



## **BAN CONVERSION THERAPY IN ASIA: DIGITAL ACTIVISM IN ILGA ASIA'S TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY NETWORKS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, etc (LGBTQ+) issues are still debated in society. Until now, LGBTQ+ people face many obstacles in fighting for their rights. Movement space has become a polemic for LGBTQ+ people throughout the world. In some countries, healing therapy or called conversion therapy is even implemented. This is said to be a way that can cure LGBTQ+ people that aimed at changing people's sexual orientation or gender identity. However, in practice the therapy is conducted without regard for human safety, involving mental and physical torture. Therefore, conversion therapy must be abolished because of harmful and abusive practice. It has encouraged the emergence of social movements against conversion therapy in various countries, including Asia. Through this research, the author aims to analyze the strategy of the movement to eliminate conversion therapy in Asia carried out by ILGA Asia. This research uses a qualitative descriptive research method by collecting secondary data through online and printed literature. By using new social movement theory, transnational advocacy networks and the concept of digital activism, the author will analyze how ILGA Asia carries out social prohibition conversion therapy movements in Asia and the actors involved in each country, namely Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Through this research, the author found that ILGA Asia uses digital activism through online petitions and videos on social media in carrying out its movement and involving local non-governmental organizations in each country.

**Keywords:** Conversion Therapy, Digital Activism, Movement, Transnational Advocacy Networks

### **INTRODUCTION**

Currently, the LGBTQ+ phenomenon (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and others) is a prominent subject of discussion and a topic of debate in society. The LGBTQ+ phenomenon generates both support and opposition within the

community. This has led to unfair treatment directed at LGBTQ+ individuals, such as discrimination within family environments, where they may be disowned and stigmatized, as well as within the workplace. Such actions are against the principles of Human Rights, which advocate for the universal and comprehensive rights of all individuals, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, culture, and so on. The rights sought by the LGBTQ+ community include recognition from governments, non-discrimination in public, and the advocacy for LGBTQ+ individuals to marry their same-sex partners.

The pervasive discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals has contributed to the rising of harmful practice known as conversion therapy. This therapy aims to "cure" LGBTQ+ individuals of their perceived deviant behaviors, which often involving physical violence. Conversion therapy is a highly dangerous practice for its recipients (OutRight, 2019). The implementation includes various practices and methods. Conversion therapy proponents believe that LGBTQ+ individuals need to be "cured." Various forms of conversion therapy exist in different countries, such as exorcism methods in Mozambique, isolation from outside world in Ukraine, and drug consumption and exposure to explicit content in Sri Lanka (OutRight, 2019).

Asia is one of the continents where the practice of painful conversion therapy practices is common spread. This practice emerges from the marginalization and multiple forms of stigma as well as discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Asia (Muliastuti, 2022). In Asia, conversion therapy is carried out in countries like China, South Korea, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The application of conversion therapy varies from country to country; for instance, China employs electric shocks, medication, confinement, and other methods, while in India, they work along with "Baba" groups (a community of healers), performing practices such as electric shocks, corrective rape, and other methods (OutRight, 2019).

LGBTQ+ individuals face numerous challenges in Asia, as proven by widespread discrimination under the guise of religion. For instance, Christian groups gather to promote conversion therapy in South Korea. Not only in South Korea, but Indonesia also believe that religion is utilized to present conversion therapy as akin to a religious practice, like *ruqyah*. This explains why conversion therapy is viewed as acceptable the general

public's opinion in Asia, as it is often packaged with religious justifications (OutRight, 2019).

One of the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) advocating for the ban of conversion therapy in Asia is ILGA Asia (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association). ILGA Asia firmly believes that conversion therapy must be halted because, in general, they aim to raise awareness among the entire Asian population about the traumatic and enduring physical and mental effects of conversion therapy (ILGA Asia, 2023a). LGBTQ+ individual from Indonesia testified about the detrimental impact of conversion therapy on their mental health, describing it as a profoundly negative experience (ILGA Asia, 2023b). The diverse dynamics of Asian societies, opposing views of each country on conversion therapy practices, varying regulations in each country, and geographical barriers bring impact towards ILGA Asia's efforts to advocate for the elimination of conversion therapy. Therefore, this study aims to examine ILGA Asia's strategies in their movement to ban conversion therapy in Asia.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Violations of LGBTQ+ rights that occur in almost every country in Asia are based on religious values, moral standards and stigma. This encouraged the emergence of a movement to fight for the rights of LGBT groups in Asia. Using the concepts of transnational activism and collective identity, Muliastuti's (2022) article focuses on the formation of Asian LGBT identities and how these identities influence the discursiveness of the LGBT rights movement.

