

BODY, TECHNOLOGY, AND POWER: THE TRANSFORMATION OF PROSTITUTION FROM CONVENTIONAL LOCALIZATION TO DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN MAKASSAR CITY 1980-2014

Fajar Sidiq Limola
{fajar.limola@unhas.ac.id}

Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar, Indonesia

Abstract. This study explores the transformation of prostitution in Makassar City, Indonesia, from 1980 to 2014, tracing the shift from conventional localization systems to digital-based practices. Using a social history and gender perspective, it analyzes how technological developments especially the rise of the internet and social media reshaped power relations among sex workers, clients, and the state. Archival research, media analysis, and interviews reveal that localization areas such as Jalan Nusantara embodied state disciplinary control over women's bodies, while digitalization in the 2000s decentralized sex markets and introduced algorithmic surveillance. The findings highlight ambivalence: digital platforms offer autonomy and flexibility for sex workers yet expose them to privacy risks and new forms of violence. This study contributes to understanding how technology, gender, and social control intersect in Indonesia's urban history.

Keywords: Prostitution; Digital Transformation; Social History; Body And Technology; Makassar

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of prostitution in major Indonesian cities has never stood alone; it is always intertwined with social, economic, and technological changes that shape the relations between the body, morality, and power. In Makassar City, prostitution practices during the 1980s–1990s operated within a localization system controlled by both the state and society through spatial regulation, religious norms, and public morality. Areas such as Jalan Nusantara and Jembatan Besi exemplify how sex workers' bodies were strictly regulated and monitored, reflecting forms of bureaucratic and patriarchal power (Pujhana & Lestari, 2021; Sonjaya, 2024). In this context, the body became the center of social discipline and a symbol of urban morality, as theorized by Foucault through his concept of biopolitics, which highlights how the state governs life and the bodies of its citizens.

Significant changes began to emerge in the late 1990s with the expansion of information and communication technology. The rise of mobile phones, the internet, and social media platforms such as Friendster, Facebook, and BBM shifted the interaction patterns between sex workers and clients from physical to virtual spaces. This phenomenon, known as digital prostitution, refers to transactional and communicative practices that occur in cyberspace without dependence on specific locations (Rosdiana, 2022; Isnawan, 2024). In this context, the body no longer appears in its physical form but is mediated through digital images and symbols designed to attract attention and build trust. Technology thus functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a means of identity production and a new arena for negotiating power (Rahmawati, 2023).

Previous studies have primarily emphasized the moral and legal dimensions of online prostitution. Febriana et al. (2017) and Nugroho et al. (2024) discuss the social and legal risks faced by young women, while Isnawan (2024) highlights weak law enforcement against digital prostitution in Indonesia. Ronald Laukon et al. (2024) further reveal the ambivalence between technological advancement and its social consequences. However, most of these studies have not situated digital prostitution within a historical framework or explored the broader dynamics of power relations. This research seeks to fill that gap by tracing digital prostitution as the outcome of a long historical

process involving transformations of space, the body, and technology in Makassar City since the 1980s.

Theoretically, this study integrates Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics to analyze the body as an object of discipline and moral control with the theory of digital media and platformization (Khamis & Vijay, 2020), which explains how algorithms and online networks create new mechanisms of surveillance. Through this approach, the sex worker's body is not merely an object of control but also an actor negotiating with structures of power through the use of technology.

This study focuses on two main questions: (1) how prostitution in Makassar transformed from conventional localization systems to digital forms between 1980 and 2014, and (2) how the relations between the body, technology, and power were constructed and negotiated throughout this process. The aim is to explain how digitalization has reshaped the construction and surveillance of the body, and how these changes reflect the broader dynamics of postcolonial urban society in Indonesia. The novelty of this research lies in positioning digital prostitution as part of the city's social history, rather than merely a moral or legal issue. Thus, this study highlights the continuity between physical localization in the 1980s–1990s, the emergence of semi-closed massage parlors in the 2000s, and the expansion of platform-based prostitution in the 2010s.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the method of social history to trace the transformation of prostitution practices in Makassar City from conventional localization systems to their shift into digital spaces between 1980 and 2014. The social history approach is chosen for its relevance in examining the relationship between social structures, policies, and community dynamics within a long-term historical context (Herlina, 2019). Within this framework, prostitution is understood not merely as an economic activity or moral deviation but as part of broader social and technological changes that illustrate how power and the body are continuously negotiated in urban spaces.

