

Social media and online prostitution industries

Khafit Badrus Zaman ^{a,1}, Mohammad Iqbal Firman Ardiansyah ^{a,2}, Muhammad Busthomi Arviansyah ^{a,3,*}, Muhammad Ferdyan Syach ^{a,4}, Naziro ^{a,5}, Aji Prasetya Wibawa ^{a,6}

^a Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia

¹ khafitbadruszaman1805356@students.um.ac.id; ² iqbalardiansyah.1805356@students.um.ac.id; ³ muhammad.busthomi.1805356@students.um.ac.id ; ⁴ muhammad.ferdyan.1805356@students.um.ac.id; ⁵ naziro.1805356@students.um.ac.id; ⁶ aji.prasetya.ft@um.ac.id

* corresponding author

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received December 19, 2021

Revised January 21, 2022

Accepted February 2, 2022

Keywords

Prostitution

Online prostitution

Social media

Developed country

Developing country

ABSTRACT

Online prostitution continuously increases along with the development of technology and information. This study aims to observe the development of prostitution globally, including the developed and developing countries. This research was conducted by collecting world data news about online prostitution in the last ten years (2011-2021). Most of the motives for online prostitution are economic factors. Several online prostitution cases involved minors. Online prostitution cases in developed and developing countries occur on social media platforms such as WeChat, LINE, MiChat, and Facebook. In the discussion chapter, the writers provide suggestions to minimize the cases of online prostitution. One of them is making regulations to govern the use of social media.

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](#) license.



1. Introduction

Prostitution is a form of the sexual transaction [1]. Etymologically, According to the Cambridge Dictionary, prostitution is a form of business having sex for money. Meanwhile, Ivan Bloch interpreted prostitution as "a form of sexual intercourse outside of marriage with a certain pattern, namely to anyone openly and almost always with payment, either by marriage or other sexual activities that give the satisfaction desired by the person concerned" [2]. The understanding and the strict line about prostitution is that in every act of prostitution, there is always an element of exchange of sexual relations for certain benefits, which are carried out as a trade transaction. The existence of rapid advancement of technology affects the development of prostitution marketing, which is becoming known as online prostitution [3]. The touch of the internet may spread the existence of online prostitution.

Online prostitution is a term for prostitution activities carried out or promoted via the internet [4]. One of the internet media that is often used is social media. By using social media, sex workers can efficiently promote themselves. Before using social media, they used SMS to promote themselves. However, social media can reduce the money they need to spend. Facebook, Twitter, Grindr, and other social media are often used to promote because many people can see in one time upload [5]. In addition, whatever the uploaded information can be viewed at any time. So, there is no need to publish new information to attract new customers. Through social media, sex workers do not need to stay at a specific location to get customers [6]. They can proceed with the transactions anywhere and anytime. The transaction occurs through private messages or private numbers deliberately distributed. When the transaction has been accepted, they hold a meeting outside the brothel. Thus, online prostitution may generate a bunch of benefits for prostitutes.

This paper aims to explore the worldwide development of online prostitution. In the exploration, data, and information sources are taken from the English news circulating on the internet for the last ten years (2011-2021). This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the development of

online prostitution in developing countries. Section 3 describes online prostitution in developed countries. Section 4 describes the discussion. Finally, section 5 presents our conclusion.

2. Development of Online Prostitution in Developing Countries

The development of online prostitution in developing countries increases from year to year. It is proven by the presence of new cases every year. Online prostitution is still widely prohibited in developing countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, China, and Thailand. Although prostitution is illegal in these countries, many people still act as clients and providers of these services.

2.1. Development of Online Prostitution in Indonesia

Online prostitution is increasing in almost all developing countries, including Indonesia. In Indonesia, many cases of online prostitution occur. One of them occurred in Balikpapan city in 2019. From the revealed online prostitution case, eight women were caught in raids in three different hotels with a male pimp. The ages of the eight women ranging from 19-22 years. The transaction mode was carried out by the perpetrator using a chat application called MiChat. Customers ordered prostitution services by chatting with the admin via social media. Then, the admin contacted the sex worker ordered by the customer [7]. A similar case also occurred in Surabaya city in 2020. The number of suspects was seven people aged 19-27 years. The prices offered by pimps in both cases ranged from one million to two million rupiahs [8].

