E-Commerce Boom and Consumer Culture amidst COVID-19 Pandemic: Delineating Indonesia's Purchasing Pattern

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ABSTRACT

Global trade transformation and technological advancement drive business sector into another level we have never imagined and alter people's daily lifestyle. However, with the occurrence of global pandemic, the world is forced to make a few steps backwards as the economy in most countries see a downturn. Surprisingly, e-commerce set a new adoption of business pattern and lifestyle, and even pushes consumerism to leap forward as people comply with stay-at-home measures. COVID-19 crisis has indeed caused a structural shift towards digital commerce, but the cultural impact is just as powerful. This study would like to delineate particular cases of e-commerce and retail development in Indonesia through mapping consumers' purchasing pattern as well as current challenges for both people and businesses. The findings suggest that culture can affect business in terms of segments, choices based on latest trends and common belief. In Indonesian case, segmentation is shifting from travel to home-based activities and interest. Yet, preferences on specific trends and lifestyle remain unchanged, for example, younger generation inclination to products of Korean popular culture and products with halal certification. This pinpoints that consumer behaviour and cultural background have to be seriously taken into account for businesses to develop. Albeit it is crucial for business players to turn their attention to this, government has to be able to encourage the growth of the overall landscape by providing an ease into business environment through physical and digital infrastructure assistance in order to create competitive and inclusive milieu in this digital economy

Keywords: e-commerce; business; culture; purchasing pattern; COVID-19 pandemic

A. INTRODUCTION

Tremendous growth in international trade flow and interminable demand have prompted the development of business sector. The development is also supported by rapid-unrestrained movement of information and communication as the key feature of global information age. Thus, internet and social media are becoming significant agents of globalisation. Pervasive influence of information and communication technology (ICT) and massive use of the internet become the major hallmarks of digitalised, modernised, and borderless world, bridging people-to-people communications and interactions globally. The use of internet itself certainly has its own benefits and drawbacks, but it has unequivocally turned into a prominent aspect in our everyday life, including business development. The Covid-19 outbreak even bolster digitalisation practices, justifying the idea that single click on mobile devices is the state of normalcy of our society.

These phenomena drive our curiousity to find an explanation on to what extent does culture affect business sector (and vice versa), particularly that of the e-commerce?; and how does COVID-19 outbreak transform digital business game? This study would like to take a general approach on the questions by specifying on particular cases of e-commerce and retail

development in Indonesia with few comparisons, and finally mapping the characteristics of Indonesian consumers' purchases, as well as challenges.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural transformation affects business and industrial sectors simply by changing people's ideas all over the world on how they manages their needs. It introduced us to a popular global term called 'consumerism' or 'consumer culture', a form of capitalism in which the economy is focused on the selling of consumer goods and the spending of consumer money. It also emphasizes on the lifestyle and the use of material goods to attain happiness and satisfaction (Leonard, 2019). The transformational process itself could be traced back in the post-World War I period when some critical theories began to evolve. During the 1930s, the Frankfurt school laid the foundation for cultural studies, coining the term "culture industry" to denote industrialisation of mass-produced culture and its commercial practices. The culture industry provides philosophical legitimation for the sustenance of the current capitalist society. Its key is mass-mediated cultural artifacts in industrial, large-scale manufacturing settings, in which the commodities are characterised by commodification, standarisation, and massification (Kellner, 2021).

The most significant impact on how cultural change affects business and vice versa could be traced back during the golden era of Fordism (1944-1971) that introduced us to industrial mass production and mass consumption. Japanese industrial giants such as Toyota adopted and modified this production technique such as what we could see in Toyota line assembly. After Fordism becoming globally integrated model, consumerism becoming a global standard with typical application in each countries. This mass production model essentially remains as a key feature on nowadays business and was adopted by almost every countries in the world, including in terms of current e-commerce and retail industries trends, although product diversification is also applied and being considered in the production process.

Besides affecting production process, cultural transformation also affects distribution process. The distribution of goods nowadays has longer chain and involves complex structures but requires shorter or faster delivery process in order keep consumers' satisfaction. It involves, among others, online or mobile payments, cross-device and content marketing, targeted advertisements, customer segmentation, dimensional shipping prices, also value-added tax (VAT) in European regions (Brown, 2015).

