

The Dating Service Phenomenon: A Manifestation of Global Culture on Social Media from a Legal and Societal Perspective

Iqlina Ula 

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia
Iqlinaula19@students.unnes.ac.id

Rini Fidiyani 

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia
rinf@mail.unnes.ac.id

Abstract

Non-physical virtual dating services have emerged as a rapidly growing socio-digital phenomenon in Indonesia, driven by the post-pandemic acceleration of loneliness and persistent regulatory gaps. This study aims to identify the determinants of the emergence of this phenomenon, examine its existence from the perspectives of law, religion, philosophy, and digital policy, and formulate strategic recommendations based on integrative analysis. This study uses a qualitative method with a juridical-sociological approach with in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 informants (N=12) through purposive and snowball sampling. This study integrates Rosa's theory of social acceleration, Turkle's paradox of connectivity, Lukacs' reification, and Pound's law as social engineering. The findings identify four synergistic determinants: (1) the acceleration of loneliness exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) the diffusion of the Japanese Rental Kareshi model through digital platforms; (3) the gig economy's economic motives with low entry barriers, including for underage individuals; and (4) regulatory gaps in the ITE Law, the Pornography Law, the National Criminal Code, and the Human Trafficking Law. A multi-perspective review demonstrates the convergence of the four disciplines in



assessing this phenomenon as a normatively problematic commodification of intimacy, but divergence in solution orientation. The integrative analysis recommends three systemic responses: the issuance of preventative technical regulations for Komdigi; strengthening the existing legal framework of the ITE Law, the TPKS Law, and the TPPO Law; and platform technical regulations to prevent the algorithmic distribution of content to vulnerable users.

KEYWORDS: Phenomenon; Dating Services; Global Culture; Social Media; Law and Society

Introduction

The digital era has fundamentally transformed human social interactions. The acceleration of communication technology, which sociologist Hartmut Rosa calls social acceleration, has created a structural paradox: the easier it is for people to connect virtually, the deeper the social isolation they feel in real life.¹ Social media platforms designed to connect people instead facilitate shallow, transactional relationships, leaving the need for authentic emotional presence and closeness increasingly unfulfilled. (SDGs-3) This situation is culminated in Kompas Research and Development data from June 2025, which showed that 19.97% of respondents in Indonesia experience loneliness at least once a week.² This finding aligns with a WHO survey published during the same period, which recorded the prevalence of loneliness in Southeast Asia at 18.3%.³ This phenomenon is structural and requires a systemic response, not just individual solutions.

In response to this reality, the phenomenon of dating services that utilize social media platforms as a means of operation has emerged. This concept first emerged in Japan, a country known for its intensive work

¹ Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), hlm. 3-6.

² Nabilah Muhamad, "Yogyakarta to Become the Most Lonely City in Indonesia by 2025," 2025.

³ Satrio Pangarso Wisanggeni, Sri Rejeki, and Ratna Sri Widyastuti, "Why Loneliness Is Dangerous," 2025.

culture and high levels of individualism. In Japan, there is a service called “*Rental Kareshi*,” where people can pay a fee to have someone accompany them on dates or outings, or to spend time with them as a couple for a certain period of time.⁴ In recent years, girlfriend rental services have become popular in Indonesia, especially in big cities like Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya.⁵ This service provides emotional support through a variety of in-person (offline) and virtual (online) activities, including meal reminders, encouragement during activities, storytelling, listening to music together, watching online content together, playing games together, and even bedtime support over the phone. This study specifically focuses on the non-physical, virtual aspect of this service that is, interactions that occur entirely through digital platforms without physical meetings. This aspect is most vulnerable to regulatory loopholes and is growing the fastest in line with Indonesia's internet penetration rate.



Figure 1. Internet Penetration Rate in Indonesia 2023-2025

Source: APJII Internet Survey 2025

This phenomenon presents legal complexities that have not been addressed within the Indonesian regulatory framework. There is a

⁴ A Jannah, R Fitriana, and Y Rahmawati, “Rent-a-Girlfriend Service (Rentaru Kareshi) as a Social Phenomenon in Japan,” *Idea*, 2020, 34–45, <https://doi.org/10.33751/idea.v2i1.1826>.

⁵ Leo and Rasji, “Analysis of Legal Protection for Rental Partners Joining an Agency in Relation to Article 1548 of the Civil Code Concerning Rentals,” *Nusantara Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* 10, no. 2 (2023): 497–505, <https://doi.org/10.31604/jips.v10i2.2023.497-505>.

regulatory gap regarding the categorization of legal entertainment services and covert prostitution. The ITE Law No. 19 of 2016⁶ and the Pornography Law No. 44 of 2008⁷ do not explicitly differentiate between emotional support and sexual exploitation in cyberspace. In the context of the latest criminal law, Articles 420 and 421 of Law No. 1 of 2023 (the National Criminal Code) stipulate criminal penalties for those who facilitate indecent acts.⁸ However, their application in the non-physical digital realm continues to spark interpretative debate, creating substantial legal loopholes. (SDGs-16)

The urgency of this study arises from the duality of the phenomenon of dating services operating in a regulatory gray area. On the one hand, these services exist as an alternative instrument of emotional support for individuals experiencing social isolation, but on the other, the systemic vulnerabilities within them cannot be ignored. Various reports point to real security risks, ranging from cases of talent harassment in late 2023,⁹ to the evolution of digital crime in the form of blackmail using video call sex (VCS) in early 2025,¹⁰ and a case of fake identity fraud by a perpetrator with the initials "Bryan" that went viral on the TikTok account @Lailysyahdaa.¹¹ This series of events demonstrates that without clear regulations, dating services

⁶ Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Amendments to Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions, State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia 2016 Number 251.

⁷ Law Number 44 of 2008 concerning Pornography, State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia 2008 Number 181.

⁸ Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (National Criminal Code), State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia 2023 Number 1. Article 420: Any person who connects or facilitates another person to commit an indecent act shall be punished by a maximum imprisonment of 2 (two) years. Article 421: If the crime referred to in Article 419 or Article 420 is committed as a habit or to gain profit as a livelihood, the sentence may be increased by 1/3 (one-third).

⁹ Muhammad Iqbal Amar, "From Being with Men of All Kinds to Being Savage: This is the Confession of a Woman Selling Boyfriend Rental Services in Semarang," 2023.

¹⁰ Wijaya Kusuma and Krisiandi, "Boyfriend Rental Scheme Leads to Blackmailing Students in Yogyakarta, Victims of Immoral Acts," 2025..

¹¹ Lailysyahdaa, "Lailysyahda Scammed by Boyfriend Rental Services Using Bryan Kevin's Fake Identity," 2025, <https://www.tiktok.com/@lailysyahdaa/video/7512065413329554694>. Note: This source is a public report on social media that has not received formal legal verification; it is included solely for documentation of the phenomenon in the field.

risk developing into a space vulnerable to social deviation and difficult to access by existing legal instruments.

Several previous studies have examined the phenomenon of dating services from various disciplinary perspectives, including in a comparative context in their countries of origin, as presented in Table 1. Different from these studies, this study specifically examines the phenomenon of non-physical virtual dating services by integrating three dimensions that have never been discussed simultaneously: (1) determinants based on the direct experiences of practitioners, namely talent, service providers, and clients; (2) a multidisciplinary review from experts in law, philosophy, religion, and Komdigi; and (3) an integrative analysis that brings together empirical reality with prevailing norms through Roscoe Pound's law as social engineering framework, which views law as an active instrument in balancing individual, public, and social interests simultaneously.