In Makassar city in 2020, 14 teenagers consisting of 8 men and six women, were arrested by the police at one of the hotels. Based on the suspect's confession, the mode of transaction of the prostitutes was carried out through social media. The prostitutes promote their social media services with a price ranging from 1-2 million rupiahs [9]. Apart from teenagers, online prostitution cases also involve children. In 2018, KPAI recorded 264 cases of online prostitution and the trafficking of children. KPAI believes that there are still many social media platforms that expose children to prostitution. One of the social media used in this case is Line. This is based on police findings about pornographic activity in the form of live streaming in the Line chat group called Show Time. The group comprises 400-500 users, including minors [10].

Social media allows a pimp to have sex workers in various places. For example, the police have arrested two pimps with the initials NNU and MIR. They worked as admins and promoted prostitution using the Twitter account 'Bandung Agency' under the id @agencyladies. The account is spread across some major cities in Indonesia, such as Bali, Jabodetabek, Malang, Surabaya, Semarang, Medan, Jambi, Kalimantan, Purwokerto, and Yogyakarta. This account is used to offer sex workers to customers. Then the interested customers will pay a down payment between five hundred thousand and one million rupiahs to the admin. After the customer gets the service, the customer will pay the remaining payment to the sex worker ordered. Furthermore, sex worker pays a commission of around 30% to the assistant or agent of the admin [11].

2.2. Development of Online Prostitution in Malaysia, China, and Thailand

Online prostitution has grown in Malaysia. One of the cases occurred in Pudu, Malaysia, in 2020. In that case, 26 foreigners were arrested. There were 23 women caught, ages 25 to 40. Some of them were caught with the man suspected to be the client of the woman who was caught. A notebook containing the client's payment records and some condoms were found and used as evidence of the case. The perpetrator used WeChat social media to make transactions with clients. The rates offered by these service providers ranged from RM 180 to RM 300 [12].

Online prostitution is also growing in China. In China, many platforms act as a link between sex workers and customers who seek these services [13]. Some of these platforms are called Quick Come Rent Me and Wechat. Sex workers offer their services for around \$ 15 per hour. At least 38 public accounts were found with the keyword "rent people". This indicates that online prostitution in China is significantly developing until 2016 .

Online prostitution has become open in Thailand. According to a Post Today report, one of the pimps who are new and popular on Facebook already has more than 16,400 likes on their account. The homepage contains contacts, prices, and terms to do. Prices range from 1,000 to 5,000 baht for each 12-hour service. Online prostitution in Thailand is easier and cheaper than going directly to a massage parlor because clients can stay with the sex workers for 12 hours. One of the online

prostitution cases in Thailand occurred in 2013. The Bangkok Police arrested nine perpetrators; three were underage, four were over 18 years of age, and two were from Myanmar. The perpetrators offer their services through social media, Facebook [14].

3. Development of Online Prostitution in Developed Countries

Not only in developing countries, but eventually online prostitution also increases in developed countries. The rising number of prostitution cases occurs because social media makes it the providers easier to carry out their actions. So the authorities are challenged to detect them. They also disguise the platform used to hide transactions that occur. The mode used by perpetrator was forcing the victim to send a nude photo, and then it was used to threaten the victim. In addition, the perpetrator also uses the victim's educational background to frighten them so that the perpetrator can continue to proceed with their actions.

3.1. Developing of Online Prostitution in the United States

The rise of social media impacts online prostitution in the United States. Many pimps make transactions online and are difficult to detect. One of the reasons is that they use social media and mobile applications. Moreover, they hide ads on commonly accessed sites like Craigslist and Backpage. They advertise prostitution by disguising the advert as a massage or dating. From interviews with 71 pimps in Atlanta and Chicago, the median income of pimps was between \$ 75,000 and \$ 100,000 [15].

One of the online prostitution cases found that the customers came from various ages, ranging from 22 to 62 years [16]. Many prostitutes were forced to participate and use addictive drugs. The death rate of prostitutes in America is around 204/100000 [17]. Abuse of prostitutes also occurred frequently, on average, once a month.