Muliastuti (2022) found that the agenda for the movement of LGBT rights in Asia was manifested through identity formation in the Being LGBT in Asia initiative. This movement does not only involve LGBT groups and activists, but also involves international organizations such as UNDP and USAID (Muliastuti, 2022). The process of transnational diffusion and mobilization in this initiative is facilitated by the internet and digital platforms. Muliastuti's writing has similarities with the author's writing in terms of topic, namely discussing the LBGT movement in Asia, but does not specifically discuss conversion therapy. Muliastuti focuses more on the construction of collective identity in the transnationalization of movements, while the author will focus on actors in transnational advocacy networks. Even though it discusses the use of the internet in the

process of diffusion and mobilization of movements, Muliastuti's writing does not use the concept of digital activism as the author's focus.

Movements by non-state actors to encourage the legalization of LGBT Rights in Thailand were discussed by Tyas (2019). Non-state actors form a Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) which seeks to achieve this goal. By focusing on the movement in Thailand, Tyas's article examines TANs efforts to push for the legality of LGBT Rights which have not been widely discussed.

By using the theory of transnational advocacy networks and the boomerang pattern approach, Tyas (2019) found various advocacy network efforts that encouraged LGBT people to achieve equality and urged the Thai government to realize the legality policy of LGBT Rights through the gender equality act B.E 2558 in 2015. Tyas's article has the same topic as the author, namely discussing the movement for LGBT issues using the theory of transnational advocacy networks. However, Tyas's writing focuses on the legalization of LGBT rights, while this article focuses on resistance to conversion therapy and discusses the use of digital activism which is not discussed in Tyas's writing.

A study of digital activism in the LBGT movement was written by Kilic (2023). Kilic examines the LBGTI+ movement in Turkey as a form of protest against the ban on LBGTI+ public events and gatherings. By using the concept of online activism, Kilic focuses his study on the role of hashtags (#) in digital activism on the Twitter platform. Kilic (2023) found that the LBGTI+ movement in Turkey was carried out using social media Twitter through the hashtag campaign #HerYürüyüşümüzOnurYürüyüşü (Every Parade of Ours is a Pride Parade). Hashtag campaign as part of digital activism also support network building in public spaces. Kilic's article helps the author understand the important role of digital media/social media in supporting the LBGT movement, but the author will not focus on studying Twitter hashtag campaigns. The author not only discusses digital activism in the LBGT movement in general but focuses on the rejection of Conversion Therapy.

Previous studies discussing movements against conversion therapy are very minimal. George (2017) examines the movement of LBGT rights groups to demand the legalization of a ban on conversion therapy in America. This is a major part of their legislative agenda. However, the law only applies to licensed mental health professionals,

even though in practice most conversion therapy is carried out by religious counsellor and lay clergy. George (2017) found that LGBT rights advocates expended a great deal of effort and political capital to create laws even though the laws did not reach all conversion therapy practitioners. The movement to ban conversion therapy is included as an expressive function, rather than prescriptive effects (George, 2017). The law is a very valuable achievement for human rights defenders, as it has the potential to change social norms and support a far-reaching agenda, thereby creating space for the strategies of the LGBT rights movement to develop. George's writing has a similar topic to this article, namely discussing the conversion therapy resistance movement, but George's writing does not discuss the movement through digital activism in Asia.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this paper the authors use new social movement theory, the concepts of transnational advocacy networks and digital activism in analysing the strategy of the movement to eliminate conversion therapy in Asia carried out by ILGA Asia. Melucci argues that the post-modern world brings new forms of social control, conformity, pressure, and information processing to which the New Social Movement responds. Movements are sparked by new situations of conflict intertwined with everyday life; The conflict itself includes symbolic codes, identity claims, and personal or expressive claims (Sukmana, 2016).