TABLE 1. Previous Studies and Research Gap

No	Researcher	Year	Study Focus	Gap
1	Dirkareshza & Agustanti	2023	The potential for human trafficking and digital pimping in the Rentaru Kareshi phenomenon	Limited to the criminal law dimension, has not touched on non-physical virtual services
2	Ramadhan, Sutanti & Prasetyo	2025	Legal grey zone and regulatory fragmentation of girlfriend rental business in Semarang	Limited to the physical and criminal law context, not yet integrative
3	Maulana Gibran & Purwanto	2025	Civil review of girlfriend rental agreements and halal causa	Limited to civil aspects, does not touch on social or virtual dimensions
4	Shandy Utama & Svinarky	2021	The influence of social media on the birth of new legal acts in the ITE Law	Limited to the perspective of legal sociology, not specific to virtual dating services
5	Vanisa & Margaret	2024	Rational Choice Theory analysis of the rental boyfriend phenomenon as deviant behavior	Limited to the perspective of behavioral sociology, does not touch on legal or multidisciplinary dimensions
6	Daniela et al.	2024	The phenomenon of partner services as an emotional solution and economic alternative in Surabaya	Limited to physical context and communication perspective, not yet integrative

7	Aini & Kurnia	2025	The commodification of intimacy and the exploitation of emotional labor in girlfriend-for-hire services on Instagram	Limited to the Instagram platform and political economy perspective, does not yet include multidisciplinary
8	Jannah, Fitriana & Rahmawati	2020	The social phenomenon of Rentaru Kareshi in Japan as the cultural roots of girlfriend rental services	Limited to the Japanese context and cultural sociology; does not discuss legal implications or its spread to Indonesia.

Source: Compiled from various sources (2020-2025)

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a juridical-sociological method, namely examining the application of legal norms in the empirical reality of society.¹² The study focuses on the practice of dating services operating virtually on the TikTok, Instagram, Twitter/X, and Telegram platforms, covering the period 2020–2025, with field data collection in 2026. Primary data comes from two sources: (1) in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight informants consisting of a group of practitioners (T1, C1&C2) and a group of experts (IA-1 to IA-4); and (3) audio-visual documentation of a YouTube talk show recording featuring a service provider (P1), three talents (T2–T4), and a client (C3) as informants. The sampling technique used purposive sampling for the expert group and a combination of purposive and snowball sampling for the practitioner group, considering that the subjects constitute a hidden population. A total of 12 informants (N=12) were recruited, as presented in Table 2. This research integrates Rosa's theory of social acceleration, Turkle's paradox of connectivity, Lukacs' reification, and Pound's law as social engineering. Data validity was tested using three-layer triangulation: source, method, and theory. The analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model (data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion

¹² Ronny Hanitijo Soemitro, *Legal Research Methodology and Jurimetrics* (Ghalia Indonesia, 1990).

drawing), complemented by a normative-juridical analysis to map regulatory gaps.¹³ All informants provided informed consent prior to the interviews, and their identities were anonymized through a coding system.

TABLE 2. Profile of Research Informants (N=12)

No	Code	Category & Criteria	N	Data Collection Method
1	P1	Service Provider	1	Audio-visual documentation, YouTube talkshow (ca. 2022)
2	T1	Talent (female)	1	In-depth interview via TikTok DM
3	T2-T4	Talent (2 female, 1 male)	3	Audio-visual documentation, YouTube talkshow (ca. 2022&2023)
4	C1&C2	Client (2 female)	2	In-depth interview via TikTok DM
	C3	Client (male)	1	Audio-visual documentation, YouTube talkshow (ca. 2022)
5	IA-1	Legal Expert (specialization in criminal/cyber law)	1	In-depth face-to-face interview
6	IA-2	Religious Expert (competence in fiqh muamalah)	1	In-depth face-to-face interview
7	IA-3	Philosophy Expert (specialization in social ethics)	1	In-depth interview via WhatsApp
8	IA-4	Komdigi Representative (digital platform regulation)	1	In-depth face-to-face interview

Source: Compiled by researchers (2026)

Result and Discussion

1. Determining Factors of the Virtual Dating Service Phenomenon in Indonesia

Based on primary data analysis, the emergence of the virtual dating service phenomenon was identified through four factors that work synergistically as presented in the following table.

TABLE 3. Table of Determining Factors of the Virtual Dating Services

¹³ Matthew B Miles and A Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Interactive Approach* (Universitas Indonesia Press, 1992).

Phenomenon in Indonesia

No	Subject	Analysis	Description	Platform
1	Synergy of the Loneliness Crisis and the Acceleration of Social Media Technology	The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated loneliness and unmet needs for affection. Digital platforms have become a coping mechanism for those who have not or are unwilling to make real commitments. Virtual services (chat, calls, voice notes) are more popular than offline services.	Data from in-depth interviews with (C1, C2, and T1), as well as audio-visual documentation (C3)	<i>Facebook, Twitter/X, Telegram, TikTok</i>
2	Global Cultural Diffusion through Digital Platforms	The Japanese Kareshi/Kanojo rental model spreads through viral content and is adopted locally without strict formal boundaries. The aesthetics of K-Pop/J-Pop idols also influence client preferences.	Data from an in-depth interview with (C1) and audio-visual documentation (P1 and C3)	<i>Facebook, Twitter/X, TikTok</i>
3	Economic Motives on the Service Supply Side	Very low barriers to entry; the primary asset is soft communication skills. A 60% talent-to-40% agency profit-sharing system forms the gig economy ecosystem. Underage talent (17 years old) was identified.	Data from in-depth interviews with (T1) and audio-visual documentation (T2-T4)	<i>Facebook, Instagram, TikTok</i>

No	Subject	Analysis	Description	Platform
4	Regulatory Void as a Structural Condition	There are no explicit regulations. Internal rules (KTP, blacklist) are reactive and lack legal force. This has led to: free services on Telegram, LGBT categories (boy x boy, girl x girl, non-binary), identity fraud (gender swap, age falsification), and invitations to VCS.	Data from in-depth interviews with (C1, C2), and audio-visual documentation (P1, T2, and T4)	<i>Telegram (gratis, RP, LGBT), Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram</i>

Source: Compiled by researchers (2026)

These four factors work synergistically, the first three factors encourage the growth of demand and supply, while the fourth factor becomes the context that allows the phenomenon to develop without clear regulation.

Synergy of the Loneliness Crisis and the Acceleration of Social Media Technology

Field data consistently points to loneliness and the need for emotional presence as key drivers of demand for these services. Two primary theoretical frameworks used to explain these factors are Hartmut Rosa's theory of social acceleration and Sherry Turkle's paradox of connectivity.

TABLE 4. Social Acceleration Theory – Hartmut Rosa

No.	Subject	Theoretical Analysis
1	Theoretical Basis	Hartmut Rosa (2013) in his theory of social acceleration states that technological advances create an accelerated pace of life, which actually narrows the space for meaningful and deep human relationships.
2	Rationale for Using the Theory	This theory is used to explain how technological acceleration drives individuals to seek instant, commitment-free

No.	Subject	Theoretical Analysis
		relationships, such as virtual dating services, in response to the increasingly rapid pace of life.
3	Analysis	Technological acceleration makes conventional relationships perceived as too slow and complicated. C3 chooses rental services because real commitments are perceived as time-consuming in a busy schedule. C2 prefers instant interactions via social media. Online services (chat, call) are preferred over offline services, reflecting a preference for fast and efficient relationships in keeping with the accelerated pace of life.