Also, there are some online prostitution cases involving children. Like the JH case, he was a high school teacher arrested for child pornography and prostitution. JH was arrested for making videos or images of the sexual abuse of children and making transactions against these videos or images. Moreover, he also had prostitutes with someone under 18 [18].

3.2. Development of Online Prostitution in Europe

Online prostitution is also growing in European countries. In European countries, one of the executors of online prostitution is an international gang that roams the social media accounts of women and girls. The gang uses the victim's education and family background to exploit them. There are tons of social media platforms in use. Most victims were women with two recruitment strategies: posting fake job advertisements on legitimate websites and responding to the victim's subsequent job requests. The criminal network also creates comprehensive websites of fake employment agencies. These sites are often promoted on social media so more victims can easily access them. Sometimes the website includes live chat, ostensibly allowing direct contact with the alleged hiring manager [19].

The rise of social media platforms impacts online prostitution in the UK. Many university students secretly become sex workers to pay for basic living expenses [20]. The research involved 6,750 students, 5% male and 3.5% female, who said they had worked in the sex industry, while nearly 22% said they had considered doing so. Other research shows that one out of twenty students has worked in the sex industry, and male students are more likely to do so than female students. The student is involved in prostitution and escorts to nude work and the internet .

In Turkey, about 20,000 women are working as sex workers online. They produce up to 4,500 Turkish Lira in a month. On one of the online prostitution websites, 600 sex workers earn an average of 26 lire per hour. Most of these women are homemakers, and some are people with disabilities. One sex worker said that the increasing market for online prostitution is the rise in unemployment due to layoffs in other occupations. Another reason is that the Turkish government strictly regulates traditional prostitution. On the other hand, online prostitution is mainly free from legal restrictions [21].

3.3. Development of Online Prostitution in Japan

As one of the countries that legalize prostitution, Japan can not avoid prostitution cases. One of the methods the perpetrator uses is luring a modeling career for the victim. After signing several

contracts, the victim was then flown to a remote place where the perpetrator was doing his prostitution business [22]. In 2019, there were at least 103 similar new cases. In most of the cases, the victims were adolescents.

Apart from being approached on the streets, the perpetrator used social media to persuade victims. They were persuaded to send their nude photos. These photos were used to blackmail the victims, so they must send more photos repeatedly. Once the victim's photos and videos are uploaded to the website, deleting or retrieving them is almost impossible. It made some victims desperate until they stopped continuing their studies, and some of them decided to end their lives [22].

4. Results and Discussion

From the cases described in the previous section, there are also several cases of prostitution involving minors. It violates the prevailing norms and morals. In the eyes of the law, online prostitution involving minors is very complicated. Even online prostitution itself is already complicated. Prostitution is a case that includes moral offenses. So that the examination of the case is carried out in a limited manner, even closed to the public [23]. To tackle cases of online prostitution involving minors, global child protection (UNICEF) should establish stricter regulations against child trafficking and child exploitation. In addition, through the commission for child protection, each country makes laws and regulations that discuss this matter. Furthermore, set a very severe punishment for those who violate these rules.

Online prostitution can also be tackled by minimizing the use of social media, which is one of the supporting factors for online prostitution itself— not minimizing the real meaning. The government may be able to make regulations that regulate the public using social media. For example, in Indonesia, the Information and Electronic Technology Law Article 27 paragraph 1 of the ITE Law prohibits Indonesian citizens from distributing, transmitting, and accessing electronic information or electronic documents whose contents deliberately violate the norms of decency. The formation of this regulation indicates the Indonesian government's seriousness in dealing with online prostitution [17]. It can be a role model for countries that have not implemented these regulations.

Even in developed countries such as the United States, prostitution is illegal. Most perpetrators of prostitution in the United States are unwilling to become a crime [24]. Besides, the case in Europe explained that prostitution could cause several health risks. Prostitution can cause sexual disease, namely HIV [25]. From this discussion, it can be concluded that prostitution does not have positive impacts but negative ones.

