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Dynamics of the Urban Middle Class, Consumerism, Social Mobility and New Identities

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of Indonesia's urban middle class has transformed patterns of consumption, social mobility, and identity formation within contemporary urban society. This study aims to examine the influence of consumerism and social mobility on the construction of new identities among the urban middle class. A quantitative survey was conducted with 400 respondents from five major Indonesian cities using purposive and proportional random sampling techniques. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression. The findings indicate that consumerism, social mobility, and new identity formation all demonstrate relatively high mean scores, reflecting strong urban middle-class aspirations and lifestyle orientation. Regression analysis reveals that consumerism has a stronger effect on identity formation than social mobility, suggesting that symbolic consumption plays a more prominent role than structural advancement in shaping contemporary urban identities. The study contributes to urban sociology by providing an integrated understanding of consumer behavior, mobility aspirations, and identity formation, offering practical implications for policies supporting sustainable and inclusive urban middle-class development.

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of the urban middle class has become one of the most influential socioeconomic transformations of the twenty first century, particularly in emerging economies where rapid urbanization, technological advancement, and sustained economic growth have fundamentally reshaped patterns of consumption, social mobility, and identity construction. Unlike traditional class structures that were primarily defined by occupational status or income, contemporary urban middle classes increasingly derive their social positioning from symbolic consumption, digital participation, educational attainment, and lifestyle differentiation. As cities continue to function as centers of economic opportunity and cultural innovation, the urban middle class has emerged not only as an engine of economic development but also as a major producer of new social values and identities (AlSuwaidi et al., 2026;

Noaime et al., 2025; Brandellero & Naclerio, 2025). Recent studies demonstrate that middle class expansion contributes significantly to domestic consumption, labor market transformation, and digital economic growth while simultaneously generating new forms of social inequality and symbolic competition (Miladinov, 2023; Boterman & Van Gent, 2023; Han, 2024; Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2023; Prester et al., 2023).

Indonesia represents one of the most dynamic examples of this transformation. Over the last two decades, stable economic growth, expanding higher education, increasing formal employment, and accelerated digitalization have substantially enlarged the country's urban middle class. This demographic shift has altered not only purchasing power but also social aspirations, cultural practices, and patterns of identity formation (Elgammal et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2025; Alauddin et al., 2024). Urban residents increasingly express their social position through branded consumption, digital self-representation, participation in modern lifestyle activities, and the accumulation of educational credentials (Zreik, 2024; He, 2025; Chan, 2022; Chen & Jiang, 2025). Consequently, the Indonesian urban middle class can no longer be understood merely as an income category but rather as a multidimensional social group negotiating between economic security, cultural capital, and symbolic recognition within an increasingly competitive urban environment (Dwianto & Rahardini, 2021; Hidayah, 2021; Rosida et al., 2023; Priyatna, 2024; Swita & Ayu, 2025).

Recent scholarship suggests that consumerism has become one of the most visible mechanisms through which urban middle class identities are constructed. Consumption has shifted beyond fulfilling material needs toward communicating prestige, modernity, professionalism, and social distinction (Warde, 2022; Enns & Metz, 2022). Luxury brands, lifestyle experiences, tourism, premium culinary consumption, and digital devices increasingly function as symbolic resources through which individuals negotiate belonging within urban society. This phenomenon has intensified with the rapid expansion of digital platforms where consumption practices are continuously displayed, evaluated, and reproduced through social media interactions (Alzubi, 2023; Pellegrino et al., 2022). Consequently, consumption today performs both economic and communicative functions, reinforcing social hierarchies while simultaneously shaping personal identities in highly visible digital environments (Sahin & Nasir, 2022; Han, 2024; Rokka et al., 2023; Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2023; Rosida et al., 2023).

At the same time, social mobility remains a defining aspiration of the urban middle class. Education, professional employment, entrepreneurial activities, and digital competencies are widely perceived as pathways toward improved socioeconomic status (Liu & Chen, 2025; Ahmad & Tariq, 2025; Canal et al., 2024). Nevertheless, recent evidence indicates that upward mobility has become increasingly uncertain due to labor market polarization, technological disruption, housing affordability challenges, and widening income inequality. Although educational attainment continues to increase across many emerging economies, structural barriers often prevent proportional occupational advancement, creating conditions of status anxiety among highly educated urban populations (George, 2025; Cacciatore et al., 2025). This situation illustrates that middle-class status is becoming increasingly fragile, depending not only on accumulated human capital but also on access to social networks, institutional opportunities, and digital resources (Pepinsky et al., 2021; Cover, 2021; Shawki & Hunter, 2022; Miladinov, 2023; Boterman & Van Gent, 2023).

