



Cybersex and Religion: Intimacy, Resistance, and Negotiation of Islamic Students In Indonesia

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Abstract

This article focused on the teenage generation and religion as the dominant sources of truth in Indonesia, especially Islam. Religion rules become a norm that is upheld and fought for. This article explained how the generation of teenagers in Surabaya who have the same background at Islamic Universities. They used to apply virtual spaces related to sexual activities. Apart from that, this paper also tried to relate their practice to the religious teachings they profess. The informants of this study were students at several universities in Surabaya. Those who become informants were students, consisting of males and females, who openly admitted to having the habit of engaging in sexual activities in cyberspace. This research aimed to explain the practices of resistance and negotiation that occur on religious teachings. The data collection method used was indepth interviews which focused on how they used virtual space relating to sexuality. There were various entrances to various forms of sexual simulacrums and sexuality within cyberspace, various sexual acts, and the scene that "offer" various sexual activities, such as voyeurism, role-playing, sexual game, cyberfetishism, and long-distance sexual activity via the internet (teledildonics). In those various activities, men were more open in telling about their activities than women because of strong patriarchal tradition. Besides, they also tried to negotiate the concept of sin in religion. They considered the consequences of sin when they do sexual virtually were heavier than when they did it.

Keywords: cybersex, religion, youth, resistance, negotiation

Paper type: Research paper

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INTRODUCTION

Arthur Kroker summarized the characteristics of cybersex in an interesting phrase: "sex without secretions"(Bell 2001). Unlike sex in the real world, cybersex is considered safe because it can keep several things in the real world often associated with sex: transmission of venereal diseases, pregnancy, abortion, and feelings of hurt being abandoned by a partner. Besides, cybersex is about anonymity or unclear identity and changes in the meaning of erotica. On the other hand, cynical circles call cybersex nothing more than technology-mediated smoking (masturbation). Some consider cybersex as an unhealthy sexual practice because it makes users addicted (Myketiak 2020).

Cybersex is known by several terms, including computer sex, Internet sex, net-sex, or informal colloquialism, sometimes only as cyber or cybering, which is a virtual sex encounter in which two or more people far apart are connected via a network. Computers exchange sexually explicit messages to describe their sexual experiences. Cybersex may occur between those who have intimate relations in the real world but are separated geographically or between those who have no prior knowledge (information) and meet in a virtual room while still hiding their true identity. Cybersex comes along with the spread of internet users around the world so cultural contexts can influence cybersex consumption differently (Griffiths 2012). One of them is Indonesia.

Indonesia is one of the countries with a relatively high population in terms of active internet users. A productive young age dominates the percentage of the user. As released by APJI (Association of Indonesian Internet Service Users), based on data released in 2018, 15-19-year-old have the highest penetration (reaching 91%). In the next sequence, the age is 20-24-year-old with 88.5% penetration. Then the underneath group is 25-29-year-old with a penetration of 82.7%, the 30-34 yearsold group with 76.5% penetration, and the age group 35-39-year-old with a penetration of 68.5%. The data above confirms that the younger generation is the dominant user of internet access. The high internet usage by the younger generation is closely related to how they use cyberspace to satisfy their sexual desires.

In Similar web data for 2018, it is explained that Indonesian internet users spend an average of 3 minutes 36 seconds watching pornographic films on the internet. According to statistical recapitulation data, Indonesia is in third place searching for 'father' themed pornographic films. Indonesia is under the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan. In another statement explained in the Study of the Ministry of Communication and Information in 2019, it is stated that millennials, or the Z generation are the dominant access to pornographic content on the internet. It also happened in America. Cybersex activity via the internet among young people reaches a prevalence of up to 40 percent of users with various practices such as receiving and sending naked objects or having sex through cyberspace; in Canada, it is even estimated to exceed this percentage although there are no detailed reports. (Adorjan, M. C., & Ricciardelli 2019)(Shaughnessy, K., Byers, E. S., & Walsh 2011)(Morgan 2011)

The data above confirmed that the teenage generation is the dominant user of internet access. They grow up in the environment and lifestyle of a digital society. They no longer feel awkward about using the internet for various functions, and sexual activity in cyberspace. Along with the development and widespread use of the internet, it has led to a sexual revolution that allows them to carry out sexual exploration that transcends the boundaries of religion, culture, gender, age, nation, and even physical form. They can channel their erotic selfexpression via email, online chat rooms, interactive webcams, or haptic technology (sense of touch).

