

The Effect of Smooth Capitalism Dimensions on Consumer Culture Through Lifestyle Trends Among The Middle Class In Marbau Subdistrict

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effect of smooth capitalism dimensions on consumer culture through lifestyle trends among the middle class in Marbau Subdistrict. The dimensions of smooth capitalism examined in this study include digital platform penetration, algorithmic personalization, influencer marketing, and transaction convenience. This research employed an explanatory quantitative approach using a survey method involving 385 middle-class respondents who actively use digital platforms. The data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4. The findings show that digital platform penetration, algorithmic personalization, influencer marketing, and transaction convenience have a positive and significant effect on lifestyle trends. Lifestyle trends also have a positive and significant effect on consumer culture ($\beta = 0.200$; $t = 3.920$; $p = 0.000$) and are proven to mediate the effect of all smooth capitalism dimensions on consumer culture. The R-square values indicate that the model has strong explanatory power, namely 0.704 for lifestyle trends and 0.756 for consumer culture. These findings affirm that digital consumption among the middle class in Marbau is not merely an economic activity, but also a social practice related to identity, status, taste, and social recognition.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed how people consume, construct identity, and display lifestyle. Consumption no longer takes place only through physical stores or traditional markets, but increasingly occurs through digital platforms, social media, e-commerce, digital payment services, and algorithmic recommendation systems. This condition indicates that consumption in contemporary society is not merely related to fulfilling needs, but is also associated with symbolic value, status, taste, and self-image. In a consumer society, goods are consumed not only on the basis of their use value, but also because of the sign value attached to them (Baudrillard, 1998).

From a sociological perspective, consumption can be understood as a social practice that reflects a person's position, taste, and identity. Bourdieu (1984) explains that lifestyle is related to habitus, capital, and the social position of individuals or groups within society. This means that consumption choices are not entirely personal; rather, they are shaped by the social, economic, and cultural structures, as well as the symbolic environment, in which individuals are situated. In the digital context, this symbolic environment is increasingly shaped by social media, influencers, algorithms, and e-commerce platforms.

Current changes in consumption practices cannot be separated from the development of digital capitalism. Srnicek (2017) explains that digital platforms have become the main infrastructure of contemporary capitalism because they are able to connect consumers, producers, advertisers, payment service providers, logistics actors, and content creators within a single economic ecosystem. In this system, economic value is generated not only from

transactions of goods and services, but also from data, attention, interaction, and users' dependence on digital platforms.

Through the concept of surveillance capitalism, Zuboff (2019) explains that users' digital activities can be collected, analyzed, and used to predict and influence human behavior. In the context of consumption, digital traces such as product searches, clicks, viewing duration, purchase history, and social media interactions can be used to display increasingly personalized product recommendations. Thus, digital platforms not only provide spaces for consumption, but also direct attention, shape preferences, and encourage consumption behavior.

This study employs the concept of smooth capitalism as an operational concept to explain how digital capitalism works in a subtle, rapid, personalized, and low-friction manner in encouraging consumption. This concept is not positioned as a new grand theory, but rather as an analytical concept derived from studies of digital capitalism, platform capitalism, surveillance capitalism, lifestyle, and consumer culture. Smooth capitalism explains that the drive toward consumption does not always appear in the form of direct coercion, but through platform convenience, algorithmic recommendations, influencer promotions, free shipping, cash on delivery, paylater services, flash sales, and transaction convenience.

The term smooth is used because digital consumption often takes place almost imperceptibly. Consumers feel that they are choosing freely, even though their choices have been shaped by a digital ecosystem that regulates what they see, desire, compare, and eventually purchase. In this sense, digital capitalism does not operate through overt pressure, but through consumption experiences that appear enjoyable, personal, practical, and aligned with lifestyle.

In this study, smooth capitalism is derived into four dimensions: digital platform penetration, algorithmic personalization, influencer marketing, and transaction convenience. Digital platform penetration indicates the increasing involvement of society in the use of e-commerce, social media, and digital applications as spaces of consumption. Digital platforms have economic value because they are able to connect multiple actors and create network effects in economic activity (Evans & Schmalensee, 2016; Srnicek, 2017).