Source: Compiled by researchers (2026)

TABLE 5. Alone Together Theory – Sherry Turkle

No.	Subject	Theoretical Analysis
1	Theoretical Basis	Sherry Turkle (2011) in "Alone Together" argues that digital technology creates a paradox of connectivity: individuals are increasingly digitally connected but increasingly emotionally isolated.
2	Rationale for Using the Theory	This theory is used to explain the paradox where individuals choose safe and controlled virtual relationships despite longing for real intimacy, as reflected in the behavior of clients of virtual dating services.
3	Analysis	Virtual dating services offer emotional presence without the risk of real vulnerability. C2 illustrates this paradox: longing for a real-life partner but feeling uncomfortable meeting in person, much more comfortable through social media. C1 chooses an exclusive VIP package to receive undivided attention while remaining in a technology-mediated relationship.

Source: Compiled by researchers (2026)

These two theoretical frameworks were empirically confirmed through the following interview data:

“I think it was more of a pandemic factor, so some people prefer instant gratification, preferring activities that don't require face-to-face contact but still require that kind of support.” (C2)¹⁴

This statement reflects Rosa's paradox: technological acceleration narrows meaningful relationships,¹⁵ and Turkle's digital connection but emotional isolation,¹⁶ accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. C1 began using the service in 2020 due to loneliness stemming from never having a relationship in person, rarely going out, and needing someone to talk to. Nurul Azizah's findings are particularly relevant: the deeper the loneliness in early adulthood (17–32 years old, the ages of all client informants), the higher the reliance on social media.¹⁷

C3 emphasized that what they were looking for was a space to share without commitment:

“Because personally, I'm just looking to share. Rentals don't have that kind of commitment, right now, because I have all sorts of work to do, making commitments is a bit complicated.” (C3)¹⁸

This reinforces Cahyono's argument that screen communication serves as an escape from real-world emotional stress,¹⁹ such as the comfortable interaction pattern of C2 users via social media (even using fake identities) through features like Padlet, Voice Notes, and Video Calls. For urban communities, these platforms have transformed into coping mechanisms

¹⁴ Client Informant (C2), interview by researcher, via TikTok DM, 2025.

¹⁵ Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), hlm. 19-21.

¹⁶ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), hlm. 1-3.

¹⁷ A Nurul Azizah, "The Relationship Between Loneliness and Social Media Addiction in Early Adulthood," *Pinisi Journal of Art Humanity and Social Studies* 4, no. 1 (2024): 67-74, <https://ojs.unm.ac.id/PJAHSS/article/viewFile/56525/25267>.

¹⁸ Talk show documentation, @talkpod_net, YouTube, January 15, 2022 (C3). <https://youtu.be/c3wQv4gHXcI?si=2rmTA77STcWePxHp>

¹⁹ Anang Sugeng Cahyono, "The Influence of Social Media on Social Change in Indonesian Society," *Publiciana* 9, no. 1 (2016): 140-57, <https://journal.unita.ac.id/index.php/publiciana/article/view/79/73>.

amidst high mental stress, with T2 users often serving as primary emotional support for those facing issues such as depression and suicide.²⁰

This situation explains why social media platforms have become fertile ground for the growth of these services. Shirky explained that social media is an infrastructure that allows users to collectively seek solutions to the problems they face, including the need for emotional presence.²¹ Nasrullah reinforced this by pointing out that platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter/X, and Telegram have created their own ecosystems that facilitate the development of this new type of interaction.²²

Global Cultural Diffusion through Digital Platforms

Rental Kareshi (male girlfriend rental) and *Rental Kanojo* (female girlfriend rental) are legal professional services in Japan where clients hire talent to act as temporary romantic partners for ¥3,000–¥6,000/hour. These services focus on healthy affection through social activities like dining and traveling, and are operated by formal agencies with strict regulations.²³ This model spread to Indonesia via viral anime content and rental girlfriend videos on digital platforms, triggering the sociological adoption of dating services.²⁴

The influence is evident in P1, who was inspired by foreign cosplayers on Facebook:

²⁰ Talk show documentation, @talkpod_net, YouTube, January 14, 2023 (T2). <https://youtu.be/e5JjYXxYIRs?si=v9kfLarlt3H1jjwz>

²¹ Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (New York: Penguin, 2009), hlm. 20-22.

²² Rulli Nasrullah, *Social Media: A Cultural Communication and Sociotechnological Perspective* (Bandung: Simbiosis Rekatama Media, 2020), hlm. 11.

²³ A Jannah, R Fitriana, and Y Rahmawati, "Rental Girlfriend Services (Rentaru Kareshi) as a Social Phenomenon in Japan," *Idea*, 2020, 34–45, <https://doi.org/10.33751/idea.v2i1.1826>.

²⁴ N I Ariyanto and B Santoso, "Rental Girlfriend as a Form of Self-Actualization for Kinoshita Kazuya in the YouTube Video "Rental Girlfriend" Episode 2 on Muse Indonesia," *Kiryoku* 8, no. 1 (2024): 91–102, <https://doi.org/10.14710/kiryoku.v8i1.91-102>.

"I often scroll through Facebook and see content about cosplayers creating their own rentals, so I wanted to try it, and it immediately went viral and went viral." (P1)²⁵

This viral effect drives consumption, such as C3, who started using the service after being exposed to it on her timeline, and C1, who chose talent with an "idol face" aesthetic (referring to K-Pop/J-Pop). This finding is in line with Herimanto's statement that communication technology transfers global innovation as well as social shifts that clash with local norms,²⁶ where technology and society mutually shape the Japanese model adapted by Indonesia by eliminating formal boundaries, creating an ecosystem vulnerable to deviation.

Economic Motives on the Service Supply Side

From the service provider side, data shows that joining as a talent is driven by economic calculations, with very low barriers to entry. T1 stated his motivation directly:

"Because I feel like I'm a communicative person and don't have much to do, I feel I can earn money and make a profit just by responding to people's chats/calls." (T1)²⁷

T3, a student, confirmed that income is variable and directly dependent on performance:

"It depends on our performance, so the better our performance, the bigger the fee. It's like freelancing." (T3)²⁸

The structured profit-sharing system mentioned by T1, 60% for the talent and 40% for the agency, suggests that this phenomenon has evolved

²⁵ Talk show documentation, @talkpod_net, YouTube, January 15, 2022 (P1)

<https://youtu.be/c3wOv4gHXcI?si=2rmTA77STcWePxHp>

²⁶ W Herimanto, *Basic Social and Cultural Sciences* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2021), page 43.

²⁷ Talent Informant (T1), interview by researcher, via TikTok DM, 2025.

²⁸ Talk show documentation, @talkpod_net, YouTube, January 14, 2023 (T3).