One of the things that are the focus of this article is how the teenage generation is dealing with a reality called religion. Religion is one of the dominant sources of truth in Indonesia, especially Islam. Religious rules become a kind of norm that is upheld and fought for. This article explained how the generation of teenagers in Surabaya who have the same background, namely students at Islamic Universities, use virtual spaces related to sexual activities. Apart from that, this paper also tried to relate their practice to the religious teachings they profess. The informants of this study were students at several campuses in Surabaya. Those who become informants were students who openly admit to having the habit of engaging in sexual activities in cyberspace.

Cybersex has a very diverse definition. Cybersex is accessing pornography on the internet, engaging in real-time, namely online sexual conversations with other people, and accessing multimedia software (Carners, P. J., Delmonico, D. L.,

& Griffin n.d.). Besides, there is a kind claim that cybersex is limited to activities in that individuals want to be sexually aroused, feel sexually satisfied, and engage in self-stimulation in other contexts (Boies 2002) (Doring 2000).

Whatever the definition debated, cybersex focused in this research is sexual activity in cyberspace. By referring to the three characteristics put forward (Cooper, A; Griffin-Shelley 2011), namely: a) Accessibility, the internet provides millions of pornographic sites and provides chat rooms that will provide opportunities for cybersex; b) Affordability, which refers to accessing pornographic sites via the internet, which does not need to be expensive; and c) Anonymity, the individual does not need to be afraid of being recognized by others (Cooper, A; Griffin-Shelley 2011).

The development of cyberspace as a sex machine has changed many things regarding conventional definitions of "body," "sex," "sexuality," "sexual object," "sexual intercourse," and "sexual gratification." Within cyberporn or cyber-sex, there are various entrances to various forms of sexual simulacrum and sexuality, various sexual acts and scenes (in the form of photos, videos, and films), which 'offer' various sexual activities: 'seeing' (voyeurism); 'Roleplaying' or playing specific sexual roles; 'Sexual game' (adult sexual gaming); sexual activity 'against' the internet (cyber-fetishism), and; remote sexual activity via the internet (teledildonic) (Piliang 2011). Argue otherwise; he thinks intimacy exists in relationships that are built in cyberspace. Suppose cyber-sex involves a symbolic meaning of sex and an intense biological and libidinal pressure. In that case, he thinks this makes it competitive for real partners and leaves little space for those partners. For cyber-sex offenders who in their sexual fantasies also involve sex symbols in the form of love, intimacy, trust, the need for satisfaction, happiness, and pleasure, it may be possible to obtain intimacy and may be able to establish sustainable relationships.

Besides, the important thing discussed in this research was related to anonymity. With anonymity, they can express it with or without their real identity. Through internet intermediaries, several generations of teenagers have an excellent opportunity to channel their deepest and darkest sexual desires by ignoring the religious, cultural, and moral barriers that block them in the real world. In his article

entitled "The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace", Michael Heim, states there is an aesthetic preoccupation when interactions with computer use reveal the desire for a "residence to the heart and mind." Another machine element as a body is desire, which is closely related to erotic things as part of our preoccupation with the virtual world. It also cannot be separated from matters of trust as a human character. Having desire often means an over-belief in the erotic potential of what to desire: losing oneself in an unknown realm while confronting moral necessity. Here, anonymity in cybersex can generate erotic stimulation precisely when fellow participants do not recognize each other intimately. Like the other, a cybersex partner is a source of eroticism that he has not been familiar with (Heim 2001).

Research on cybersex was also conducted by Rianto (2015) with the title "Cybersex Sexuality as Pleasure and Commodity." This research explores how sexuality is present in the cyber world. The research explains that sex is more understood as a pleasure and a commodity. Various reports of sexual offenders describe the pleasure of sexual intercourse in such away. Meanwhile, on the other hand, sex is also a commodity. Besides, various offers or advertisements also sell as a way to peddle body and sex. The orientation is to get economic benefits for the sexual activity they do (Rianto 2015).