Algorithmic personalization refers to how platforms present content, advertisements, and product recommendations based on users' digital traces. Recommendation systems work by processing user data to display options considered relevant to users' interests and behavior (Ricci et al., 2015). In the context of digital consumption, personalization can make products appear closer to personal needs, although such needs are often formed through repeated digital exposure.

Influencer marketing also functions as an important mechanism in the formation of lifestyle trends. Influencers do not merely promote products; they also display particular lifestyles that followers may imitate. Abidin (2016) explains that influencers build closeness with audiences through everyday narratives, visuality, and impressions of authenticity. Khamis et al. (2017) also emphasize that influencers construct themselves as brands through self-branding practices, so that the products they display are often attached to certain images, aspirations, and lifestyles.

In addition, transaction convenience is an important dimension of smooth capitalism because it reduces the barriers between desire and the act of purchasing. Berry et al. (2002) explain that service convenience can influence consumer evaluations and decisions because it reduces the sacrifice of time, effort, and energy. In digital consumption, transaction convenience appears through features such as fast payment, cash on delivery, paylater, installments, vouchers, free shipping, flash sales, and delivery tracking.

Lifestyle trends in this study are positioned as a mediating variable that explains the relationship between smooth capitalism and consumer culture. Lifestyle does not merely reflect

individual choices, but is also related to social processes of forming taste, identity, and social position (Bourdieu, 1984). In the digital era, lifestyle is also shaped by social media, influencers, virality, and algorithms that accelerate the circulation of consumption trends (Lupton, 2015; Rocamora, 2017).

Marbau Subdistrict is an important location to study because it represents a local community that is increasingly connected to digital consumer culture. The middle class in this area uses digital platforms not only to purchase goods, but also as sources of lifestyle references. Therefore, this study is significant because it examines how digital capitalism operates in a local context, not only in urban communities or major cities.

Based on the discussion above, this study aims to analyze the effect of smooth capitalism dimensions on consumer culture through lifestyle trends among the middle class in Marbau Subdistrict.

The conceptual model of this research was developed to show the relationship between the four dimensions of smooth capitalism as independent variables, lifestyle trends as a mediating variable, and consumer culture as the dependent variable. This model emphasizes that consumer culture is not formed only through the direct influence of digital dimensions, but also through the process of lifestyle trend formation as a social mechanism that bridges digital structures and everyday consumption practices.