Social movements play an important role as messages that express oppositional tendencies and modalities. People's tendency to engage in collective action is related to their ability to identify identities in the first place because the movement focuses on the personal, spiritual and expressive aspects. This also means that a social construction of collective identity is the main prerequisite and major achievement of the New Social Movements. This also includes examining the LGBT movement as part of the identity struggle. In this article the author uses new social movement theory to examine the LGBT movement as part of a new social movement.

Some issue areas reproduce transnationally the webs of personal relationships that are crucial in the formation of domestic networks. Advocacy networks have been particularly important in value-laden debates over human rights, the environment, women, infant health, and indigenous peoples (Keck and Sikkink, 1999). Advocacy networks are

significant transnationally, regionally and domestically. TANs is an advocacy network that has a role as a pressure group on an issue or policy that is deemed not to meet its objectives.

Keck and Sikkink (1999) classify this transnational advocacy network into seven main actors, namely 1) international and domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs), research and advocacy organizations; (2) local social movements; (3) foundations; (4) the media; (5) churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, intellectuals; (6) parts of regional and international intergovernmental organizations; (7) parts of the executive and/or parliamentary branches of government (Keck & Sikkink, 1999). In every advocacy network that is formed, all of these actors are not always present. However, international and domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a central role in most advocacy networks, usually initiating actions and pressuring more powerful actors to take positions. NGOs introduce new ideas, provide information, and lobby for policy changes. Many transnational advocacy networks link activists in developed countries with others in or from less developed countries. These kinds of linkages are most commonly intended to affect the behaviour of states.

In its development, the movement carried out by the transnational advocacy network was also assisted by various digital media which is often called digital activism or online activism. Digital activism refers to a series of activities or campaigns that use digital technology and networks comprehensively and exclusively (Rahmawan, Mahameruaji, & Janitra, 2020). Digital activism is also defined as social activism mediated through digital technologies to promote social movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). From this understanding, it can be drawn that the main element of digital activism is the use of digital technology to accommodate digital action aimed at creating social change. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube are also an important part of digital activism.

Online activism is divided into three categories, namely: (1) awareness/advocacy, the internet is used to increase public awareness regarding a cause which is carried out by disseminating information related to events or issues that are not reported/not reported by traditional information channels to efforts to organize or mobilize action; (2) organization/mobilization, the internet is used to mobilize which can be done in three ways, namely

spreading invitations to take offline actions, online actions which are generally carried out online, and invitations to take online actions; (3) action/reaction which refers to hacktivism activities (Vegh, 2013).

George and Leidner (2019) categories digital activism into 10 activities include:

1. Clicktivism is a category of digital activism which discusses social media by dividing it into 3 things, namely liking, voting and following.
2. Metavoicing is a category that assesses individuals from the way an individual shares, retweets and comments on social media.
3. Assertion is a category that describes content creation on social media through audio, video, photos and text media. Assertion assesses from likes and retweets.
4. Political Consumerism is a category that assesses individuals' views on their consumerism habits, by looking at what they buy has an impact on businesses that match their views.
5. Digital Petition is a method aimed at changing policies by inviting people to sign petitions online (Linder, 2011).
6. Botivism is virtual activism that combines bots or artificial intelligence with activists. This aims to get the public's attention to what a person or group has created.
7. E-Funding is a category that discusses how digital and funding are combined for certain purposes.
8. Data Activism is a category that explains how politics and social activism can work, data activism has the aim of promoting individuals to gain power.
9. Exposure is a way to spread confidential information in an unauthorized way such as through WikiLeaks, press releases or social media.
10. Hacktivism is a method aimed at hacking organizations or individuals with social or political goals

In this paper, the concept of TANs is used to analyse the actors involved in the transnational network of movements carried out by ILGA ASIA to prohibit conversion therapy in Asia. The concept of digital activism is used to analyse the methods used by ILGA ASIA in carrying out its movement with its transnational network which prioritizes the use of internet support and digital platforms.