Parallel to these structural transformations, digital technologies have fundamentally altered processes of identity construction (Staab & Thiel, 2022; Lou et al., 2024). Social networking platforms have evolved into important arenas where individuals

construct professional images, demonstrate lifestyle preferences, and negotiate social recognition. Identity is increasingly performed through online interactions that combine consumption practices, cultural preferences, and symbolic communication (Rokka et al., 2023; Maria-Teresa et al., 2023). Rather than representing fixed social categories, contemporary identities remain fluid, performative, and continuously reconstructed through digital engagement. While digital platforms create opportunities for self expression and social inclusion, they also intensify pressures to maintain socially desirable lifestyles and consumption patterns that reinforce existing class distinctions (Prester et al., 2023; Rokka et al., 2023; Cover, 2021; Rosida et al., 2023; Han, 2024).

Although previous studies have substantially advanced understanding of urban middle class development, several important limitations remain. First, many investigations continue to conceptualize the middle class primarily through economic indicators such as income, expenditure, or occupational status while paying relatively limited attention to the interaction between consumerism, social mobility, and identity formation. Second, existing research often examines these dimensions separately rather than considering their interconnected relationships within a comprehensive analytical framework. Third, empirical evidence from emerging economies, particularly Indonesia, remains relatively limited regarding the mechanisms through which consumerism and social mobility jointly shape contemporary urban identities under conditions of rapid digital transformation. Consequently, the sociocultural dynamics underlying middle class development remain insufficiently understood despite their increasing importance for explaining urban social change (Boterman & Van Gent, 2023; Miladinov, 2023; Rokka et al., 2023; Priyatna, 2024; Swita & Ayu, 2025).

This study addresses these limitations by integrating consumerism, social mobility, and identity formation into a single explanatory framework that captures the multidimensional dynamics of Indonesia's urban middle class. Rather than treating these variables independently, the study investigates how consumption practices and aspirations for upward mobility simultaneously contribute to the emergence of new urban identities within digitally connected environments. The novelty of this research lies in its holistic examination of urban middle class dynamics by combining economic, sociocultural, and digital dimensions within one empirical model. In addition, this study contributes to contemporary urban sociology by providing empirical evidence from Indonesia, an emerging economy experiencing rapid middle class expansion but relatively underrepresented in international literature. The findings are expected to enrich theoretical discussions on class formation, consumer culture, and digital identity while offering practical insights for policymakers seeking to understand the evolving social structure of rapidly urbanizing societies.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a descriptive explanatory survey design to examine the dynamics of the urban middle class in Indonesia through the interrelationships among consumerism, social mobility, and new identity formation. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables the systematic measurement of latent social constructs and facilitates statistical examination of relationships among variables using standardized instruments. The descriptive component was intended to portray the characteristics and behavioral tendencies of the urban middle class, while the explanatory component aimed to identify the extent to which consumerism and social mobility influence the construction of new urban identities. Survey research is particularly appropriate for investigating social attitudes and behavioral patterns across large populations

because it provides reliable empirical evidence and allows for statistical generalization when representative sampling procedures are implemented (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Saunders et al., 2023). The overall conceptual framework guiding this research is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the hypothesized relationships among the study variables.

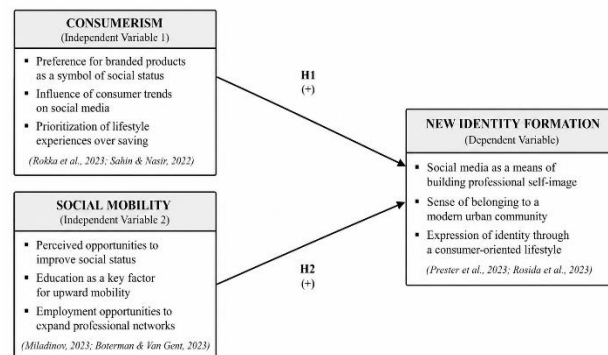


Figure 1. Research Framework

Source: Developed by the authors, 2025

Research Context and Participants

The research was conducted in five major metropolitan areas in Indonesia, namely Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, Makassar, and Medan. These cities were selected because they represent the country's largest urban economic centers and exhibit relatively high concentrations of middle-class households, advanced digital infrastructure, diverse employment opportunities, and rapidly evolving consumer cultures. As major urban hubs, these cities provide an appropriate setting for investigating the social and cultural transformations associated with middle-class expansion.