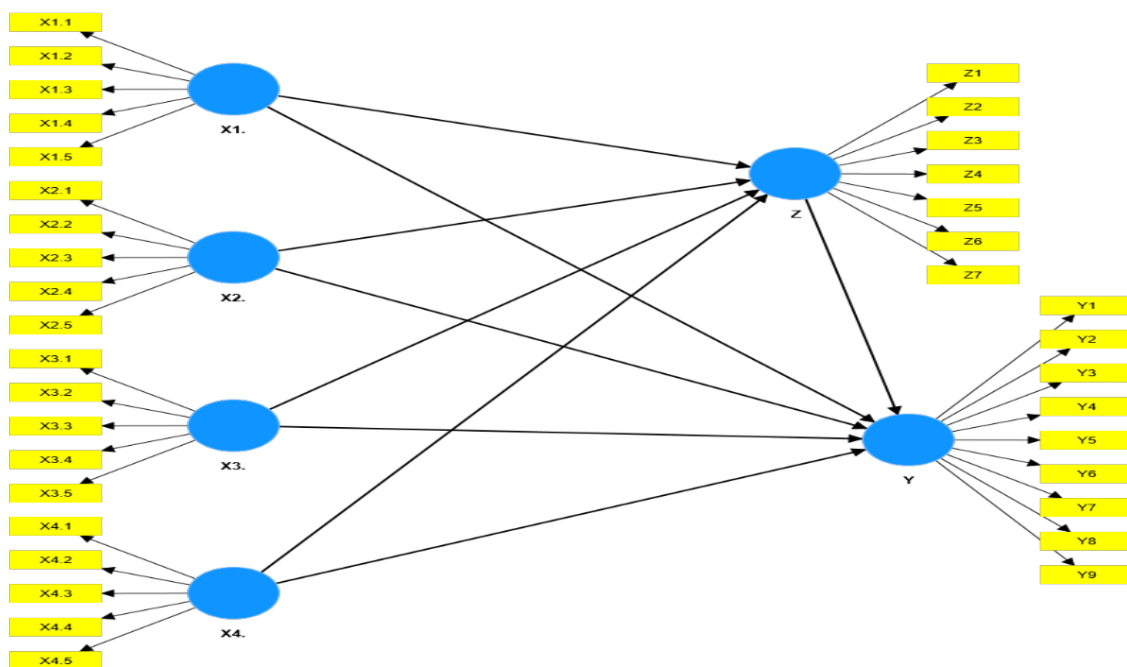


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Research

Based on the model, this study examines the effect of digital platform penetration, algorithmic personalization, influencer marketing, and transaction convenience on consumer culture, both directly and indirectly through lifestyle trends.

METHOD

This study employed an explanatory quantitative approach. The explanatory quantitative approach was used because this research aimed to explain the causal relationships among variables, namely the effect of smooth capitalism dimensions on consumer culture through lifestyle trends. Explanatory research is appropriate when the researcher seeks to test relationships among variables based on a theoretical model and formulated hypotheses.

The research was conducted in Marbau Subdistrict, North Labuhanbatu Regency. Marbau Subdistrict was selected because it has an interesting socioeconomic character: it is situated within a local setting that still retains traditional social characteristics, while at the same time becoming increasingly connected to digital platforms, social media, and online consumption practices. This context is important for understanding how digital consumer culture develops not only in urban areas, but also in local and semi-rural communities.

The population in this study consisted of middle-class residents of Marbau Subdistrict who actively use digital platforms. The study sample comprised 385 respondents. Respondents were selected based on middle-class criteria and their involvement in the use of digital platforms, particularly in consumption activities, product information searches, social media use, and online shopping.

The research variables consisted of four independent variables, one mediating variable, and one dependent variable. The independent variables were digital platform penetration, algorithmic personalization, influencer marketing, and transaction convenience. The mediating variable was lifestyle trends, while the dependent variable was consumer culture.

Table 1. Research Variables

Variable Type	Variable	Measurement Focus
Independent	Digital platform penetration	Respondents' intensity of engagement with e-commerce, social media, and digital applications
Independent	Algorithmic personalization	Exposure to product recommendations, advertisements, and content based on digital traces
Independent	Influencer marketing	The influence of influencers on consumption-related interests, preferences, and lifestyles
Independent	Transaction convenience	Ease of payment, promotions, COD, paylater, free shipping, and digital transaction features
Mediating	Lifestyle trends	The tendency to follow popular lifestyles through digital spaces
Dependent	Consumer culture	Consumption patterns related to identity, status, taste, and social recognition

Data were collected using a questionnaire developed based on the indicators of each variable. A questionnaire was used because this study required quantitative data from a large number of respondents. Each indicator was formulated to measure respondents' experiences related to the use of digital platforms, exposure to algorithms, the influence of influencers, transaction convenience, the tendency to follow lifestyle trends, and practices of consumer culture.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM was used because it is capable of testing models of relationships among latent variables, including both direct and indirect relationships. This method is widely used in social and management research when research models involve latent constructs measured through a number of indicators (Hair et al., 2019).

The analysis was conducted in two stages: evaluation of the measurement model, or outer model, and evaluation of the structural model, or inner model. The outer model evaluation was carried out to assess construct validity and reliability through outer loading, Average Variance Extracted, composite reliability, rho_a, and discriminant validity. The inner model evaluation was

conducted to assess relationships among variables through R-square values, effect size, and hypothesis testing for direct and indirect effects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents in this study were middle-class residents of Marbau Subdistrict who actively use digital platforms. These characteristics indicate that local communities are no longer outside the flow of digital consumption. Digital platforms have become part of daily activities, whether for searching product information, comparing prices, viewing promotions, following influencer content, or conducting online transactions.