## **METHOD**

The aim of this research is to analyze the strategy of the movement by ILGA ASIA to eliminate conversion therapy in Asia. This research uses qualitative research methods. According to Bagman and Taylor, qualitative methodology is defined as a research procedure that produces data descriptions in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior (Sugiono, 2005). Meanwhile, the type of research used by researchers is a qualitative descriptive type that studies existing problems and applicable work procedures. This qualitative descriptive research aims to obtain information about the existing situation. Data collection was carried out through literature studies carried out through online searches of books and journals about transnational movements, especially LGBTQ+ and conversion therapy, websites, social media and YouTube ILGA ASIA and other actors involved in this movement.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

### **ILGA ASIA's Movement to Fight for LGBT Rights**

Established in 2002, International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Asia serves as a International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) representing around 100 member organizations in the Asian region (ILGA, n.d). The organization envisions a world as a safe place in which people can live as equal beings, free from discrimination regardless of their Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, and Sex Characteristic (hereinafter referred to as SOGIESC) (ILGA, 2022). This vision aligns with its mission, which are to: 1) promote human rights, fundamental freedom, and elimination of discrimination; 2) advocating equality of human beings notwithstanding their SOGIESC; and 3) empower LGBTQ+ communities, especially in Asia region.

To actualize the aforesaid visions and missions, ILGA Asia (n.d)A promotes several strategic objectives, consists of:

1. Strengthen the capability of LGBT civil society in terms of human rights mechanism; equipped the members with training on human rights, facilitate grassroots communities, advocate the case of violations against LGBT and uphold the values of human rights;

2. Enhance the public awareness towards SOGIESC issues through influential figures, such as family and religious leaders; improve the understanding of knowledge of SOGIESC and collaborate with religious figures in discourses;
3. Provides repository under the purpose of sharing knowledge and information of SOGIESC issues in Asian region; establish a database in form of website and foster communication and advocacy;
4. Enhance the capabilities of ILGA Asia Executive Board and Staff in governance, project management, financial oversight, performance assessment, and fundraising areas; capacity building for board member, strengthen technical system in the respective organization;
5. Collaboration and networking among the LGBT communities; coordinate ILGA Asia Regional Conference

Referring to Melucci's opinion (Sukmana, 2016) so the movement carried out by ILGA ASIA as a non-governmental organization that focuses on LGBTQ+ people include identity claims, namely recognition of the existence of LGBTQ+ people as well as personal or expressive claims, including their rights as part of human rights. This movement responding to human rights violations includes the rejection of conversion therapy.

The issue of conversion therapy was first introduced to ILGA Asia in the 7th ILGA Asia Regional Conference in 2018. It is stated in the conference that within the past few years, there has been various forms of violence across the region incited by the governments and religious extremists, such as the state-sponsored conversion therapy in Malaysia (Asia Pacific Transgender Network, 2019). Seeing the human right violations involving conversion therapies, ILGA Asia feels as since one of their mechanisms involves responding to any violations of LGBTQ+ human rights or challenges of human rights mandates, it is their obligation to help advocate for the ban of conversion therapy (ILGA Asia, n.d.). The renewal of the mandate of the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity at the UN Human Rights Council in 2022 further cemented the need for commitment towards advocating the ban of conversion therapy (ILGA Asia, 2022). Thus, in March 2023, ILGA Asia officially launched a regional campaign to end conversion therapy in Asia, collaborating with All Out and local organizations (ILGA Asia, 2023).

## **Digital Activism by ILGA ASIA with Transnational Networks Against Conversion Therapy**

The regional campaign to end conversion therapy in Asia by ILGA ASIA was implemented in 4 countries, namely, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka. In carrying out the movement to reject conversion therapy in Asia, ILGA ASIA does not move alone. ILGA ASIA develops transnational networks in its movement through digital activism by collaborating with other non- state actors.

### ***India***

As a country with a Hindu majority, along with its history of rich culture, the awareness of the existence of divergent type of sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (hereinafter referred to as SOGIE) is relatively modest (APTN, n.d). The presumption of gender normative in the society resulted in marginalized gender minorities and the lack of acknowledgement towards the gender-diverse individuals. Furthermore, this situation has put the minorities in perpetuation, to name a few: rejection by their family, harassment, inability to gain access to healthcare, and so forth.

