

Navigating Gender Sexism on Social Media: Challenges and Collective Solidarity Among Hijab-Wearing Women in Muslim Fashion Trends on TikTok

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Abstract

This research aims to understand the experiences of women wearing the hijab in facing gender sexism on the TikTok platform, especially related to Muslim fashion trends. Through a digital ethnographic approach, this research analyzes the content, comments, and social interactions of ten active participants in the TikTok hijab fashion community who have experienced or witnessed negative comments. The research results show that the TikTok platform, with its algorithm that personalizes content, helps reinforce gender bias through repeated exposure to negative comments and stereotypes. These findings also reveal a complex dynamic in which criticism of modern hijab fashion often comes from fellow women, but it is necessary to examine further the social and cultural factors that underlie this phenomenon. This research highlights the importance of understanding how social media platforms can shape the perceptions and experiences of women wearing the hijab and calls for efforts to build more inclusive and supportive online communities.

Keywords

Hijab, Tik-Tok, Sexism, Gender Inequality.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology has changed many aspects of life, including the way Muslim women view and use the hijab. In this context, social media, especially TikTok, has become the main platform influencing the perception and representation of hijab fashion. The hijab has been a symbol of religious identity and obedience for centuries. However, it is now undergoing a radical transformation in the context of increasingly pluralistic and individualistic popular cultures (Harefa, 2018). According to Indarti & Peng (2016), the Hijab, which was previously considered a conventional



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garment, is now transforming into a modern and stylish fashion trend. In recent years, TikTok has emerged as one of the most popular social media among the public, especially the younger generation (A. S. Bernier, 2024). The platform is a place to share entertainment content and a space where cultural values and identities are debated and reconstructed (Kinasih, 2021). For Muslim women who wear hijab, TikTok is a means to express themselves, promote hijab fashion trends, and share their views on identity and religion. However, using hijab on social media cannot be separated from various challenges (Segarra & Lopez, 2024). One of the main challenges that arise is criticism that often contains elements of sexism, where negative comments about women wearing hijab often do not only focus on aesthetic aspects but also touch on moral and religious issues (Widyanita et al., 2022). These criticisms often reveal gender biases that are still deeply rooted in society, where women who wear hijabs are often faced with double standards and unfair expectations (Adliandri & Yohana, 2016).

This transformation reflects a major shift in people's view of the hijab, from a mere religious symbol to an expression of personal identity and style (Einifar, 2022). This phenomenon raises important questions about how social media, through its algorithms and features, shapes people's perceptions and views of the hijab and the women who wear it (Maghdalena & Lessy, 2024). To understand this phenomenon, this study will use media reception theory and gender theory as an analysis framework. With this approach, we will explore how hijab fashion content on TikTok is received and responded to by social media users and how hijab values and media ideologies affect the perception of women wearing hijab. The main focus of this research is to identify the challenges women face wearing hijab on social media and understand how gender bias affects solidarity between women.

This research aims to fill the knowledge gap related to the impact of social media on the perception of hijab fashion by providing new insights into gender equality and encouraging women's emancipation that supports solidarity between women. Through this analysis, it is hoped that it can be revealed how social media, especially TikTok, can become a more inclusive space and support women's creativity in expressing their identity through hijab fashion.

METHODS

This study uses a digital ethnographic approach to explore the responses of social media users to hijab fashion content on TikTok. According to Mirza (2016), ethnography is divided into two types, interpretive ethnography and hermeneutic ethnography, which are analyzed to determine the meaning of the observed social interactions. Digital ethnography allows researchers to understand social and cultural interactions in the digital environment, adapting traditional ethnographic principles into online spaces. This study involved 20 participants who were selected using the purposive sampling technique. Participants were selected based on certain criteria, namely TikTok users who actively post or interact

with hijab fashion content, especially those who use the Sabrina turban style, and those who have direct experience with negative comments about their hijab. The number of participants was increased from ten to twenty to ensure a broader representation of the user experience. Data Collection Data will be collected through several methods: 1) Online Observation: Researchers will directly observe content, comments, and interactions on the TikTok platform during a certain period. These observations will focus on how hijab fashion content is presented and how users respond. 2) In-Depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted online with selected participants to dig deeper into their experiences using TikTok and facing sexist comments. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed for further analysis. 3) Content Analysis: Researchers will also collect secondary data from comments, likes, and shares on TikTok videos about hijab fashion. This will help understand the pattern of user response to the content at hand.

