phenomenon can be attributed to digital spaces opening new arenas for identity negotiation, free from conventional social norms. Social media facilitates encounters between local and global cultural values, enabling limitless self-expression.<sup>21</sup> In this context, symbols such as clothing color, body language, and visual narratives become means for men to construct their identities amid a fluid

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<sup>14</sup> Raho, *Teori Sosiologi Modern (Edisi Revisi)*.

<sup>15</sup> Gita Juniarti and Jihan Ariella, "Masculinity Symbols on Skincare Everwhite Advertisement," *Paragraphs Communication Update*, August 23, 2023, 65–73, <https://doi.org/10.59260/pcommu.2023.65731614>.

<sup>16</sup> Wahyuningtyas and Agustiana, "Resepsi Mahasiswa Terhadap Maskulinitas Melalui Fashion Idol Kpop. Jurnal Komunikasi, Masyarakat Dan Keamanan."

<sup>17</sup> Raewyn Connell, "The Sociology of Gender in Southern Perspective," *Current Sociology* 62, no. 4 (July 2014): 550–67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392114524510>.

<sup>18</sup> Diniyah, Hanum, and Apriantika, "Transformasi Nilai Maskulinitas Laki-Laki Pengguna Kosmetik."

<sup>19</sup> Fathinah, Priyatna, and Adji, "Maskulinitas Baru Dalam Iklan Kosmetik Korea: Etude House Dan Tonymoly."

<sup>20</sup> Wahyuningtyas and Agustiana, "Resepsi Mahasiswa Terhadap Maskulinitas Melalui Fashion Idol Kpop. Jurnal Komunikasi, Masyarakat Dan Keamanan."

<sup>21</sup> Maydiyana Pangesti et al., "The Influence of Social Media on the Cultural Identity of the Millennial Generation: Indonesian Case Study," *Pubmedia Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (June 29, 2024): 7, <https://doi.org/10.47134/pssh.v2i1.241>.

society.<sup>22</sup> Shafwa et al. support this, indicating that “feminine fashion styles among male students on campus are greatly influenced by social media, and accepted by peers when backed by community”.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the digital realm has evolved into not just a technological medium but a social arena where modern masculinity is built, tested, and validated.

These symbolic interactions echo Mead’s theory of symbolic interactionism concerning “mind” and “self.” Individuals act not only according to personal needs but also in response to symbols and social expectations within their communities. Men's adoption of symbols, such as skincare routines or fashion accessories, reflects internalization of social influence via observation, imitation, and reinterpretation.<sup>24</sup> Riyadie reinforces this, finding that teenagers imitate idol fashion styles to help form and reinforce their identities. In this way, social interaction serves dually as a medium of communication and as a site of cultural education and reproduction of new gender norms.<sup>25</sup>

The implications of these findings have both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the study strengthens the argument that media and community are key actors in the social construction of gender. Practically, it suggests that young men require safe spaces to explore their identities without fear of exclusion or stigma, relevant in educational settings and media and advertising industries, which must respond effectively to contemporary gender dynamics. These findings also contribute to cross-cultural understanding of masculinity, especially in urban Indonesia, like Mataram, situated at the intersection of local and global cultures.

## 5. Conclusion

This study reveals a shift from traditional to modern masculinity values among male fashion users in Mataram. Modern masculinity is characterized by acceptance of self-care, emotional expression, attention to appearance, and openness to symbols previously associated with femininity. This shift is not only an individual phenomenon but also the result of social and symbolic interactions within real-world communities and digital media. Symbols such as skincare, fashion choices, and accessories serve as social communication tools representing contemporary masculinity. Theoretically, the findings reaffirm that masculinity is a dynamic social construct shaped through symbolic interaction, as described by George Herbert Mead. Practically, these insights underscore the importance of providing safe social spaces that support diverse, inclusive gender identities. The study contributes to gender and popular culture scholarship, particularly within Indonesia’s urban context. However, limitations include a geographically and demographically narrow

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<sup>22</sup> Dian Ayu Komala, Wisnu Widjanarko, and Mite Setiansah, “Interaksi Simbolik Social Climbing Dalam Pembentukan Gaya Hidup Brand Minded Pada Konsumen Brand Fast Fashion.,” *Urnal Online Mahasiswa Ilmu Komunikasi* 1, no. 2 (2021): 1–9.

<sup>23</sup> Ailsa Fitri Shafwa et al., “Stereotype Mahasiswa Terhadap Gaya Fashion Laki-Laki Feminis Di Lingkungan Kampus,” *Jurnal Hawa : Studi Pengarus Utamaan Gender Dan Anak* 5, no. 2 (2023): 205–14.

<sup>24</sup> Siti Som Husin, Anis Amira Ab Rahman, and Dzulkifli Mukhtar, “The Symbolic Interactionism Theory: A Systematic Literature Review of Current Research,” *International Journal of Modern Trends in Social Sciences* 4, no. 17 (September 15, 2021): 113–26, <https://doi.org/10.35631/IJMTSS.417010>.

<sup>25</sup> Qonita Fitriannisa Riyadie, “Perilaku Imitasi Fashion Pada Remaja Pecinta Anime Di Purwokerto,” *Jurnal Mahasiswa Komunikasi Cantrik* 2, no. 2 (December 30, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.20885/cantrik.vol2.iss2.art2>.

participant pool. Future research should explore masculinity constructions across different regions and social groups, employing quantitative or mixed methods to enhance the generalizability of findings.

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