The target population consisted of individuals classified as members of the Indonesian urban middle class according to the income classification of the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik), with monthly household incomes ranging between IDR 6,000,000 and IDR 20,000,000. Additional eligibility criteria required respondents to reside in urban areas and to be between 20 and 45 years of age, representing the economically productive population actively participating in urban social and economic activities. A purposive sampling strategy was initially employed to ensure respondents satisfied these predefined characteristics. Subsequently, proportional random sampling was applied across the five selected cities to improve sample representativeness and minimize sampling bias. Following the recommendations of Rahman (2023), a total sample of 400 respondents was considered adequate to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error for large populations.

Data Collection Procedures

Primary data were collected using a structured online questionnaire administered through the Google Forms platform. Online data collection was selected because it facilitates access to geographically dispersed urban respondents while ensuring efficiency and consistency throughout the survey process. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section collected demographic information, including gender, age, educational attainment, occupation, and monthly household income. The second section measured the three principal constructs of the study using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Consumerism was operationalized through indicators reflecting preferences for branded products, lifestyle-oriented consumption, and expenditure on experiential activities such as tourism and culinary experiences. Social mobility was measured through respondents' perceptions regarding opportunities for upward social status, the importance of education, and employment opportunities that facilitate career advancement and network expansion. The new identity construct captured respondents' perceptions regarding digital self-presentation, participation in urban communities, and identity expression through consumption practices. These measurement indicators were adapted from previous studies on consumer culture, social mobility, and digital identity to ensure conceptual consistency with contemporary literature (Hair et al., 2022; Han, 2024; Rokka et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a two-stage statistical procedure. First, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize respondent characteristics and describe the distribution of responses for each research variable through mean scores and standard deviations. This analysis provided an overview of prevailing consumer behavior, mobility aspirations, and identity construction among Indonesia's urban middle class.

Second, inferential statistical analysis was performed to examine the relationships among the research variables. Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the strength and direction of associations between consumerism, social mobility, and new identity. Subsequently, multiple linear regression analysis was employed to determine the simultaneous influence of consumerism and social mobility on new identity formation while estimating the explanatory power of the proposed research model through the coefficient of determination (R^2). Multiple regression was considered appropriate because it enables the evaluation of the relative contribution of multiple independent variables toward a single dependent variable while controlling for their combined effects (Hair et al., 2022; Field, 2024).

Instrument Validity, Reliability, and Research Ethics

To ensure measurement quality, the research instrument underwent both validity and reliability assessment before the main survey was conducted. Content validity was established through expert review involving scholars specializing in urban sociology, consumer behavior, and cultural studies to ensure that all questionnaire items adequately represented the intended theoretical constructs. Empirical validity was subsequently evaluated using corrected item-total correlation, with correlation coefficients greater than 0.30 considered acceptable indicators of construct validity. Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with coefficients exceeding 0.70 indicating satisfactory internal consistency and measurement stability (Hair et al., 2022; DeVellis & Thorpe, 2022).

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Prior to participation, respondents received information explaining the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained electronically before respondents accessed the questionnaire. All collected data were used exclusively for academic purposes, securely stored, and analyzed in aggregate form to prevent individual identification, thereby ensuring compliance with internationally recognized ethical standards for social science research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings of the study regarding the dynamics of Indonesia's urban middle class by systematically examining four major dimensions: respondent characteristics, consumerism, social mobility, new identity formation,

and the statistical relationships among the research variables. The presentation of the results follows the analytical sequence established in the research framework. First, the demographic characteristics of the respondents are described to provide the contextual profile of the sample. Subsequently, descriptive statistical analyses are presented for each latent construct, namely consumerism, social mobility, and new identity. These findings provide an overview of behavioral tendencies and perceptions among Indonesia's urban middle class. The second part of the results section will present inferential statistical findings, including multiple linear regression analysis, to evaluate the influence of consumerism and social mobility on the construction of new urban identities.