<https://youtu.be/e5JjYXxYIRs?si=v9kfLarlt3H1jjwz>

into an informal economic ecosystem with its own income distribution mechanism. This finding is consistent with Aini and Kurnia's conceptualization of the commodification of intimacy, where emotional labor is marketed as a measurable service with an explicit exchange value.²⁹ (SDGs-8)

This phenomenon reflects the empowerment of the creative economy based on interpersonal skills in the gig economy. As experienced by T2, this service opens opportunities for individuals to convert soft communication skills into flexible economic income with qualification criteria such as "Good Looking", "Telephone-able" (pleasant voice), and the ability to build conversation topics to ensure customer satisfaction.³⁰ However, there is a worrying finding that there is a very low barrier to entry opening the door to underage individuals, namely T4, who is 17 years old, admitted to joining without any obstacles.³¹

Regulatory Vacuum as a Structural Condition

The existence of dating services in Indonesia is based on a legal vacuum, which is a major factor in the massive nature of this business. Without clear legal boundaries for paid emotional services, businesses create their own "rule of law" in lieu of state protection. This is evident in agencies P1 and T2, which require clients to provide ID cards as a guarantee of their own security. T2 revealed that the talent registration process requires ID cards, an unedited full-face photo, and promotional voice notes for marketing, although structured, all internally without oversight by official authorities. This regulatory ambiguity has led to looser systems on other platforms. T1,

²⁹ S N Aini and N Kurnia, "Commodifying Intimacy: Labor Dynamics in Virtual Lover Rental Services on Instagram," *Journal Communication Spectrum* 15, no. 1 (2025): 25-38, <https://doi.org/10.36782/jcs.v15i1.2605>.

³⁰ Talk show documentation, @talkpod_net, YouTube, January 14, 2023 (T2). <https://youtu.be/e5JjYXxYIRs?si=v9kfLarlt3H1jjwz>

³¹ Talkshow documentation, GritteAgatha, YouTube, August 3, 2022 (T4). https://youtu.be/3Cp7pNK9nBo?si=U8qxZex_XTrg2odO

T3, T4, and C1 acknowledged that some agencies do not require official identification:

"Bookings do not require ID cards (KTP) ; just fill out the regular form. Fake identification is allowed, as long as you include a backup account." (C1)³²

Figure 2. Dating Service Order Form on Twitter (X)

Source: Documentation C1

Further findings from C1's documentation show that the booking form on the Twitter platform (X) even provides explicit service orientation options, namely girl x boy (gxb), boy x boy (bxb), and boy x non-binary (bxnb), indicating that this ecosystem has accommodated LGBT service categories without any regulatory oversight. This condition is exacerbated by C2's findings in the Telegram ecosystem: services are available for free through the Rental Pacar Promotional Platform (LPM), LGBT service categories are available (boy x boy, girl x girl, non-binary), and cases of gender swaps and falsification of the age of talent claiming to be in high school are actually still in junior high school. C2 also received an invitation for Video Call Sex (VCS) from individuals with the lure of money, which was immediately rejected and blocked. This experience shows that the

³² Client Informant (C1), interview by researcher, via TikTok DM, 2025.

regulatory vacuum not only creates a gray area for emotional support services, but also opens up loopholes for further exploitative practices within the same ecosystem.

This situation is the result of gaps in four potentially relevant legal instruments. First, the 2016 Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law) regulates cybercrime but does not define the category of virtual emotional support services as an entity that needs to be regulated or protected. Second, the 2008 Pornography Law (Pornography Law) does not provide an adequate definition to differentiate virtual emotional support from exploitative contenta loophole that has been proven to be exploited in practices such as the invitation to video call sex (VCS) experienced by C2. Third, the National Criminal Code (Law No. 1 of 2023) through Articles 420 and 421 threatens criminal penalties for those who facilitate indecent acts with aggravated penalties if done as a livelihood, but the phrase "indecent acts" in the context of non-physical virtual interactions remains a matter of debate, creating significant implementation gaps.³³ Fourth, Law No. 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Human Trafficking (TPPO Law), which defines exploitation as a key element of TPPO, is potentially relevant.³⁴ However, as identified by Dirkareshza and Agustanti, the application of the Human Trafficking Law in this context is hampered by the difficulty of proving "exploitation" in non-physical virtual interactions that do not involve direct physical contact.³⁵

³³ D P Ramadhan, R D Sutanti, and H Prasetyo, " Legal Review of the Crime of Prostitution in the Practice of Renting a Girlfriend Business: A Case Study in Semarang City," *Diponegoro Law Journal* 14, no. 4 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.14710/dlj.2025.53589>.

³⁴ Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Human Trafficking, State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia 2007 Number 58. Article 2 paragraph (1) defines TPPO as the act of recruiting, sending, transferring, harboring, or receiving a person by means of threats of violence, use of violence, abduction, forgery, deception, abuse of power, or giving payment to obtain the consent of a person who has control over another person for the purpose of exploitation.

³⁵ N P Dirkareshza and R D Agustanti, "Law Enforcement Against Trafficking in Persons in the Rentaru Kareshi Phenomenon," *Journal of Humanities and Social Studies* 7, no. 3 (2023): 978-83, <https://doi.org/10.33751/jhss.v7i3.9445>. Dirkareshza and Agustanti identify the potential for human trafficking in this phenomenon but acknowledge that its

This legal vacuum creates role ambiguity that poses risks for practitioners. While some agencies establish internal rules, their implementation depends entirely on the talent's own initiative. T2 revealed that her agency established rules prohibiting indecent acts, verbal and physical harassment, and 18+ content, with a blacklist mechanism for clients who violate them. However, this type of protection is entirely reactive and lacks binding legal force. Since no legislation plainly defines and regulates the functioning of virtual dating services, this legal vacuum makes it challenging to handle the matter using current legal instruments. Consequently, this ecosystem is expanding on its own in a gray area, therefore endangering every stakeholder.

Combining Causal Elements

The four elements above do not work on their own, instead they create a tiered causal process. On the demand side, as documented in C1, C2, C3, and T2 and verified by the theoretical framework of Rosa, Turkle, Azizah, and Cahyono, the acceleration of loneliness worsened by the epidemic generates emotional demands not addressed by conventional relationships. On the context side, gaps in the four legal instruments, the Electronic Information and Transactions Law, the Pornography Law, the National Criminal Code, and the Human Trafficking Law allow this intersection of supply and demand to occur without adequate oversight and protection. This paradigm clarifies why virtual dating services not only surfaced but also endured and have the possibility for divergence: as long as the first three circumstances exist and the fourth condition stays unaltered, this phenomenon will keep expanding outside the scope of current legal instruments.

application is limited to the physical dimension and does not yet cover non-physical virtual services.

2. A Multi-Perspective Review of Virtual Dating Services' Presence on Social Media

The phenomenon of virtual dating services cannot be adequately understood from a single perspective. This study presents four perspectives: law, religion, philosophy, and digital policy, each offering a distinct yet complementary assessment. Before explaining each perspective in depth, below is a general overview of the normative positions of the four perspectives used in this study.