Spatially, the research focuses on Makassar City, particularly on areas that played a central role in the evolution of prostitution practices, such as Jalan Nusantara, Jembatan Besi, and a network of semi-private massage parlors and salons that emerged in the early 2000s. Temporally, the 1980–2014 period encompasses three major phases: the era of officially localized prostitution (1980s–1990s), the transitional period toward semi-private spaces in the 2000s, and the rise of digital prostitution in the early 2010s culminating with the national “Internet Positif” policy in 2014. This temporal framework enables a comprehensive exploration of shifts in structure, regulation, and media used within prostitution practices.

The data sources consist of two main categories: primary and secondary. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with individuals directly involved in the changing landscape of prostitution in Makassar, including former sex workers, entertainment business owners, local journalists, and municipal officials. All interviews were conducted anonymously to ensure informants' privacy and safety, given the social sensitivity and high risks associated with prostitution. In addition, online observations were carried out on websites, social media groups, and messaging platforms such as Facebook and BBM to understand how bodies and services are constructed and represented in virtual spaces (Rahmawati, 2023).

Secondary data were collected through archival research and media documentation. The archives included reports from local newspapers such as *Pedoman Rakyat*, *Fajar*, and *Tribun Timur*, as well as digital articles discussing the closure of localization sites, local government policies, and the broader dynamics of prostitution in Makassar. Public policy reports, regional regulations, and relevant prior studies were also examined (Rosdiana, 2022; Sonjaya, 2024). All data were analyzed thematically by combining discourse analysis and a historical approach. Discourse analysis was used to identify the construction of meanings related to the body, morality, and technology, while the historical approach was employed to reconstruct the chronology of structural and practical transformations in prostitution within a broader socio-political context (Herlina, 2019; Khamis & Vijay, 2020).

The analytical process consisted of three main stages. First, data reduction was conducted to categorize information based on themes of body, technology, and power. Second, data were organized chronologically to identify patterns of transformation across the selected periods. Third, analytical conclusions were drawn by linking empirical findings to Foucault's theory of biopolitics and digital media theory. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, comparing interview results, media archives, and online observations to produce comprehensive and verifiable interpretations (Sugiyono, 2019).

From an ethical standpoint, the research adheres to principles of confidentiality, informed consent, and informant protection. All participant identities were anonymized to prevent potential social repercussions. The research followed ethical guidelines for social and humanities studies established by Hasanuddin University and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). With this methodological design, the study seeks to provide a deep and contextualized understanding of the transformation of prostitution in Makassar while contributing empirically and theoretically to discussions on the intersections of body, technology, and power within the framework of Indonesian urban social history.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

1.1. The Era of Regulation and Spatial Control (1980–1999)

Prostitution practices in Makassar during the 1980s to the late 1990s operated within a social framework tightly regulated by the state. The local government, through security apparatuses and the Social Affairs Office, implemented a localization system designed to control social “diseases” and discipline public behavior. Areas such as Jalan Nusantara, Jembatan Besi, and parts of the Paotere Port became central sites for prostitution, recognized *de facto* though not formally acknowledged. This localization policy aligned with the New Order state's urban governance approach, which sought to regulate bodies, morality, and social mobility in the name of political stability (Mappangara, 2012). In this context, women's bodies were not treated as individual entities but as objects of surveillance legitimized through the discourse of health, morality, and security.

From the outset, the logic of prostitution control in Makassar was not solely driven by social needs but also represented the biopolitical manifestation of the state, as described by Foucault (1978): power operates through the regulation of life, particularly bodies deemed “risky” to social order. Routine health examinations, administrative registration, and restrictions on the mobility of female sex workers formed a systematic surveillance structure. The city government and the police kept detailed records of residents within localization areas, requiring them to carry special identity cards indicating their occupational status. Consequently, these bodies were positioned within a paradoxical social structure: governed and monitored by the state, yet still labeled “immoral” by society.