Respondent Characteristics

The survey involved 400 respondents representing the Indonesian urban middle class residing in five metropolitan cities, namely Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, Makassar, and Medan. The respondents met the inclusion criteria established in the methodology section, including monthly household income between IDR 6,000,000 and IDR 20,000,000 and an age range of 20 to 45 years. Understanding respondent characteristics is essential because demographic composition influences consumption preferences, perceptions of upward mobility, and patterns of identity construction in urban environments.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 400)

Characteristics	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	52
	Female	48
Age	20–25 years	30
	26–35 years	45
	36–45 years	25
Education	High School/Diploma	15
	Bachelor's Degree	60
	Master's Degree	25
Occupation	Private Employee	55
	Entrepreneur	25
	Civil Servant	20

Source: Primary survey data processed by the authors, 2025

The demographic profile confirms that the respondents adequately represent the characteristics of Indonesia's urban middle class as defined in the research design. The dominance of highly educated individuals within productive working ages provides an appropriate empirical foundation for examining how consumerism and social mobility contribute to the emergence of contemporary urban identities.

Urban Middle-Class Consumerism

Consumerism constitutes one of the central dimensions examined in this study because consumption practices increasingly function as symbolic resources through which urban middle-class individuals communicate social status, professional achievement, and personal identity. Rather than serving purely utilitarian purposes, contemporary consumption frequently reflects broader aspirations toward modernity and urban belonging. Three indicators were used to evaluate consumerism, including preferences for branded products, susceptibility to social media trends, and prioritization of lifestyle experiences over financial savings.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Consumerism

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I prefer branded goods to demonstrate my social status.	3.85	0.89
My lifestyle is influenced by consumer trends on social media.	3.72	0.91
I prioritize lifestyle experiences such as culinary activities and tourism over saving money.	3.95	0.84

Source: Primary survey data processed by the authors, 2025

Consumerism was measured using three indicators related to branded product preferences, the influence of social media, and spending priorities for lifestyle experiences. As presented in Table 2, all indicators obtained mean values above 3.70, reflecting a relatively strong tendency toward consumer-oriented lifestyles among the respondents. The highest mean score was found for the statement regarding prioritizing culinary activities and tourism over saving ($M = 3.95$; $SD = 0.84$), followed by preferences for branded products ($M = 3.85$; $SD = 0.89$) and the influence of social media trends on lifestyle choices ($M = 3.72$; $SD = 0.91$). These results suggest that lifestyle experiences, symbolic consumption, and digital influences have become important components of consumption behavior among Indonesia's urban middle class.

Social Mobility

Social mobility represents another fundamental dimension of urban middle-class development because it reflects individuals' perceptions regarding opportunities for improving their socioeconomic position. In rapidly urbanizing societies, educational attainment, occupational advancement, and professional networking frequently function as the primary mechanisms through which individuals pursue upward mobility. Accordingly, this study evaluated respondents' perceptions regarding opportunities for status improvement, the importance of education, and employment as a means of expanding professional networks.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Social Mobility

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I believe I have opportunities to improve my social status.	3.88	0.83
Education is the most important factor for achieving social mobility.	4.20	0.72
My occupation provides opportunities to expand my professional network.	3.76	0.86

Source: Primary survey data processed by the authors, 2025

The descriptive findings for social mobility are presented in Table 3. Overall, respondents expressed positive perceptions regarding opportunities for improving their socioeconomic status, as reflected by mean values above 3.70 for all indicators. The highest level of agreement was recorded for the statement that education is the primary determinant of social mobility ($M = 4.20$; $SD = 0.72$), followed by confidence in opportunities to improve social status ($M = 3.88$; $SD = 0.83$). The perception that employment provides opportunities to expand professional networks also received a favorable evaluation ($M = 3.76$; $SD = 0.86$). These findings indicate that respondents perceive education, employment, and career development as important factors supporting upward social mobility within Indonesia's urban middle class.

New Identity Formation

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of New Identity Formation

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social media helps me build my self-image as a professional.	3.81	0.85
I feel that I am part of a modern urban community.	3.67	0.88
I express my identity through a consumer-oriented lifestyle.	3.74	0.83

Source: Primary survey data processed by the authors, 2025

The descriptive statistics for new identity formation are presented in Table 4. The results indicate that respondents generally demonstrated positive perceptions regarding the role of digital platforms and urban lifestyles in shaping their identities, with all mean scores exceeding 3.60. The statement that social media helps build a professional self-image recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.81$; $SD = 0.85$), followed by expressing identity through a consumer-oriented lifestyle ($M = 3.74$; $SD = 0.83$) and feeling part of a modern urban community ($M = 3.67$; $SD = 0.88$). These findings suggest that digital engagement, lifestyle expression, and urban social participation constitute important elements in the construction of contemporary identities among Indonesia's urban middle class.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Results

