

CHAPTER II

**CONTEXTUALIZATION OF ONLINE DATING IN RELATION OF
COVID PANDEMIC 2020 IN INDONESIA: SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND
ECONOMIC ASPECTS**

Online dating in Indonesia is a complex phenomenon shaped by a variety of social, cultural, and economic factors, all of which play a key role in how people utilize these platforms for romantic relationships. Socially, Indonesia is a diverse country with a vastly different population in terms of ethnicity, religion, and social norms, which greatly influences the acceptance and practice of online dating. In more conservative areas, especially those with a strong Islamic influence, traditional values regarding courtship and family relationship building remain deeply rooted. These cultural norms often emphasize personal introductions through family and community over meeting strangers online (Nilan, 2020). In contrast, urban areas such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya have a younger, more globalized population and tend to be more open to online dating. These populations are often exposed to Western ideals of romance and individual autonomy in relationship building, resulting in increased acceptance of dating apps as a legitimate way to find a romantic partner (Lim, 2016). However, this change is not without tensions, and traditional values remain dominant, creating a unique cultural landscape where modern and conservative ideals about relationships coexist and sometimes clash.

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 had a significant impact on social interactions around the world, and Indonesia was no exception. The pandemic led to dramatic changes in how people interact, especially in romantic relationships, as traditional face-to-face interactions were limited by lockdowns and social distancing measures. This situation led people to turn to digital means to establish and maintain romantic relationships, resulting in a significant increase in the use of online dating platforms. The social, cultural, and economic context in Indonesia during this period shaped the way users experienced online dating and gave rise to distinct narratives about relationships formed or maintained during the pandemic.

2.1. Social

As restrictions were imposed on movement and gatherings during the pandemic, online platforms became more important for people seeking companionship. With physical interactions limited, many Indonesians, especially young professionals in urban areas, relied on dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, and local platforms such as Taaruf.id to socialize. These platforms provided an important way to continue socializing during the quarantine period. In this context, online dating became more than just a means to meet potential romantic partners. It became a lifeline to maintain a semblance of social interaction at a time when traditional methods were unavailable (Situmorang, 2020). This shift also led to a redefinition of romantic relationships, with virtual interactions becoming the primary means of communication. Face-to-face meetings have been replaced by video calls, text messages and virtual dates, leading to the

development of "virtual intimacy" that prioritizes emotional and intellectual connections over physical ones - a notable change in the social structure of dating in Indonesia.

2.2. Cultural

In Indonesia, the role of family and religion in relationships is paramount, the majority of the population self-identifies as Muslim, and marriage is often viewed as an important life goal linked to both religious and familial expectations (Smith-Hefner, 2019). Many users of online dating platforms are not simply seeking casual relationships, but often also seeking partners with serious intentions, in keeping with a culture that values marriage and long-term commitment. For this reason, some online dating platforms in Indonesia, such as B.Taaruf.id, specifically target users who are looking for a spouse according to Islamic principles. This reflects how online dating in Indonesia is adapting to cultural needs and creating a hybrid model of using technology to meet partners within cultural and religious expectations. The tension between liberal dating practices and conservative values is exacerbated by the pressure many young Indonesians face from their families to marry by a certain age, which may affect their engagement on online dating apps and how they compare to users in Western contexts who are more goal-oriented and less casual in their approach.

The pandemic has exacerbated tensions between traditional relationship norms and the growing influence of modern globalized dating practices. Indonesia's cultural fabric is heavily influenced by religion, particularly Islam,

and community-based values, and has traditionally emphasized family involvement in relationship building and personal courtship. The shift to online dating during COVID-19 has forced many to manage these traditional values in the virtual space. For example, platforms like Taaruf.id, which target Muslims seeking serious relationships within the framework of Islamic values, have seen increased usage during the pandemic. These platforms offer a more culturally and religiously focused experience, illustrating how online dating is adapting to Indonesia's unique cultural context (Fatoni & Susilo, 2021). At the same time, younger users, especially in urban areas, have adopted globalized dating norms and have been more open to trying out casual dating and exploring relationships outside of traditional settings. This cultural dichotomy has become even more apparent during the pandemic, when the need for digital interaction has forced those who previously shied away from online dating to consider it as a viable option.

2.3. Economic

Economically, the rise of online dating in Indonesia is closely tied to the country's growing access to smartphones and the internet, driven by a growing middle class and urbanization. According to data from the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, internet penetration in Indonesia has grown rapidly over the past decade, reaching over 73% of the population in 2020 (Haryanto, 2020). This increased internet availability, along with the increasing affordability of smartphones, has given more people the opportunity to participate in online dating platforms. However, there remains an economic divide

between urban and rural areas, which impacts who has access to online dating and how they use it. In cities where internet access is widespread, young professionals are more likely to use these platforms to expand their social networks and explore romantic possibilities beyond traditional boundaries. In rural areas where internet access is limited, online dating remains uncommon and traditional relationship-building forms such as family gatherings and community events still predominate. Moreover, economic factors also influence the types of relationships people seek through these platforms. For example, economic instability and job insecurity during times like the COVID-19 pandemic have led many Indonesians to prioritize finding a financially stable partner, which further influences their use of online dating apps (Lim, 2021).

The pandemic has brought both challenges and opportunities to the world of online dating. On the one hand, the economic downturn caused by widespread unemployment and reduced income during the lockdown has affected how people build relationships. Many Indonesians, especially those in lower-income brackets, face increased economic insecurity, which may be affecting their dating decisions. Indonesia's economic stability is often associated with the likelihood of marriage, but the pandemic has raised concerns about financial readiness for long-term relationships and marriage (Sutrisno, 2021). These economic pressures may have made some users cautious about pursuing serious relationships, while others may have turned to online dating as a temporary solution to fulfill their emotional needs without expecting immediate financial commitment.

On the other hand, Indonesia's economic development in the years prior to the pandemic increased the availability of smartphones and the internet, giving more people access to dating platforms than ever before. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology reported that internet usage surged during the pandemic as people relied heavily on digital platforms for work, education, and social interactions (Haryanto, 2020). This digital shift led to the popularity of online dating, especially among urban people who were already accustomed to using technology in their daily lives. For those who are financially stable, the pandemic brought an opportunity to explore new ways to build relationships, with dating apps offering a convenient and safe alternative to traditional dating.

In conclusion, online dating in Indonesia cannot be understood without considering broader social, cultural, and economic factors. Social norms, influenced by both modern and traditional values, shape individuals' perceptions and usage of online dating platforms, while cultural expectations regarding marriage and family commitments continue to influence relationship goals. Economically, increased internet access has made online dating more accessible, but urban-rural differences remain. Collectively, these factors create a unique and dynamic environment for online dating in Indonesia that combines modern technological practices with deeply rooted cultural traditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a unique context for online dating in Indonesia, characterized by social isolation, cultural tensions, and economic challenges. Socially, dating apps have become an essential tool for maintaining romance and

social connections during lockdown. Culturally, the pandemic has highlighted the balance between traditional relationship norms and the growing acceptance of modern digital dating practices. Economically, economic insecurity due to the pandemic has affected romantic relationships for some people, but the increased accessibility of online platforms has allowed online dating to continue to grow. These intertwined social, cultural and economic factors have created a unique online dating environment during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, which has had a profound impact on the way relationships are formed and developed.