The use of social media for online prostitution is difficult to stop. However, it can be limited by the application of technology on social media, one of which is the selection of features on social media. By implementing feature selection on social media, such as for names, profile photos, hashtags, biodata, and uploaded content, prostitution or pornographic content can be detected [26] so that the social media system can easily remove the content. In addition to selecting features, another way can be used, namely by implementing SVM (Support Vector Machine) for image content on social media. This method is used to determine whether an image includes prostitution content or not. Image detection can be done from several attributes, one of which is skin [27].

5. Conclusion

Online prostitution occurs in almost all parts of the world, both in developing and developed countries. The main factor behind the occurrence of prostitution is the economy. By performing the prostitution service, providers will get relatively large profits more quickly. In this all-digital era, the use of technology, which caused the rise of online prostitution, has become a similarity between developing and developed countries.

The use of social media as a medium of online prostitution is constantly growing in developed and developing countries. Prostitutes use social media to offer their services. Transactions are also carried out through social media, which is more accessible and practical. Also, those platforms make it easier to communicate and negotiate. Social media often used in online prostitution include Facebook, Line, WeChat, and MiChat.

References

- [1] J. O'Connell Davidson, "Prostitution," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2007, doi: [10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosp111](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosp111).
- [2] V. Samarasinghe, *Female Sex Trafficking in Asia*. Routledge, pp. 1-234, 2012, doi: [10.4324/9780203485231](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203485231).
- [3] G. Ekberg, "The Swedish Law that Prohibits the Purchase of Sexual Services," *Violence Against Women*, vol. 10, no. 10, pp. 1187–1218, Oct. 2004, doi: [10.1177/1077801204268647](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801204268647).
- [4] L. E. C. Rocha, F. Liljeros, and P. Holme, "Information dynamics shape the sexual networks of Internet-mediated prostitution," *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci.*, vol. 107, no. 13, pp. 5706–5711, Mar. 2010, doi: [10.1073/pnas.0914080107](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0914080107).
- [5] F. MacKee, "Social Media in Gay London: Tinder as an Alternative to Hook-Up Apps," *Soc. Media + Soc.*, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 205630511666218, Jul. 2016, doi: [10.1177/2056305116662186](https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116662186).
- [6] S. Cunningham *et al.*, "Behind the screen: Commercial sex, digital spaces and working online," *Technol. Soc.*, vol. 53, pp. 47–54, May 2018, doi: [10.1016/j.techsoc.2017.11.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2017.11.004).
- [7] "Online prostitution uncovered in Balikpapan." Accessed Apr. 06, 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/08/20/online-prostitution-uncovered-in-balikpapan.html>.
- [8] P. Daulay, S. Kanto, D. Wisadirana, and S. Mu'adi, "Post Closure Prostitution and The Adaptation Strategy of Sex Workers: Case Study of Dolly Prostitution Community, Surabaya Indonesia," *International Journal of West Asian Studies*, vol. 10, pp. 14, 2018. [Online]. Available at: <http://journalarticle.ukm.my/17693/1/30036-92048-1-SM.pdf>.
- [9] R. Cempaka, B. Wardhani, A. A. S. Sawitri, P. P. Januraga, and B. Bavinton, "PrEP Use Awareness and Interest Cascade among MSM and Transgender Women Living in Bali, Indonesia," *Trop. Med. Infect. Dis.*, vol. 5, no. 4, p. 158, Oct. 2020, doi: [10.3390/tropicalmed5040158](https://doi.org/10.3390/tropicalmed5040158).
- [10] "KPAI: Social Media Eases Child Prostitution Practices - News En.tempo.co." Accessed Apr. 06, 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://en.tempo.co/read/1173466/kpai-social-media-eases-child-prostitution-practices>.
- [11] L. R. Bennett and S. G. Davies, "Surveilling sexuality in Indonesia," *Routledge*, pp. 47-68, Dec. 05, 2014. Accessed Apr. 06, 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/>.
- [12] "Prostitution ring smashed, three Malaysians and 26 foreigners nabbed in Pudu raid." Accessed Apr. 29, 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/04/24/prostitution-ring-smashed-three-malaysians-and-26-foreigners-nabbed-in-pudu-raid>.
- [13] E. Y. Tsang, "Finding Hope as a 'Tempting Girl' in China: Sex Work, Indentured Mobility, and Cosmopolitan Individuals," *Deviant Behav.*, vol. 39, no. 7, pp. 896–909, Jul. 2018, doi: [10.1080/01639625.2017.1335543](https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2017.1335543).
- [14] "Online sex services 'booming.'" Accessed Apr. 29, 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/349226/online-sex-services-booming>.
- [15] "Social media is helping prostitution thrive online, pimps earning Rs 50 lakh annually: Study." Accessed Apr. 29, 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://news.abplive.com/lifestyle/social-media-is-helping-prostitution-thrive-online-pimps-earning-rs-5016746-annually-study-399699>.
- [16] M. Soohoo, M. Blas, G. Byraiah, C. Carcamo, and B. Brown, "Cervical HPV Infection in Female Sex Workers: A Global Perspective," *Open AIDS J.*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 58–66, Dec. 2013, doi: [10.2174/1874613601307010058](https://doi.org/10.2174/1874613601307010058).
- [17] C. Cooke, "Decriminalizing Prostitution: Embracing the Swedish Model By Removing the Mistake-Ofage Defense From New York'S Stop Violence in the Sex Trade Act.," *Journal of Law & Policy*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 248-284 2020. [Online]. Available at: <https://libproxy.wustl.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/>.
- [18] "Concord Teacher Arrested On Prostitution, Child Sex Image Charges." Accessed Apr. 29, 2021.
-