Data analysis This study uses an interpretive method, following the principles of interpretive ethnography. Data collected from observations and interviews will be analyzed to identify key themes related to gender bias, solidarity between women wearing hijab, and perceptions of hijab. Content analysis will be used to identify response patterns that appear in user interactions on TikTok. Researchers will also use qualitative analysis software (such as NVivo) to assist in organizing and analyzing unstructured data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Gender sexism on social media, particularly on TikTok, highlights the challenges faced by hijab-wearing women participating in Muslim fashion trends. Hijab-wearing women are often subjected to negative comments and discriminatory behavior on the platform, reflecting deep gender bias. TikTok, as a visual-first platform, often reinforces narrow beauty standards, where hijab-wearing users are sometimes perceived as not meeting those standards, which can trigger verbal attacks or trolling (Mukti & Asriadi, 2023a). In addition, the sexism experienced by hijab-wearing women on TikTok is also related to negative stereotypes that associate hijab with underdevelopment or oppression, which is often the basis for discriminatory comments. However, during these challenges, a strong form of solidarity emerged among the women wearing hijabs on TikTok. They often use these platforms to support each other, share fashion tips, and positively express their identities. This solidarity is an emotional support mechanism to counter negative stereotypes and reinforce the positive representation of hijab-wearing women on social media (Chomairha, Prabandari, Fudholi, et al., 2024). Thus, while TikTok can be a challenging space for hijab-wearing women, the platform is also an important arena for building solidarity and fighting for the right to express themselves without facing gender-based or religion-based discrimination.

The results of this study are based on a qualitative analysis of comments posted on TikTok videos featuring women in hijab in Muslim fashion content. Some of the main findings of this study are as follows:

Gender Sexism in Comments

In the analysis of comments on TikTok videos, various forms of sexism experienced by women in hijab were found. These forms of sexism include: 1) Objectification: Many comments comment on the physical appearance of women wearing hijab excessively, directing attention to the aspects of the body that are visible despite being covered by the hijab. This reflects sexual objectification that still occurs even though women are already dressed and covered. 2) Negative Labeling: Hijab-wearing women often get comments that stereotype them as "unmodern," "old-fashioned," or "less stylish." In addition, some question the authenticity of their Islam because they combine fashion trends with hijab. 3) Moral Judgment: Most of the comments highlight the morality aspect, where hijab-wearing women who follow fashion trends are considered "shariah" or "inappropriate". These comments contain elements of sexism based on patriarchal views on how women should look.

In practice, TikTok is also used as a personal journal and a virtual photo album for its users, where users can upload photos and videos anytime, anywhere, anytime. Judging from the content of TikTok, this platform offers freer, funnier, and more relaxed video content (Chomairha, Prabandari, & ..., 2024). However, the free and relaxed nature of TikTok and the new communication spaces created by social media creates injustice and gender sexism. On private content posts with your account name @BEH, you are a man. In one of the video's contents, she discusses the figure of a Muslim woman wearing a turban hijab.



Source: Tik-tok @BEH

The video uploaded by the @BEH account shows the reaction to women wearing hijab in turban style. The reaction of the account owner in the form of a cynical facial expression, complemented by a folded hand gesture on the chest, indicates disapproval or a condescending attitude towards the woman who appears in this style. This content was posted with a provocative caption, namely "When: passing a person who is hijab but the hijab is worn for a turban."

The video received more than 2,200 comments, many of which came from female users who added negative comments or mocked the style of the turban hijab. For example, @Ginaaaa's account commented with a sentence that laughed at the dressing style, showing a lack of solidarity between women.

The two comments above are examples of other comments with the same intention. Based on the gender perspective, the socio-cultural phenomenon shows that there is still a lack of sense in supporting each other and respecting each other for fellow women. There is also a lack of support to provide strength support between fellow women (Women support women). As mentioned in the description above, the turban differs from the hijab.

However, from the comments, there are many forms of support and even try to straighten out without judging, as is following religion. As in the @violetxz account, which wrote, "Turban is not a hijab," then the @ul account with the text "Turban is not a hijab. " The account owner is neutral, according to what he is impartial about, but also does not drop. Comments like this are much better than giving our opinion but bringing others down. Not a few videos discuss turbans and their essence based on religion. However, most of the total 2,214 comments were mixed with comments that showed gender sexism between women.

Another proof of gender problems that men do to women is on an account with the name @SaskyDwi, which is also the same as the first video; she made a video about the expression that will be displayed when she sees a woman with a Sabrina fashion style combined with a hijab. In the video, the @SaskyDwi account also showed a reaction when seeing a woman in hijab wearing a Sabrina crop-top outfit, which is considered not to follow the dress norms in certain societies. The text used was "When you cross paths with girls wearing hijab but wearing Sabrina crop tops," with visuals highlighting disapproval of the fashion style. The video also garnered many comments that were mostly derogatory or highlighted as inappropriate, showing gender bias and judgment of Muslim women's clothing choices.

