

Student Consumerism in the Digital Era: A Comparative Study of Socialist Economics and Islamic Economics

Andra Dwi Rahmat¹, Moh. Ulwanul Roid Al Fahmi², Fauzan Mahmudi³
Muhammad Diaz Supandi⁴

¹²³ Postgraduate Program Syariah Economics, Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari State Islamic University, Ponorogo, Indonesia

⁴ University of Darussalam Gontor, Ponorogo, Indonesia

 andra.rahmat@student.uinponorogo.ac.id

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Abstract

This study addresses a significant academic gap by critically examining the pervasive phenomenon of student consumerism in the digital era through the lens of alternative economic systems. While existing research often analyzes this behavior from psychological or sociological perspectives, a systemic critique from paradigms fundamentally opposed to market capitalism is scarce. This research aims to fill this void by conducting a comparative analysis of how Socialist Economics and Islamic Economics diagnose, critique, and offer alternatives to the hyper-consumptive behaviors of students engaged with digital platforms.

The urgency of this inquiry is multifaceted, extending from the practical need to foster critical economic literacy among students to the academic imperative of facilitating dialogue between two major alternative economic traditions, all within the global context of ecological and social crises driven by unsustainable consumption. Employing a qualitative library research methodology within a critical-comparative framework, this study systematically deconstructs the phenomenology of the digital marketplace. It applies core concepts from each paradigm such as alienation and commodity fetishism (Socialist) versus *maslahah*, *israf*, and *amanah* (Islamic).

The study's novelty lies in its rare comparative focus, its translation of abstract principles into tools for analyzing concrete consumption behaviors, and its reconceptualization of students as both objects of systemic forces and potential agents of change. The analysis ultimately reveals a profound convergence in both paradigms' condemnation of consumerism's dehumanizing effects, yet highlights a fundamental divergence in their ontological roots, causal explanations, and envisioned solutions, indicating the potential for strategic complementarity in critiquing contemporary digital capitalism.

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INTRODUCTION

Amidst the barrage of personalized advertisements, the ease of one-click digital payments, and an online culture that glorifies the possession of the latest goods, today's students live in a hyper-active consumption ecosystem (Danlami et al., 2023). E-commerce platforms, subscription streaming services, games with in-app purchases, and rapidly changing lifestyle trends on social media have created a new reality. In this reality, the line between needs and wants is increasingly blurred, while the social pressure to always appear updated and connected becomes an imperative. Consumption behavior is no longer merely about fulfilling basic needs but has transformed into a tool for identity expression, seeking validation, and an escape from boredom (Atha Zhalifunnas, Muhammad Diaz Supandi, 2025). The phenomenon

of student consumerism becomes increasingly evident with the prevalence of purchasing branded coffee as a "study companion," subscribing to various digital platforms, to buying clothes online only to be worn once for social media content. This objective reality illustrates how students, as an intellectual group, are instead trapped in a vortex of impulsive, hedonistic, and often irrational consumption patterns in the digital era.

Idea As agents of change and future national leaders, students are expected to possess critical awareness and autonomy in their actions, including in their consumption patterns. Ideally, their economic behavior should be based on the values of rationality, prioritizing academic needs, future awareness, and social responsibility (Danlami et al., 2023). Consumption should function as a means to support productivity, self-development, and sustainable well-being, not as an end goal or a tool for social validation. In a broader context, a healthy economic system should ideally be able to shape economic subjects—in this case, students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also financially wise and possess resilience against market manipulation. The ideal consumption pattern is one that is reflective, planned, value-oriented, and aligned with individual financial capacity as well as its impact on the environment and surrounding community (Supandi et al., 2024). Thus, there is a wide gap between the occurring reality of student consumerism and the ideal role and economic behavior expected of students.

Various studies have extensively discussed consumerism among students, generally through social psychology, marketing, or cultural sociology approaches. These studies often highlight triggering factors such as the influence of social media, advertising, peer pressure, and self-concept. However, in-depth analysis that places this phenomenon within the framework of alternative economic systems critical of market capitalism remains limited (Arafah, 2019). Conventional economics often views consumerism as a natural result of individual preferences and supply-demand dynamics, without fundamental criticism of the underlying systemic structure. On the other hand, literature on socialist economics and Islamic economics often discusses the concept of consumption normatively and separately, without conducting a critical reading of contemporary phenomena such as student consumerism in the digital era. Therefore, there is a gap in research that comparatively and applicatively tests the relevance of systemic critique from two alternative economic paradigms Socialist and Islamic towards the reality of student consumption behavior in the digital era, which is notably a product of the current dominant economic system.

Examining student consumerism through the comparative lens of socialist and Islamic economics has multidimensional urgency. Practically, this research is important to provide critical and alternative perspectives for students so they can deconstruct the consumption culture surrounding them, thereby building self-immunity and more principled economic literacy. For educational institutions, the research findings can serve as a basis for designing value-based financial education and consumption awareness modules, not merely technical ones. Academically, this research fills a discursive void by dialoguing two traditions of economic thought often considered opposing in reading contemporary phenomena. More broadly, in a global context marked by ecological crisis and social inequality largely triggered by unsustainable consumption patterns, critiquing consumerism among the educated middle class becomes a strategic initial step towards envisioning more just and responsible economic practices.