However, the existence of localization zones was never free from moral and religious resistance. Throughout the 1980s, protests from religious groups and community leaders emerged, condemning localization as the state's tolerance of sin. Local newspapers such as *Fajar* and *Pedoman Rakyat* documented public debates about the need to “close places of vice” while simultaneously “protecting women who had already fallen into it.” This discourse demonstrates that public morality was not an absolute opposition to state authority but part of the mechanism of power itself—producing social legitimacy for the surveillance of women's bodies. Morality thus became an extension of political control.

In daily life, existence within the localization zones reflected contradictions between order and vulnerability. Sex workers lived within an informal economic system connected to entertainment venues, transportation, and petty trade. At the same time, they faced social risks such as violence, stigma, and isolation. Archival interviews with former residents of Jalan Nusantara (Makassar Social Affairs Office, 1998) reveal that many women entered this world not by free choice but due to economic pressure and lack of employment opportunities. The state normalized these conditions

through a paternalistic narrative of “protection through restriction,” typical of the New Order regime.

The policy of controlling sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) served as the state’s primary justification for regulating sex workers’ bodies. Mandatory medical examinations, conducted every two weeks at health centers in the Port and Wajo districts, functioned not only as preventive measures but also as rituals of power marking who was “clean” and who was “impure.” In a Foucauldian sense, this practice represents anatomo-politics: the surveillance of the body not because of actual transgression, but because of its potential to contaminate or disrupt the moral and social order (Foucault, 1978). The female body thus became a moral index of public health.

Simultaneously, the localization system generated economic interdependence among local government, law enforcement, and surrounding communities. Informal levies, semi-open supervision, and “security fees” became routine practices binding prostitution to the city’s bureaucracy. This relationship formed what might be called the city’s grey economy—an economic space allowed to exist beneath the radar of legality. Consequently, prostitution during this period cannot be understood merely as moral deviance but as part of the urban social structure that sustained Makassar’s informal economy (Rahman, 2019; Pujhana & Lestari, 2021).

From the perspective of the sex workers themselves, the localization regime also opened limited spaces for solidarity and subtle resistance. Despite living under constant surveillance, they built internal communities to protect one another from violence, extortion, or police harassment. Such forms of solidarity are evident in testimonies of former sex workers who later joined advocacy groups after the closure of localization areas, such as the Forum Perempuan Marjinal Makassar (Marginal Women’s Forum) (interview, 2014). In their narratives, localization was an ambivalent space repressive yet simultaneously safer than the dangers of the streets. This condition illustrates the paradox of biopolitics, wherein power not only represses but also enables certain forms of survival.

Spatially, the placement of localization zones near ports and terminals reflected their connection to urban economic mobility and labor migration. Most sex workers came from rural areas of South Sulawesi such as Jeneponto, Bulukumba, and Luwu. Migration to Makassar offered new economic opportunities for young women but simultaneously trapped them within the city’s patriarchal structures of control. In this regard, prostitution reflected the broader dynamics of urbanization, where female migrants negotiated their bodies and labor within increasingly concentrated economic and social spaces.

The late 1990s marked a turning point. The 1997–1998 economic crisis and the transition toward Reformasi weakened state control. Many localization zones in Makassar became targets of public pressure and were eventually closed on moral grounds. Yet these closures did not eradicate prostitution; they merely pushed it into more hidden and fragmented spaces. This marked the beginning of a shift from a disciplinary regime to a moral regime, which would characterize the next phase in the history of prostitution in Makassar.

During the New Order, prostitution in Makassar was regulated through officially tolerated localization systems managed by local authorities. Areas such as Jalan Nusantara, Jembatan Besi, and parts of Mariso served as centers of prostitution that were tacitly acknowledged. Archival records from Pedoman Rakyat (1983–1995) show the involvement of the Health Department in conducting regular medical examinations and the presence of security officers ensuring “order” within these zones. This mechanism reveals a biopolitical pattern of power, as described by Michel Foucault (1978) the governance of life through the surveillance of bodies. The state did not aim to abolish prostitution but to organize it spatially to maintain the city’s image. Female bodies were administratively managed and medically inspected while simultaneously stigmatized by the media and society.

Interviews with former residents of Jalan Nusantara reveal the ambivalence of life within localization areas: safe from raids and street violence but confined within social stigma. One informant remarked, “We were safe inside, but invisible outside.” Thus, localization functioned dually as a space of protection and exclusion.

