



## Consumerism in Indonesian Contemporary Popular Culture: A Qur'anic Ethical Critique of Urban Consumption Patterns

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### Abstract:

This study aims to analyze consumerism in contemporary popular culture and critically examine consumption practices through Qur'anic ethical principles, particularly wasatiyyah, and the prohibition of *isrāf* and *tabzīr*. The study employed a qualitative descriptive design using field and library approaches. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with religious leaders and Muslim consumers, observations of contemporary consumption practices, and documentation of Qur'anic texts, interpretations, and relevant scholarly literature. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and verification to identify recurring patterns of consumption and their relationship with Qur'anic ethical values. The findings show that popular culture contributes to normalizing excessive consumption by encouraging pleasure-oriented consumption, social recognition, lifestyle presentation, and material-based self-image. Consumption practices were frequently associated with identity construction and social validation rather than functional needs. These patterns indicate tensions between contemporary consumer culture and Qur'anic principles of moderation, self-control, and responsible consumption. The study highlights the importance of reactivating Qur'anic ethical values in religious education, public discourse, and digital spaces to promote more balanced, conscious, and socially responsible consumption practices.

## INTRODUCTION

The expansion of popular culture, digital media, and consumer-oriented lifestyles has made consumption increasingly important in shaping how individuals express identity, status, and belonging. This issue matters to society because consumption is no longer confined to economic transactions but increasingly influences social relationships, aspirations, and everyday values. Research on meaning-oriented consumption shows that consumers use products and consumption experiences to construct personal and social meanings (Jain et al., 2023; Helmi et al., 2023; Ajewumi et al., 2024). At the same time, digital environments intensify the visibility of consumption by connecting purchasing practices with self-presentation and social interaction. Therefore, understanding consumerism is important not only for examining economic behavior but also for identifying changes in social and cultural values. In religious societies, this issue becomes particularly significant because consumption may interact with moral principles concerning moderation, responsibility, and self-control.

A general problem emerges when consumption shifts from fulfilling needs toward satisfying social expectations, pleasure, and symbolic aspirations. Contemporary consumer culture can encourage individuals to associate happiness and achievement with material possessions, lifestyle experiences, and public recognition. This problem is intensified by digital platforms, where consumption is continuously displayed, compared, and evaluated. Studies of Indonesian Muslim consumers indicate that digital and popular-cultural environments increasingly shape lifestyle choices and consumption practices (Millie & Baulch, 2024; Hartono et al., 2024; Bettache, 2025). Such conditions may create tension between consumerist expectations and religious values that emphasize moderation and responsible consumption. The problem is therefore not consumption itself, but the normalization of excessive and symbolic consumption as a desirable standard of contemporary life. This condition requires closer examination because its consequences extend beyond purchasing behavior to identity, social values, and ethical awareness.

The phenomenon is particularly visible in everyday urban consumption practices and digital self-presentation. Shopping, culinary activities, entertainment, fashion, travel, and lifestyle content are increasingly presented as markers of attractiveness, success, and social recognition. Social media contributes to this process by providing spaces where individuals display consumption and compare their lifestyles with others. Research on Indonesian Muslim youth has documented the growing interaction between Islamic identity, popular culture, and digitally mediated lifestyles (Aidulsyah, 2023; Rofhani, 2026; Jamil et al., 2025). Similarly, studies of Muslim beauty practices and halal lifestyles demonstrate that consumption can simultaneously express religious identity and contemporary aspirations (Pribadi & Sila, 2023; Rakhmani, 2024; Umami et al., 2024). These developments indicate that contemporary consumption is multidimensional, involving economic choices, identity construction, social validation, and religious negotiation.

Previous studies have examined consumerism through cultural, behavioral, and digital perspectives. Meaning-oriented consumption research emphasizes identity and symbolic meaning, while studies of Muslim consumption examine how religious values interact with contemporary markets (Jain et al., 2023; Sadali et al., 2024; Sainyaara et al., 2025). Other research has addressed digital consumption, including impulse buying through e-wallets and purchasing through live-streaming platforms (Yudha et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). These studies provide important explanations of why contemporary consumers purchase products and how digital environments influence consumption. However, their primary emphasis remains on consumer behavior, perceived value, economic practices, or lifestyle patterns. The ethical and spiritual consequences of consumerism therefore remain comparatively underexplored, particularly when consumption is examined through Qur'anic principles of moderation and self-control.