The novelty of this research lies in three main aspects. First, a comparative approach between socialist economics and Islamic economics in analyzing the specific phenomenon of student consumerism in the digital era is still very rarely conducted. Second, this research does

not stop at the conceptual-normative level but attempts to translate the abstract principles of both economic systems into critical analytical tools for concrete student consumption behavior, for example in purchasing gadgets, fashion, or digital services. Third, this research offers a unique perspective by positioning students not merely as passive objects of the economic system, but also as subjects who have the potential for agency to adopt, reinterpret, or reject the logic of consumerism, with support or critique from alternative ideological economic perspectives. Thus, this research offers a fresh analytical synthesis at the intersection of political economy studies, consumption psychology, and higher education.

Based on the problem identification and urgency above, this research will be carried out with a comparative-critical framework formula. This research seeks to answer the main question: How do socialist economics and Islamic economics perspectives analyze and critique the phenomenon of student consumerism in the digital era, and what are the points of convergence and divergence of these two perspectives in offering alternatives? To answer this, the research will be conducted through three analytical stages. First, identifying and deeply describing the manifestations of student consumerism in the digital era through literature study and preliminary observation. Second, conducting a critical analysis of the phenomenon using core concepts from socialist economics (such as commodity fetishism, alienation, exploitation, and critique of capital) and Islamic economics (such as the concepts of *maslahah* (benefit/welfare), *israf* (extravagance), *tabdzir* (wastefulness), *gharar* (excessive uncertainty), and the function of wealth as a trust/*amanah*). Third, mapping comparatively the similarities and differences in the critiques and solutions offered by the two paradigms, to then conclude the theoretical and practical implications for shaping more conscious and responsible economic behavior among students.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

1. *Dominant Paradigms in Analyzing Student Consumerism: The Limits of Sociological and Psychological Approaches*

The academic inquiry into student consumerism has been predominantly framed within the disciplinary boundaries of sociology, psychology, and educational studies. This body of literature conceptualizes the phenomenon as the adoption of market-oriented attitudes, where students increasingly view themselves as customers purchasing an educational service rather than as learners engaging in a scholarly endeavor. Empirical studies, such as those by Fairchild et al. (2007), quantify this shift, revealing that a significant majority of undergraduates prioritize grade outcomes over learning depth, viewing instructor engagement as a service obligation. Scholars like Delucchi and Korgen (2002) link this mentality to the broader neoliberal restructuring of higher education, characterized by rising tuition fees, institutional competition for rankings, and the strategic rebranding of universities as service providers. This market logic is shown to negatively impact pedagogical integrity, student well-being, and the very purpose of education. However, this conventional scholarship operates largely within the established framework of market capitalism. It critiques the symptoms the commodification of education and the attendant student attitudes but stops short of a fundamental interrogation of the economic system that generates and depends upon a pervasive culture of consumption. By focusing on institutional policy and individual psychology, it neglects the systemic economic imperatives that make consumerism a functional necessity, not merely a cultural choice, thereby offering a diagnosis that is descriptive but not radically critical of the underlying structure.

2. ***The Structural Critique of Socialist Economics: Alienation, Fetishism, and the Imperatives of Capital***

In stark contrast, socialist economics, rooted in the Marxist tradition, provides a foundational structural and systemic critique of consumerism. From this perspective, consumerism is not an accidental byproduct but a logical and necessary component of capitalist reproduction. It serves the dual function of realizing the surplus value locked in commodities and averting crises of overproduction by perpetually stimulating demand. The digital era represents an intensification of this logic into a phase of "digital capitalism," where platforms like Meta, Amazon, and Google become dominant global actors. Their business models, reliant on data extraction, algorithmic persuasion, and targeted advertising, create a hyper-efficient apparatus for manufacturing desires and driving continuous consumption, with significant ecological costs. The socialist critique employs powerful analytical tools: commodity fetishism, which describes how social relations between people are obscured by relations between marketed things, and alienation, which captures the multidimensional estrangement of individuals from their labor, its products, their community, and their own human potential. For students, this translates to being interpellated as both future exploited laborers and present-day consumers, their desires shaped to serve capital accumulation. This integration is seen as a form of false consciousness, diverting potential political energy towards personal consumption. The proposed socialist alternative, as discussed by contemporary theorists of digital ecosocialism, involves a revolutionary shift to common ownership of digital infrastructure, the abolition of exploitative intellectual property regimes, and the organization of production based on collective human need rather than private profit.

