

Digital Sexualization: The Ignored Cause of Violence Against Women

PART 1

At the end of 2021, the largest Muslim country, namely Indonesia, was rocked by news of sexual violence and the heated pros and cons of its prevention policies. There was fierce debate at home about how to solve the violence against women, especially among women's activist groups, university academics, community leaders as well as policy makers. Some foreign media even dubbed Indonesia as the least safe ASEAN country for women. Citing data from the National Commission on Violence Against Women, reported cases of rape and other violence against girls and women have soared since Yuyun's murder in 2016, increasing by 66% to 430,000 in 2019.

The phenomenon of sexual violence in Indonesia does not stand alone, the digital world is also increasingly playing a role in triggering it. Along with the increasing trend of internet users in Indonesia 202.35 million people in 2021 - with an increase of 34% since 2016 and nearly 400% since 2011, Komnas Perempuan's 2019 data shows a significant increase in reporting of cybercrime cases to 281, where an increase of 300% from the previous year. Even at the end of 2021 obtained by Komnas Perempuan showed that there were at least 1940 cases of online violence that occurred during the pandemic with female victims.

In its development, there are eight types of online violence against women (KBGO) which are the most popular, including cyber grooming; cyber harassment; hacking; illegal content; invasion of privacy; malicious distribution; online defamation, and online recruitment. This also gives a domino effect for the victim, where the psychological shock of the victim causes the victim to be unable to socialize properly because of being ostracized.

Unfortunately, the mainstream narrative is a feminist narrative that likes to simplify matters, just throw the blame on patriarchal culture and even accuse religious teachings as the cause, even though the issue of sexual violence against women involves many systemic dimensions. The values of Western-style freedom plus massive digital development are among the main factors that are often overlooked in public discourse.

Let's look at South Korea. This big country which is known for its digital technology advancements with almost 100% internet installation, is in the midst of a crisis of digital violence against women. A 2021 Human Rights Watch special report showed South Korea had become a global center for spycams or the use of tiny hidden cameras to film victims naked, urinating, or having sex. Other cases involve intimate photos being leaked without permission, or sexual harassment such as rape caught on camera and videos shared online. According to data from the Korean Institute of Criminology, prosecutions for sex crimes involving illegal filming increased 11-fold between 2008 and 2017. In 2019, nearly 45 percent of digital sexual crimes cases were dropped by the country's prosecutions, compared to 19 percent of robberies and 27.7 percent of homicides, the report said. Reporting from The Korea Times, a survey showed about 14 percent of women living in Seoul, South Korea experienced sexual violence digitally or were victims in person, while about 43 percent of respondents said they had experienced or witnessed sex crimes online, including hidden cameras, unsolicited intimate pictures and porn video distribution.

The Velocity of Society's Sexualization in the Digital Flow

Sexualization and digitization, these two components are very strongly correlated. Sexualization is a classic problem of Western civilization which adheres to the values of freedom, hedonism and the view that women are sexual objects. In 2008, the American Psychological Association released a report entitled "The Sexualization of Girls". They claim that the massive prevalence of sexual images in the media and pop culture has created a mental health crisis, as evidenced by the increasing rates of depression, insecurity and eating disorders in young girls due to the constant feeling of being less beautiful, less slim or less attractive.

The report analyzes that the impact of sexualization of women is very significant on society, even to the extent that it affects all other members of society. Public institutions such as schools and workplaces may be affected as a result of the objectification and sexualization of the media. The practice of violence against girls and women, sexual exploitation of girls, other forms of pornography, and prostitution of girls, will become more widespread if the sexualization of girls is not stopped.

Imagine if this sexualization was accelerated more rapidly in society. The convenience obtained from ICT advances then plays a big role in the leap of society sexualization. Within a decade, this flow of sexualization has increased exponentially, as evidenced by the case of Indonesia, i.e. the soaring rate of violence against women in less than 5 years along with the soaring rate of increasing internet use. Capitalistic digital development such as smart cities, smart villages and other digital infrastructures has become a catalyst in tarnishing private spaces and polluting public spaces. Some patterns of interaction and digital behavior that significantly encourage the acceleration of community sexualization are:

1. Culture of individual freedom. Easy and free to share – the convenience of technology meets liberal values that guarantee the freedom to share personal activities in public life, where this makes no longer any boundaries between private and public life. The private parts of the bedroom and even the contents of the bathroom become the daily feed of young people which are displayed on their public accounts. As a result, personal issues that should be kept in private rooms are often exposed for the sake of sensation. No wonder hoaxes, sensations and small news then become viral and counterproductive to Muslim youth.

2. Industrialization of *fahishah* (vice) culture and massive sexual information in society. Dirty news (*fahishah*) spreads easily in public, due to media business orientation which makes bad news is good news. A flash news about online prostitution of a celebrity for example - can quickly spread with great detail in the media and consumed by innocent teenagers. This is where the destructive media plays a big role, when the information stimulus is controlled by corporations, these media channels also play in intensity. Intense information is about vile sensational news that tarnishes the honor of the public sphere, so the price is the destruction of future generations.

3. Massive publication of women's personal cases to the digital space by feminist groups. The digital behaviour of this group cannot be separated from their doctrine of struggle, known as "personal is political". The feminist notion that women are unhappy in their role as housewives is seen as a personal matter; however, the 'personal is political' doctrine emphasizes that women's personal problems (e.g. sex, parenting, and the idea that women are dissatisfied with their lives at home) are all

political issues that require political intervention to bring about change. That's why those women's activist groups carry out massive publications on cases of domestic violence that befell women in their private spaces. It is raised, exposed and discussed in the public sphere with the aim of pressuring policy makers to pass laws that they see will protect women's rights.

4. Capitalism's digital surveillance is the control of corporate actors (such as Google or Facebook) over private data - known as big data to control the digital public space with its algorithm. The algorithm controls interactions on social media according to market interests. This corporation sees human as mere users or consumers who are presented with feed information that fits their market category. In fact, this algorithm also filters and sabotages Islamic da'wah content that is considered radical by the oligarchs. As a result, information on important issues and educational content eventually became less popular than liberal entertaining news. So, consumers can no longer distinguish the quality of information. Which is useful news which is just stale news.

5. Lack digital information control by the regimes of the Islamic world. The rulers of Muslim countries, including Indonesia, seem to be more concerned with information content that benefits their power than protecting the public from the dangers of social damage due to *fahishah* information and entertainment content that indulges lust. Hundreds of Muslim countries allow the Netflix platform to operate in their countries, but on the other hand they silence information related to the Shariah of Dawah Islam. According to a transparency report from Google, Indonesia is the country that most requested the removal of content and information from various Google services, such as search engines, YouTube and Gmail. The 254,461 content that was requested to be deleted was mostly hate speech and content that disturbed the public who were deemed to have violated the law.

The multi-factors above should be comprehensively studied by policy makers as the causes that accelerate sexual violence against women in society. Instead of only hearing single voice from feminist groups with their draft bills, which often only blames religion or patriarchal culture. The systemic interaction between the culture of individual freedom, the capitalist media industry, digital corporate hegemony and the actions of feminist groups has accelerated sexualization in Muslim societies, especially in Indonesia. This has not been added to the weak role of the state in dealing with the hegemony of foreign digital media, but at the same time it is very unjust about digital da'wah content which they consider illegal. Thus, the first part of this article will be continued with the topic of the urgency of digital information shielding for women in the second part, of course by making Islam as an alternative vision of information politics for Muslim communities.

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