

THE CONSUMERIST LIFESTYLE OF THE ZOOMER GENERATION IN RELATION TO IPHONE OWNERSHIP IN PURWOKERTO



Jurnal Analisa Sosiologi

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Received: 4 July 2025
Revised: 14 August 2025
Accepted: 30 October 2025

Edition:
October 2025, 14 (4): 745-
762

Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has shaped the lifestyle of Generation Z, or “zoomers,” who are known as digital natives. iPhone ownership among zoomers in Purwokerto reflects not only functional needs but also symbolic consumption linked to identity and social status. This study aims to analyze how zoomers in Purwokerto interpret iPhone ownership as part of their self-identity construction. The research method used is qualitative with a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, which were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model to identify patterns of meaning. The results indicate that iPhone ownership among zoomers is closely linked to status symbols, personal branding, social integration, and the representation of a consumerist lifestyle. Although aware of the consumptive nature of this practice, the Zoomers generation continues to prioritize avoiding social pressures such as the fear of missing out (FOMO) by making the iPhone a symbol of modernity and prestige. This study concludes that the iPhone functions not only as a communication tool but also as a cultural symbol that reinforces a consumptive lifestyle while legitimizing social existence in the digital age.

Keywords: iPhone, Lifestyle, Zoomers Generation, False Needs, Cultural Symbol

INTRODUCTION

Advances in communication technology in the current era are bringing major changes to digital culture within society. According to Pahlawan and Prabowo (2020), Wasserman (2010), Gyorödi et al. (2017), and (Stach et al. (2013) gadgets are no longer viewed merely as tools for improving efficiency or facilitating information exchange. Instead, gadgets are now seen as the primary means of expressing meaning, asserting one's presence, and participating in symbolic consumption practices. The symbolic and aesthetic value of commodities has become the primary driver of consumption incentives

in the digital cultural economy, replacing utilitarian value. The commodification of smartphones, which has become a key marker of social identity and status hierarchies in the digital realm, reflects this trend (Wijaya et al. 2025; Akhmad et al. 2025). An individual's social norms and validity within the framework of digital relationships are determined by the implicit ownership of specific devices, which serve as implicit social control.

This phenomenon of symbolic consumption finds its most massive expression among Generation Z, who grew up as digital natives (Dangmei and Singh 2016; Dimock 2019). The iPhone has been revered as a symbol of status, lifestyle, and group identity among zoomers (Benita et al. 2023; Fitrayassa et al. 2024). Surprisingly, the iPhone's popularity is no longer monopolized by teenagers in major cities but has spread widely to developing cities like Purwokerto (BPS Banyumas, 2023). Purwokerto is a student city that brings together the dynamics of youth from various regions. This makes it an ideal place to observe how digital pop culture transcends demographic boundaries and influences symbolic consumption behavior at the local level.

Table 1. Global Market Share of Apple Inc (3Q24 - 3Q25)

No.	Quarter/Period	Global Market Share
1.	Third Quarter of 2024 (3Q24)	18,1%
2.	Third Quarter of 2025 (3Q25)	18,2%

Source: IDC Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker (Data Processed, 2025)

Rather than viewing this stable market dominance presented in Table 1 merely as techno-managerial success, in the context of critical sociology, this phenomenon is viewed as a major event with deep-seated structural issues linked to the dominance of digital capitalism. According to Herbert Marcuse, mechanisms of consciousness control and the creation of "false needs" lie behind the aesthetic visual satisfaction offered. Digital capitalism cleverly distinguishes between practical needs and symbolic desires. By transforming lifestyles, the market system creates the illusion of consumer freedom, leading Generation Z to believe they can choose goods independently. However, in reality, they are conditioned by the system to keep consuming in order to maintain their social legitimacy.

Questions regarding the reasons individuals use iPhones have been extensively studied, albeit with varying emphases. According to Indria et al. (2025) and Azhar (2025),

the dominance of brand image and technological advancements that enhance prestige are factors motivating people to purchase iPhones. However, Sari et al. (2023) critique perspectives that emphasize internal brand factors. Sari argues that peer pressure and social comparison, which compel people to follow trends to avoid being excluded from their group, are more significant factors in iPhone usage than product superiority. Nevertheless, by linking iPhone ownership to the development of class identity, Rahman et al. (2024) and Mulyati et al. (2021) seek to bring this discussion into the social realm. Despite this, these studies still view identity as a conscious decision made by individuals to enhance their self-perception. This is refuted by Kangsadewa and Pratama (2023) who state that this consumption phenomenon has not been fully explained by the influence of lifestyle and brand image. Previous studies have failed to dissect the dimensions of repression and control of digital capitalism that manipulate consumer consciousness through the creation of such artificial needs.