3. ***The Normative-Ethical Critique of Islamic Economics: Trusteeship, Prohibition of Excess, and Spiritual Purpose***

Islamic economics originates from a radically different epistemological foundation, offering a normative-ethical and transcendental critique of consumerism. Its core principles are Tawhid (the Oneness of God) and Khilafah (human vicegerency or trusteeship on Earth). Consequently, all wealth is considered a sacred trust (amanah) from God, and all economic conduct must comply with Shariah to achieve comprehensive welfare (maslahah) and divine justice ('adl). Its condemnation of excessive consumption is therefore unequivocal and grounded in spiritual law. Central to this critique are the prohibitions against israf (extravagant waste) and tabdzir (squandering), and the injunction against gharar (excessive uncertainty and deception in transactions). Where socialist analysis identifies class exploitation, Islamic economics identifies a violation of the inherent rights (huquq) of the poor and the community, as hoarding and lavish spending obstruct the just circulation of wealth. This critique has been extended to contemporary "Islamic consumerism," where scholars decry an "epidemic" of commodifying religious practice from luxury halal tourism and branded modest fashion to premium "Sunnah" product lines arguing that it substitutes material display for sincere God-consciousness (taqwa). This focus on worldly possession (dunya) is seen as inducing ghurur (deception) and ghaflah (spiritual heedlessness), alienating the individual from their ultimate purpose. The Islamic economic alternative is a complete system built on the prohibition of riba (usury/interest), the wealth-purifying mechanism of zakat (obligatory alms), and ethical trade and profit-loss-sharing partnerships, all designed to cultivate a balanced (tawazun), equitable, and spiritually conscious society.

4. ***The Digital Era as a New Frontier: Divergent Diagnoses of Platform-Mediated Consumption***

The digital era constitutes a novel and critical frontier that both paradigms engage with, yet their diagnoses differ markedly. For socialist critique, digital platforms are the apotheosis of capitalist exploitation—privatized, globalized utilities that intensify commodification through surveillance, behavioral nudging, and the creation of addictive feedback loops. The "frictionless" experience of one-click buying and digital credit is seen as a deliberate strategy to accelerate consumption cycles and deepen alienation. The student, in this view, is a prime target: a data-rich subject with future earning potential, actively groomed for a lifetime of indebted consumption. Islamic critique, while acknowledging these mechanisms, frames the digital arena primarily as a powerful new sphere of spiritual trial and moral hazard. The endless scroll of curated lifestyles on social media is analyzed as a potent engine for fuelling hasad (envy), riya' (ostentation), and israf. The ease of digital transactions is seen as weakening the psychological and ethical guardrails against impulsive and unnecessary spending. Both paradigms thus recognize the transformative impact of digital technology, but one interprets it as a structural economic weapon, while the other views it as an unprecedented moral and spiritual challenge that demands greater individual discipline and systemic safeguards based on Islamic ethics.

5. ***Conceptualizing the Student Subject: Structural Victim vs. Responsible Moral Agent***

A fundamental divergence between the two paradigms lies in their conceptualization of the individual in this case, the student within the system of consumerism. Socialist analysis, with its emphasis on material determinism, predominantly positions the student as a victim of overarching capitalist structures. Their desires, choices, and very subjectivity are seen as shaped by ideological apparatuses (education, media, advertising). While agency exists in the form of potential class consciousness and resistance, it is heavily constrained by the logic of capital; the alienated consumer lacks true autonomy. Islamic economics, conversely, posits the individual as a morally responsible agent (mukallaf). Endowed with intellect ('aql) and divine guidance, each person is accountable for their choices. Excessive or unethical consumption is therefore not merely the deterministic outcome of a corrupt system, but primarily a personal and spiritual failure succumbing to base desires (nafs) and Satanic whispers (waswas), and a breach of the divine trust (amanah). This foundational difference between a subject shaped by structure and a subject judged by moral choice profoundly influences each paradigm's proposed path to change and its vision of an ideal economic actor.

6. ***The Identified Research Gap and Hypothesis Development***

A critical synthesis of the literature reveals a significant, multi-layered academic gap. Mainstream social science provides a descriptive analysis but lacks a foundational systemic critique. Meanwhile, the rich theoretical traditions of socialist and Islamic economics have developed their critiques of consumption in parallel, largely in isolation from one another and from the empirical specifics of contemporary digital-native student life. There is a striking absence of scholarship that: (1) compares these two major alternative economic paradigms directly; (2) applies their abstract, normative principles as joint analytical tools to dissect concrete, modern digital consumption behaviors (e.g., subscription services, influencer-driven purchases, "pay later" schemes); and (3) reconceptualizes students not as passive, one-dimensional subjects (either purely victims or purely sinners), but as complex actors who are both shaped by powerful systemic

forces and possess the potential for agency informed by critical ideological perspectives. Therefore, this study is guided by the central hypothesis that while Socialist and Islamic Economics will demonstrate significant convergence in their damning diagnosis of digital-era student consumerism as destructive and dehumanizing, they will diverge fundamentally in their root-cause analysis (material structure vs. moral-spiritual deviation) and, consequently, in their proposed solutions (revolutionary structural change vs. comprehensive ethical-systemic reform). By staging this critical dialogue and testing this hypothesis, the research aims to produce a novel synthesis at the intersection of political economy, religious ethics, and digital culture studies.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a library research approach, utilizing a critical-comparative analysis method (Drs. Albert Lumbu et al., 2021). The primary data source consists of textual materials, including: (1) foundational and contemporary literature on socialist economics (e.g., works by Karl Marx, contemporary Marxist critiques of consumer culture) and Islamic economics (e.g., classical fiqh texts on consumption, modern Islamic economic treatises); (2) academic journals, books, and reports that discuss the phenomenon of consumerism, digital culture, and the sociological-psychological aspects of student consumption behavior; and (3) relevant empirical studies on student spending patterns, digital platform engagement, and the influence of social media (Sugiyono, 2019). The data collection technique involves systematic documentation, where sources are identified, selected, and critically examined for their theoretical arguments, conceptual frameworks, and relevance to the core research question. This method allows for a deep, conceptual exploration and theoretical construction necessary for a philosophical and economic comparison of two distinct paradigms.