TABLE 6. Multiperspective Review of Virtual Dating Services

No.	Subject	Analysis	Description
1	Legal Perspective	• Located in a gray area of positive law, there are no explicit regulations, but it is potentially accessible to a number of criminal and civil instruments. • Enforcement authority is reactive, not preventative.	IA-1 (Legal Expert) Articles 1320, 1337 of the Civil Code; Articles 420–421 of the National Criminal Code; the Electronic Information and Transactions Law; Article 14 of the Anti-Trafficking Law; the Human Trafficking Law
2	Religious Perspective	• Legal status depends on the purpose of use (maqashid sharia); elements of simulated intimacy fall within the realm of mutual understanding. • The principle of sadd al-dzari'ah closes the gap once its potential is apparent. Islamic-Christian common ground: rejecting the commercialization of affection.	IA-2 (Islamic Religious Expert) Surah Al-Isra: 32; Maqashid Sharia; Sadd al-Dzari'ah; Isaiah 41:10

No.	Subject	Analysis	Description
3	Philosophical Perspective	• Lukacs' Reification: Empathy and warmth are transformed into measurable commodities through three stages: objectification, social reproduction, and false consciousness. • What is needed is not just regulation, but the deconstruction of consciousness.	IA-3 (Philosopher) Lukacs' Reification Theory (1971); Marx's Commodity Fetishism; Aini & Kurnia (2025)
4	Digital Policy Perspective	• Platform algorithms actively distribute content to vulnerable users. Authorities (Komdigi, Police, Platforms) are available, but all are reactive. • Current responses are limited to digital literacy education, which is slow compared to the speed of algorithms.	IA-4 (Diskomdigi Central Java) Collaboration Program; aduankonten.id;

Source: Compiled by researchers (2026)

Legal Perspective

From a civil point of view, the dating service agreement is deemed null and invalid since it does not satisfy the criteria of a legal cause as specified in Article 1320 of the Civil Code and infringes against public morality and order as set forth in Articles 1337 and 1339 of the Civil Code.³⁶ Moreover, although the connection essentially meets the criteria of a service agreement as specified in Article 1548 of the Civil Code, the lack of a written contract between the agency and the talent renders the talent's rights to pay, job security, and privacy unenforceable.³⁷

To frame the current legal conditions, this study uses Nonet and Selznick's theory of the nature of the workings of state law as an analytical tool.

³⁶ Civil Code (KUHPPerdata). Articles 1320, 1337, 1338, 1339, 1548.

³⁷ Riska Anggraeni et al., "Legal Protection for Talent in the Rental Girlfriend Service Business Affiliated with an Agency," *Judge: Jurnal Hukum* 6, no. 3 (2025): 473–479.

TABLE 7. Theory of the Nature of the Operation of State Law – Nonet and Selznick

No.	Subject	Theoretical Analysis
1	Theoretical Basis	Nonet and Selznick (1978) classified law into three types: (1) Repressive law as a tool of power; (2) Autonomous law, rigid and adhering to formal texts; (3) Responsive law, adaptive to social needs and changes.
2	Rationale for Using the Theory	This theory is used to diagnose why Indonesian law has not been able to address the phenomenon of virtual dating services due to the rigidity of normative texts (autonomy) or the absence of regulations oriented toward the substance of protection (responsiveness).
3	Analysis	Indonesian law currently operates autonomously: criminal instruments can only be applied after a crime has occurred (<i>ultimum remedium</i>). The phrase "obscene acts" is interpreted formally as requiring physical contact, placing virtual interactions in a gray area. Recommendation IA-1 that Komdigi establish a preventive legal classification reflects the need for responsive law that can anticipate digital realities before harm occurs.

Source: Compiled by researchers (2026)

From a criminal standpoint, IA-1 claims that virtual dating platforms inherently resemble intermediary-based prostitution: an agency as the middleman, activity-based charges, and a profit-driven mentality. IA-1 states directly:

"This dating service is no different from prostitution. There are intermediaries called pimps, and there are ID card requirements. If there's a fee for hand-holding, what's the difference between it and a pimp?" (IA-1)³⁸

The most relevant criminal instrument is Articles 420-421 of the National Criminal Code, which impose penalties on those who facilitate

³⁸ Legal Expert Informant (IA-1), interview by researcher, Central Java Governor's Office, Legal Bureau, Semarang, February 27, 2026.

indecent acts as a means of livelihood.³⁹ However, its application to non-physical virtual interactions is hampered because the phrase "indecent acts" in traditional interpretations requires physical contact, placing chats, voice notes, and video calls in a legal gray area. IA-1 refers to the ultimum remedium as applicable only after the crime has occurred, not before.

In the digital realm, several legal instruments have the potential to address practices such as those documented in cases C1 and C2. Article 27 paragraph (1) of the ITE Law and Article 4 paragraph (2) of the Pornography Law can be applied to explicit promotional content,⁴⁰ while Article 5 of the TPKS Law offers a more responsive framework, particularly for cases such as the VCS invitation experienced by C2, as it explicitly recognizes electronic-based sexual violence as a crime and accepts electronic evidence.⁴¹ On the other hand, the TPPO Law also has the potential to be applied given the broad definition of exploitation in Article 1 paragraph (7),⁴² although proving it still faces unique challenges in the non-physical virtual context.⁴³

The relevance of this legal framework becomes increasingly apparent when looking at the empirical findings of C1 and C2. C1's documentation reveals the practice of open ordering via Twitter (X) listing the orientation options gxb, bxb, bxbn without any age verification mechanism. This practice directly intersects with Article 27(1) of the ITE Law in conjunction with Article 27(1) of the ITE Law. Article 4(1) of the Pornography Law, as well as Article 76I of the Child Protection Law,⁴⁴ prohibits the exploitation of children for economic gain, as evidenced by the fact that 17-year-old T4

³⁹ Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (National Criminal Code), Articles 420–421.

⁴⁰ Un Law Number 44 of 2008 concerning Pornography, Article 4 paragraph (2).

⁴¹ Law Number 12 of 2022 concerning Criminal Acts of Sexual Violence, Article 5.

⁴² Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Human Trafficking, Article 1 paragraph 7.

⁴³ N P Dirkareshza and R D Agustanti, "Law Enforcement Against Trafficking in Persons in the Rentaru Kareshi Phenomenon," JHSS 7, no. 3 (2023): 978–983.

⁴⁴ Law Number 35 of 2014 Amendment to Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection

can be realized without hindrance. This gap has the potential to be narrowed through two new layers of regulations, namely PP TUNAS (PP No. 17 of 2025) and its derivative regulation, Regulation of the Minister of Communication and Digital Number 9 of 2026, which technically allows digital platforms to implement age verification and content removal. However, the effectiveness of the regulation in practice will be largely determined by the consistency of law enforcement at the platform level.

Constitutionally, IA-1 emphasized that freedom of expression is guaranteed by Article 28 of the 1945 Constitution, but is not absolute. Article 28J paragraph (2) provides the basis for the state to restrict it for moral, religious, security, and public order reasons:

"I do not interfere with individual rights. But if asked from the government's perspective, I see that it has the potential to cause crime, and I will not allow it." (IA-1)⁴⁵

At the value level, IA-1 emphasized that this phenomenon is not only problematic from a positive legal perspective, but also contradicts Pancasila, the fundamental principle of the entire Indonesian legal system.⁴⁶ This distinguishes Indonesia from Japan: something that can be legally regulated in Japan with limitations is already morally problematic in Indonesia before it even reaches the point of regulation. Therefore, IA-1 recommended that Komdigi immediately establish an explicit legal classification as a basis for preventive action, without waiting for public reports. This recommendation reflects the need for a shift from autonomous law to responsive law within the Nonet and Selznick framework – law that does not wait for violations to occur, but rather anticipates the ever-evolving social realities in the digital space.