As stated by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2012, in India, homosexuality is considered as sinful. However, on February 2012, the Central Government stated that homosexual behavior was legally accepted (Krishna, et al., 2023). The bill to decriminalize Section 377 of Indian Penal Code<sup>1</sup> was introduced, nonetheless got rejected. Fast forward, in 2018, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was dismantled, implying that homosexuality was decriminalized (Krishna, et al., 2023). In spite of their SOGIE, the Supreme Court has recognized that they are entitled to freedom. Despite the decriminalization of homosexuality in India, in fact, the social stigma towards LGBT

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<sup>1</sup> Section 377 of Indian Penal Code stated that: “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with: 1) [imprisonment for life], or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine”

community has not progressively diminished (Daigavane & Das, 2020). The discrimination towards the community still exists, even worse, the individuals have to live in fear due to the existing conversion therapy. In 2022, a case of conversion therapy came from Div, a 17-year-old queer, who was taken to a temple by her parents in order to be “fixed” (Mij, 2022). Another case coming from Anjana, a 21-year-old bisexual which committed suicide after being forced to get the conversion therapy (Daigavane & Das, 2020). The aforementioned cases were just samples from the long list of victims of this destructive therapy.

While the practice of conversion therapy has been banned on the Madras High Court<sup>2</sup> in 2021, up until today, conversion therapy remains legal in India and the practice continues openly in the country, although not normally advertised (Lynch, 2023). Albeit the National Medical Commission (NMC)<sup>3</sup> has banned the therapy and classified it as a form of “misconduct”, there are still reported cases of the therapy being conducted (Datta, 2022). As on 2023, a practice of conversion therapy by health practitioner being reported after Lynch, a journalist, went undercover as a ‘gay woman’ (Lynch, 2023). After further investigation, it is reported that the victims underwent a poor dietary process. Besides, they were also given pills as a cure for their so-called illness (Lynch, 2023).

In India, the movements against conversion therapy have been massively performed (All Out, n.d). “Stop Conversion Therapy in India” petition was posted on All Out as a form of collaboration between ILGA Asia and other local NGOs: 1) Yugantar, a non-governmental organization focusing in women and LGBTQIA+, urban life, and governance issues; 2) Trans Right Now Collective, a community of trans people that is working in education, workplace, and politics realm; and 3) Sahodaran Chennai, a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to support sexual minorities. These entities share the same goals which were envisioned in the same movement, which is the creation of digital petition via All Out platform. Through the conception of digital activism, George and Leidner (2019) classified this movement as a digital petition. In addition, Yugantar

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<sup>2</sup> Madras High Courts is one of three high courts in India

<sup>3</sup> NMC is a regulatory body of medical professionals in India

collaborated with ILGA Asia has created a YouTube video to share a story of conversion therapy in India, by which this action can be categorized as assertion under the concept made by George and Leidner.

### ***Bangladesh***

The topics of sexual identity and gender diversity are often considered complex in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh society, other sexual orientation aside from heterosexual is prohibited and considered unacceptable. Section 377 of Bangladesh penal code of 1860 prohibits any sexual relations between any man, woman, or animal against the order of nature, effectively banning any same-sex relationship. A report published by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in 2021 about the lives of Bangladesh's LGBTQ+ Community finds that over 50% of the respondent has faced discrimination, physical violence, mental torture, verbal harassment, and even sexual harassment solely because of their sexual and gender identity (Macdonald, 2021). Several participants confessed that they faced sexual abuse almost every day and being raped and assaulted is a common occurrence. To make matters worse, stigma towards homosexuality caused members of the LGBTQ+ community in Bangladesh to have very few options for help. Refusal of treatment and harassment are a common occurrence while trying to access healthcare in Bangladesh (Macdonald, 2021).

Aside from the harassment and abuse, there are also cases of conversion therapy forced upon members of the community in Bangladesh. Numerous members of the community have recounted stories of them being sent by their parents or guardian to a drug rehabilitation facility and forced to take sedatives, wear traditional clothing, and recite the Quran. The Bangladesh government had not addressed this situation nor taken any measures to ban these so-called conversion therapy (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labor United States of America, 2022).