The analysis is conducted in three systematic stages, guided by the comparative-critical framework. First, data regarding the manifestations of *student consumerism in the digital era* are synthesized from sociological, psychological, and media studies literature to build a comprehensive descriptive foundation. Second, a thematic and conceptual analysis is performed by applying key analytical tools from each paradigm such as alienation and commodity fetishism (Socialist lens) versus *maslahah* and prohibition of *israf* (Islamic lens)—to interpret and critique the constructed phenomenon. This stage involves extracting, comparing, and contrasting the inherent logic and normative critiques within each system's literature (Fadli, 2021). Finally, in the third stage, the findings from both analytical streams are juxtaposed to map points of convergence (e.g., shared critiques of exploitation, unsustainable excess) and divergence (e.g., foundational philosophical assumptions, proposed ideal systems). The entire process ensures the research remains anchored in theoretical dialogue, leading to synthesized conclusions about alternative frameworks for understanding and addressing contemporary student consumerism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Deconstructing the Digital Marketplace: The Phenomenology of Student Consumerism

The digital marketplace that serves as the daily habitat for students is far from a neutral or passive space; it is a dynamic ecosystem that aggressively shapes consumer subjectivity, preferences, and even desires through sophisticated algorithmic personalization engines (Awan et al., 2023). Every digital interaction from clicks, views, watch duration, to search history is harvested as raw data, then processed into psychographic models that not only

predict but also progressively shape and dictate wants. Under these conditions, the philosophical boundary between free will and algorithmically-directed suggestion becomes profoundly blurred, raising fundamental questions about autonomy in consumption. Platforms such as e-commerce, social media, and streaming services operate on the principle of *captology*—computers as persuasive technology—where user interface design is deliberately engineered to maximize user engagement and convert it into purchases. As adept users who have grown up with this technology, students often live within a consumption *filter bubble* or *echo chamber*, where their preferences are constantly reflected and reinforced by algorithms, creating a tautological cycle (Maulidy et al., 2025). Within this cycle, desires that are essentially triggered and conditioned by the market are mistakenly felt and believed to be the most authentic and spontaneous expressions of personal identity.

Instant digital payment mechanisms—such as one-click purchases, e-wallets, and *paylater* facilities—have radically deconstructed the traditional economic experience, transforming transactions into a kind of simulation disconnected from the material reality of money (Ira Yulistin, Nayla Kamilatul Mukaromah, 2025). The exchange process loses its physical "weight" and psychological ritual; the tangible sensation of handing over paper money or swiping a credit card is replaced by brief on-screen notifications and the abstraction of subtracting numbers from a virtual balance. The phenomenology of student consumption in this context reveals symptoms of *financial desensitization* or *financial numbing*, where the act of spending money gradually loses its psychological charge of consideration, caution, and reflection. This *frictionless payment* creates a psychological illusion that financial resources are either limitless or easily renewable, which in turn significantly encourages impulse buying behavior (Fathoni, 2025). Linguistically, students no longer "pay" in the conventional sense imbued with value exchange, but merely "authorize approval" or "confirm," a semantic shift that reflects both the shallowing of economic meaning and the loss of awareness regarding the real consequences of their consumption actions.

For the digital generation of students, the online marketplace has evolved into the primary stage for the ongoing project of *self-making* and identity performance. Each purchase—from meticulously curated thrifted clothing to the latest limited-edition gadgets—is often no longer motivated solely by utility, but primarily by its *sign-value* as material for producing self-narratives on social media. Consumption thus transforms into a complex visual language for communicating aesthetic taste, social status positioning, and technological sophistication (Awan et al., 2023). Cultural phenomena such as *haul culture*, *unboxing videos*, and *outfits of the day* (OOTD) are clear evidence of how a commodity's use-value has been completely subsumed by its sign-value and symbolic value. Within this shifted market logic, students are essentially consuming the *image* and *aspiration* represented by a product, more than the physical product itself (Bartram et al., 2007). The peak of satisfaction often lies not in the functional use of the item, but in the moment of *social validation* when their posts receive likes, complimentary comments, and shares, thereby reinforcing the cycle of consumption as a quest for recognition.

The digital marketplace has successfully commodified the two most valuable and finite assets students possess: time and attention. Subscription-based business models—such as Spotify Premium, Netflix, Canva Pro, Microsoft 365, and various software-as-a-service (SaaS) offerings—have created a new form of consumption that is parasitic, automatic, and continuous. The relatively small monthly fees, often promoted as "the price of just a cup of coffee," become normalized, yet cumulatively and over the long term they form a significant *financial bleed* that erodes budgets. Students frequently experience *subscription*

fatigue, a mental exhaustion from having to manage and keep track of so many active subscriptions, yet find it difficult to cancel them because these services have become deeply integrated into their academic, social, and entertainment routines (Ira Yulistin, Nayla Kamilatul Mukaromah, 2025). Consumption here is passive, invisible, and operates in the background—a reality that reflects how the digital market cleverly locks consumers into long-term dependency relationships that are hard to sever, while periodically extracting value.