This condition demonstrates that digital consumption is not only an urban phenomenon, but has also entered the lives of the middle class in local areas. This is in line with Lupton's (2015) view that digital technologies have become part of everyday social practices, not merely tools of communication. Thus, the use of digital platforms can shape habits, preferences, and consumption orientations within society.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The results of the measurement model evaluation show that the research constructs met the criteria for validity and reliability. The indicators for each variable could be used to measure the constructs under study. Convergent validity was assessed through outer loading and Average Variance Extracted, while construct reliability was assessed through composite reliability and rho_a. In PLS-SEM, indicators are considered adequate when they consistently represent the latent construct being measured (Hair et al., 2019).

After the outer model criteria were fulfilled, the variables of digital platform penetration, algorithmic personalization, influencer marketing, transaction convenience, lifestyle trends, and consumer culture could proceed to the structural model testing stage.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model analysis shows that the research model has strong explanatory power. The R-square value for the lifestyle trends variable is 0.704, while the R-square value for consumer culture is 0.756. This means that the dimensions of smooth capitalism are able to explain 70.4 percent of the variation in lifestyle trends. Meanwhile, the combination of smooth capitalism dimensions and lifestyle trends is able to explain 75.6 percent of the variation in consumer culture.

These values indicate that the research model has a strong ability to explain the phenomenon of digital consumption among the middle class in Marbau Subdistrict. In the context of PLS-SEM, R-square is used to determine the extent to which exogenous constructs can explain endogenous constructs in the structural model (Hair et al., 2019).

In general, the findings show that digital platform penetration, algorithmic personalization, influencer marketing, and transaction convenience have a positive and significant effect on lifestyle trends. Furthermore, lifestyle trends have a positive and significant effect on consumer culture. Lifestyle trends are also proven to mediate the effect of all smooth capitalism dimensions on consumer culture.

Table 2. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Relationship Between Variables	Direction of Effect	Description
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Digital platform penetration -> Lifestyle trends	Positive	Significant
Algorithmic personalization -> Lifestyle trends	Positive	Significant
Influencer marketing -> Lifestyle trends	Positive	Significant
Transaction convenience -> Lifestyle trends	Positive	Significant
Lifestyle trends -> Consumer culture	Positive	Significant
Digital platform penetration -> Lifestyle trends -> Consumer culture	Positive	Mediated
Algorithmic personalization -> Lifestyle trends -> Consumer culture	Positive	Mediated
Influencer marketing -> Lifestyle trends -> Consumer culture	Positive	Mediated
Transaction convenience -> Lifestyle trends -> Consumer culture	Positive	Mediated

To strengthen the presentation of SEM-PLS results, this article displays the PLS Algorithm and bootstrapping models from SmartPLS. The following figures help illustrate the structure of the relationships among variables tested in this study.