Last but not least, cultural changes have also affected consumption and consumer culture, including behavior, preferences, and consumption rates. Due to higher consumer growth rates or expanding market, the production processes are getting massive too and it is also applicable vice versa. It is undeniable that purchasing power parity (PPP) and percapita income have affected the growing consumerism or support consumer's attitude and amounts in purchasing business products, both goods and services.

Jeswald W. Salacuse cultural impact on business remains as a broad topic which could be discussed over and over due to various contexts, backgrounds, and point of views. Nevertheless, notable suggestion which strengthen the fact that culture has prominently affected business sector has been underlined by Salacuse: "International business deals not only

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cross borders, they also cross cultures. Culture profoundly influences how people think, communicate, and behave" (Brown, 2015).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Retail industry is facing unprecedented challenges. Across all sectors and markets, retailers are shifting their business models and customer engagement strategies to ensure their survival, and more recently, to pull through during the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic exigencies. The rise of online shopping platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee, Blibli, Bukalapak, Lazada, JD.ID and countless other options are at the heart of many of these changes and at the same time, opportunities.

According to J.P. Morgan research, Indonesia's e-commerce market is worth 13.6 billion USD and has expanded for approximately one-third in 2016-2017. It is projected that by the end of 2021, the expansion will reach a compound annual growth rate of 34.6% (J.P. Morgan, 2019). This can be considered massive remembering Indonesia has low internet penetration compared to other Asian counterparts. In addition, mobile commerce growth is also quite high despite low smartphone penetration, with 58% transactions completed on a mobile device nationwide (J.P. Morgan, 2020). This underlined the peculiarity of the nation to a certain extent.

In Indonesia, massive utilisation of social media has become one major factor which contributes to the rising number of online purchases. Social networking media, such as Facebook and Twitter-which is immensely popular in Indonesia-provides starting point for the growing of e-commerce and retailers. The use of social networking media which is highly favored by Indonesian netizens. In fact, according to the statistical research of Veritrans and Daily Social, half of online shoppers in Indonesia use Facebook. Facebook and Twitter are two popular social media mostly used by Indonesian netizens. 43 million people in Indonesia use Facebook, covering large amount of users ranked 4th largest globally. Moreover, as the middle class population in Indonesia were rising in the past few years, the internet usage also increased by threefold (Utoyo & Ramda, 2012). International Enterprise Insights Journal of Singapore in 2013 reported that solid domestic demand is relied upon to underpin Indonesia's GDP growth as private consumption is anticipated to ascend from 56% in 2012 to 65% in 2030. A positive outlook for domestic consumption is also projected to be worth S\$1.38 trillion by 2030 with the support of its demography dominated by the 30-year-old population, rising income levels, and evolving modern lifestyles (Hsien, 2013: 3). This highlights that young consumers and the rise of middle class are key to the thriving online sales.

Meanwhile, in terms of segments, according to a mapping in 2019, Indonesians tended to spend on travel, which took 58.9% share of all online sales with Tiket.com and Traveloka as leading local travel platforms. Clothing and apparel are Indonesia's second most popular online shopping category, recording 14.6 percent in the domestic e-commerce market. This is followed by furniture and household goods with 8.7%, electronics at 8.1%, and food, health and beauty with 6.8% (J.P. Morgan, 2019). However, generally these segments can change really fast in accordance with current trends and situations, as well as regulations, not to mention the great shifting due to the global pandemic. Corona virus outbreak has put e-commerce at the front line of retail and according to World Bank, this has profoundly changed the retail landscape due to movement restriction measures to ensure public health. This greatly affects buyers' inclination to stay away from physical stores and migrate to

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online alternatives. Businesses that are able to adapt to digital platforms survived, while traditional retailers dwindled (Totolo & Baijal, 2020).