The process of socializing consumerist values among students is no longer dominated by traditional corporate advertising, but by new actors such as influencers, content creators, and haulers. These figures function as *proxies* or extensions of the market that are far more persuasive because they are constructed as "virtual friends," "relatable peers," or trustworthy experts within specific niches. They present consumption as part of a desirable lifestyle through personal and seemingly authentic narratives. On the other hand, online communities—such as specific product discussion groups on Facebook, gamer forums on Discord, or fandom platforms—become highly effective spaces of socialization. Within these spaces, product knowledge, shopping tips, detailed reviews, and recommendations create an *echo chamber* that encourages collective purchasing and provides social legitimacy for consumption decisions. The pressure to consume in this ecosystem comes horizontally from peer reference groups, making it more difficult to identify, reject, or critically scrutinize compared to the vertical pressure of corporate advertising.

One of the most sophisticated strategies of the digital marketplace is its ability to frame excessive consumption as a rational and even imperative investment for academic success. Products such as high-specification laptops, tablets for digital note-taking, expensive ergonomic chairs, paid productivity apps, premium online courses, and even specialty coffee for study sessions are marketed not as luxury items, but as *legitimate needs* for becoming a competitive, efficient, and modern student. Consequently, the logic of consumerism—which is essentially hedonistic and accumulative—successfully infiltrates and masquerades as an ethos of learning, productivity, and self-improvement (Skovgaard, 2024). Students thus become trapped in an ironic paradox: they feel they must consume more and more sophisticated goods to become more productive and academically successful, yet in reality, their time, cognitive energy, and financial resources are heavily drained by the activities of curating, comparing, purchasing, and managing these various "productivity-enhancing" commodities, which can sometimes distract from the academic goals themselves.

The digital marketplace drives its consumption engine by deeply exploiting human psychological mechanisms, primarily the Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) and the perception of scarcity. Tactics such as time-limited flash sales, heavily discounted items with countdown timers, and "only X items left!" notifications are designed to create an artificial sense of urgency and trigger quick decisions without mature consideration (Rafiki & Wahab, 2014). For students who typically operate on limited budgets, these psychological mechanisms are highly effective because they offer the illusion of access and the ability to afford items that are usually beyond their financial reach. The trap, however, lies in the logic of *false economy*: they buy something primarily because it is cheap, not because they genuinely need it. As a result, the small savings made on one individual item turn into large aggregate expenditures on many items that are ultimately unnecessary. In this scenario, consumptive greed is attractively packaged within a narrative of financial intelligence and savvy shopping, turning students into "smart shoppers" who only become more deeply entangled in the shopping cycle.

This comprehensive phenomenological analysis ultimately reveals the core paradox defining the student's position within the digital marketplace: they are agents who are

technically highly active (constantly choosing, clicking, comparing, and deciding) yet structurally passive (because the framework of choices, the horizon of desires, and even the criteria of "need" have been curated and shaped by algorithmic logic and market architecture). They experience a form of *consumer alienation*: disconnected from the real—financial, social, and ecological—consequences of their atomized and abstracted consumption acts. The digital marketplace, with all its sophistication, successfully creates a consumer subject who *feels* sovereign, autonomous, and expressive in their consumption choices, while simultaneously and systematically stripping away their critical and reflective capacity to question the broader economic-political system that produces these illusory choices (Mohd Najib et al., 2025). This deconstruction firmly demonstrates that *student consumerism* in the digital era is not merely a matter of individual lifestyle choice or a simple lack of financial literacy, but rather a complex symptom of a sophisticated *techno-economic-cultural apparatus* that strategically positions students—with their social mobility, trend sensitivity, and productive future—as a highly valuable *nodal point* in the circulation and accumulation of global digital capital.

Two Lenses of Critique: Socialist and Islamic Economic Analyses of Consumption

The socialist and Islamic analyses of consumption are rooted in radically different philosophical and cosmological foundations, which in turn shape the logic of their critiques. Socialist economics rests on historical-dialectical materialism, which views the economic structure (relations of production, ownership of the means of production) as the base that determines social consciousness, law, and cultural patterns, including consumption (Syamsur, Abdul Aziz, Hendri, 2021). From this perspective, consumerism is a superstructural symptom logically generated by the capitalist base. Conversely, Islamic economics is grounded in the principle of tawhid (the Oneness of God) and the concept of khilafah (vicegerency/humanity as God's trustee). This principle positions all ownership as a trust (amanah) from Allah, and all economic activity, including consumption, must submit to the framework of Shariah, which aims to achieve maslahah (comprehensive welfare) and 'adl (justice). This foundational difference produces distinct starting points for critique: socialism attacks the material structures that produce injustice, while Islam emphasizes the moral-spiritual deviation from the purpose of human creation and wealth.