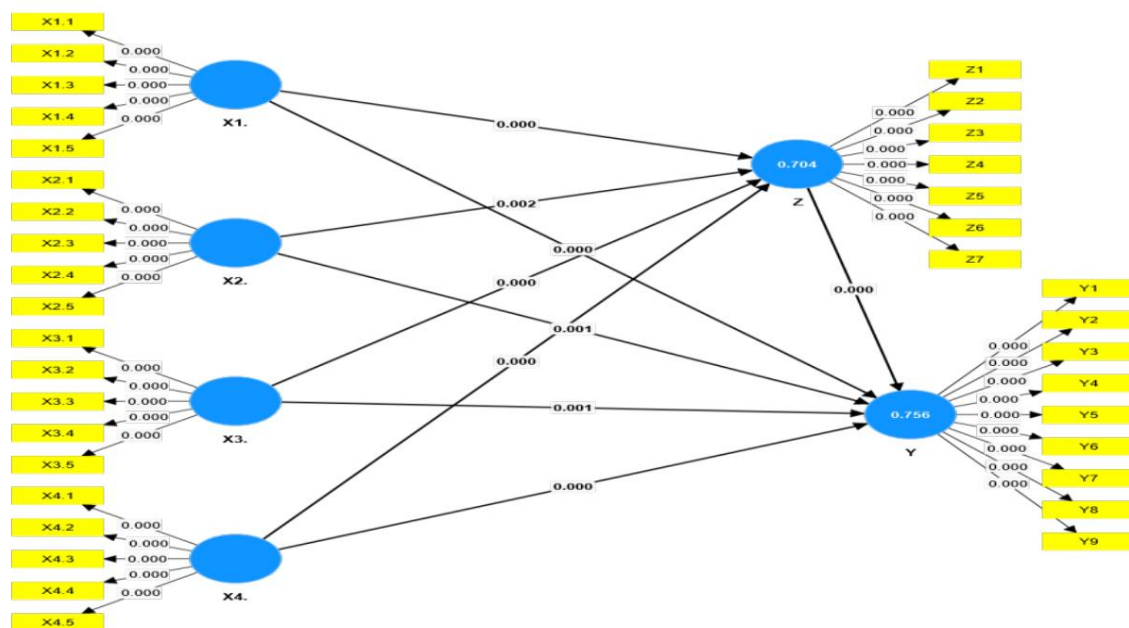


Figure 2. PLS Algorithm Result of the Research Model

In addition to the algorithm results, this study also presents the bootstrapping model to show the significance of the relationships among variables in the structural model.

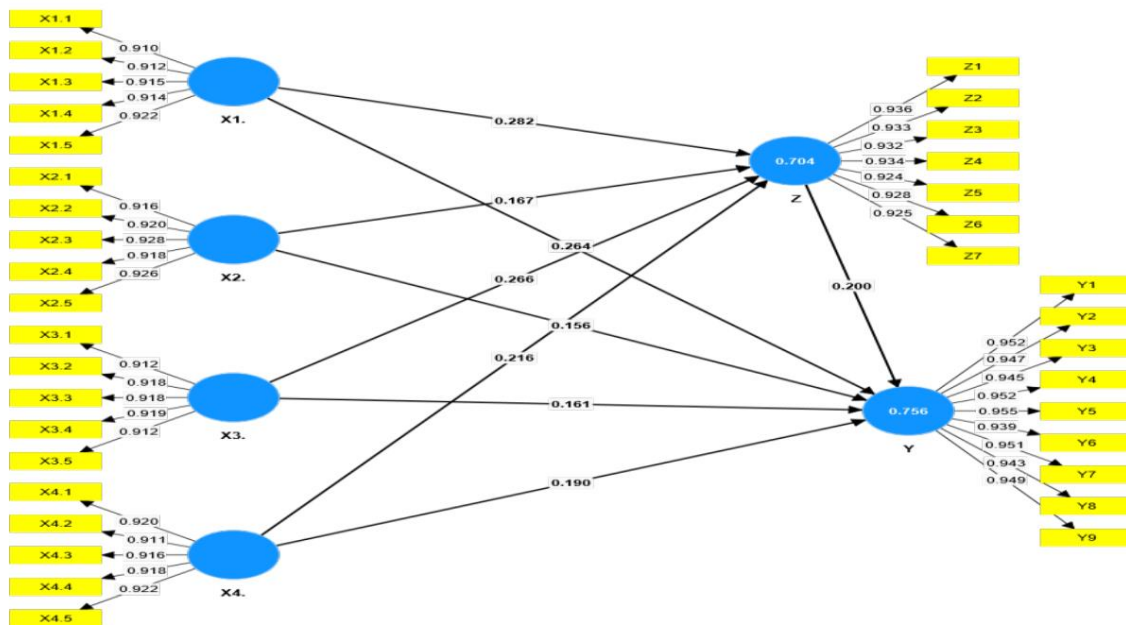


Figure 3. Bootstrapping Result of the PLS-SEM Model

The presentation of these model results is important to demonstrate that the relationships among variables in the article are not only explained narratively, but are also supported by empirical outputs from SEM-PLS. The PLS Algorithm model shows path coefficient values and indicator loadings, while the bootstrapping model shows the significance of paths through t-statistics values.