Toward the late 1990s, moral pressure intensified. The campaign “Makassar Clean from

Immorality” (Makassar Bersih dari Maksiat) appeared frequently in Fajar newspaper (1996–1998), representing efforts by political elites and religious groups to discipline public spaces. However, behind this moral rhetoric lay political interests: the closure of localization sites was often used to symbolize the local government’s success in enforcing social order. This period shows that the state’s power over women’s bodies was exercised through spatial regulation and moral discourse, while the media functioned as an agent reinforcing social stigma. The bodies of sex workers thus became both the object of policy and the site of moral narratives that defined the boundary between “moral” and “immoral” citizens.

1.2. Transitional Phase: Hidden Spaces and Moral Reorganization (2000–2009)

After the fall of the New Order and the beginning of the Reformasi era, the official localization system was abolished. The Makassar City Government closed the Nusantara Street and Jembatan Besi areas in the early 2000s, under the pretext of preserving the image of a religious city. However, the closure did not end prostitution it merely transformed into hidden practices within semi-private spaces such as beauty salons, massage parlors, karaoke venues, and boarding houses.

Local newspapers such as *Fajar* and *Tribun Timur* between 2003 and 2008 documented frequent police raids on so-called “plus-plus salons” in Panakkukang and Rappocini Districts. Law enforcement was sporadic, while sex workers adapted by forming informal trust-based networks. This phenomenon illustrates a shift from state administrative control to moral regulation exercised by society and the media (Rahman, 2019).

Technology gradually began to play a role. During this period, mobile phones and text messages (SMS) were used to connect sex workers and clients. Local print media also began reporting on the use of “secret codes” in personal advertisements in entertainment magazines. A senior journalist from *Fajar* revealed that by the mid-2000s, the term “massage parlor plus” had become a common metaphor for clandestine prostitution.

This phase can be read as a transition from spatial surveillance to moral and technological surveillance. Without localization zones, the control over women’s bodies shifted from government authorities to non-state actors owners of entertainment venues, salon managers, and even clients. Yet on the other hand, sex workers gained a new space for negotiation: they could choose their clients, set their own working hours, and develop survival strategies.

Within Khamis and Vijay’s (2020) theoretical framework, this period marks the early stage of *digital mediation of the body*, when sexual communication began to detach from physical presence and was replaced by symbolic representation. The female body began to operate as a virtual commodity, though still limited to rudimentary media.

Mass media reinforced this moral ambiguity. Headlines such as “Immoral Salon Raided by Police” or “Spa Behind the Curtain of Sin” strengthened the perception of prostitution as a moral threat rather than a social issue. Behind this moral rhetoric, however, lay an urban economic dimension: prostitution persisted because it was embedded in the city’s cycles of entertainment, consumption, and tourism (Mappangara, 2012).

Furthermore, the closure of red-light districts created an invisible geography of desire, dispersing sex work into the micro-spaces of the city. These hidden sites rooms behind salons, dimly lit karaoke booths, and private residences became the new nodes of the sexual economy. Urban planners and sociologists observed that this dispersal made prostitution more difficult to monitor and simultaneously deepened its integration into everyday urban life.

At the same time, this period marked the beginning of a new cultural negotiation between modernity, religion, and gender politics in Makassar. While the state projected an image of a morally upright and Islamic city, the persistence of these hidden spaces revealed the contradictions within urban morality. The tension between visibility and concealment, control and autonomy, would later become the foundation for the emergence of digital-based prostitution in the following decade.

1.3. Digitalization and the Platformization of Desire (2010–2014)

Entering the 2010s, prostitution in Makassar underwent a significant transformation alongside the

rise of digital technology and social media. Sex workers no longer relied on physical venues but instead used online platforms such as BlackBerry Messenger (BBM), Facebook, and WhatsApp to communicate with clients. This shift marked the emergence of a new form of prostitution that was decentralized, anonymous, and network-based.

Reports from *Tribun Timur* (2012–2014) recorded numerous cases of “*booking online*” (BO) through closed BBM groups. The police admitted difficulty in tracking these practices because digital evidence was private and easily erased. In response, the central government launched the *Internet Positif* policy in 2014, which blocked pornographic websites but failed to address social media platforms where digital prostitution actually occurred (Isnawan, 2024).