The socialist lens, through Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, criticizes how capitalism conceals social relations and exploitation behind relationships between objects (commodities) (Wildan, 2022). In the market, commodities appear to possess an intrinsic magical value, obscuring the fact that their value originates from human labor and exploitative relations of production. Consuming these fetishized commodities means participating in reinforcing the system's illusion and alienating workers from the products of their own labor. On the other hand, Islamic economics approaches commodities through the concepts of halal (permissible), thayyib (wholesome/good), and amanah (trust). A good (mal) is not neutral; it must be acquired and used in a halal and thayyib manner (Bashardost & Taheri, 2025). Consumption involving unlawful goods, or the excessive use (israf) of lawful goods, constitutes a breach of the trust of ownership. Islamic critique places greater emphasis on the morality of transactions and usage, and their impact on the individual's soul (nafs) and social balance (mizan), rather than merely uncovering hidden relations of production.

In the capitalist economy critiqued by socialism, the motive for individual consumption is closely tied to the logic of capital accumulation at the systemic level. High consumption is necessary to realize the surplus value embedded in commodities and to prevent crises of

overproduction (Farizi & Khotimah, 2022). However, at the individual level, the need to consume is artificially created through advertising and culture to perpetuate the accumulation cycle. The underlying motive is the reproduction of capital, and consumers are manipulated into becoming instruments of this process. Islamic economics analyzes consumption motives through human psychology within the framework of divine norms. Consumption is justified to fulfill needs (*hajat*) and achieve comfort (*kamal al-nafs*), but it must be free from the drives of excess (*israf*), arrogance (*takabbur*), and following base desires (*ittiba' al-hawa*). The ideal motive for consumption is to strengthen the body for worship, support the family, and give charity (Awan et al., 2023). Islamic critique is directed at diseases of the heart such as greed, avarice, and the desire for ostentation (*riya'*), which distort the true function of consumption.

Socialism views modern consumerism as both a product and a tool of class exploitation. Uneven consumption patterns reflect and deepen the class division between the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who only sell their labor power (Alatas, 1985). The alienated consumption of the working class—buying goods they themselves produce but do not own—merely becomes a means of reproducing labor power for further exploitation. Furthermore, consumerism diverts attention from class struggle (false consciousness). Islamic economics criticizes consumerism through the lens of distributive justice and the rights inherent in wealth. Excessive consumption (*israf* and *tabdzir*) by an individual or group is considered a violation of the rights of the poor and *zakat* recipients, which are attached to the wealth of the rich. The principles of *'adl* (justice) and *ihsan* (excellence/benevolence) demand consumption patterns that do not disturb social balance. Violating the prohibition of *israf* is not only a personal sin but also a social crime that can lead to inequality, envy, and the corruption of the community's (*ummah*) order (Aprilianti et al., 2023).

Socialist critique is systemic and radical, targeting the very heart of capitalism: private ownership of the means of production, production for profit, and the law of value. Consumerism is seen as an inevitable logical consequence of a system that requires perpetually growing effective demand and the creation of false needs to absorb production and maintain profit rates (Rusanti, 2021). The solution offered is a revolutionary transformation of the system—abolishing private ownership in favor of social/state ownership. Islamic economic critique is also systemic, but its point of focus is different: the interest-based economic system. *Riba* (usury/interest), in the Islamic view, is the heart of injustice and exponential growth that forces exploitation and excessive consumption. The usurious system encourages consumption through burdensome easy credit and severs the financial sector from the real economy. The Islamic solution is to build an alternative economic system based on the principles of profit-loss sharing, the prohibition of *riba*, and *zakat*, which is intrinsically believed to encourage fairer and more controlled consumption patterns.

In socialist analysis, the individual consumer is essentially a victim of the overarching capitalist economic structure. Their desires and choices are shaped by market forces, bourgeois ideology, and cultural apparatuses. Although there is room for class consciousness and resistance, individual agency is heavily constrained by economic determinism (Rusanti, 2021). The alienated consumer lacks genuine autonomy. In contrast, Islamic economics positions the individual as a fully responsible moral agent (*mukallaf*) before God. Every Muslim is endowed with intellect (*'aql*) and revealed guidance to distinguish between the *halal* and *haram*, and to control their desires (*nafs*) (Muhammad Diaz Supandi, 2025). Excessive or misguided consumption is not merely the result of systemic determinism but is primarily a personal failure in executing the trust (*amanah*) and resisting Satanic temptations (*syaitan*).

Individual responsibility (fardh 'ain) is heavily emphasized, although a just system must also be built to facilitate good choices.

The alternative consumption patterns proposed by the two paradigms reflect their philosophical differences. Socialism envisions consumption patterns rationally planned based on the real needs of society, not market-created wants. Needs are determined through democratic/collective processes, and consumption is met through fair distribution based on the principle "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Consumption becomes functional and loses its competitive symbolic dimension. Islamic economics envisions a balanced (tawazun) and proportional (i'tidal) consumption pattern. Consumption is not forbidden but must be within the corridors of halal, thayyib, non-israf, and prioritizing needs over wants. It must also be directed towards social investment through charity (infak and sadaqah) (Dita Afrina, Achiria, 2020). This ideal consumption pattern is one imbued with blessing (barakah), satisfying physically while drawing one closer to God and benefiting others. These two lenses of critique show important convergence in condemning the greed, inequality, and irrationality inherent in extreme capitalist consumerism. Both reject consumption as the ultimate end of life and criticize the system that drives such destructive behavior. However, their divergence is fundamental. Socialism is rooted in material immanence, offering worldly solutions through revolutionary changes in political-economic structures, with the state as the primary actor. Islamic economics is rooted in theological transcendence, offering solutions that integrate changes in the legal-economic system (Shariah) with the spiritual transformation of the individual. For socialism, consumerism is a problem of class and system; for Islam, it is a problem of morality, spirituality, and system simultaneously. Their meeting point lies in the critique of the status quo, but the exits they offer come from completely different maps of reality—one centered on collective humanity in history, the other centered on humanity as servant and vicegerent of God on earth.