Oxford Business Group argued that e-commerce was already gaining significant portion in Indonesia prior to the Covid-19 disruption as it becomes one of the main driving forces behind the country's emergence as Southeast Asia's largest digital economy, valued at \$40bn in 2019 and expected to soar by more than threefold or equal to approximately \$130bn by 2025. As retailers and consumers are being forced to shift to e-commerce options, growth is accelerated even further (Oxford Business Group, 2020). Based on a report, a sharp 71% rise has been recorded in the monthly expenditure on online shopping despite the crisis. Tokopedia, for example, displayed escalation in selling-and-buying activity and access with more than 10 million users since January 2020 to total more than 100 million users (Meylynda, 2021). On the other hand, market dynamics caused by the pandemic are also paving broader opportunities for small-medium business players, for instance in Kenya, agricultural valuechain platform Twiga Foods partnered with e-commerce platform Jumia Kenya to sell assorted fruits and vegetables directly to consumers. In Brazil, the Compre Local initiative enables customers to locate and purchase items from small businesses in their neighborhoods using a simplified payment solution (Totolo & Baijal, 2020). Similarly, while small and medium-sized businesses are gaining popularity in Indonesia, one of which is due to its locality background, big businesses are likely to suffer. Pizza Hut, one of well-known F&B franchise giants, is lately changing its marketing strategy and picking up the ball to consumers by selling on the side of the roads to boost its sales rate during the pandemic. Currently, the online food delivery through ride-hailing app like Go-Jek that has been promoting contactless delivery mechanisms to continue serving consumers is perhaps most preferred due to its ease.

Furthermore, segmental transformation is obvious as the implementation of staying-athome measures prompts shifting preferences and needs, as can be observed according to one of the famous marketplaces, Bukalapak that expanded its grocery selection for its consumers. Online mall Blibli also reported that sales of groceries, cleaning and sanitising products, surgical masks and vitamins have all experienced increases. In addition, besides essential goods like food, health, pharmacy, and wellness products, people generally shop for hobbies and interests, such as sports and fitness equipment, self-improvement books, gardening and painting tools, and cooking appliances, as people adjust to spending more time at home (Oxford Business Group, 2020). This denotes that segment will change rapidly in accordance with situational trend, cultural influence, and policies, but one particularity is that it pinpoints market potential, modes of market entry, competitive landscape and regulations (Hsien, 2013: 3).

The growth of e-commerce and increasing number of online shops, other than expanding consumer culture, apparently have also paved the way for the dissemination of other cultures, including those from East Asian countries. China, Japan, and South Korea have been acknowledged for their products offering practicality and latest trends, particularly for youth in Indonesia. Moreover, with rapidly growing popularity of Korean Wave (or so-called "Hallyu") in this country, youth is becoming much more consumptive on general products from South Korea (or those with Korean themes), such as fashion goods and cosmetics. Mass adoption of Korean style, products, and event cultural values into

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Indonesian lifestyle became so imminent, especially among young generations. The impact is not merely affecting socio-cultural sector, but also influencing the economic sector as well. Products of Korean Wave such as movies, music, books, food, or even cosmetics and electronics undeniably became commercial objects. Every single Korean or Korean-style product has become incredibly popular in Indonesia, shifting the consumer preferences of Indonesian from previously popular Western products to Asian. For example if ones watch Korean drama and their favorite actor or actress is using or wearing a specific product, they will be really obsessed to get the same thing, ranging from fashion products to gadgets. Catching up with the latest Korean products is a must. Indeed, Korean stars have a big influence on shaping consumer culture, including gadget, food, fashion, make-up, and every single lifestyle trends (Shim, 2006).

According to Robert Jeyakumar Nathan, a researcher from Multimedia University Malaysia, culture and lifestyle are easily digested and widely accepted young people in Indonesia and Malaysia. He mentioned that cultural acculturation and adoption of Korean lifestyle is emulated by young people in both countries and additionally impacts deals on sales of Korean products such as skin care, cosmetics, food, and clothing (School of Business and Management, Bandung Institute of Technology, 2020). Initially, this could be traced back in the late 2000s or early 2010s when the popularity of Korean entertainment in Indonesia grew bigger through television series and music of idol groups. Online shops have become a media for the spread of Korean popular culture accordingly. The case of boosting revenue of Thehallyu-Korean online fashion store- after launching Indonesian version site in 2013 pinpointed the actual culture-driven consumerism through online shopping platforms. Its founder realised that Indonesia is currently having a Korean fever, hence he caught the opportunity to target high-potential Indonesian market. Besides, though the price is not cheap, Thehallyu founder pointed that Indonesia's average expenditure on online shopping was still higher than the average price, which hit \$51 per transaction at that time (Lukman, 2013).