Independent Variables	Standardized Beta (β)	Sig.
Consumerism	0.41	0.000
Social Mobility	0.36	0.000
R^2	0.52	

Source: Primary survey data processed by the authors, 2025

To examine the influence of consumerism and social mobility on new identity formation, multiple linear regression analysis was performed. As presented in Table 5, both independent variables significantly influenced new identity ($p < 0.001$). Consumerism produced the strongest standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.41$), indicating a greater contribution to identity formation than social mobility ($\beta = 0.36$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.52$) shows that 52% of the variance in new identity formation can be explained jointly by consumerism and social mobility, while the remaining 48% is attributable to other factors not included in the research model. These findings demonstrate that both variables contribute significantly to explaining variations in identity formation among Indonesia's urban middle class.

Overall Descriptive Statistics

Table 5. Overall Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Consumerism	3.84	0.76	1.67	5.00
Social Mobility	3.95	0.69	2.00	5.00
New Identity Formation	3.74	0.72	1.67	5.00

Source: Primary survey data processed by the authors, 2025

To provide a comprehensive overview of the study variables, descriptive statistics were calculated for the composite scores of consumerism, social mobility, and new identity formation. As presented in Table 5, social mobility recorded the highest

overall mean score ($M = 3.95$; $SD = 0.69$), followed by consumerism ($M = 3.84$; $SD = 0.76$) and new identity formation ($M = 3.74$; $SD = 0.72$). The relatively similar standard deviations indicate moderate variability among respondents, suggesting that perceptions across the three constructs were generally consistent. Furthermore, the observed minimum and maximum values demonstrate that responses covered the full range of the measurement scale, indicating sufficient variability for subsequent inferential analysis.

Distribution of Respondents by City

Table 6. Distribution of Respondents by Research Location

City	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Jakarta	100	25.0
Surabaya	90	22.5
Bandung	80	20.0
Makassar	70	17.5
Medan	60	15.0
Total	400	100.0

Source: Primary survey data processed by the authors, 2025

The respondents were proportionally distributed across the five selected metropolitan areas to ensure representation of Indonesia's major urban regions. As shown in Table 6, Jakarta contributed the largest proportion of respondents (25%), followed by Surabaya (22.5%), Bandung (20.0%), Makassar (17.5%), and Medan (15.0%). This distribution reflects the sampling strategy described in the methodology and provides balanced representation across different urban contexts, thereby improving the generalizability of the findings.

Respondents' Monthly Household Income

Table 7. Monthly Household Income of Respondents

Monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage (%)
IDR 6,000,000–10,000,000	140	35.0
IDR 10,000,001–15,000,000	170	42.5
IDR 15,000,001–20,000,000	90	22.5
Total	400	100.0

Source: Primary survey data processed by the authors (2026).

Respondents represented various levels of urban middle-class income within the inclusion criteria established for this study. As presented in Table 7, the largest proportion of respondents reported monthly household incomes between IDR 10,000,001 and IDR 15,000,000 (42.5%), followed by IDR 6,000,000–10,000,000 (35.0%), while 22.5% reported incomes exceeding IDR 15,000,000 per month. These findings indicate that the sample encompasses a broad range of middle-income households, thereby providing an adequate representation of the socioeconomic diversity within Indonesia's urban middle class.

Consumerism, Social Mobility, and the Construction of Urban Middle-Class Identity in Indonesia

The findings demonstrate that the urban middle class in Indonesia is increasingly characterized by the intersection of consumerism, aspirations for upward social mobility, and digitally mediated identity construction. Rather than functioning as independent dimensions, these factors collectively shape how middle-class individuals position themselves within rapidly changing urban environments. The significant influence of consumerism on new identity formation suggests that lifestyle

practices have become an important mechanism through which individuals communicate social status and urban belonging. This finding is consistent with recent studies indicating that contemporary consumer culture extends beyond economic transactions to become a symbolic process of identity construction and social differentiation (Rokka et al., 2023; Han, 2024; Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2023). Likewise, Sahin and Nasir (2022) argue that status-oriented consumption increasingly reflects symbolic value rather than functional utility, particularly among urban populations experiencing socioeconomic advancement. The Indonesian context therefore reinforces the argument that consumption practices are embedded within broader sociocultural processes associated with modernization and digital transformation.