Research on Islamic consumption has increasingly emphasized ethical principles, including *maslahah*, moderation, and responsible consumption. Sadali et al. (2024) demonstrate the importance of ethical dimensions in Islamic consumption, while Rahmi et al. (2026) specifically discuss *isrāf* within the context of digital consumption and hedonistic lifestyles. Studies of *flexing* likewise indicate that digital self-presentation can create tensions with Islamic ethical principles (Sifa et al., 2023; Ma'rifah & Zahra, 2025; Reisdorfer et al., 2023). Nevertheless, existing research tends to examine Qur'anic or Islamic consumption ethics primarily as normative concepts, while empirical studies tend to focus on observable consumer behavior. The limited integration between these two

perspectives constitutes an important research gap. A study that connects lived consumption practices with Qur'anic ethical evaluation is therefore necessary to understand how contemporary consumerism is experienced and ethically negotiated.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating empirical observation of contemporary consumption with Qur'anic ethical analysis within a single interpretive framework. Rather than treating Qur'anic ethics merely as a set of normative prescriptions, the study uses concepts such as *wasatiyyah*, *qana'ah*, and the avoidance of *isrāf* and *tabzīr* as analytical categories for interpreting consumer practices. This approach enables the research to identify not only patterns of excessive consumption but also the forms of tension, negotiation, and value displacement that emerge when popular culture encounters religious ethics. The study is important because it seeks to develop a contextual understanding of Islamic consumption ethics that responds directly to contemporary digital and popular-cultural environments. Its state of the art is therefore positioned at the intersection of consumer culture, Muslim social life, and Qur'anic ethical criticism.

The research problem addressed in this study is how consumerism in popular culture transforms consumption into a mechanism of pleasure, identity construction, and social recognition, and how these practices relate to Qur'anic ethical principles. The study argues that consumerism should not be understood solely as an individual economic choice but as a cultural process that can reshape ethical and spiritual orientations. By examining interviews, observations, and Qur'anic documentation, this research seeks to demonstrate how excessive and symbolic consumption creates tensions with *wasatiyyah*, *qana'ah*, and the avoidance of *isrāf*. The study contributes theoretically by positioning Qur'anic ethics as a critical framework for interpreting contemporary consumer culture, methodologically by connecting empirical and textual evidence, and practically by providing a basis for developing more balanced, conscious, and socially responsible approaches to consumption.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with an interpretive orientation to explore how Muslim communities understand and experience consumption within contemporary popular culture. A qualitative approach was selected because the phenomenon involves meanings, values, identities, and social experiences that cannot be adequately reduced to numerical indicators. Qualitative descriptive research is particularly appropriate for presenting participants' experiences while allowing researchers to develop contextual interpretations of social phenomena (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024; Villamin et al., 2025). In this study, the Qur'anic ethical perspective served as the primary analytical lens for examining how consumption practices are understood, negotiated, and evaluated in relation to Islamic values. The approach therefore enabled the study to examine consumerism as a cultural and normative phenomenon shaped by digital media, popular culture, and contemporary Muslim lifestyles (Rahman, 2026; Rakhmani, 2024; Setianto, 2026).