Interviews with two former sex workers who had transitioned to the online system revealed that digital platforms provided a sense of safety but also created new forms of surveillance. One informant stated, “Now we don’t need a pimp, but every eye can watch from the screen.” This statement reflects how the power once exercised by the state has been replaced by algorithmic authority (Fuchs, 2022).

In digital spaces, the body is no longer physically present but represented through photos, text, and emojis. This virtual body is governed by the logic of the platform visibility, search algorithms, and online interactions. As Haraway (2016) argues, the human body in cyberspace becomes a hybrid entity a fusion of human and machine. Sex workers use technology to adapt and survive, yet they must also learn to navigate algorithmic visibility to remain “seen” and safe.

This phenomenon illustrates a subtle shift of power: from direct surveillance to invisible control. Social media creates an illusion of freedom while simultaneously collecting data and regulating behavior through algorithms. In the context of digital prostitution, authority no longer takes the form of the police but of technological systems that determine who is visible, who disappears, and who remains hidden (Rahmawati, 2023).

This transformation also altered the social understanding of morality. Public discourse shifted from concerns about “sinful districts” to fears of an “immoral internet.” Editorials in *Fajar* (2013–2014) warned of “the moral dangers of social media for youth,” reflecting a shift in the locus of social anxiety from the body to technology itself. Thus, technology not only changed the practice of prostitution but also expanded the discourse of morality into the digital realm.

Moreover, the digitalization of desire created new economies of intimacy that blurred the boundaries between work, pleasure, and connectivity. Some online sex workers began to adopt influencer-like strategies, using curated images and coded captions to attract potential clients while avoiding censorship. The commodification of self-image became part of a broader attention economy, where erotic visibility competed with lifestyle content, beauty tips, and self-branding.

At the same time, this new ecosystem revealed the gendered inequalities embedded within digital capitalism. While technology offered autonomy and flexibility, it also exposed women to digital harassment, data theft, and moral stigmatization. The online marketplace of desire thus reflected both empowerment and exploitation an ambivalent terrain where freedom operated within the confines of algorithmic governance and patriarchal gaze.

1.4. Power, Technology, and the Reproduction of the Urban Body

The shift of prostitution practices in Makassar from localized districts to digital spaces signifies not merely a change in place and method but a transformation of the regimes of power that govern the human body within the city. From a social-historical perspective, prostitution serves as a mirror of how the state and society construct their citizens through systems of moral and technological regulation. In Makassar, the bodies of sex workers have become the most tangible sites where discipline, morality, and algorithm intersect.

In the first regime (1980–1999), power operated through direct surveillance. Medical examinations, sex worker identification cards, and security patrols in red-light districts embodied what Foucault (1978) called *disciplinary power* a mode of governance that regulates bodies through institutions. This power manifested in concrete forms police officers, doctors, and state officials. The female body became a subject of both statistics and morality, incorporated into the administrative apparatus

of the state. The localization system functioned like a social laboratory in which every behavior had to be measured, observed, and controlled.

However, when the localization regime was abolished, power did not disappear it merely changed direction. During the 2000s, the female body was no longer managed by bureaucracy but by a regime of private morality and economy. Massage parlors, beauty salons, and boarding houses replaced the role of localization zones but continued to operate under the same logic: the control of visibility. Sex workers were no longer “registered,” yet they remained surveilled through media exposure and social pressure. The body became a hidden commodity, perpetually pursued by the public gaze. This shift illustrates how social surveillance replaced bureaucratic oversight, echoing Hall’s (2019) notion of “moral technologies” produced by media discourse mechanisms of control as effective as formal law.

The third regime the digital technological regime (2010–2014) introduced a new form of power: *algorithmic power*. The walls of localization and police raids were replaced by invisible codes that determined who could be seen and who would disappear. Fuchs (2022) describes this phenomenon as *surveillance capitalism* a digital economy that profits from the visibility and data of users’ bodies. In the context of digital prostitution, social media algorithms dictate how easily sex workers’ profiles can be found, how they interact with clients, and how specific words or images are censored.

The digital body of the sex worker thus becomes both an object and a subject of two simultaneous forces:

- The *attention economy*, which demands visibility for financial survival; and
- Algorithmic surveillance, which restricts visibility to align with digital morality and platform policies.

These dual forces create a paradox: sex workers in Makassar feel freer, yet more closely watched than ever before. As one informant put it, “Now I can choose my clients, but every trace is recorded.”