To combat this situation, ILGA Asia, along with the partnered NGOs has conducted numerous types of digital activism to ban the practices of conversion therapy, one of which is content creation. With the help of local NGOs such as Inclusive Bangladesh, Noboprobhaat Foundation, Somporker Noya Setu and Prantoz Foundation, ILGA Asia successfully hosted an interview in order to spread awareness to the horrors faced by survivors of conversion therapy in Bangladesh. The interview titled "Conversion Therapy

in Bangladesh: Tarin's Story” tells a story about the cruel practices of conversion therapy and how the practice damages the mental and physical health of its victims. The existence of the interview helps the cause in engaging with the audience in order to create a sense of caring between the audience and the cause. Aside from content creation, ILGA Asia has also collaborated with All Out to create a digital petition to ban the practice of conversion therapy in Bangladesh. This petition has also been shared and re-shared numerous times by ILGA Asia and its various partners in order to amplify and spread awareness and advocate the cause (All Out, 2023).

With all of the collaborations with the local NGOs and All Out, ILGA Asia has managed to carry out activities of digital activism as mentioned by George & Leidner (2019). Those activities include Digital Petitions, the creation of digital petition, which can be seen by the collaboration of ILGA Asia and All Out to ban conversion therapy in Bangladesh; and Assertion, the creation of content for the purpose of social or political movement, which can also be seen by the collaboration with ILGA Asia and Local NGOs in Bangladesh to conduct an interview with the survivor of conversion therapy in order to advocate the practice in Bangladesh.

### ***Indonesia***

As a predominantly Muslim country, religion plays a crucial role in Indonesia's society, thus the issues of gender diversity and sexual identity are still considered as a taboo topic and rarely discussed. The early 2010s marked the rise of homophobia in Indonesia (Ridwan & Wu, 2018). In this era, numerous anti-LGBT incidents occur in Indonesia, a series of anti-LGBT public comments by a few of government officials grew into a cascade of abuse and threats against the LGBTQ+ community by government, extreme Islamist, and religious organizations and Non- Governmental Organizations. Currently, there is no national law pertaining to the prosecution of the LGBTQ+ community for existing in Indonesia. Even though being part of the LGBTQ+ community is not punishable by law, harassment and prejudice still happens frequently (Ridwan & Wu, 2018).

The existence of conversion therapy is also one of the threats that they have to face. A report published by Asia Pacific Transgender Network in 2021 regarding the practices of conversion therapy in Indonesia, finds that most of the respondents were subjected to

conversion therapy from a young age. Most of the practices of conversion therapy in Indonesia disguises itself as a form of religious practices such as *ruqyah* for Muslims and pastoral counseling for Christians (Asia Pacific Transgender Network, 2021). Thus, as a religious country, the Indonesian government had not shown any significant responses towards the issue.

Responding to the situation at hand, ILGA Asia has collaborated with numerous local NGOs and communities to alleviate the problem, such as: (1) GAYa Nusantara, one of the pioneers of queer organization in Indonesia; (2) Yayasan Pesona Bumi Pasundan, an HIV/AIDS Response Organization based in Bogor; (3) Pelangi Nusantara, an international advocacy community for the betterment of Indonesia's LGBTQ+ Community and; (3) Arus Pelangi, an organization focused on advocating the rights of individuals and SOGIESC community in Indonesia; all four of those NGOs and communities has been part of the ILGA Asia's effort to advocate for the ban of conversion therapy in Indonesia (ILGA Asia, 2023).

Those efforts include a collaboration with All Out to create a digital petition in order to urge the Indonesian government to enforce a complete and nationwide ban on the practice of conversion therapy (All Out, 2023). This action is consistent with one of the activities of digital activism as mentioned by George & Leidner (2019), the act of Digital Petition. Another effort includes collaboration with Pelangi Nusantara, along with Arus Pelangi and GaYa Nusantara in terms of metavoicing. As they have shared the digital petition to ban conversion therapy in Indonesia numerous times during the ongoing collaboration with ILGA Asia.

Not only that, Pelangi Nusantara, as one of the community that collaborated with ILGA Asia, have made numerous content on their instagram page promoting the ban of conversion therapy in indonesia such as an interview titled "Conversion Therapy in Indonesia: Arisdo's Story" conducted with one of the survivors of conversion therapy, Arisdo Gonzales. The interview was conducted in an attempt to engage with the audiences on an emotional level. Digital activist has long learned that in order to truly captivate the audience and humanize the victims, a logical argument alone is not enough, as such digital activist such as Pelangi Nusantara and ILGA Asia has resorted to a storytelling format so the audience can resonate and sympathize with the victims and eventually support the

cause. According to George & Leidner (2019), the creation of content, such as conducting an interview and promoting it through a post, is one of the tactics that can be employed by digital activists to advocate for their cause.