This kind of phenomenon brings dramatic impacts to Korean industries and enterprises, so does Indonesian business players that commercialise Korean culture and products. For the past few years, the quantity of online shops offering Korean products in Indonesia has flourished, so does their purchase. In 2020, Indonesia ranked second among the nations with the most noteworthy K-beauty popularity. Moreover, approximately 38.5 million U.S. dollar-worth of beauty and skincare products were imported from South Korea (Nurhayati-Wolff, 2021).

However, specific cultural factors have different significant impacts to each countries' business pattern. Take Indonesia and Japan which has been recognized as one of the most established ones in the world as comparison. eMarketer for example has conducted an empirical research on how Japanese and Indonesian customers respond to the products or brand they normally buy or consume. The statistical data shows differentiation between Indonesian and Japanese e-commerce users or online buyers. Japanese e-commerce users or buyers tend to utilize e-mail to keep in contact to the products' providers, while Indonesians tend to utilize social media more often, particularly Facebook as it is being used by half of online shoppers in Indonesia. Other differences according to data retrieved from Daily Social lies on the services and payments. Japanese retailers and e-commerce players tend to involve loyalty programs such as collecting points as key driver to build a customer base, while

Indonesian retailers, although have been trying the same method, have also tend to give coupons and direct bonuses more in engaging with customers. Japanese retailers also provides better and faster services for customers' satisfaction, whilst in Indonesia slow internet and unreliable delivery time, poor product quality and customer service, as well as the lack of online transaction facilities are still becoming key obstacles to explosive growth in e-commerce. Furthermore, in terms of payment, bank transfer remains as the most popular mode of e-commerce payment in Indonesia, despite the fact that they require double the number of steps compared to credit card payment. Unlike in Japan, online payment solutions, despite steady rise and inherently promising future, are still fragmented and not yet widely preferred in Indonesia (Lee, 2012).

Other than that, Indonesian customers are likely concerning more about halal status of the products. With over than 80 in percentage, Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population and naturally, the halal status of a product becomes a huge concern for most Indonesians. In terms of food and beverages, this started being a concern especially after the issuance of Trade Regulation No. 06/M-DAG/PER/1/2015 on the Control and Supervision of Procurement, Distribution, and the Sale of Alcoholic Beverages. Similarly, halal status issuance does not only apply to food products, but also skincare, cosmetics, beauty and personal care items. For businesses wanting to expand to Indonesia's skincare industry, halal certification has now become more of a necessity to compete in Indonesia as it is a key determinant that greatly motivates consumers to purchase products. A government regulation in October 2019 indicates that cosmetics and skin care products distributed and imported to Indonesia have to be halal-certified (Lim, 2019). For instance, Wardah, one of the renowned cosmetic brands from Indonesia, is generally preferred due to its halal status compared to culturally booming Korean products which are also popular among youths in Indonesia. This national pioneer of halal cosmetics and skincare products recorded the highest sales among other leading brands in online stores, with 7.37 million items sold per January 2020 (Nurhayati-Wolff, 2021).

Whereas in another Asian country like Japan, it is more prominent for people to get fresh products such as groceries through purchasing directly in the closest store rather than ordering it through delivery services even though many small retailers right now provides quick delivery services, even by employing local citizens who have bicycles. Japanese shoppers have high expectations around quality and freshness. They tend to visit stores to check products before making purchases. Frozen products are less popular in Japan than other mature markets and customers tend to shop for groceries every other day rather than making volume purchases (Accenture, 2014). Overall, different markets have distinguished cultures and it is essential to understand consumer behaviour that serves as deliberative points for effective retail strategies (Boardman et al., 2019: 43).

The obstacles, however, need to be addressed too and for Indonesian case, physical and digital infrastructures are the two main areas where they seem lacking. Physical infrastructure is the key challenge remembering Indonesia is an archipelagic country and hence, delivery becomes concern for both merchants and buyers. Shipping can be troublesome in online shopping due to the distance. Sometimes buyers could possibly find their orders come in unoriginal shape. It may occur when online seller packed carelessly. This perhaps being one of the reasons why cash on delivery (COD) option is still preferable among

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Indonesian online buyers (besides the fact that more than half the population remains unbanked (J.P. Morgan, 2019)), assuming that they can check the product first, then secure the payment after. The state-owned national postal service, PT Pos Indonesia, claimed to struggle with a lack of local infrastructure and low consumer postal charges below the cost of the service (J.P. Morgan, 2020).