This statement reflects the emergence of a new *digital panopticon* a mode of surveillance no longer imposed externally but internalized through everyday digital habits.

In this condition, the body is no longer a purely biological entity but a *networked body*. As Haraway (2016) explains, the human in the digital world exists in a hybrid state where biological flesh, data, and machine are intertwined. Sex workers no longer sell their physical bodies but rather their digital representations images that can be accessed, edited, or deleted according to market needs. This transformation creates a new form of agency: the capacity to self-regulate and construct one’s own digital identity.

Yet this agency exists within a complex structure of power. Every act of resistance using pseudonyms, coded language, or blurred photos is ultimately an adaptation to surveillance systems. Power no longer coerces but seduces participation. Sex workers become active users of technology, yet simultaneously suppliers of the very data that reinforce surveillance.

Thus, what appears as liberation reveals instead a continuation of control in a more refined form. Power no longer represses directly but operates through mechanisms of desire, algorithms, and digital consumption. Prostitution in Makassar exemplifies a form of *digital biopolitics* the governance of life through the interplay between body, data, and social networks.

When viewed across these three historical regimes, prostitution in Makassar follows a clear trajectory of shifting power:

1. The disciplinary regime (1980–1999): spatial surveillance and state regulation;
2. The moral regime (2000–2009): social pressure and media control;
3. The technological regime (2010–2014): algorithmic and platform-based governance.

Together, they reveal a continuous logic of control over the female body. In the disciplinary regime, the body was *administratively managed*; in the moral regime, it was *symbolically sanctified*; and in the technological regime, it was *digitally represented*. Yet in each phase, women also demonstrated

agency and resistance through adaptation, negotiation, and the creative use of technology to survive. These changes are also visible in the evolving language of local media. In the 1980s, terms like “*registered sex worker*” were common, which shifted to “*massage parlor plus*” in the 2000s, and later to “*open BO*” in the 2010s. This linguistic evolution is not merely semantic it signifies changing ways in which society and the media construct the body and sexuality. As Hall (2019) argues, language itself is a technology of power it determines what can be said and who is permitted to speak.

Ultimately, the history of prostitution in Makassar is not a story of moral decline but of social adaptation to urban modernity. Prostitution continually finds new spaces as social structures and technologies evolve. It never truly disappears; it transforms following the shifting forms of power and economy that define the modern city.

1.5. Historical Continuity and Urban Modernity

The case of Makassar reflects a broader pattern shared by many major cities in Southeast Asia an ongoing attempt to balance modernity and morality. Since the colonial era, the city has served as a meeting ground for trade, migration, and entertainment. Local government efforts to project an image of a religiously modern city have often clashed with the persistent reality that the sex industry remains embedded in the urban economy (Intanulsitta & Burhanuddin, 2024).

Policies such as the closure of red-light districts and the rise of digital surveillance reveal that moral control continues to function as a political instrument of spatial governance. Yet, digitalization simultaneously challenges state authority: as prostitution moves online, total surveillance becomes impossible. This phenomenon reaffirms Foucault’s view that power never truly disappears it simply transforms, adapts, and continues to produce new subjects.

The history of prostitution in Makassar demonstrates that every attempt at control whether through spatial regulation, legal enforcement, or algorithmic monitoring has always been accompanied by the production of new forms of freedom and resistance. This dialectic between body, technology, and power forms the analytical core of this study.

Each phase of bodily control has been closely tied to the city’s modernist projects. Since the colonial period, Makassar has functioned as a key port in global trade networks, where entertainment and prostitution grew alongside the harbor economy (Suriadi, 2015). This pattern persisted during the New Order era, when urban expansion was followed by the growth of service industries, tourism, and rural-to-urban migration. Prostitution became part of the informal economy that sustained the city’s modernity although it was consistently erased from official development narratives.

Government policies to close down prostitution zones and “cleanse” the city from immorality were part of a broader moral politics of modernization. City authorities sought to portray Makassar as a “faithful and cultured” metropolis, echoing regional development slogans of the early 2000s. Yet, as field data reveal, morality was often used as a political instrument to regulate space and discipline the behavior of lower-class citizens, particularly women. Prostitution was labeled a symbol of decline, while modern entertainment industries cafés, karaoke bars, and hotels serving the middle class were allowed to thrive.