In other research, which is related to Indonesia's scope, Hening (2015) explains in her research "Cybering's Future Acceptance in Germany and Indonesia." The research compared cybersex activity in German and Indonesian societies. This comparative research shows that no significant differences were found between Indonesians and Germans in perceiving or accepting ideas of sexuality. The difference lies in their acceptance of the cybering phenomenon if these activities continue to occur in the future. From the research, it is known that Indonesians seem more receptive to cybersex activities in the future than Germans. Social and cultural aspects appear to be overshadowed by the fact that society has now become increasingly global. It is in line with the increasing influence of internet penetration and new media technology. (Hening 2015).

In the context of acceptance and practice of cybersex, Juditha (2020) in her research "Cybersex Behaviour in Millennial Generation," This research used a survey method with a quantitative approach. The study explained that most of the respondents engaged in offline sex activities (masturbation, intercourse, making out, and oral sex) during the last six months. The majority of respondents also

admitted to having sex with boyfriends, close friends, and strangers (just known) without marriage ties. Most of the respondents did cybersex activity once or twice a week in their own homes. The goal is because they are curious, as entertainment and recreation.

Most respondents engaged in cybersex activities by browsing pornographic sites; the rest engaged in sexual conversations, downloaded pornography, and accessed multimedia/sex software. Another finding stated that respondents also admitted to having sexual conversations with their boyfriends, husbands/wives, close friends, and new people who had met face to face with someone for sexual purposes who previously only met online. It has similarities with this research, namely related to variants of cybersex practice. However, this research has only finished mapping out what types of cybersex practices are being carried out. Meanwhile, this research focused on what motives encourage teenagers to do cybersex. (Juditha 2020)

Stated that the practice of cybersex is often considered a disgraceful act, especially in religion, as illustrated in the research above. It was confirmed by Lim (2013) that the relationship between religion and sexual activity, Indonesia has a decisive intervention against the existence of sexual content in cyberspace (Lim n.d.). Ghoroghi, S., Hassan, S. A., & Ayub (2017), in a quantitative study, explained the influence of student religiosity on the habit of doing cybersex. One of the conclusions of this research is that student religiosity also affects the habit of doing cybersex. Religious understanding can help fight and prevent the practice of cybersex (Ghoroghi, S., Hassan, S. A., & Ayub 2017). It explains that religion has a connection with cybersex in terms of restricting or prohibiting it. However, research related to the correlation between religion and cybersex showed that the higher the religious level, the higher the risk of viewing pornography. (Ross, M. W., Mansson, S. A., & Daneback n.d.)

Giddens (1984) in the theory of saturation explains that society is formed or limited by aspects of human agents and social structures that are bound in time and space. Religion is one of the dominating structures in the Indonesian context. However, there is no total domination of power (Giddens 1984). Thus, in the context of cybersex and religious relations, there is always a tug of war. In a specific context,

religion experiences resistance from its adherents. The form can be directly or indirectly. Parker (1984) reviewed that social groups whose consensus has never been fully reached and those who disagree at one time will resist (resistance) realistically and silently. The group that disagrees with the ones that will, on one occasion, take up a real and silent fight (Parker 1984).

In the context of religion, especially Islam, cybersex is called *Istimna*. The unique thing occurs when someone has accessed porn site is there are sex stories, erotic pictures, and videos in a porn site that can make the body's hormones fluctuate. The majority of fiqh scholars allow this case, if it is done with a legal partner. If it is done alone or for those who have not been legally paired, many scholars forbid it (Wakaf, K., & Kuwait 2006). The prohibition on cybersex is understood as the dominant structures that limit adherents.

From the description above, this research is different from previous research since it would be analyzed not only the cybersex category but also the motives of Islamic students to practice cybersex and its intersection with their religion. Their ways to do cybersex was part of the resistance to religion. Besides, gender differences are also the focus of the elaborated studies--the difference between male and female students.

METHOD

This study will examine the sexual practices of students in urban areas in cyberspace. The analysis was conducted qualitatively by trying to link these practices to their understanding of religion. Cyber-sex is understood as an arena of resistance and negotiation. This qualitative analysis will be presented descriptively by sharpening the analysis in a theoretical context. That way, this research will get rich and in-depth data and analysis by conducting in-depth interviews with several informants familiar with sexual activity in cyberspace.