The research was conducted in urban areas of Indonesia, focusing on Jakarta and Bandung. These locations were purposively selected because urban environments provide intensive encounters between digital media, popular culture, commercial spaces, and contemporary consumption practices. Previous studies indicate that Indonesian urban Muslims increasingly negotiate religious identity, lifestyle, beauty practices, and halal consumption within rapidly changing media environments (Pribadi & Sila, 2023; Hartono et al., 2024; Kustiawan et al., 2023). Jakarta and Bandung were therefore considered relevant contexts for examining how consumerist practices interact with

religious values and contemporary Muslim identities. The two cities also provide diverse spaces for observing consumption, including shopping centers, cafés, creative-industry environments, and digitally mediated social interactions. This contextual selection allowed the study to capture how Qur'anic ethical values are practiced, negotiated, or challenged within everyday urban consumption.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected Muslim urban residents who actively engage with popular culture and digital media, including young consumers and individuals working in retail or creative industries. Religious scholars, *kyai*, and Islamic community figures were also included as key informants to provide normative perspectives on consumption ethics. Observations were conducted in selected public and digital spaces to identify visible consumption practices and symbolic expressions of lifestyle. Documentation included relevant Qur'anic verses, interpretations, academic literature, and digital media materials. The combination of these techniques enabled methodological triangulation and supported a contextual understanding of consumption behavior, particularly regarding social media influence, Islamic identity, and contemporary Muslim consumer practices (Aidulsyah, 2023; Millie & Baulch, 2024; Hidayat et al., 2026).

Data analysis followed an interactive process consisting of data condensation, data display, and verification. During data condensation, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were selected, coded, categorized, and reduced according to themes related to consumerism, popular culture, religious values, and Qur'anic ethics. The condensed data were subsequently displayed through thematic matrices and narrative descriptions to identify relationships and recurring patterns across participants and data sources. Verification was conducted continuously by comparing emerging interpretations with the collected evidence and examining consistency across different informants and sources. The final interpretation focused on identifying patterns of conformity, negotiation, and tension between contemporary consumption practices and Islamic ethical principles. This systematic process strengthened the credibility and interpretive depth of the findings (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024; Villamin et al., 2025).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Consumerism in Popular Culture

The findings indicate that consumerism in contemporary popular culture was manifested through several forms of consumption, including fashion, food and beverages, entertainment, leisure activities, and digital content. Interview data showed that consumption was not always associated with functional needs. Participants described purchasing activities in relation to appearance, lifestyle, social recognition, and self-presentation. These patterns were particularly visible among younger urban consumers who actively interacted with popular culture and social media.

The observation data further showed that consumption practices were increasingly connected with digital self-presentation. Shopping activities, visits to cafés, leisure activities, and purchases of branded products were frequently accompanied by photography and the production of social-media content. Consumption spaces therefore functioned not only as places for acquiring goods and services but also as spaces for displaying lifestyle and constructing personal images.

The data condensation process identified recurring codes related to symbolic consumption, lifestyle expression, social recognition, digital self-presentation, and

material display. These codes were grouped into broader categories representing consumerism within popular culture. The resulting data display showed that consumption practices appeared across both physical and digital environments.

### **Consumerism and Hedonistic Lifestyle**

The findings demonstrate that consumerism was frequently associated with pleasure-oriented consumption. Interview data indicated that shopping, entertainment, culinary activities, and leisure were commonly described as sources of enjoyment and personal satisfaction. Some participants associated particular consumption activities with relaxation, happiness, prestige, and the experience of contemporary urban life. Observation data supported these patterns in several settings, where visitors in shopping centers and cafés were observed spending considerable time engaging in consumption-related activities, taking photographs, and producing social-media content. In digital spaces, luxury products, travel, fashion, food, and entertainment were repeatedly displayed as elements of an attractive lifestyle.

The condensation of interview and observation data generated recurring codes involving pleasure, prestige, lifestyle, appearance, and social validation. These codes were subsequently organized into the category of hedonistic consumption. The category appeared across different consumption settings, indicating that pleasure and social recognition were recurring characteristics of the observed consumption practices.

### **Consumption Practices and Qur'anic Ethical Values**

The interview findings showed that excessive consumption was frequently associated with the desire for social recognition. Participants described situations in which individuals purchased expensive products not primarily because of their functional usefulness but because the products could strengthen their public image. This pattern was particularly evident in consumption practices involving fashion, branded goods, and products displayed through social media.