The Effect of Digital Platform Penetration on Lifestyle Trends

The findings show that digital platform penetration has a positive and significant effect on lifestyle trends. This finding indicates that the higher the involvement of the middle class in Marbau Subdistrict with digital platforms, the greater their tendency to follow lifestyle trends circulating in digital spaces.

Digital platforms function not only as shopping spaces, but also as social spaces where people encounter products, promotions, reviews, visual content, and the lifestyles of other users. In the platform economy, the value of a platform increases when more actors are connected and interactions within it become more intensive (Evans & Schmalensee, 2016). Therefore, the more frequently a person uses digital platforms, the greater the opportunity to be exposed to products, promotions, and consumption trends.

This finding reinforces Srnicek's (2017) view that digital platforms have become the main economic infrastructure of contemporary capitalism. In the context of Marbau Subdistrict, digital platforms expand the consumption space of local communities and connect them with trends that previously circulated more widely in urban areas or centers of the digital economy.

The Effect of Algorithmic Personalization on Lifestyle Trends

Algorithmic personalization has a positive and significant effect on lifestyle trends. This indicates that product recommendations, advertisements, and content that appear based on respondents' digital traces can shape interests, tastes, and lifestyle tendencies.

Digital recommendation systems work by processing user data to present options considered relevant (Ricci et al., 2015). In digital consumption practices, products that have been searched for, viewed, or placed in a shopping cart can reappear as recommendations. Repeated exposure can create familiarity and increase the likelihood that a person will perceive the product as attractive or needed.

This finding is consistent with Zuboff's (2019) argument that behavioral data in digital spaces can be used to predict and influence subsequent actions. In the context of smooth capitalism, algorithms operate subtly because they do not force consumers to buy; rather, they regulate what is frequently seen, perceived as relevant, and ultimately considered for consumption.

The Effect of Influencer Marketing on Lifestyle Trends

Influencer marketing has a positive and significant effect on lifestyle trends. This finding shows that influencers play an important role in shaping the consumption aspirations of the middle class in Marbau Subdistrict.

Influencers do not only deliver product information, but also display certain lifestyles that are perceived as attractive, modern, aesthetic, and worthy of imitation. Abidin (2016) explains that influencers build closeness with audiences through everyday narratives, visuality, and impressions of authenticity. This closeness makes product recommendations feel more personal than conventional advertisements.

Moreover, influencers also construct themselves as brands through self-branding practices, so that the products they use or promote are often attached to particular self-images (Khamis et al., 2017). In the middle-class context, following the products or lifestyles of influencers can become a way to feel modern, keep up with the times, and obtain social recognition.

Thus, influencer marketing in this study is understood not only as a marketing strategy, but also as a symbolic mechanism that shapes lifestyle. Products promoted by influencers are consumed not only for their benefits, but also because of the image and identity value attached to them.

The Effect of Transaction Convenience on Lifestyle Trends

Transaction convenience has a positive and significant effect on lifestyle trends. This finding indicates that digital transaction features such as fast payment, cash on delivery, paylater, vouchers, free shipping, flash sales, and delivery tracking can strengthen people's tendency to follow digital consumption trends.

Service convenience can influence consumer decisions because it reduces barriers of time, energy, and effort in obtaining products (Berry et al., 2002). In digital consumption, transaction convenience makes the buying process faster and more practical. When someone sees an attractive product on social media or e-commerce, they can immediately purchase it without having to visit a physical store or carry cash.

In the context of smooth capitalism, transaction convenience becomes an important mechanism because it shortens the distance between desire and purchasing action. Consumption feels lighter, more spontaneous, and requires less lengthy consideration. Therefore, transaction convenience not only assists consumers, but also accelerates the formation of consumption patterns that follow trends.

The Effect of Lifestyle Trends on Consumer Culture

Lifestyle trends have a positive and significant effect on consumer culture. This finding shows that the stronger respondents' tendency to follow digital lifestyle trends, the stronger the consumer culture that is formed.