On consumers' side, online shopping might be overwhelming for some people. Cyberspace obviously contains potential threats, such as unknown links, pictures, or whichever that could contain malwares, and Indonesian people are not really familiar with this and their internet literacy is considered low. Moreover, purchasing items in an online shop is not always like what consumer expected. A product could be different from what one sees through gadget screen. It is somehow common to get one's ordered package different from what it looks like in the online shop, or even worse, buyers would never get their package delivered because of fraudulent virtual seller. Some online sellers, particularly the small-size online shops do not want to guarantee the quality of the products they sold, because they assumed it as online buyers' consequences. That is why big and reliable online shopping platforms are deemed trustworthy because they have precise rules for both merchants and buyers to avoid such scenario and based on the data on business-to-customer mobile commerce market in 2019, mobile commerce completed in-app made up 69% of the access (J.P. Morgan, 2020).

Additionally, infrastructure for digital payments is critical for the expansion of ecommerce. Most platforms saw a surge in the use of digital payments, notably digital wallet such as GoPay, OVO, Dana, and LinkAja. Despite being the fastest-climbing payment method, obtaining domestic banking license to operate an e-wallet business within the country requires an extremely long wait for issuance (most likely due to bureaucracy). In addition, digital wallet providers with more than 300,000 active users must seek further approval before starting another expansional activity such as creating new products (J.P. Morgan, 2019). Data from 2019 OECD's report demonstrated that consumers in less developed markets and many middle-income economies including Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Turkey and Ukraine have a stronger willingness to utilise mobile and alternative payments (OECD, 2019: 36) but this certainly has to be supported by country's policy outlook.

Nevertheless, that is not the only remaining challenge. Uncertainty about regulatory frameworks for the provision of financial services also become a key risk for e-commerce platforms. Regulators have not yet reinforced a coherent and simplified framework for embedded finance solutions and a fast-moving regulatory environment is another issue (J.P. Morgan, 2020). The Indonesian government is currently introducing a raft of measures to recover greater taxes from e-commerce, including the import taxes and with this, newcomers have to stay on top of shifting rules and regulations. Addressing these barriers should be prioritized to make digital economies more inclusive for smaller companies (J.P. Morgan, 2020).

All in all, the elaboration above portrays significant rise to online selling and buying activities and clarifies the fact that internet is an engine for economic growth, both domestically and internationally. It does not solely create rapid social and cultural changes, but also triggers individual and collective economic activities, small and medium or big business and transactions. People's propensity to redirect their economic activities digitally also brings significant implication to the daily products consumption. The idea of running a

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small economic business activity online could enhance productivity and being one's effort in facing the ongoing global economic recession. UNDP stated that: "communications revolution is a blessing for humanity which creates a tremendous force for human development for those connected by providing information, enabling empowerment, and raising productivity" (Kegley& Wittkopf, 2006: 268). Furthermore, the internet economy-besides depicting the ideas of people in times of crises—is one of many ways that every individuals can do to overcome global economic recession coupled with uncertainty due to the Corona virus outbreak which has been weakening people's financial condition.

D. CONCLUSION

The changing pattern of cultural impact on business and vice versa signifies that people have begun to embrace technology-related or electronic media into their economic activities. Therefore, internet is a digital tool that absolutely shapes human's daily behavior, including in terms of product consumption—an e-commerce figure. Purchasing goods online are supported by the practicality of digital media that provides openness and real-time access to business services. In all of the instances, one could purchase goods even services anywhere and anytime they need. On the other hand, business players shall also pay attention to cultural aspect to develop ventures by understanding customers background that either motivates or demotivates them to purchase products. In Indonesia, halal status is among the most important prerequisites for businesses to promote their products in the market.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened uncertainty, but it surely has vastly accelerated digital adoption. Online sales are no longer an option, but a necessity for brick-and-mortar businesses. The COVID-19 crisis has caused a structural shift of demand towards digital commerce that is likely to continue in the upcoming years. However, not only business players, government and stakeholders shall be ready to face challenges in adopting new business models and assisting the overall landscape to become more competitive and inclusive (includin for small and medium-sized businesses), particularly through regulatory clarity in this digital economy era.

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