Between Structural Alienation and Ethical Trusteeship: Convergences and Divergences in Alternative Paradigms

Despite originating from opposing philosophical foundations, the socialist and Islamic paradigms meet in a strong critical consensus regarding the end result of the capitalist economic system. Both reject the reduction of humans to mere consumption machines (*homo economicus*) and pure commodities (Lestari et al., 2025). The socialist critique of *commodity fetishism*, which hides exploitative relations, finds its parallel in the Islamic critique of the worship of wealth (*ta'thir al-mal*) that causes forgetfulness of God. Both view excessive, impulsive, and status-oriented consumption patterns as pathological symptoms that degrade human dignity. Here, the socialist analysis of *alienation*—humans estranged from the products of their labor, from the labor process, from fellow humans, and from their own potential—resonates with the Islamic concepts of *ghurur* (deception) and *ghaflah* (heedlessness), where humans are alienated from their purpose as servants and vicegerents of God (Syaripudin & Furkony, 2020). This convergence lies in the diagnosis that consumer capitalism destroys human integrity, whether by turning them into a cog in an alienating accumulation machine (socialism) or by diverting them from the path of worship and justice (Islam).

However, the agreement in diagnosing the symptoms quickly dissolves when investigating the root causes. For socialism, the source of all consumption pathologies lies in an inescapable material structure: capitalist relations of production. Consumerism is the logical consequence of private ownership and capital's need to continuously reproduce and

expand its markets (Anis Kurlillah, Nurfadillah, Osman Abulkalam Fazal Ahmed, Mirdat AL Bakr, 2025). The solution, therefore, must be structural: a revolution of ownership. Conversely, for Islamic economics, the root of the problem lies in moral and spiritual deviance (*inhiraf akhlaqi wa ruhani*) within individuals and society. The systems of usury (*riba*) and injustice are manifestations of greed (*hirs*), avarice (*thama'*), and neglect of divine law. Thus, its primary solution is the reformation of individuals and society based on Shariah, which would then shape a just economic structure. Here, the fundamental difference between historical materialism and theocentrism becomes clear: one views structure as determining consciousness, the other sees consciousness (guided by revelation) as the foundation for a correct structure (Pradanimas & Julaihah, 2023).

The concept of justice becomes another crucial field of divergence. Socialist justice is immanent and materialistic, realized primarily as economic equality through redistribution and the abolition of classes. Justice in consumption means the equal fulfillment of basic needs and the elimination of conspicuous consumption that represents class inequality. In contrast, justice in Islam (*'adl*) is part of a transcendental, cosmic order that is multidimensional, encompassing a balance (*mizan*) between individual and societal rights, and between material and spiritual needs. Justice in consumption within Islam does not always mean quantitative equality, but adherence to the corridors of *halal/thayyib*, avoidance of *israf* (wasteful excess), and fulfillment of the rights of beneficiaries (*mustahik*) inherent in wealth (Pradanimas & Julaihah, 2023). Socialist justice aims for relative homogenization in consumption patterns, while Islamic justice acknowledges differences in divine provision (*rizq*) but mandates redistributive channels (*zakat*) and condemns greed.

The primary agents of change in the two paradigms are also fundamentally different. In socialism, the agent of historical change is the awakened working class (*proletariat* with *class consciousness*) that will carry out the revolution. Changes in consumption will occur as a consequence of the change in ownership of the means of production by this collectivity (via the state) (Zair et al., 2025). The individual is essentially a product of their material conditions; changing the structure will change consciousness and consumption behavior. In Islam, the agents of change are the *ummah*—the community of pious believers—and the responsible individual Muslim (*mukallaf*). Change begins with the transformation of the individual's heart and mind regarding the concept of ownership (as a trust/*amanah*) and consumption (as worship), which is then consolidated socially through the implementation of Shariah. The state (*khilafah/imamah*) acts as a facilitator and enforcer of the divine legal corridor, not as the owner of all means of production. Thus, change in consumption patterns is initiated by an internal revolution, not merely an external structural one.

The view of the relationship between the individual and the community also influences each paradigm's vision of consumption. Socialism tends towards a functional collectivism where collective interests (class, society) dominate, and individual consumption is viewed within the framework of their contribution and needs for collective reproduction (Ahmed Fernanda Desky, Muhammad Jailani, 2025). Individual consumption autonomy is heavily constrained by social planning. Islamic economics offers a unique synthesis: responsible individualism within a strong community. The individual has the freedom to own and consume (*ikhtiyar*), but this freedom is bounded by horizontal responsibility (to fellow humans, through prohibitions on hoarding/*ikhtikar* and the obligation of *zakat*) and vertical responsibility (to God, through prohibitions on *israf* and the *haram*). The community (*jama'ah/ummah*) functions as a support system and social control to uphold norms but does not claim direct ownership over individual wealth as in state socialism.