-
- [Online]. Available at: <https://patch.com/new-hampshire/concord-nh/concord-teacher-arrested-prostitution-child-sex-image-charges>.
- [19] Y. Dandurand, "Review of International Sex Trafficking of Women & Children – Understanding the Global Epidemic," *J. Hum. Traffick.*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 255–256, Jul. 2016, doi: [10.1080/23322705.2015.1099875](https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2015.1099875).
- [20] J. Simpson and C. Smith, "Students, sex work and negotiations of stigma in the UK and Australia," *Sexualities*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 474–490, Mar. 2021, doi: [10.1177/1363460720922733](https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720922733).
- [21] A. İçduygu, "International Migration and Human Development in Turkey," *Munich Personal RePEc Archive*, Oct. 01, 2009. Accessed Apr. 29, 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/19235/%0D>.
- [22] C. UENO, "Self-determination on sexuality? Commercialization of sex among teenage girls in Japan 1," *Inter-Asia Cult. Stud.*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 317–324, Jan. 2003, doi: [10.1080/1464937032000113060](https://doi.org/10.1080/1464937032000113060).
- [23] W. Zukerman, "Could online prostitution crackdown endanger women?," *New Sci.*, vol. 212, no. 2840, p. 24, Nov. 2011, doi: [10.1016/S0262-4079\(11\)62895-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0262-4079(11)62895-9).
- [24] A. Lutnick and D. Cohan, "Criminalization, legalization or decriminalization of sex work: what female sex workers say in San Francisco, USA," *Reprod. Health Matters*, vol. 17, no. 34, pp. 38–46, Jan. 2009, doi: [10.1016/S0968-8080\(09\)34469-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(09)34469-9).
- [25] M. A. Barnard, "Violence and vulnerability: conditions of work for streetworking prostitutes.," *Sociol. Heal. Illn.*, vol. 15, no. 5, pp. 683–705, Nov. 1993, doi: [10.1111/1467-9566.ep11434434](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.ep11434434).
- [26] R. Permatasari and N. A. Rakhmawati, "Features Selection for Entity Resolution in Prostitution on Twitter," *Int. J. Adv. Data Inf. Syst.*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 53–61, Mar. 2021, doi: [10.25008/ijadis.v2i1.1214](https://doi.org/10.25008/ijadis.v2i1.1214).
- [27] Y.-C. Lin, H.-W. Tseng, and C.-S. Fuh, "Pornography Detection using Support Vector Machine," *16th IPPR Conference on Computer Vision, Graphics and Image Processing (CVGIP)*, pp. 123-130, 2003. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.bunny.idv.tw/~sbb/work/paper/CVGIP2003.pdf>.
-