The study also confirms that education remains the most important perceived pathway to upward social mobility among Indonesia's urban middle class. This finding aligns with evidence from emerging economies where educational attainment continues to represent a critical form of human capital for improving occupational opportunities and socioeconomic status (Miladinov, 2023; Boterman & Van Gent, 2023). However, the regression results indicate that consumerism exerts a stronger influence on identity formation than social mobility, suggesting that symbolic lifestyle expressions increasingly complement, and in some cases outweigh, structural achievements in shaping social identity. This pattern differs slightly from earlier research that emphasized education and occupational status as the dominant determinants of middle-class positioning, reflecting the growing importance of digital consumer culture in contemporary urban societies (Pepinsky et al., 2021; Cover, 2021). The findings therefore illustrate that while educational achievement remains essential for socioeconomic advancement, the public expression of identity is increasingly negotiated through visible consumption and digital participation.

Another important finding concerns the role of digital platforms in reinforcing contemporary urban identities. Respondents reported that social media contributes substantially to the development of professional self-images and feelings of belonging to modern urban communities. This observation supports recent studies demonstrating that digital environments have become central spaces for identity performance, social interaction, and symbolic recognition (Prester et al., 2023; Rokka et al., 2023). Unlike traditional perspectives that viewed identity primarily as a consequence of occupation or socioeconomic status, current evidence suggests that digital communication technologies enable individuals to continuously construct and reconstruct their identities through online representation and lifestyle expression. These findings are also consistent with recent research showing that social media facilitates both personal branding and the reproduction of urban cultural values, thereby strengthening the relationship between consumer practices and identity formation (Rosida et al., 2023; Priyatna, 2024). Consequently, urban identity is increasingly shaped by interactions between digital participation and consumption behavior rather than by economic position alone.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing literature on urban sociology by integrating consumerism, social mobility, and identity formation into a single analytical framework. Previous studies have frequently examined these constructs independently, whereas the present study demonstrates their simultaneous influence on the evolving characteristics of Indonesia's urban middle class. This integrated perspective constitutes the principal novelty of the research by illustrating that identity construction is produced through the interaction of economic aspirations, symbolic consumption, and digital engagement. Practically, the findings provide useful insights for policymakers and urban planners seeking to understand changing middle-class behavior in rapidly urbanizing societies. Public policies promoting educational opportunities should therefore be complemented by

initiatives encouraging responsible consumption, financial literacy, and digital citizenship to strengthen long-term socioeconomic resilience rather than solely supporting consumption-driven growth.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional survey design, preventing the observation of changes in consumer behavior and identity formation over time. Second, the sample was limited to respondents from five metropolitan cities, which may not fully capture the diversity of Indonesia's urban middle class across different regional contexts. Third, the regression model explained 52% of the variance in identity formation, indicating that additional determinants such as religiosity, family background, cultural values, psychological factors, and political orientation may also contribute to contemporary identity construction. Future studies are therefore encouraged to employ longitudinal designs, expand geographical coverage to secondary cities, and incorporate broader sociocultural variables within more comprehensive analytical models. Such approaches would provide deeper understanding of how urban middle-class identities continue to evolve in response to digital transformation, economic restructuring, and changing social values while further enriching comparative studies across emerging economies.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the dynamics of Indonesia's urban middle class are shaped by the interaction between consumerism, social mobility, and new identity formation within an increasingly digitalized urban environment. The findings reveal that consumerism exerts a stronger influence on identity formation than social mobility, indicating that lifestyle practices and symbolic consumption have become central mechanisms through which urban middle-class individuals express social status and belonging. Although education remains the most highly valued pathway for upward mobility, identity construction is increasingly mediated by digital engagement and consumption-oriented lifestyles.

These findings contribute theoretically by integrating consumerism, social mobility, and identity formation into a unified analytical framework, thereby extending contemporary discussions on urban sociology and consumer culture in emerging economies. Practically, the study provides insights for policymakers to strengthen educational opportunities while promoting financial literacy and responsible consumption to support sustainable middle-class development. Nevertheless, this research is limited by its cross-sectional design, focus on five metropolitan cities, and the exclusion of broader sociocultural determinants. Future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches, include more diverse urban contexts, and incorporate additional variables such as cultural values, religiosity, digital literacy, and social capital to provide a more comprehensive understanding of middle-class transformation.

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