A fundamental difference lies in the framework of time and ultimate purpose. The socialist project is ultimately immanent and worldly: building a classless society on earth, a secular utopia where needs are met and humans are free from alienation. Rational consumption patterns are both a means and an indicator of achieving this historical goal. Conversely, Islamic economics places all worldly activities, including consumption, within the transcendental framework of the Hereafter. Worldly life (*dunya*) is a field for the Hereafter (*akhirah*). Good consumption (*halal, thayyib, qawam*) is worship that brings reward, while wrongful consumption is sin. The ultimate reference is not a future classless state, but God's pleasure (*ridha Allah*) and success on the Final Day. This difference in temporal orientation—one horizontal towards a historical future, the other vertical towards transcendental accountability—colors the entire consumption ethic of each paradigm.

The sources of legitimacy and authority for determining consumption norms also differ. In the socialist vision (at least in theory), the authority to determine what constitutes a "need" and how to distribute it stems from the collective, scientific reason of humanity, often mediated by the state or planning councils representing the people. Its validity is pragmatic-material: does it advance equality and liberate humans from oppression? In Islamic economics, the ultimate authority derives from revelation (the Qur'an) and the Prophetic Sunnah, interpreted through collective juristic reasoning (*ijtihad* of the *ulama*) (Rahman, 2025). The validity of a consumption pattern is determined by its conformity with scriptural texts (*nash*) and the objectives of Shariah (*maqasid al-shariah*), such as preserving religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. One centers on the emanation of collective, rational human authority; the other on submission to a transcendent divine authority enacted through obedient human reasoning.

Ultimately, attempting to reconcile these two paradigms into one coherent theoretical framework is nearly impossible due to their fundamental ontological and epistemological differences. Socialism is a child of the Enlightenment and materialism, while Islamic economics is a child of revelation and theocentrism. However, in the practical and strategic realm of combating rampant capitalist consumerism, there is room for strategic complementarity. The socialist critique of global capitalist power structures and their mechanisms of exploitation can enrich Islamic analysis, which sometimes focuses too heavily on the individual. Conversely, the ethical-transcendental dimension and the concept of trusteeship (*amanah*) in Islam can fill the spiritual void and meaninglessness within the materialist socialist vision, offering a powerful intrinsic motivation for simplicity. Their meeting point may not be in a philosophical synthesis, but in a shared front against the logic of capital that degrades humanity—each with its own language, motivation, and worldview, yet both envisioning a world where consumption is no longer the master, but a servant to a dignified and just life.

CONCLUSION

This study has elucidated that the phenomenon of student consumerism in the digital era is a profound structural and cultural pathology, emerging from a sophisticated techno-economic apparatus designed to commodify attention, shape desire, and normalize perpetual consumption. Through a phenomenological deconstruction, it is evident that students are ensnared in a paradoxical state of hyper-active agency and profound structural passivity, experiencing a deep alienation from the economic, social, and ecological consequences of their digital consumption habits. The digital marketplace, with its algorithmic personalization, frictionless transactions, and social validation economies, successfully constructs a subject who confuses market-driven impulses with authentic self-expression. Against this backdrop,

the comparative analysis employing socialist and Islamic economic paradigms reveals that while conventional economics naturalizes this behavior, both alternative systems offer radical, albeit fundamentally different, critiques. They converge powerfully in diagnosing consumerism as a dehumanizing force that reduces individuals to mere cogs in a machine or distracts them from their spiritual purpose, and in condemning the injustice, waste (*israf/tabdzir*), and exploitation inherent in the system. Their shared rejection of *homo economicus* and the limitless accumulation of capital provides a crucial common ground for challenging the dominant narrative.

However, the paradigms diverge irreconcilably in their foundational philosophies, root-cause analyses, and proposed solutions. Socialist economics, rooted in historical materialism, identifies the problem in the material structure of capitalist relations of production, advocating for a revolutionary collectivization to achieve justice as equality. Islamic economics, grounded in *tawhid* and trusteeship (*amanah*), locates the core issue in moral-spiritual deviation, prescribing a comprehensive reform guided by Shariah to achieve justice as divinely ordained balance (*mizan*). One envisions change through class struggle and state-led restructuring, the other through individual repentance and community (*ummah*) revitalization within a transcendental framework. Therefore, a full theoretical synthesis is impossible. Yet, strategically, their critiques are complementary: socialism provides a powerful lens to analyze global power structures and class dynamics often underemphasized in Islamic discourse, while Islam offers an ethical and motivational framework that addresses the spiritual void in materialist critiques. For students and educators, this dialogue underscores that overcoming destructive consumerism requires both a critical understanding of systemic power *and* the cultivation of personal ethical responsibility, pointing towards an educational approach that combines political-economic literacy with value-based spiritual reflection.

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