Twelve young people are living in Surabaya willing to become informants, ten men, and two women. Their ages range from 21-30 years. They are a large generation with strong cyberculture. According to Ryder NB (1965), the concept of generation consists of individuals with the same age range who have experienced the same historical events in the same period (NB. 1965). On this basis, the existing informants were representatives of the younger generation.

Although bound to territorial and other conditions. Female subjects were used in research to see the risk of women's discrimination in cyberspace in the form of hegemonic masculinity (Adorjan, M. C., & Ricciardelli 2019). Several types of research have stated that women tend to have less motivation to use cybersex than men because of finding female subjects. The quantity is not comparable to male subjects (Paul, B., & Shim 2008). However, this does not mean that women are not addicted to cybersex consumption because other research results show that both women and men have the same addictive potential from consuming presentations of pornographic images on the internet (Laier, C., Pekal, J., & Brand 2014). It means that women exposed to pornographic images on the internet are more likely to be sexually exposed than women who are not.

This research was qualitative so the purpose of this research was to try to understand the phenomena experienced by the research subject, such as behavior, perception, motivation, actions, and other things holistically, and utilizing descriptions in the form of words and language, in a particular context naturally and by utilizing various scientific methods (Moleong 2008). The approach was descriptive to collect information about the status of a symptom that does not intend to measure specific hypotheses but only describes what it is about variables, symptoms, and circumstances (Arikunto 1998).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Cybersex and Practice

This section describes the experiences and struggles of several informants in the cyber world. How do they differ, and how to get the satisfaction and enjoyment they do not get in the real world. Cyberspace, which was initially a "channel of communication" between humans on a global scale, has recently been transformed into a "giant channel" of almost every human activity, including "sexual activity."

Based on my interviews with D and O, they both have activities in the same simulacrum sex. They both often look at (voyeurism) pictures of naked women. For them, there is satisfaction in seeing a still image. They can achieve sexual arousal — even orgasm — when secretly viewing images of a naked body, half-naked, undressing, or having sexual intercourse. Sexual stimulation and satisfaction can arise in a person because, in him, various sexual fantasies develop along with the

process of seeing images. The activity of seeing the body or 'body image' leads to achieving what Mulvey calls 'visual pleasure.' In this context, D and O feel that they are more often observers of sexual objects on several social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram).

For abbreviations at the beginning of sentences: either spell out the abbreviation in full or rephrase it. With scientific names, it is common to abbreviate the genus to its first letter after the first mention so long as one genus is being represented (*Aspergillus niger* at first mention and *A. niger* thereafter, for example). However, it is better to spell out the genus in full at the beginning of a sentence.

It was also involved in the same sexual activity, but the difference was how the informant responded to the pictures. He sees the body or image while taking action. An action to stimulate people to reach orgasm is called masturbationvoyeurism. Masturbation, according to Lacan, cannot be separated from fantasy, which is when one's genitals are directed to an image, which is imagined. In the masturbation that accompanies voyeurism, orgasm can only occur when the image (sexy, beautiful) and the fantasy 'marker' (certain women, for example) are present side by side in shaping sexual satisfaction(Lacan 1991).

Both men (informant with initial S and A) admitted that they prefer to watch interactive sexual activities. They both are usually active on a social media platform, "Bigo." In this application, they can interactively greet the women who are online in it. Even though they never use their real name (Anonim account), they enjoy the activity. The pleasure and sexual gratification presented in cyberspace by distance interaction are what Howard Rheingold calls "teledildonic." The basic idea of 'teledildonics,' as put forward by Steve Aukstakalnis, is that when our entire body is covered with a kind of 'virtual reality clothing' that covers the whole body, especially the genital and other erogenous zones, and which consists of various sensors (signalsending devices to cyberspace) and effectors - then we can simulate sexual activity (Aukstakalnis, S., & Blatner 1992).