This study views this phenomenon as the result of systematic social construction, in contrast to previous studies that regard gadget ownership as a form of free expression of identity. To explore in depth how the digital political economy normalizes Generation Z's consumption behavior in non-metropolitan areas such as Purwokerto, this study applies Herbert Marcuse's critical sociological analysis, specifically his concepts of false needs and the illusion of consumer freedom, combined with a popular culture approach.

Based on this framework, the primary objective of this study is to identify and describe how, within a society grounded in digital capitalism, the practice of using advanced technologies such as the iPhone has evolved into a means of reproducing a culture of consumerism and a tool for managing the critical consciousness of the younger generation, a phenomenon paradoxically accepted as a form of personal autonomy

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to understand the meaning of iPhone ownership within the Zoomers generation's consumerist lifestyle in Purwokerto. The case study approach is used to explore social phenomena in depth within a real-life context, particularly regarding technological consumption practices and the formation of social identity among the younger generation. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, comprising members of the Zoomers generation born between 1997 and 2012 who actively use iPhones in their daily lives. Overall, this study involved eight informants: seven primary iPhone-using informants and one supporting

informant who does not use an iPhone but is part of the social environment of iPhone users. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore informants' experiences, perceptions, and reasons for using iPhones in their social lives. Observations were conducted to examine iPhone usage practices during social interactions among the Zoomer generation in public spaces in Purwokerto, such as campuses, cafes, and shopping centers. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement the research data from various sources, including online news, technology industry reports, and social media content relevant to iPhone usage. The data were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Sugiyono 2013). The analysis was conducted iteratively through the processes of data collection, information simplification and focusing, presentation in descriptive narratives, and the drawing of conclusions, all continuously verified to ensure the validity of the findings.

Table 2. Primary Informant Data

No.	Informant Initials	Year of Birth	iPhone Model	Background
1.	LY	2007	iPhone 11	Student
2.	DV	2007	iPhone 11	Student
3.	EL	2007	iPhone 11	Student
4.	FF	2003	iPhone 15 and iPhone 7+	Student
5.	ML	2005	iPhone 13	Student
6.	ND	2005	iPhone Xs	Student
7.	DB	1998	iPhone 11 Pro	Office Worker
8.	MH	2006	iPhone 13	Factory Worker

Table 3. Supporting Informant Data

No.	Informant Initial	Year of Birth	Smartphone Model	Background
1.	DT	2004	Poco Xiaomi	Student
2.	RM	2003	Samsung M11	Student
3.	MT	2005	Realme C71	Student

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In this study, iPhone ownership among the Zoomer generation in Purwokerto is viewed as both a technological tool and a part of their social identity. Based on interviews with informants, iPhone ownership carries connotations across several social domains, including prestige, self-image, social interaction, and a consumerist lifestyle.

The iPhone as a Symbol of Status and Social Stratification

iPhone ownership among the Zoomers generation in Purwokerto holds social significance in daily interactions beyond its role as a communication tool. The iPhone is often regarded as a status symbol in various social contexts, influencing how individuals are perceived within their social groups. This device is valued not only for its technological capabilities but also for the symbolic meaning attached to the brand and the image it represents. Some informants stated that using an iPhone can enhance one's perceived social status within social circles. This is reflected in DV's statement:

“Oh, yeah, it's a symbol of social status because in my circle, people who own an iPhone are seen as being part of a higher social group...” (DV, December 3, 2025).

This statement indicates that owning an iPhone within Generation Z social circles in Purwokerto is often interpreted as a marker of a specific social position. However, the perceived prestige associated with such items is often an illusion or a mask for one's social class. This is critically exposed by MH, who, in reality, acquired his devices through a credit scheme:

“In my circle, that's pretty much how it's seen. Sometimes people think iPhone users are more 'high-class,' even though that's not necessarily true” (MH, May 13, 2026).

By combining these two perspectives, it becomes clear that the glorification of “upper-class” or “cool” status does not necessarily correlate with users' financial means. On the contrary, this highlights how the iPhone serves merely as a tool for symbolic consumption, through which the younger generation feels compelled to acquire luxury goods to mask their identity vulnerabilities and maintain their position within the social structure (Indria et al. 2025; Rahman et al. 2024).

This symbolic meaning also emerges in everyday social interactions. Differences in the devices used can lead to experiences of social exclusion within friendship groups.

This is evident in ML's experience, who describes the differences in feature usage between iPhones and Android devices:

“Well, I think so, because a lot of my friends do have them—I mean, they were given to them by their parents, right? Sometimes it's like their parents have one too, so they have one, or there's that FOMO thing, you know, and I really feel it when my friends who have iPhones can just use AirDrop, you know, AirDrop, while we who do not have one, with Android, are like, ‘Oh well, just send a WhatsApp message,’ you know? It's really sad sometimes, I feel like that's where social status comes in.” (ML, December 9, 2025).