⁴⁵ Legal Expert Informant (IA-1), interview by researcher, February 27, 2026.

⁴⁶ Zainudin Hasan et al., "Implementation of Pancasila Values in the Formation of Legal Regulations in Indonesia," *Journal of Law and Political Science Matters* 2, no. 2 (2024): 138-50, <https://doi.org/10.51903/perkara.v2i2.1863>.

Religious Perspective

From a religious perspective, Indonesia, as a state based on the rule of law, places divine values as the fundamental norm that underpins all legal systems and social life. Religious considerations cannot separate religious considerations from the assessment of social phenomena. In the Islamic faith practiced by the majority of Indonesians, Surah Al-Isra', verse 32, expressly forbids Muslims from engaging in any act that leads to adultery. Therefore, dating activities packaged in commercial transactions fall within the category of adultery.⁴⁷ However, IA-2 provides a more nuanced assessment through the *maqasid sharia* approach: these services are not necessarily absolutely haram (forbidden), but their status depends on the purpose of their use. If used simply to find someone to confide in or share positive experiences for the purpose of seeking input and advice, this is still considered permissible, although it falls within the category of those not recommended. However, the element of "pretending to date," inherently built on terms of endearment, simulated intimacy, and deliberate emotional dependence, falls within the realm of *ikhtilat*, which IA-2 believes must be avoided because it has the potential to open the door to something more:

"When warmth and empathy are traded, a distortion of values occurs that contradicts the principle of sincerity in building relationships between people." (IA-2)⁴⁸

The principle of *sadd al-dzari'ah* is applied to close this gap, since its potential is seen as distinct from the law that requires consequences.

The Christian perspective, as examined by Praktika et al., provides a similar assessment from different traditions: sexuality is a sacred gift from God within a framework of commitment, so relationships built on material

⁴⁷ R Maulana Gibran and A M D C Purwanto, "A Legal Review of the Practice of Renting a Girlfriend Agreements from the Perspective of Freedom of Contract," *Lex Stricta Journal of Legal Studies* 4, no. 2 (2025): 399-407. QS Al-Isra verse 32: "And do not come near to adultery; indeed, it is an abomination and an evil way."

⁴⁸ Religious Expert Informant (IA-2), interview by researcher, Informant's Residence, March 21, 2026.

transactions are dangerous because they create the illusion that the partner is a commodity. Addressing the crisis of loneliness that drives the use of these services, the Bible, through Isaiah 41:10, affirms that true happiness can only be found in wholeness in God, not through relationships without commitment based on transactions. The common ground between Islam and Christianity lies in the rejection of the commercialization of affection, which both lead to the fulfillment of authentic relationships that transcend market logic.⁴⁹ The difference lies in the degree of assessment: Islam, through IA-2, uses a contextual approach in which the purpose of use also determines the law, while the Christian perspective leads to a more principled rejection of paid romantic relationship simulations in any form.

Philosophical Perspective

The adoption of dating services is not merely a lifestyle trend, but has also become part of a deeper economic system: the commodification of intimacy, managed by professional management. Aini & Kurnia (2025) noted that virtual girlfriend rental service accounts on Instagram commodify intimacy through the exploitation of labor, divided into absolute and relative dimensions.⁵⁰

To understand this phenomenon more deeply, the philosopher interviewed in this study, IA3, asserted: "In contemporary capitalist society, referring to Georgy Lukacs's Marxist theory, reification and commodification occur in everything."⁵¹ This statement serves as the basis for the philosophical analysis in this study, which utilizes two theoretical frameworks simultaneously: Lukacs's marxism theory.

⁴⁹ Praktika, J T. "A Biblical Review of Renting a Girlfriend Services Among Generation Z" 5, no. 1 (2024): 1–17.

⁵⁰ Aini and Kurnia, "Commodifying Intimacy: Labor Dynamics in Virtual Lover Rental Services on Instagram."

⁵¹ Philosopher Informant (IA-3), interviewed by researcher via WhatsApp, March 13, 2026.

Building on Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, Lukacs developed the idea that in capitalist society, social relationships between humans are transformed into relationships between things (thing-like relations).⁵² Unlike Marx, who emphasized commodity fetishism in the infrastructure-superstructure relationship that produces alienation, Lukacs specifically highlighted how the relationship between producers and infrastructure gives rise to a false consciousness formed from a standard of living that demands a practical and measurable system.⁵³ Reification occurs through three stages: first, objectification where human qualities are transformed into new objectivities that can be measured and traded; second, social reproduction where the practice is repeated consistently until it becomes a habit (second nature) referring to Aristotle's concept as quoted by Aji & Asnawi (2020) and third, the emergence of false consciousness where actors no longer realize that the relationship they are in is actually a product of the logic of capital.⁵⁴

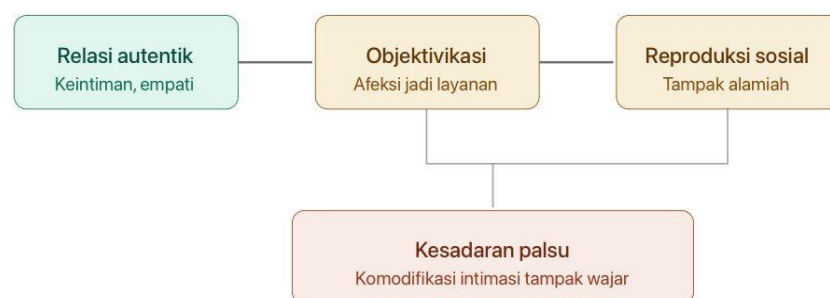


Figure 3. Lukacs' Stages of Reification in Dating Services

Source: (Lukacs 1971; Aji F B 2020)

In the context of dating services, this reification mechanism is at work: intimacy, empathy, and emotional warmth, which are essentially

⁵² Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, 1971.

⁵³ F B Aji and N Asnawi, "Critical Reflections on the Degradation of Authenticity in Media Society,," *Jurnal Komunikasi* 14 (2020), 170-171 <https://journal.uui.ac.id/jurnal-komunikasi/article/view/14904>.

⁵⁴ Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*.

spontaneous expressions of humanity, are transformed into commodities with objectively measurable prices. This is seen in the particular prices established by talent; for instance, T4 bills IDR 20,000 for physical contact such as a hug or embrace and IDR 20,000 for a voice note, call or video conversation, while T3 provides a weekly package of IDR 400,000 for chat and phone services. Here, empathy and other interpersonal skills become digital commodities evaluated by their monetary value and duration rather than being actual emotional reactions.⁵⁵

This philosophical viewpoint has ramifications beyond official and legal matters: What is required is not only regulation but also a deconstruction of the consciousness created by the reification of an awareness that causes people to find the commodification of intimacy to be both natural and even lucrative.

Communication and Digital Policy Perspective

From a digital policy viewpoint, the Central Java Communication and Digital Services Office (IA-4) sees this as part of the new dynamics of social interaction in the digital age that have to be handled wisely. A key insight offered by IA-4 concerns the function of algorithms:

“Social media algorithms recommend material depending on user interests, behavior, or interactions. Content about renting a girlfriend is hence more likely to show up in the feeds of consumers who have previously shown interest in social contacts, loneliness, or romantic material, therefore increasing the likelihood of the phenomena going viral and reaching more susceptible consumers.” (IA-4) ⁵⁶

In terms of enforcement power, IA-4 stated that the power framework is absolutely operational: The central Komdigi (Community Development

⁵⁵ Aini and Kurnia, “Commodifying Intimacy: Labor Dynamics in Virtual Lover Rental Services on Instagram.”