Regarding the existing fashion style, we cannot close ourselves to every development that impacts world globalization; we can limit ourselves and sort out something appropriate for ourselves. Regarding gender issues, gender inequality experienced by women by men is already a patriarchy that considers women inferior to men. However, regarding sexism, the absence of a sense of mutual support

and cooperation for women's gender equality seen through these actions can bring gender inequality towards women to a higher level, which may have the potential to be unable to be abolished and we will live in a patriarchy that considers men higher than women. Moreover, we will forget that every human being, regardless of gender, male or female, brings his Human Rights as the basis for becoming a society. We as a society should be able to respect every basic right owned by every age on this earth, especially in society. So that women will lose their rights just because they are female (Tamonob et al., 2022).

Then another thing that is underlined is how media content can influence the views of people who are unconsciously viewed, including forms of gender inequality in the media, especially social media, TikTok. Previous research, "Women's Commodification on Tiktok: A Semiotic Study of 'Elbow Sticking' Challenge" by Rully et al. (2021), mentions that stereotypes of women in online media often reflect a limited and shallow view of women.

In addition, content like this may impact a woman's self-confidence, such as videos created by @Manda accounts. This account posted a video reflecting the personal experience of the account owner related to wearing Sabrina's clothes and hijab in the past. The account owner expressed his fear of wearing the outfit again in the present because he was afraid of being the target of criticism or ridicule from others on social media.



Source tik-tok: @manda

Insecurity can have an impact on other things, such as work. This aligns with research conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which states that although women have good academic values, they do not positively influence work in science and technology due to a lack of confidence. The existence of social constructs even more expects men to participate in this matter.

Also seen on @Qubills account, @H! Bestieeee dan @putrisull16. It started when an account had the name @H! Bestieeee had commented on the @Qubills account that he did not like to disagree with Sabrina's outfit, but the account owner @Qubills got a photo where the account owner @H! Bestiee has also used Sabrina's outings. Until there was an act of satire on each account and also brought an account in the name of @Putrisull16. This action reflects women's inability to support each other and instead exacerbates existing gender biases.

ZZ



Source: Tik-tok

It is undeniable that the paradox lies in the fact that the mass media often displays stereotypical images and roles of women so that the audience accepts the messages of the media as a real reality. The analyzed content showed a lack of solidarity between women, who were more often involved in criticism and judgment than supporting each other. This indicates the internalization of patriarchal standards that women then apply to their fellow women. The patriarchal culture that is deeply rooted in society creates certain standards for how women should appear and behave. Wanita yang melanggar norma-norma ini, seperti mengenakan busana yang tidak konvensional, sering kali menjadi target kritik atau ejekan. Social media, such as TikTok, reinforces this norm by providing a platform for individuals to express their patriarchal views freely. Social media has rules in the concept that media should be news about women, showing the side that women also have the same rights as men and that women can be independent and achieve. That way, it will create insights and sources of aspirations for fellow

women and encourage them to develop independence so that gender equality and women's support will be achieved.

Solidarity Among Hijab Women

The concept of solidarity in Islam lies in strengthening relationships between fellow Muslims. This concept underscores the importance of help, justice, and togetherness in goodness in Islamic teachings. The Prophet and his companions are a clear example of the application of solidarity in various aspects of their lives. They assist others in need, uphold justice, and support each other in doing good. Solidarity in Islam is also reflected in various activities and communities of Muslims, such as the hijab community in Indonesia. This community was founded on the values of solidarity that underlie Islam. The members of the hijabers community support each other in exercising obedience to Allah and maintaining hijab values. They inspire and motivate each other and provide help and support in facing life's challenges (Utami et al., 2019).

In addition to the community, solidarity in Islam also includes daily relationships between Muslim individuals. Muslims are obliged to help each other and help each other in meeting the needs of life. In a Muslim community, no individual is left out or neglected. Solidarity in Islam encourages Muslims to always care for others, help those in difficulty, and maintain justice in all aspects of life. In this study, it was found that there was a strong form of solidarity among women wearing hijab. This solidarity is reflected in several aspects: 1) Support Between Hijab Women: Many comments support hijab women, praising them for their courage to express themselves through fashion while still holding religious values. Comments such as "You're inspiring!", "Stay strong!" or "You're beautiful for who you are" often appear as a form of moral support. 2) Identity and Community Strengthening: Hijab-wearing women active on TikTok reinforce each other's identities as modern Muslim women. They form a virtual community that supports each other, where they share sharia fashion tips and provide motivation to continue working. 3) Resistance to Shyness: There is also a form of resistance from women in hijab to sexist comments. They showed steadfastness in the face of criticism by reaffirming their right to express themselves through fashion without sacrificing religious values.