Thus, Makassar’s urban modernity is deeply paradoxical: it erases formal red-light spaces in the name of religiosity, yet allows “hidden” and digital versions of the same practice to flourish behind screens. This illustrates what Foucault called *productive power* a form of power that not only prohibits but also generates new realities. Every attempt to eliminate prostitution has, in fact, given rise to newer, more adaptive forms of it.

This continuity is also visible in shifting cultural symbols and language. During the colonial era, prostitutes were referred to as “harbor women”; in the 1980s–1990s as “registered sex workers”; in

the 2000s as “massage plus parlors”; and in the 2010s as “open BO.” These terminological shifts are not merely semantic they reflect changing relations between power, economy, and morality. Language becomes a crucial tool for constructing social boundaries between what is acceptable and what is forbidden, between the moral and the immoral, between the visible citizens and the “hidden others.”

From a social-historical perspective, the persistence of prostitution reveals a structural imbalance between state regulation and the economic realities of urban life. The closure of prostitution zones in the 2000s was not followed by social protection policies for sex workers; instead, they were pushed into informal and riskier environments. This shows how moral policies often serve to reinforce the state’s symbolic power rather than address underlying social problems.

Digital modernity further complicates this issue. Since the 2010s, the local government has promoted the slogan *Makassar Smart City*, emphasizing transparency, data, and connectivity. Yet, at the same time, digital prostitution flourishes within the same online infrastructure through social media, messaging apps, and local websites. Ironically, a city branded as “smart and transparent” harbors unmonitored digital spaces where illicit economies thrive. Technology, in this context, mirrors the contradictions between transparency and surveillance.

Media archives such as *Tempo Magazine* (2008) and *Kompas* (2010) note that public morality is often instrumentalized as a display of political piety rather than a genuine effort to resolve social issues. This research finds that behind moral regulation and digital censorship lies an enduring logic: the control of women’s bodies as symbols of societal virtue.

The long history of prostitution in Makassar, therefore, serves as a reflection of the city’s journey toward an ambiguous modernity. On one hand, the city seeks to present itself as religious and civilized; on the other, it thrives on a service economy that often contradicts public morality. Prostitution becomes the site where modernity, religion, and economy continually negotiate their tensions.

The shift toward digital prostitution underscores that modernity is never neutral. Digital technologies promise freedom and efficiency but simultaneously extend control from the state’s authority to the algorithmic governance of global platforms. Sex workers in Makassar now depend not only on local policies but also on the decisions of technology corporations that determine their visibility and access.

In this sense, the historical continuity of prostitution in Makassar demonstrates that technology does not liberate humanity from power it reconfigures it into new, more complex, and hidden forms. Digital prostitution stands as the sharpest metaphor for the condition of urban modernity itself: a society that strives to appear virtuous in public, yet sustains itself through digital systems that blur its own moral and social boundaries.

CONCLUSION

This study addresses the central question of how prostitution in Makassar transformed from a conventional localization system into a platform-based digital practice, and how the body, technology, and power intersect throughout this process. The findings reveal that this transformation is not merely a change in the form of an underground economy but represents a broader shift in the structures of power governing women’s bodies in both social and digital spaces.

Between 1980 and 1999, prostitution operated under a disciplinary regime imposed by the state through official localization zones such as Jalan Nusantara and Jembatan Besi. The bodies of sex

workers were subjected to medical and administrative regulation, turning them into objects of biopolitical control in the name of social stability. Yet, this state control simultaneously reinforced social segregation and moral stigma. Following the closure of localization sites (2000–2009), surveillance shifted toward the community and the media. Prostitution relocated into semi-private spaces massage parlors and salons signaling the rise of a moral regime that disciplined bodies not through law, but through social gaze and collective judgment. The period 2010–2014 marked a fundamental transformation, as prostitution migrated into the digital sphere via social media platforms and messaging applications. This period introduced a technological regime, where power no longer emanated from the state or moral authorities but from the algorithms that determine visibility and access. The female body became a digital representation a form of data that could be controlled, circulated, and surveilled. Technology provided new autonomy for sex workers to choose and negotiate clients, yet it also produced new, subtle, and pervasive forms of surveillance.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the evolution of prostitution in Makassar represents a historical process of power reproduction through three overlapping regimes: disciplinary, moral, and technological. Each regime does not replace the previous one but rather accumulates and coexists, forming a layered pattern of bodily regulation that continuously adapts to the changing times. This confirms Foucault's notion that power is productive it does not merely repress but also generates new ways for individuals to act, work, and present themselves. In Makassar, the female body has become the site where state authority, public morality, and technological algorithms

intersect, clash, and transform. Digital prostitution, therefore, is not a form of absolute freedom, but a continuation of bodily governance in a more fluid, decentralized, and globalized sphere.