⁵⁶ Representative of the Central Java Provincial Communications and Information Service (IA-4), interviewed by researchers, Central Java Provincial Communications and Information Service Office, Semarang, March 13, 2026.

Agency) has the power to stop access or remove content in breach of the ITE Law; the police are in charge of looking into and acting upon any elements of a crime; platforms are in charge of moderating content in accordance with their community policies.

"While the central government retains the primary authority to terminate access or remove content in violation of the ITE Law through Komdigi, law enforcement officials are tasked with investigating and acting if there are elements of a crime, social media platforms are responsible for moderating content in accordance with their community policies." (IA-4)

The Ministry of Communication and Digital (Komdigi) officially restricted social media access for children under 16 through Ministerial Regulation No. 9 of 2026 (a derivative of Government Regulation No. 17 of 2025/PP Tunas). This policy, which took effect in stages on March 28, 2026, prohibits children under 16 from having accounts on high-risk platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Finding T4 (a 17-year-old joining without verification) is evidence of a structural gap; this regulation narrows vulnerable access via age verification, as a preventative measure, rather than legalizing previously absent services.

But the fundamental question is not who has the power, but rather the character of the power itself which is reactive and depends on public reporting through aduankonten.id rather than on proactive, preventative rules..⁵⁷ There is no particular legal category aimed at virtual dating sites; the takedown system can only be triggered if the material is shown to breach pornography standards or an established crime. Here is the significant difference that brings Komdigi's viewpoint into line with the demands of IA-1: Komdigi has power, however as needed, that power is responsive rather than preventative.

The current answer of IA-4 concentrates on digital literacy and education via the *Sekolaborasi* initiative, educational video material, and

⁵⁷ Ibid. The official complaint channel can be accessed at <https://aduankonten.id>.

broadcasts on Jateng Online Radio. This approach has fundamental limitations: education works long-term and is passive, while platform algorithms actively and in real time distribute content to vulnerable users. (SDGs-4) This imbalance between the speed of content distribution by algorithms and the speed of policy response by the government is one of the roots of the persistence of this phenomenon.

Convergence and Divergence Between Perspectives

After presenting the positions of each perspective, points of convergence and divergence can be identified, which will form the basis for the integrated analysis in the following subchapter. Overall, all four perspectives agree that this phenomenon is an issue requiring a response; none view it as neutral or unproblematic. However, the basis for their assessments, focus of concerns, and recommended solutions differ significantly, as presented in the following table:

TABLE 8. Convergence and Divergence Between Perspectives

Analytical Aspect	Convergence	Divergence	Recommendation
Nature of the Problem	Commodification of Intimacy: Feelings and empathy are transformed into merchandise (transactional).	Law: Legality and prostitution issues. Philosophy: Capitalism and reification issues.	Preventive prohibitions and explicit criminal classifications.
Norms & Values	Contrary to moral norms and the Staatsfundamentalnorm.	Religion: Sin/adultery (ikhtilat). Policy: Literacy and technology abuse issues.	Religion: Moral strengthening and the principles of Sadd al-Dzari'ah.
Nature of Intervention	Everyone agrees that this phenomenon poses a risk to vulnerable communities/users.	Religion/Philosophy: Proactive (prohibiting from the intention/simulation stage). Law/Digital: Reactive (waiting for physical	Philosophy: Deconstructing consciousness (raising perpetrators).

	evidence/reports)
Distribution Mechanism	The Role of Social Media: Digital platforms accelerate the normalization of this phenomenon. Digital Policy: Focuses on technical algorithms and content moderation on platforms. Digital: Mass literacy and platform algorithm adjustments.

Source: Processed from expert informant interview data and literature (2026)

Based on this multi-perspective analysis, the four viewpoints agree that the phenomenon of virtual dating services is not just regular social contact but also a kind of commodification of intimacy in which simulated romantic-sexual relationships are turned into a nominally quantifiable economic commodity. Every viewpoint points out that this behavior distorts values in opposition to moral standards, the nature of real connections, and the moral foundation of the country (Staatsfundamentalnorm). But there is a key difference in the level of evidence and the direction of the answer. Religious and philosophical views are more active; while philosophy sees it as a systematic influence of capitalism harming human consciousness, religion employs the idea of sadd al-dzari'ah to bridge the gap for sin from the simulation level. The viewpoints of criminal law and digital policy, which tend to be reactive, differ here, whereby intervention can only be started following an actual physical crime or explicit pornographic material. The difference in orientation between preventative legal banning, the enhancement of spiritual morality, and the deconstruction of sociological consciousness forms the basis for the integrative analysis in the following sub-chapter.

3. Integrative Analysis and Recommendations

The integrative analysis in this sub-chapter uses Roscoe Pound's law as social engineering framework, which views law as an active instrument in balancing individual, public, and social interests simultaneously.

TABLE 9. Theory of Law as Social Engineering – Roscoe Pound

No.	Subject	Theoretical Analysis
1	Theoretical Basis	Roscoe Pound stated that law functions as a tool of social engineering, tasked with balancing three interests simultaneously: individual interests, public interests, and social interests.
2	Rationale for Using the Theory	This theory is used as an integrative framework to bring together four perspectives (law, religion, philosophy, digital policy) in a systemic analysis that addresses three layers of interests simultaneously: individual protection (talent and client), public order, and broader social values.
3	Analysis	Pound's three interests are mapped to this phenomenon: (1) The individual interests of talent lack formal legal protection; clients are emotionally vulnerable without consumer guarantees; (2) The public interest lacks state oversight, including the involvement of underage talent (T4, 17 years old); (3) The social interest of the commodification of intimacy distorts relational values, contradicting Pancasila as the State Principles. These three layers form the basis of the integrative analysis and recommendations in this sub-chapter.

Source: Compiled by researchers (2026)

The findings from the previous two subchapters form a layered problem structure. Subchapter 1 identifies four determinants that work synergistically to drive the existence of virtual dating services, while Subchapter 2 confirms that all perspectives from legal, religious, philosophical, and digital policy experts converge in assessing this phenomenon as a normatively problematic form of commodification of intimacy.

The Interplay of Emotional Crisis and Legal Void as Structural Roots

Demand for virtual dating services comes from emotional vulnerabilities unfulfilled by traditional relationships rather than from totally rational choices, according to empirical data. Key motivators often cited by C1, C2, and C3 are loneliness, absence of relational commitment,

and the demands of city living. As IA-4 shows, social media algorithms that actively distribute content from these sites to the most sensitive user groups aggravate this predicament. In accordance with Shirky's model of how platforms enable group solutions to social demands, digital platforms are an active infrastructure that accelerates the normalization of this phenomena rather than just a vehicle for transactions..⁵⁸

On the other hand, this emotional vulnerability runs against a regulatory void that produces a borderless environment. When it comes to non-physical virtual interactions, each of the four potentially pertinent legal instruments ITE Law No. 19 of 2016, Pornography Law No. 44 of 2008, National Criminal Code Articles 420–421, and Human Trafficking Law No. 21 of 2007 has substantial interpretive ambiguities.⁵⁹ The failure of positive law to specifically categorize paid emotional support services is not only a technical-legislative flaw but also a structural circumstance allowing the intersection of vulnerable demand and opportunistic supply free from governmental supervision.