One informant working at a fashion store in Jakarta stated:

*"Sekarang orang belanja bukan karena butuh, tapi karena ingin diakui. Banyak pelanggan yang beli barang mahal hanya untuk dipamerkan di media sosial."*

The statement was consistent with observations conducted in consumption spaces. Individuals were observed purchasing products, taking photographs, and displaying their consumption activities through digital platforms. The data showed repeated relationships between purchasing behavior, self-presentation, social recognition, and lifestyle expression.

The condensed data were organized into four recurring categories: excessive consumption, social recognition, self-presentation, and material orientation. The display of these categories across interviews and observations showed that consumption practices were frequently accompanied by attempts to communicate particular social identities.

### **Excessive Consumption and Spiritual Orientation**

The findings indicate that excessive consumption was associated with changes in the way individuals expressed Happiness, satisfaction, and personal achievement. In interviews, consumption was described in connection with ownership, appearance, entertainment, and participation in contemporary lifestyle trends. Several observed

practices similarly placed material possessions and pleasurable experiences at the center of everyday activities.

The observation data showed these patterns across shopping centers, cafés, tourism spaces, social-media platforms, and modern entertainment events. Individuals were observed engaging in activities involving branded products, expensive food and beverages, lifestyle photography, luxury displays, and entertainment-oriented consumption. These activities were recorded as recurring forms of consumption and lifestyle expression.

The verification process compared patterns found across different observation locations. Excessive consumption, social recognition, pleasure seeking, material display, and lifestyle presentation appeared repeatedly across the observed settings. The comparison indicated that excessive consumption was not limited to a single location or activity but appeared across physical and digital consumption environments.

**Table 1. Observations of Excessive Consumption and Spiritual Orientation**

| Observation Location             | Observed Behavior                                                                              | Indication of Hedonism                                                | Relationship with Qur'anic Values                                                          |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mall Kota Kasablanka, Jakarta    | Groups of teenagers spent considerable time taking photographs and purchasing branded products | Appearance and social prestige were prioritized over functional needs | Contradiction with the principles of <i>qana'ah</i> and avoidance of excessive consumption |
| Café in Bandung                  | Visitors purchased relatively expensive beverages for social-media content                     | Visual pleasure and social recognition became prominent motivations   | Inconsistent with <i>tawadhu'</i> and modesty                                              |
| Kuta Beach, Bali                 | Visitors engaged in nightlife and displayed unrestricted lifestyles                            | Pleasure was prioritized without apparent limits                      | Contradiction with self-control and <i>taqwa</i>                                           |
| Social Media (Instagram, TikTok) | Influencers displayed luxury lifestyles, travel activities, and expensive products             | Happiness was represented through wealth and pleasure                 | Inconsistent with the principle of balanced consumption                                    |
| Modern Music Events              | Audiences displayed unrestricted consumption and entertainment practices                       | Pleasure was prioritized over reflective or spiritual activities      | Inconsistent with modesty and self-restraint                                               |

The table shows that similar patterns appeared in both physical and digital environments. The most frequently observed characteristics were lifestyle display, social recognition, pleasure seeking, and material presentation. These characteristics were recorded across different locations and forms of consumption.

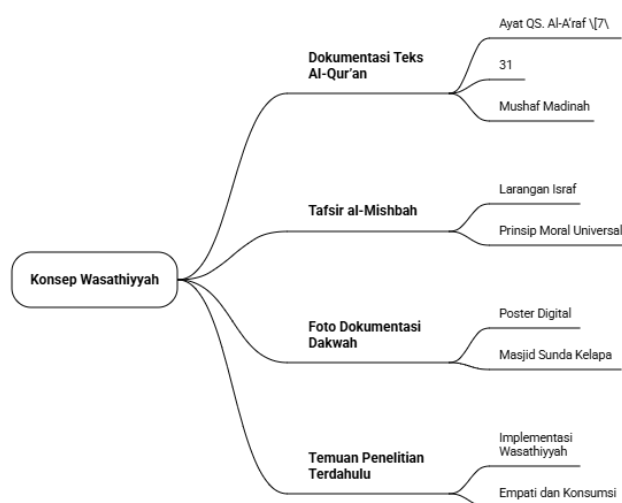
The verification stage subsequently compared the observations with interview data. The comparison revealed consistency between participants' descriptions of consumption and the behaviors recorded in the field. Both data sources showed that excessive consumption was frequently connected with appearance, recognition, pleasure, and lifestyle presentation.