The next activity that I did not encounter from all of my informants was adult sexual gaming, which is viewing "interactive pictures" in cyberspace while interacting (or "intercourse") with those images. This sexual game program's basic principle is someone who "takes a role" (roleplaying) interactive in virtual sex activity. In this program, a virtual woman simulated her back on a bed, with a body position that invites someone to have sexual intercourse with her. Through

roleplaying, an internet user can have virtual intercourse with the woman through the virtual penis provided. The woman will react according to the way the user “treats” the virtual organ to her. Cyberspace is full of various types of adult sexual gaming like that, which lead to various forms of sexual fantasy that were previously unimaginable, such as Fantasy Land, Studettes, and Sexquiz. The above activities are classified as taboo and impossible to do given that the user must show his face. All informants who live in strong Islamic culture and teachings still think that their activities are prohibited. Almost all cybersex activities are carried out clandestinely and using fake accounts.

Apart from that, almost all male gender informants openly shared their sexual activities in contrast to the two female informants in this study. However, they admit their habit of watching or seeing naked bodies in cyberspace. However, they are not willing to explain the activities they usually do in it. The urge to watch or see nude videos or images in cyberspace is driven by viral or often discussed information on social media. Even though these activities are carried out in the cyber world, the two female informants still think that sex talk with the opposite sex is taboo and should be avoided. They were evidenced by the reluctance to tell openly. This context shows that the virtual world cannot wholly change behavior in the real world. It can become a space for sexual aggression.

The reluctance of women to tell openly indicates that cyberspace cannot be explicitly stated as a free space for them to express their sexuality. It may be an implication of the existence of hegemonic masculinity, as explained by Adorjan, M. C., & Ricciardelli (2019), that women are considered less worthy of being active in sex in the cybersphere while men are considered normal (Adorjan, M. C., & Ricciardelli 2019). This circumstance shows that there is still an old double standard in which sexually active men are adored while women are insulted. Cyberspace does not prevent women from oppression and hierarchical gender constructs that are ancient. In other words, there needs to be critical of the claim that cybersex frees its perpetrators to explore their sexuality as safer and less risky.

This criticism needs to exist because women are still haunted by a sense of "inappropriate" when expressing sexual activities in interviews. So it is not surprising, according to Branwyn, that several women avoided public chat areas or

completely withdrew from membership in chat groups. In other words, there is still a patriarchal ideology that places men in the primary position not only in the domestic sphere but also in the public sphere (Adnani, K., Udasmoro, W., & Noviani 2016).

Resistance and Negotiation in Cybersex

The existence of cybersex has an even more significant influence on religious belief systems. Religion regulates the relationship between humans and God. In relations between humans, religion regulates aspects of life, which are also regulated, including aspects of the body's use in social life. However, in contrast to a culture, which is a purely social contract between humans, religion is a 'system of governance based on divine revelation intervention. In particular, religion regulates the body, organs, eyes, liver, visibility, desire, heart, and the use of the body (Ibnu Qudamah in Al-Mughniy Book, juz 1/349). In this context, the presence of cybersex and its activities are related to understanding religion. It is illustrated in the interviews in this study. How to practice in cybersex space is considered part of the resistance to the dominant rules regulated in society's religion and social norms.

In Islam, the body's arrangement is rigorous and detailed, including showing the body, even denouncing sexual activities outside the norm, such as masturbation, same-sex sexuality, and sexuality with animals. In the context of cyberporn, the body is deprived of religious authority, so it is now a public authority. The body and sexual activities displayed in various positions, poses, details, and exposures now belong to anyone who wants it. Cybersex is certainly done for a reason. Almost all of my informants engage in sexual activity in cyberspace as part of their fun. The pleasure motive is undoubtedly not singular.

An informant with initial A and S explained that they often watch pictures or videos as references or examples when connecting with their partners. An informant with initial A in his explanation emphasized that cyberspace provides new space for actualization related to sexual activity. The real world does not give him a chance to see naked bodies because he is well aware that it is against the dominant norms, especially religion. However, he sees that cyberspace has a positive side that not many people understand. He considered a sexual activity in cyberspace as a safe and helpful activity. Their journey as young people often gets

temptation or the urge to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage. For them, cyberspace helps them to avoid this.