Lifestyle can be understood as an expression of social position, taste, and identity (Bourdieu, 1984). In the digital context, lifestyle is increasingly shaped by social media, visuality, virality, and interactions within digital platforms (Rocamora, 2017). When people perceive a product or consumption practice as popular, modern, aesthetic, and socially valuable, the product is no longer understood only on the basis of function, but also on the basis of symbolic meaning.

Consumer culture is formed when consumption practices are repeated and acquire social meaning. Arnould and Thompson (2005) explain that Consumer Culture Theory views consumption as an arena for the formation of meaning, identity, and social relations. In this study, consumer culture among the middle class in Marbau Subdistrict appears through the tendency to purchase non-essential goods, follow viral products, use digital promotions, and make consumption part of the expression of social identity.

This finding is also consistent with Baudrillard's (1998) view that modern consumption is not only related to use value, but also to sign value. Consumed goods become symbols of status, taste, modernity, and social recognition. Thus, lifestyle trends serve as an important bridge between digital exposure and the formation of consumer culture.

The Mediating Role of Lifestyle Trends

The findings show that lifestyle trends mediate the effect of all dimensions of smooth capitalism on consumer culture. This means that digital platform penetration, algorithmic personalization, influencer marketing, and transaction convenience do not only directly influence consumer culture, but also operate through the formation of lifestyle trends.

This finding is important because it demonstrates that digital consumption does not move in a simple linear way from digital exposure to purchase. Between the two lies a social process in which individuals recognize, evaluate, adopt, and display particular lifestyles. This process explains why platforms, algorithms, influencers, and transaction convenience can shape consumer culture.

From a sociological perspective, lifestyle trends function as a mechanism connecting digital structures with everyday consumption practices. Smooth capitalism works through subtle processes: platforms provide spaces of consumption, algorithms direct attention, influencers shape aspirations, and transaction convenience accelerates purchasing. These four dimensions form lifestyle, and that lifestyle then develops into consumer culture.

Synthesis of the Discussion

Overall, this study shows that digital consumption among the middle class in Marbau Subdistrict cannot be understood merely as an economic activity. Digital consumption has become a social practice related to identity, status, taste, and social recognition. This finding reinforces the view that consumption in contemporary society is closely related to the formation of symbolic meaning and social identity (Baudrillard, 1998; Bourdieu, 1984; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Smooth capitalism in this study explains how digital capitalism works subtly in everyday life. Digital platforms create broad spaces of consumption, algorithms direct attention in a personalized manner, influencers shape lifestyle aspirations, and transaction convenience removes purchasing barriers. This sequence of mechanisms makes consumption feel like a free choice, even though that choice is shaped by a digital ecosystem that operates systematically.

Therefore, the main contribution of this study lies in its attempt to read the digital consumption of the local middle class through the concept of smooth capitalism. This concept helps explain that digital capitalism does not always operate through direct coercion, but through convenience, personalization, speed, and ease that make consumption increasingly embedded in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the dimensions of smooth capitalism influence consumer culture through lifestyle trends among the middle class in Marbau Subdistrict. Digital platform penetration, algorithmic personalization, influencer marketing, and transaction convenience are

proven to have positive and significant effects on lifestyle trends. Furthermore, lifestyle trends have a positive and significant effect on consumer culture and mediate the effect of all dimensions of smooth capitalism on consumer culture.

These findings show that digital consumption among the middle class in Marbau Subdistrict is influenced not only by economic needs, but also by social processes shaped through digital platforms, algorithms, influencers, and transaction convenience. Consumption becomes part of the way people construct identity, follow trends, display status, and obtain social recognition.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the fields of sociology of consumption and digital sociology by offering smooth capitalism as an operational concept for understanding how digital capitalism operates in a subtle, personal, rapid, and low-friction manner. Practically, this study highlights the importance of digital literacy and consumption literacy so that people can respond more critically to algorithmic recommendations, digital promotions, influencer influence, and transaction convenience.

Future research is recommended to test the smooth capitalism model in different regions and social groups, such as urban communities, younger generations, informal workers, or rural communities. In addition, qualitative approaches may be used to explore people's subjective experiences in encountering digital consumption in greater depth.

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