With those collaborations, ILGA Asia has managed to successfully conduct various activities of digital activism as mentioned by George & Leidner (2019). These collaborations include Digital Petition, the act of creating a digital petition in order to change policies; Metavoicing, the amplification of a user's opinion through re-sharing; and Assertion, the act of content creation for the purpose of a social or political movement (George & Leidner, 2019). In which all three of those collaborations can be seen on all of ILGA Asia's partners in this campaign; such as Pelangi Nusantara's Instagram page, Arus Pelangi's Instagram page, or All Out's Website.

### *Sri Lanka*

Sri Lanka Country Report published by ILGA Asia in 2021 stated various challenges the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer) community face in Sri Lanka. The prime challenge is the protection and economic, social, and cultural rights improvement concerning the discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, the Samurdhi program, which provides assistance to those living below the poverty line, is not extended to LGBTQ+ and SOGIESC individuals.

Through their endeavor of activism across Asia, ILGA Asia has initiated petitions and created video content to shed light on the practice of conversion therapy in Sri Lanka. The video titled "Conversion Therapy in Sri Lanka: Dimithri's Story," told about how they conduct an interview where Dimithri discusses parents' concern when their children exhibit LGBTQ+ symptoms, leading them to seek out conversion therapy as a "cure." Within these conversion therapy centers, individuals are examined by psychiatrist named Ruby Ruben who promotes conversion therapy through the mainstream media. Ruby offers treatments for depression and give sleeping pills, encourages ongoing treatment, and even suggests watching pornography as the method to become "normal." In addition, there is Kapuwa, a religious figure who engages in physical assault and exorcism of LGBTQ+ individuals, the highly detrimental practice. Furthermore, the government doesn't offer defensive resolution or legislation to protect the LGBTQ+ community, leaving them without government support and protection (ILGA Asia, 2023c). In their

campaign to ban conversion therapy in Sri Lanka, ILGA Asia collaborates with a Sri Lankan national community, the Community Welfare and Development Fund (CWDF), as well as two NGOs, DAST and Equal Ground (ILGA Asia, 2023a). These three intuitions cooperate with ILGA Asia in their efforts to ban conversion therapy.

CWDF is a community organization established in February 2018 by queer activists and education advocacy groups. The Planet Romeo Foundation initiated the founding of CWDF with the goal of contributing to equal rights and opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals. CWDF, in conjunction with its transnational network, including All Out, DAST, Bridge to Equality, and Equal Ground Sri Lanka, conducts movement activities such as petition creation (All Out, 2023b). The second NGO that ILGA Asia collaborates with is the Diversity And Solidarity Trust (DAST). DAST's mission is to provide services for the LGBTQ community. DAST is formed by Bride to Equality, whose objectives involves advocating for LGBTQ human rights in Sri Lanka using international human rights law. This is made possible by the International Commission of Justice (ICJ), a non-governmental organization dedicated to human rights advocacy and legal aid worldwide (ICJ, n.d) providing support for Bridge. DAST's services include providing affirmation of rights and human rights responses to LGBTQ+ individuals in Sri Lanka. Alongside ILGA Asia, All Out, CWDF, and Equal Ground, they collaborate to work on a petition to ban conversion therapy in Sri Lanka (All Out, 2023b). Last is Equal Ground, established in 2008, is the third NGO partnering with ILGA Asia. Equal Ground focuses on LGBTQ+ rights, including counseling, providing safe spaces, and publications (EQUAL WORK, 2023). The collaboration between Equal Ground, ILGA Asia, All Out, CWDF, and DAST aims to create a petition to ban conversion therapy in Sri Lanka (All Out, 2023b).