Conceptually, this research expands the understanding of digital biopolitics in Indonesia, showing how power now operates through networked systems and social media platforms. Empirically, it demonstrates that the social history of the body in a postcolonial city like Makassar does not end with the closure of localization sites but continues to evolve within new digital interactions. Based on these findings, it is recommended that future policies move beyond moralistic approaches toward a framework centered on social protection, digital safety, and media literacy for vulnerable groups particularly women working in informal online sectors. Further research is also encouraged to examine the post-2014 developments of digital prostitution, especially with the rise of platforms such as Telegram and Twitter, to better understand the emerging dynamics between the body and technology in Indonesia's urban modernity.

Based on the findings, it is recommended to enhance digital literacy and provide specific legal protections for sex workers in the digital context to minimize the risks they face. Policies should also be more inclusive and adaptive, prioritizing the protection of rights, security, and welfare of sex workers rather than merely taking a repressive approach. An interdisciplinary approach that considers technological, gender, and social aspects is crucial to ensure that policies are effective and equitable in managing digital prostitution in Indonesian urban areas.

References

- Febriana, N. D., Cahyo, K., & Kusumawati, A. (2017). Fenomena prostitusi online di Jakarta Selatan. *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat*, 5(1), 45–56.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: An Introduction. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fuchs, C. (2022). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.
- Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hasibuan, N. S., & Masyhuri, M. (2024). Overview and development of cybersex: Factors, impact, and measurement. *Journal of Education Research*, 5(3), 112–124.
- Herlina, N. (2019). *Metodologi Sejarah Sosial*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Intanulsitta, V., & Burhanuddin, A. (2024). Non-traditional security and sex-worker regulation in Southeast Asia. *Terang: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Sosial Politik dan Hukum*, 5(2), 75–88.

Isnawan, F. (2024). Criminal law enforcement to combat social-media-based prostitution. *KRTHA Bhayangkara*, 18(2), 49–60.

Kemendikbudristek. (2023). *Panduan Etika Penelitian Bidang Sosial Humaniora*. Jakarta: Direktorat Riset dan Pengabdian Masyarakat.

Khamis, S., & Vijay, D. (2020). *Online Body Politics: Digital Self-Representation and the Gendered Body*. New York: Routledge.

Mappangara, S. (2012). *Moralitas dan Ruang Sosial di Kota Makassar*. Makassar: Inninawa Press.
Nugroho, E., Nisa, A., Hermawati, B. B., Raharjo, B. B., & Saputri, E. S. (2024). Adolescents and the prostitution industry: Changing patterns and risks faced. *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat*, 9(2), 15–27.

Pujhana, A., & Lestari, I. (2021). Relasi tubuh, ruang, dan moralitas dalam prostitusi urban Indonesia. *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, 15(2), 301–320.

Rahmawati, L. (2023). Digital media, gender, and moral surveillance in Indonesia. *Asian Journal of Media and Society*, 7(1), 44–58.

Rosdiana, A. C. (2022). Online prostitution in social media: How is the victim protection? *Indonesia Media Law Review*, 1(2), 90–104.

Ronald Laukon, D., Fadila, L., Edhisty, N. R., & Hasna, Z. (2024). Prostitusi daring: Antara kemajuan teknologi dan dampak sosial. *SOSMANIORA: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora*, 6(1), 101–115.

Sonjaya, S. (2024). Mengeksplorasi regulasi industri seksual di Indonesia: Pemidanaan pembeli jasa pekerja seks komersial. *JCIC: Jurnal CIC Lembaga Riset dan Konsultan Sosial*, 7(1), 56–68.

Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Alfabeta. Chaer, Abdul. (2009).

Pengantar Semantik Bahasa Indonesia. Jakarta: Gajah Mada University Press.