



Urban Consumerism Trends in Asia

Last May, there was an astonishing infographic by Kompas.id about piles of 'food' waste in big cities in Indonesia. The report describes that for food waste alone, Jakarta reaches 3 million tons per year with a simulated pile height of 514 meters even though the Monas Monument is only 132 meters high. Surabaya 811,255 tons with a simulated height of 106.5 meters.

This finding shows how the lifestyle of urban people is very easy to throw away food. As a result of consumerism and the diminishing understanding of the blessings of sustenance, urban communities are increasingly consumptive. Even our children eat Boba and buy iced tea every day, young people cannot escape from a cup of coffee from many cafes. So, I remember the story of my parents, mothers in ancient Indonesia were always careful in throwing away food, they were afraid of being judged in the Hereafter. Even leftover rice is dried in the sun, processed again so that it is not wasted.

This phenomenon is just one piece of stories about consumerism, waste and environmental problems that are common symptoms of urban society globally. This, of course, cannot be separated from the perspective of Capitalism and global brands who always view the population as the target market, no different from the population in Asia. This perspective is what drives consumerism to emerge as a colossal trend emanating from capitalistic values and systems. Especially in Asia, the most populated region in the world which accounts for half of global consumption growth in the next decade.

Digitization is also accelerating the flow of consumerism, with Asian Markets leading in terms of e-commerce and fintech. This is especially true because China has contributed to more than half of the world's e-commerce retail sales. The country's sales value exceeds the total of Europe and the United States combined. In fact, the largest population of digital buyers in the world belongs to China, which amounts to more than 780 million people. Consumers from other countries in Asia Pacific are also starting to increase digital consumers. According to a report from Bain & Company, Southeast Asia's digital consumer population is expected to reach around 380 million by 2026.

Value and Cultural Challenge

Lifestyle is the outermost formation of a civilization, which is rooted in the ideology and fundamental values adopted by a society. Likewise, the consumptive lifestyle that dominates urban residents, this level of consumption is not a coincidence or just a mere tradition, but a reflection of the formation of certain values and systems adopted by a nation. Therefore, we need to complete our glasses in reading consumerism as a value challenge that is internalized in a society, besides of course seeing it as an Islamic normative limitation regarding halal and haram.

Today we see that the condition of urban society is actually running in decline and is plagued by various damages. This can be seen from how consumptive urban families are and make consumption activities a standard of success when all their needs are met. Working mothers and fathers have careers, monthly salaries, insurance and bank loans to meet all their needs including their children's education and health costs, not to forget the mortgage and car payments. For them, this is fulfilment because they have successfully 'struggled' to meet real needs, including basic needs. This "low level struggle" lifestyle makes their lives never improve, individualism is increasingly widespread because they are self-centred people who don't care about other people because they feel the burden of life is already heavy. Plus, the role of religion is weakened in family building, as a result they are not able to think long and are no longer sensitive to halal and haram.

They just follow the flow of materialism and pragmatism in urban areas and become part of a secular consumer-industrial society. That is to make them consumers of prestigious brands, whether it's cell phones, luxury cars or traveling for tours. Luxury for them is the ability to reach the price of these goods, which is considered to increase their social status in society. As a result, the values of hedonism from the philosophy of utilitarianism have increasingly penetrated into urban families. Ironic, even though they are all just consumers, there is no achievement that contributes to the wider audience, other than just consuming it.

An ideology has its own capacity to give a distinctive immersion to human activities living in a particular society. At first glance, we can see that there is nothing wrong with consumption activities in fulfilling the necessities of life, as long as we as Muslims apply the standards which are halal and haram. However, Capitalism has given a different dip when consumption has become the standard of community satisfaction, which affects human instincts and prestige.

Wrapped in the values of materialism and hedonism, consumption activities have developed into a culture of showing off (flexing) and being proud to be a consumer of branded goods just for fear of being considered 'outdated' in order to fulfil their prestige. This culture of showing off continues to develop into social pressures and even mental stressors and eventually turns Muslims into love of wealth and love of the world. It is this materialistic ideology and system that encourages the uncontrolled consumption of goods and services by individuals, driven by the desire to have even though they don't really need it.

Political Challenge

In the capitalist development school, state actors only act as facilitators and regulators on an equal footing with other actors. The real rulers are the oligarchs who are the main actors of capitalistic development, they are the ones who hold the helm of public strategic assets that monopolize the lives of many people. As Noreena Hertz said, the democratic system becomes expensive because it has an affair with the capitalist system. His illegitimate son is an oligarch. Consumerism as a capitalistic value order is strongly influenced by the superstructure of secular civilization, with its physical infrastructure being malls in urban areas, usurious banking institutions, the development of digital cities, and growth centers such as the CBD area.