Solidarity in the Hijabers Community in Indonesia is reflected in the members' various activities, such as holding charity events, and social services, and supporting fellow members in various matters, ranging from education to business. They also always support and motivate each other to live a hijab lifestyle and fight for women's rights (A. Bernier, 2023). This solidarity is also seen in how hijabers support each other in overcoming social pressure related to hijab, thus creating a safe and supportive environment for fellow hijabers (Utami et al., 2019).

As time goes by, more and more members of the hijab community are joining this solidarity

movement. Charity activities and social services have become more frequent and diverse, including social initiatives and community empowerment. Not only within the scope of its community but also extends to other communities throughout Indonesia. Solidarity in the hijab community is also reflected in the way they support each other and overcome social pressures related to hijab. They form a strong social network, where community members provide mental and emotional support to each other (Pradesa et al., 2022). They inspire and motivate each other to maintain their trust and identity as hijabers (Jalilvand & Ziadost, 2024). In this safe and supportive environment, every member feels heard and deeply valued.

Solidarity in the Hijabers Community in Indonesia continues to blossom and grow over time. Every day, more and more hijabers are inspired and join this movement, creating a great positive change in society and embracing the values of brotherhood (Hasba, 2022). By joining this community, they find the strength and courage to express their identity proudly, while helping and supporting their fellow hijabers (Sinaga & Tambunan, 2023). So it can be concluded that solidarity in the Hijabers community in Indonesia has a very important role in strengthening the identity of hijab-wearing women and improving their welfare. The Hijabers community has succeeded in creating an environment that supports, empowers, and provides a sense of community for its members.

Sexism as a Challenge

The concept of sexism refers to discriminatory views or treatment of a person based on their gender. Hijab-wearing women often experience sexism in the form of unfair treatment, derogatory comments, or even verbal and physical abuse on social media platforms such as TikTok (Medvi & Syahminan, 2024). Sexist attitudes can be reflected in the view that women in hijab are less modern, backward, or limited in terms of freedom of opinion and uploading content. This shows that there is a negative stigma and stereotype against women wearing hijab in society, which is indirectly a factor that triggers sexism against them in cyberspace.

(Elistya & Arsi, 2024) (Elistya & Arsi, 2024). Seksisme ini dapat menghambat kebebasan mereka dalam mengekspresikan diri dan menimbulkan tekanan sosial yang memaksa mereka untuk memenuhi standar tertentu yang dianggap sesuai oleh masyarakat. Seksisme yang muncul juga mengindikasikan adanya ketidakpahaman yang luas di masyarakat mengenai konsep hijab dan fashion (Aeni, 2022). Many comments show the perception that women in hijab should not follow fashion trends because they are considered contrary to religious values. This shows the need for further education about freedom of expression and the role of the hijab in the lives of modern Muslim women (Chaniago et al., 2022).

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The importance of recognizing the negative impact of sexist actions and views on hijab-wearing women should not be overlooked. When we look at the experience of women wearing hijabs, it is clear that they often have to deal with unfair discrimination. They often face derogatory and humiliating comments, while their rights to express opinions and share content are limited. This is unacceptable, and we need to fight it. Not only in the real world but also in the virtual world, women wearing hijab continue to face harmful sexism. When they use social media platforms like TikTok, they often experience inappropriate verbal and physical abuse (Tanjung et al., 2022). They are seen as unmodern and backward and lack the freedom to speak and share content. This view results from the stigma and stereotypes that grow in our society.

We must eliminate these stigmas and stereotypes as an inclusive and civilized society. Hijab-wearing women have the same right to be respected, heard, and felt in cyberspace (Agustina, 2015). We must help them to fight sexism and stop discriminatory acts against them. By supporting and advocating for equality, we can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all hijab women.

Solidarity as a Form of Resistance

Amid the challenges of sexism, the solidarity formed among hijab-wearing women on TikTok shows the strength of the community in the face of external pressures. This solidarity serves as moral support and a mechanism of resistance against the sexism they face (Sholichah, 2020). Hijab-wearing women support each other in expressing their identities and show that fashion can be a medium for expressing religious values without sacrificing personal freedom (Humaida & Kinasih, 2024). This solidarity also shows how social media can function as a space that allows the marginalization of certain groups, such as women in hijab, to come together and amplify their voices. With platforms like TikTok, hijab-wearing women can express themselves more freely and gain support from the wider community, which they may not have had in the offline world.