### **Qur'anic Emphasis on Moderation and Balance**

The documentation findings identified moderation and balance as central themes in the Qur'anic materials examined in this study. The documented materials consisted of Qur'anic verses, interpretations, and related textual sources concerning consumption, expenditure, moderation, and the avoidance of excess. The data were organized

according to recurring concepts of proportionality, self-control, and responsible use of material resources. These findings established the main categories used to describe moderation and balance within Qur'anic perspectives on consumption and material practices.

The documentation process identified recurring categories, including moderation, balance, proportionality, self-control, and responsible consumption. These categories were displayed according to their relationship with consumption practices, showing moderation as a principle governing the use of material resources. The findings were then compared with interview and observation data. This comparison revealed recurring themes concerning excessive consumption, material orientation, self-control, and balanced consumption, providing a basis for integrating documentary findings with empirical data from participants and observed settings.



**Figure 1. Qur'anic Emphasis on Moderation and Balance**

The figure presents the documented relationship between Qur'anic values and moderation in consumption. The displayed materials indicate that moderation encompasses more than the limitation of expenditure. The documented categories also include self-control, proportionality, responsible use of resources, and balance in everyday consumption.

The verification process compared the categories represented in the figure with patterns identified through interviews and observations. The comparison showed recurring references to moderation, control of consumption, and avoidance of excessive practices across the three sources of data.

### Consolidated Findings

The final data display integrated the findings obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Three dominant patterns were identified: consumption as social and identity expression, excessive consumption associated with pleasure and social recognition, and moderation and balance as recurring Qur'anic ethical values. These patterns were present across multiple data sources and observation settings. Interview data primarily revealed participants' experiences and perceptions of consumption, while observation data recorded visible consumption practices in physical

and digital spaces. Documentation data provided textual categories concerning moderation, balance, self-control, and responsible consumption.

The three data sources were subsequently compared during the verification stage. The final verification showed consistency among the major categories emerging from the different data sources. Symbolic consumption, lifestyle presentation, social recognition, excessive consumption, pleasure orientation, moderation, and balance constituted the principal patterns identified in the research. These categories represent the consolidated empirical findings of the study.

## Discussion

The findings indicate that urban consumerism is increasingly driven by social recognition and identity expression rather than functional needs. This finding is consistent with Jain et al. (2023), who conceptualize consumption as a meaning-oriented activity, and Helmi et al. (2023), who show that young Indonesian consumers' online shopping practices are shaped by lifestyle and social considerations. The present findings extend this literature by showing that such identity-oriented consumption is also experienced as a tension between contemporary lifestyle expectations and Qur'anic ethical values. In particular, interview data indicate that consumers may purchase products to appear socially equal or superior, especially through digital platforms. Thus, consumerism in this study is not merely an economic practice but also a mechanism of social positioning and self-presentation within urban Muslim communities.

The observational findings further demonstrate that cafés, shopping centers, entertainment spaces, and social media function as environments where consumption and lifestyle are publicly represented. This finding corresponds with Millie and Baulch (2024), who highlight the political and cultural dimensions of Islamic consumerism in Indonesia, and Rakhmani (2024), who demonstrates that halal culture has become embedded within broader processes of meaning-making among Indonesian Muslims. However, the present study differs by emphasizing excessive consumption and its spiritual implications rather than focusing primarily on consumer culture as a form of identity or cultural participation. The findings suggest that the visibility of consumption transforms pleasure into a socially communicable lifestyle, particularly when consumption is repeatedly displayed through digital media.

The relationship between consumerism and pleasure-oriented lifestyles found in this study is also consistent with Yudha et al. (2025), who identify impulse buying among e-wallet users as a relevant dimension of contemporary Muslim consumption, and Zhang et al. (2024), who demonstrate the importance of perceived value in Indonesian consumers' live-stream shopping behavior. Both studies illustrate how contemporary digital environments facilitate consumption through immediate value and attractive experiences. The present findings complement this perspective by showing that consumption is not limited to purchasing decisions but extends to the pursuit of prestige, visual satisfaction, and social validation. The novelty lies in connecting these behavioral patterns with the ethical problem of excessive consumption within the lived experience of urban Muslim communities.