Many large shopping malls are located in urban areas, reflecting the two world megatrends that are shaping today's global capitalist economy: (1) the rising global consumer class and (2) urbanization. Both megatrends hit a tipping point in this century. In 2008, the world became an urban majority and by 2019, the World Data Lab projects that half the world will be middle class or richer.

Capitalist elites even have projections that by the end of 2021, there will be 4 billion people in the global consumer class, and, if there is no major economic crisis, the global consumer class will reach 5.2 billion people by 2030. worthy of being called the consumer class are those who earn more than \$11/per day, while the poor and vulnerable classes are those who earn less than \$11/per day.

Urbanization will also continue throughout this decade. Waves of people move from villages to cities just to get better education, health services, and jobs. Moreover, in emerging markets, former villages contribute to urbanization as they grow rapidly to represent the sub-urban (suburb) segment as is the case in the satellite areas of Jakarta, Mexico City, Mumbai, São Paulo, or Lagos.

Today's urbanization is a symbol of two paradoxical things, firstly modern urban progress, secondly urbanization is also a symbol of the gap between rural and urban areas. Urban development, which is oriented towards economic growth, is in stark contrast to rural development, which is synonymous with backwardness and stagnation. This clearly reflects the failure of the distribution of wealth. The gap between rural development and urban development is often discussed as a problem of underdevelopment in suburban areas. This

is very typical in capitalistic development, namely the phenomenon of the dichotomy of the center and the periphery (center-periphery).

The Urgency of the Islamic Vision of Political Economics in Healing Consumerism

From all these readings, we can conclude that consumerism is a systemic disease caused by the superstructure of secularism values and the infrastructure of capitalistic economic development policies. So, there is no other way to cure this disease except with systemic healing. The healing path must start from the state, where the state must focus on managing the affairs of its people by implementing a property distribution mechanism and prohibiting the ownership of public assets by the private sector.

Distribution is a major problem faced by today's society. Poverty basically occurs because the distribution mechanism does not work, while consumerism occurs because of a capitalistic perspective that prioritizes production but minus distribution.

In Islam, distribution is done economically and non-economically. The economic mechanism is directed to the productive sector, while the non-economic mechanism is not through productive economic activities, but through non-productive activities such as zakat, inheritance, and sunnah alms. In this way, the distribution of welfare in both rural and urban areas will occur naturally and systemically.

The disease of consumerism will be removed by Islam, **firstly**, for the consumer class who has high purchasing power, they will be given the right understanding of investing in wealth with a blessed lifestyle. Urban communities in Islam will not live in the dark fog of consumerism because they are kept away from the hedonism virus and motivated to compete in alms (sadaqah) and waqf as charity for their afterlife. Their wealth is invested to solve the great affairs of the Ummah such as da'wah and jihad, not merely for the sake of prestige and social status. The state will also not facilitate the construction of too many malls in urban areas just to facilitate oligarchic business, because urban infrastructure is directed at the advancement of Islamic civilization where economic activity, science and Islamic symbols run in a balanced manner under the control of Aqeedah and Islamic Sharia.

Second, for the poor and weak, there will be guaranteed consumption of basic needs for them, so that villagers do not need to flock to the city just to fill their stomachs, because it is not difficult for them to meet their family needs even though they are in the village. They will go to the city to work, trade or study to gain knowledge, because the function of the city in Islam is not only as a center of economic growth but also as a center for Islamic symbols, da'wah and knowledge. This can be seen from how the Prophet Muhammad (saw) when he built Medina, the mosque was the first building that was built as a symbol of the infrastructure of the spiritual relationship of the Islamic community with their Rabb.

Thus a glimpse of Islam in eradicating consumerism in society, of course this effort must be started simultaneously both from individual awareness, community control and the role of the state that does not ignore the laws of Allah. Remember the word of Allah Ta'ala:

﴿وَإِذَا أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نُهْلِكَ قَرْيَةً أَمَرْنَا مُتْرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُوا فِيهَا فَحَقَّ عَلَيْهَا الْقَوْلُ فَدَمَّرْنَاهَا تَدْمِيرًا﴾

“Whenever We intend to destroy a society, We command its elite ‘to obey Allah’ but they act rebelliously in it. So the decree ‘of punishment’ is justified, and We destroy it utterly.” [Al-Isra: 16].

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