Cybersex is considered to distance itself from several cases in the real world that is often associated with the harmful consequences of free sex, such as the transmission of venereal diseases, pregnancy, abortion, and feelings of hurt being abandoned by a partner.

The arguments developed by the informant with initial A and S are attempts to put up resistance against religious rules. On the one hand, they realize that their activities are forbidden, but on the other hand, they show that cybersex is an activity that has benefits. The power of religion over its rules seems to have received resistance from its adherents. At this level, as Foucault said, power will always give birth to anti-power. "Surveillance can be turned to countersurveillance" (Koskela 2003).

Apart from that, the secretive practice of engaging in cybersex activities is part of the resistance to religious and cultural domination. Almost all informants carried out these activities in private. Even though it is considered forbidden, the practice of watching and consuming is a practice of resistance. Louis Althusser (2015) emphasizes that resistance will arise automatically when a cultural group is showered with verbal abuse and is threatened. Swearing and being threatened can be interpreted as a form of discomfort from a group of generalizations or negative judgments addressed to them. The resistance is aimed at rejecting claims to affixed generalizations (Althusser 2015). Apart from being done clandestinely, using fake accounts is part of this resistance. Anonymity and clandestine practice are the same resistance to the dominating structure, in this context, religious rule.

In another context, informants I and J tried to explain that what they were doing was not part of addiction. The assumption that the hobby of doing cybersex activities is addiction is also emphasized by Young (2008), who describes that it is considered "crack cocaine," which is the same as an addictive, illegal, and illegal substance. (Young 2008) There is a kind of stigmatization that is like drug addiction. The two informants denied it. They explained that the activity they did watch did not make them addicted. Moreover, equating to a drug addict. It was conveyed

because they were young adults who were old enough and able to control themselves.

In another context, the informant with initial D explained that cybersex is not a sin. There is an attempt to negotiate the meaning of sin. Cybersex, in the view of divine religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), is the source of all sins. Christians feel this worry about the source of sin. As Baker said, "Initially, God said that all of creation was good. Soon after that, however, sin tainted all that good. The collapse's impact is visible in all aspects of people's lives, including the online world. Despite the many advantages of cyberspace, it is a sin. In the context of sins, Islamic teachings can be grouped into three groups, namely: (a) the significant sins that cannot be forgiven; (b) significant sins which can still be forgiven; (c) minor sins that are erased because of diligent worship or because they do many good deeds. Even though they understand the concept of sin in detail, they try to negotiate that this practice is a practice that is not forbidden because it is done by those who have grown up.

CONCLUSION

Cybersex characteristics are different from sex in the real world. In practice, cybersex is conducted by the informants of this study in a variety of ways. First, this practice is conducted in the form of voyeurism. Their Voyeurism is divided into two virtual sexual activities; just looking at body parts or body images to masturbating along with voyeurism (masturbation-voyeurism). Second, this practice is also done by tele-sexuality as a virtual remote sexual activity. In the various activities above, men are more open in telling about their activities than women. It happens because the patriarchal tradition is still strong.

Apart from activities, another exciting thing was how resistance and negotiation occurred in the informants' religious teachings. Some informants thought that religion should temporarily counter the practice of cybersex. Based on his experience, cybersex is a space that can help them from being tempted or driven by the desire to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage. Cybersex was considered to distance itself from several dirty things, such as the transmission of venereal disease, pregnancy, abortion, and the feeling of being hurt by a partner. Besides, they also try to negotiate the concept of sin in religion when they engage in virtual sexual activity, which does not apply in cyberspace.

They consider the consequences of sin when they do the three activities mentioned above to be virtually no more decadent than when they do it in the real world. For them, cyberspace frees them to channel their sexual desires without religious interference. Based on this, religion faces a significant challenge to convince humans of the concept of sin, which can be violated by cybersex.

The reflection of this research is trying to see religion from outside the field of religious discourse itself. It is essential to increase the productivity and dynamics of (religious) knowledge. According to Filiang, religious knowledge authorities are reluctant to carry out the process of self-expulsion or what Foucault calls genealogy because everything will end in the authority of religious institutions and even God himself. Of course, religious authorities will not be willing to use Derrida's deconstruction approach in religious studies because it can make religious truths vague and without certainty.

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