Analyzing these movements through the concept of digital activism as described by George and Leidner, the movements conducted by the three NGOs (CWDF, DAST, Equal Ground) can be classified as a form of metavoicing. This is substantiated by individual activities of sharing and commenting on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on behalf of these NGOs. Digital movements through assertion is evident in the creation and dissemination of content in the form of videos, photos, and text uploaded to social media platforms by these NGOs in support of LGBTQ+ human rights. The movement in digital petitions is demonstrated through the collaboration between these three NGOs and ILGA Asia and All Out in their joint effort to ban conversion therapy in

Sri Lanka. In conclusion, the activities of these NGOs in Sri Lanka are associated with metavoicing, assertion, and digital petitions within the realm of digital activism.

According to classification of seven main actors in transnational advocacy network from Keck and Sikkink (1999), it was found that in the movement to ban conversion therapy in Asia, ILGA ASIA builds transnational network in 4 countries involving other non-state actors, namely NGOs and advocacy organization, community as part of local social movements and the media. There are several local NGOs and advocacy organizations involved, In Bangladesh such as Inclusive Bangladesh, Noboprobhaat Foundation, Somporker Noya Setu and Prantoz Foundation, NGOs in Indonesia such as GAYa Nusantara and Pesona Bumi Pasundan Foundation, local NGOs from India, namely Yugantar and Sahodaran Chennai, and two NGOs in Sri Lanka, namely DAST and Equal Ground. Other non-state actors involved are communities like an international advocacy community based in Indonesia, Pelangi Nusantara, a community in India namely Trans Right Now Collective and a national community from Sri Lanka namely the Community Welfare and Development Fund (CWDF). ILGA ASIA also build transnational networks involves digital media platform as media representation, namely collaborating with All Out to coordinate with various local or national NGOs in several countries such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka to create a campaign and video testimonies from former conversion therapy patients in each country (ILGA ASIA, 2023a). All Out is a digital media as part of a global movement that voices justice for LGBT+ and provides petition creation for LGBT Rights on its platform.

In the development of the movement to ban conversion therapy carried out by ILGA ASIA together with the transnational advocacy network, use various digital media which is often called digital activism. From the analysis it was found that the in this collaboration shows three activities of digital activism including metavoicing, shown by the numerous re-shares post on social media; assertion, which can be seen by the interview organized by ILGA Asia with a conversion therapy survivor in Bangladesh, Indonesia; and digital petitions which could be seen by the collaboration of ILGA Asia and All Out to ban conversion therapy in Asia. Based on the digital activism category according to Vegh (2013), the digital activism carried out by ILGA ASIA together with its transnational networks is included in the awareness/advocacy category where activities are carried out using digital media to increase public awareness like using video or post about the practice

of conversion therapy which harmful and violation of human rights and also in the organization/mobilization category where digital media is used to take online actions such as creating petitions. The analysis also shows that digital media helps expand the movement's reach beyond the geographic boundaries usually found in networked activism carried out offline.

## **CONCLUSION**

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Asia is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that represents organizations across the Asian region. It is dedicated to the promotion of equality and non-discrimination in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. The effort to ban conversion therapy is one of the key concerns that ILGA Asia has prioritized. ILGA Asia has reacted to human rights violations related to conversion therapy and is committed to campaigning for a ban on conversion therapy when LGBTQ+ human rights are at stake. The effort includes recognizing the existence of LGBTQ+ people and personal or expressive claims that uphold their rights as part of human

rights. Opposition to conversion therapy has been an important part of this effort. ILGA ASIA has worked with other non-state actors, including NGOs, advocacy organizations, the community and the media, as part of local social movements to build a transnational network in India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The campaign to outlaw conversion therapy, undertaken by ILGA ASIA in collaboration with the transnational advocacy network, employs diverse digital tools referred to as digital activism. The collaboration highlighted three digital activism activities: metavoicing, proven by the many reposts on social media; assertion, exemplified by ILGA Asia's interview with a survivor of conversion therapy in all four countries; and digital petitions, demonstrated by the joint effort of ILGA Asia and All Out to ban conversion therapy in Asia. The digital activism performed by ILGA ASIA and its transnational networks falls within two categories. The first is awareness and advocacy, which involves employing digital media to increase public awareness, for example by creating videos or posting about the harmful and human rights-violating practice of conversion therapy. The second is organization and mobilization, which utilizes digital media to take online action like creating petitions. Digital media facilitates the expansion

of the movement's reach beyond the geographical boundaries that are typically associated with offline networked activism.

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