The findings concerning excessive consumption and spiritual orientation demonstrate both continuity and divergence from previous studies. Sifa et al. (2023) identify *flexing* as a contemporary lifestyle phenomenon that can conflict with Qur'anic principles of *tauhid*, while Ma'rifah and Zahra (2025) similarly identify social-media flexing

as an emerging consumption phenomenon requiring ethical evaluation. The present study confirms this tendency through field observations showing luxury displays, lifestyle content, and consumption-oriented self-presentation. However, it advances previous discussions by demonstrating that excessive consumption may affect not only moral behavior but also the way happiness and personal achievement are constructed. The findings therefore position spiritual weakening as a consequence of changing meanings attached to consumption, rather than simply as a violation of individual religious norms.

The documentary findings concerning moderation and balance are consistent with Sadali et al. (2024), who identify moderation and ethical responsibility as important dimensions of Islamic consumption, and Noor and Ayaz (2025), who emphasize the Islamic rejection of *isrāf* and excessive behavior. These findings confirm that Qur'anic consumption ethics provide a normative framework emphasizing proportionality, self-control, and responsible use of resources. Nevertheless, this study moves beyond a purely textual formulation by placing these principles alongside empirical evidence of contemporary consumption practices. Its contribution therefore lies in demonstrating the gap between the availability of Qur'anic ethical principles and their practical negotiation within urban consumer culture.

A further contribution emerges from the relationship between digital media, popular culture, and Muslim ethical identity. Hartono et al. (2024) show that social media contributes to new patterns of religiousness among urban Indonesian Muslims, while Aidulsyah (2023) demonstrates the role of social media and popular culture in shaping contemporary Indonesian Islamic identities. The present study supports these findings but identifies a more specific process: digital visibility can simultaneously facilitate religious identity expression and intensify consumerist aspirations. This dual function represents an important novelty of the study. Social media is therefore understood not simply as a communication channel but as a cultural arena in which religious values, lifestyle aspirations, social recognition, and consumption practices continuously interact.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by integrating empirical consumption practices with Qur'anic ethical interpretation through interviews, observations, and documentation. Existing studies have generally examined Muslim consumption, digital lifestyles, Islamic identity, or consumption ethics as relatively distinct domains. This study brings these dimensions together by demonstrating how symbolic consumption, pleasure orientation, social validation, and digital self-presentation can generate tension with *wasatiyyah*, *qana'ah*, and the avoidance of *isrāf*. Its main novelty lies in positioning Qur'anic ethics as an analytical lens for interpreting lived consumer culture rather than merely as a normative conclusion. Practically, the findings support the development of contextual Islamic consumption literacy through religious education, contemporary *dakwah*, and digital content that promotes balanced and responsible understandings of happiness and consumption.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that consumerism in popular culture is not merely an economic phenomenon but reflects a deeper transformation in lifestyle orientation, identity construction, and spirituality. The key lesson is that consumption driven by social recognition, pleasure, and self-presentation can create tension with Qur'anic principles of *wasatiyyah*, *qana'ah*, and the avoidance of *isrāf* and *tabzīr*, highlighting the importance of balancing material aspirations with ethical and spiritual responsibility. The study's

scholarly contribution lies in integrating empirical findings from interviews, observations, and documentation with Qur'anic ethical analysis, thereby positioning Islamic ethics as an analytical framework for understanding contemporary consumer culture rather than merely as a normative reference. Nevertheless, the qualitative scope and limited informant coverage restrict the transferability of the findings, while the study does not fully examine the broader political-economic structures underlying consumerism. Future research should therefore employ interdisciplinary approaches, involve more diverse social groups and geographical contexts, and develop practical models of Qur'anic consumption ethics that can support culturally relevant strategies for responsible consumption in contemporary digital society.

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