Implications of Gender Sexism on TikTok Social Media

This research has several important implications, both academically and practically. These findings point to the need for stricter policies on social media platforms such as TikTok to deal with

sexist and discriminatory comments. Increased moderation and reporting of sexist comments could help create a safer environment for women wearing hijab (Nufus et al., 2021). The results of this study indicate the need for public education about the concepts of gender, sexism, and freedom of expression, especially in the context of Muslim women. These educational programs can help reduce prejudice and harmful stereotypes. It is important to continue to empower the hijab community on social media, whether through community support programs, training, or the development of specialized platforms that support their expression without the threat of sexism (Pithaloka et al., 2023).

Given that TikTok is popular among Gen Z, gender-biased content spread on this platform can shape the younger generation's view of gender and sexuality. If left unsupervised or critically educational, this could become more entrenched in the future, exacerbating gender inequality (Astuti et al., 2023). Women who are targeted by sexist or derogatory comments on social media may experience a decrease in self-confidence. As @Manda's account points out, the fear of being the object of ridicule or criticism can lead to a wider distrust of self-confidence, negatively affecting other aspects of life, including career or education. Content that discriminates against women's clothing choices or lifestyles reinforces gender stereotypes, where women are expected to conform to certain norms (Nejad et al., 2018). This can affect people's views of women's roles, hindering progress in achieving gender equality.

The impact of gender sexism on TikTok users is very diverse, ranging from feeling inferior and depressed to feeling psychologically insecure. Female users are exposed to derogatory comments, objectification, and even sexual harassment on the platform, which can negatively impact their mental and emotional health (Mukti & Asriadi, 2023b). Hateful comments and discrimination are further aggravating this situation. In addition, stereotypical views about gender spread on TikTok can also affect the perception of women and men at large. This forms an unbalanced and unfair mindset, which in turn contributes to perpetuating gender inequality in society (Kamel, 2014). The spread of views that narrow the space for women's movement in various areas of life is also expanding.

As a popular platform among teens and young adults, TikTok has a huge role to play in shaping their views and attitudes towards gender sexism. Content that demeans and insults certain genders can continue to grow rapidly, reinforcing sexist attitudes and behaviors. A digital environment like TikTok should be a safe and inclusive for all users. Efforts to reduce this negative impact must be carried out collectively. TikTok as a platform should tighten policies and involve more effective moderation to prevent sexist and harassing content (Rokan & Monang, 2023). Users, especially those who witness sexist content, should also be more aware of reporting and opposing such behaviors. Cooperation between various parties, including users, platforms, and society, is needed to create a more positive and inclusive platform.

Gender inequality is a problem that exists in many aspects of life, and the use of digital platforms

such as TikTok must be a forum to strengthen equality and remove gender stigma. With a concerted effort to fight sexism and promote attitudes that respect the values of equality, people's views can change and women's mobility becomes wider in all fields (Utomo & Yuliana, 2023). Only with hard work and collective awareness can we transform this platform into a supportive environment for all users, regardless of gender. Efforts to combat gender sexism on TikTok can be carried out through various steps, including establishing clear platform policies related to content that supports gender equality. In addition, TikTok users can be empowered by providing education about the importance of inclusive language use and respect for all genders. Support for content that raises gender issues also needs to be increased so that users can continue to be educated and better understand the importance of gender equality. In addition, forming a community that supports gender equality can also effectively combat sexism on TikTok's social media.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that women wearing hijab on TikTok face significant challenges related to gender sexism, which is reflected in various forms of objectification, negative labeling, and moral judgment through other users' comments. This sexism not only illustrates the still strong patriarchal norms but also indicates a widespread misunderstanding of the concept of hijab and freedom of expression in the context of Muslim fashion. On the other hand, despite the many challenges faced, the strong solidarity among the hijab-wearing female community on TikTok has become an effective form of resistance to sexism. They support each other, strengthen their identities as modern Muslim women, and fight against harmful stereotypes. This solidarity shows how social media, which is often a challenging space for women in hijab, can also be an important arena to fight for their right to express themselves without having to face discrimination based on gender or religion. The study also emphasizes the importance of stricter policies and broader public education to address sexism on social media, as well as the need to empower the hijab-wearing women's community to continue to thrive and express themselves positively on digital platforms. Overall, the findings of this study show that despite the great challenges, the hijab-wearing women's community on TikTok can transform this digital space into a more inclusive and supportive place, which reinforces their positive representation amid the prevailing dynamics of gender sexism.

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