The Commodification of Intimacy as a Cross-Disciplinary Issue

The point of convergence of the four perspectives in Subchapter 2 lies in the concept of the commodification of intimacy. From a Lukácsian philosophical perspective, the process of reification transforms empathy and emotional warmth into objects with a measurable price, as reflected in the T3 rate of IDR 400,000 per weekly package and the T4 rate of IDR 20,000 per call, video call, and voice note session.⁶⁰ From a religious

⁵⁸ Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (New York: Penguin, 2009), hlm. 20–22.

⁵⁹ Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Amendments to the ITE Law, Article 27 paragraph (1); Law Number 44 of 2008 concerning Pornography, Article 4 paragraph (2); Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (National Criminal Code), Articles 420–421; Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Human Trafficking, Article 1 paragraph 7.

⁶⁰ Talkshow documentation, @talkpod_net, YouTube, January 14, 2023 (T3); Talkshow documentation, @talkpod_net, YouTube, January 14, 2023 (T4). See also S N Aini and N Kurnia, “Commodifying Intimacy: Labor Dynamics in Virtual Lover Rental Services on

perspective, this commodification creates a distortion of values, which IA-2 identifies as a violation of the principle of sincerity in human relations, while also potentially paving the way for further *ikhtilat* (reconciliation) in accordance with the principle of *sadd al-dzari'ah*. From a legal perspective, IA-1 asserts that the agency-talent-client structure with activity-based pricing has elements substantially identical to the practice of mediated prostitution.

This similarity in cross-disciplinary assessment is important because it demonstrates that the problem with this phenomenon is not simply a matter of formal legality, but rather touches a deeper layer: the distortion of relational values that contradict the *Staatsfundamentalnorm* Pancasila as the foundation of Indonesia's legal order and social life. This fundamentally distinguishes the Indonesian context from Japan, where *Rental Kareshi* operates legally within a formal regulatory framework: something that can be legally regulated in Japan is already morally problematic in Indonesia before the question of regulation arises.

Divergence of Solution Orientations and Implications

Although the four perspectives converge in normative assessment, fundamental divergences emerge in their solution orientations. The religious and philosophical points of view are proactive: philosophy demands the deconstruction of awareness produced by the reification of capitalism, while religion, via *sadd al-dzari'ah*, seeks to fill gaps from the simulation stage.⁶¹ By contrast, the viewpoints of digital policy and criminal law are reactive: intervention is only possible following a verified crime or content submission via the *aduankonten.id* channel.⁶²

Instagram,” *Journal Communication Spectrum* 15, no. 1 (2025): 25–38, <https://doi.org/10.36782/jcs.v15i1.2605>.

⁶¹ Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, 1971; Religious Expert Informant (IA-2), interviewed by the researcher, March 21, 2026..

⁶² Legal Expert Informant (IA-1), interviewed by the researcher, February 27, 2026; Representative Informant from the Central Java Province Communication and

This divergence isn't contradictory, rather it's supplementary. To properly address this phenomena, a multifarious strategy that simultaneously combines all three orientations is required: (1) preventive rules delivering legal certainty; (2) long-term development of digital and moral literacy; and (3) deconstruction of awareness via critical education on real connections in the internet realm. Since each deals with a different dimension, these three layers need to operate concurrently: Regulation deals with the structural framework, literacy deals with individual behavior, and deconstructing awareness deals with the cognitive basis that makes the commodification of intimacy seem normal.

Three strategic recommendations are developed in this study based on the integrated analysis presented above. Rather than awaiting public complaints, Komdigi must first create a clear legal classification for paid virtual emotional support services as a foundation for proactive, preventative action as underlined by IA-1. This categorization would close the legal vacuum that has been the primary structural basis for the continuous existence of this phenomenon. Second, The government and law enforcement officials need to optimize the implementation of existing legal instruments, in particular Article 27 paragraph (1) of the ITE Law and Article 4 paragraph (2) of the Pornography Law which can be applied to explicit promotional content, Law No. 12 of 2022 on the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Violence (TPKS) (Article 14 on electronic-based sexual violence), and Law No. 21 of 2007 on the Prevention of Human Trafficking (TPPO) regarding the commodification of intimacy without having to wait for new legislative revisions. These three instruments together are capable of reaching the most dangerous dimensions of this phenomenon: the distribution of promotional content, action against invitations to VCS (C2), and the commodification of intimacy through

Information Service (Diskomdigi) (IA-4), interviewed by the researcher, March 13, 2026. The official complaint channel can be accessed at <https://aduankonten.id>.

communication which is often a form of exploitation as long as it is supported by clear enforcement guidelines and effective cross-agency coordination. Third, social media platforms should be urged via technical regulations to modify their recommendation algorithms such that dating service material is not actively dispersed to user segments exhibiting signs of emotional vulnerability; a responsibility now totally assigned to the platforms' voluntary efforts.

These three recommendations are concrete manifestations of Pound's law as social engineering, which targets three layers of interest simultaneously: preventive regulation of Komdigi for individual interests, revision of the law for the public interest, and regulation of platform algorithms for social interests. These three recommendations culminate in one goal: to provide legal certainty in Indonesia's digital space that is not only responsive to violations that occur, but also anticipatory enough to protect vulnerable individuals before deviations occur.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of non-physical virtual dating services in Indonesia is a product of multiple causalities: The loneliness crisis, exacerbated by digitalization and the pandemic, has created emotional vulnerabilities that can be exploited by platform algorithms. The proliferation of the Rental Kareshi model offers a business model with minimal barriers to entry for any individual, including minors. Furthermore, loopholes in the ITE Law, pornography law, national criminal law, and human trafficking law create structural conditions that allow this ecosystem to thrive without formal protection or sanctions.

A multi-perspective evaluation reveals a convergence that this phenomenon is a normatively objectionable commodification of intimacy, seeing it as mediated prostitution, religion as a possible cause of adultery, philosophy as a Lukácsian reification, and digital policy as algorithmic normalization of vulnerable consumers. However, there is a fundamental

difference in how solutions are approached: religious and philosophical viewpoints are proactive, using sadd al-dzari'ah and the deconstruction of consciousness, while positive legal and digital policy views are usually reactive, waiting for reports or proven criminal behavior. This divergence is not a contradiction; rather it is a complementarity that underpins three integrative recommendations: (1) Komdigi establishes clear legal categorization as a basis for preventive action; (2) The government and law enforcement officials optimize the implementation of existing legal instruments, especially the ITE Law, the Pornography Law, the TPKS Law, and the TPPO Law, as a legal umbrella that can reach the most dangerous dimensions of this phenomenon without having to wait for new legislative revisions; and (3) platforms are technically regulated so that algorithms do not target users with signs of emotional vulnerability. Virtual dating services will continue to operate in a gray area as long as this legislative vacuum is not resolved, endangering talent, consumers, and general societal ideals.

The availability of hidden populations, possible selection bias in YouTube talk show sources, and a temporal span that might miss recent events limit this study. Further research comprises a longitudinal analysis of user psychosocial consequences, comparative policy research with Japan, South Korea, and the Netherlands, and an interdisciplinary investigation of the function of algorithms in normalizing services for underprivileged populations.

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