This experience demonstrates that differences in devices are not merely about technological functionality but can also influence the dynamics of social interaction within friendship groups. These findings align with research conducted by Sari et al. (2023), which shows that peer pressure and social comparison have a significant impact on how adolescents use technology. In such situations, owning a specific gadget can help fit in with your peers.

The experience with the Airdrop feature exclusion demonstrates how technology can create social barriers. Research by Sari et al. (2023) shows that peer pressure and social comparison significantly influence how adolescents use technology. In such situations, owning a specific gadget can help fit in with peers. According to Bourdieu's (2016) paradigm, this constitutes a subtle form of symbolic violence, where the distinction between Android and iPhone devices transforms technical features into tools of differentiation that make those without access to such environments feel inferior. Beyond social contexts, the iPhone's symbolic meaning also emerges in professional settings. In certain fields of work, the devices people use can influence others' perceptions of their success. This was shared by DB, who works in sales:

“I'm in Sales, so my office is a distributor, and most of the salespeople there have this mindset: if I use a fancy phone, people will definitely notice and think, ‘This salesperson is successful,’ because of that. That's true, especially one thing my director once told me, like, ‘Your phone is getting old,’ and I said, ‘Why bother?’ ‘Just get a better one, maybe an iPhone 16, or maybe a Samsung Fold, or something like that, so people will see you're successful...’” (DB, December 12, 2025).

This statement indicates that, in certain professional contexts, the iPhone can serve as a representation of success and an individual's professional image. A device perceived as luxurious can influence how clients or colleagues view an individual's credibility. These findings are consistent with the study by Rahman et al. (2024), which shows that high-end products can enhance an individual's perception of success in the workplace

and their professional image. However, the symbolic meaning of the iPhone is not uniformly perceived by all informants. Some informants noted that the iPhone's status as a symbol of exclusivity is diminishing as more people gain access to and own it. This was expressed by LY, who stated that:

"People definitely notice, like, if someone's using an iPhone, they're like, 'Oh, this person, this person, this person.' So even though there are so many people using iPhones now, right? It's not like back in the day, maybe. Back then, people would see an iPhone and think, 'Oh, this person must be rich,' but now anyone can use an iPhone, right..." (LY, December 2, 2025).

A similar view was expressed by ND, who believes that owning an iPhone is no longer a significant marker of social class.

"I do not think so, because now everyone can buy an iPhone." (Nandika, December 10, 2025).

Nevertheless, the perception of the iPhone as a status symbol persists among supporting informants, including those who do not use an iPhone. DT stated that the iPhone, especially the latest models, is still often viewed as an indicator of a person's financial capability.

"As a lifestyle and social status symbol as well, because in certain circles, owning an iPhone or perhaps even the latest iPhone model is still seen as a sign of one's financial capability." (DT, December 15, 2025).

Evidence from the field suggests that this symbolic exclusivity is beginning to lose its value, even though owning an iPhone was initially used as a differentiation strategy to claim an "upper-class" position in society (Bourdieu 2016). Critical perspectives from informants indicate that the boundaries between different social classes are becoming increasingly blurred. Informant RM notes that, given the widespread availability of used smartphones, where owners are more focused on the practical need for a camera, the iPhone is no longer a definitive indicator of social status. Meanwhile, MT explains how this notion of exclusivity has crumbled:

"For now, I do not think so, because there are already so many iPhone users, and there are so many ways to get one. It's different from back then, when it seemed like only rich people used iPhones" (MT, May 13, 2026).

These findings suggest that Bourdieu's theory of social stratification is no longer rigid. The iPhone has now become a mass-market product, no longer an exclusive

commodity for the elite, thanks to increased access to ownership through the secondhand gadget market and other financial benefits. Consequently, the social circles of the Zoomer generation are gradually eroding the image of prestige and “wealth” that was once so closely associated with this technology.

The iPhone as a Support for Image and Self-Confidence

In addition to being seen as a symbol of social status, informants also perceive owning an iPhone as a way to enhance one’s self-image and boost self-confidence. Research findings indicate that this self-confidence is often linked to the visual quality of the iPhone’s camera, which is believed to produce better photos, particularly for social media use. This was highlighted by LY, who noted that using an iPhone makes her feel more confident when taking photos and uploading them to social media.

“It does boost self-confidence, yeah. I feel more confident than before because, well, maybe because when we take selfies, the camera quality is better, so when we post them on social media, we just feel a bit more confident, you know? And that boosts our self-confidence.” (LY, December 2, 2025).

A similar experience was shared by ML, who felt that using an iPhone boosted her confidence when creating digital content.

“It’s like my confidence, I guess, maybe when I create content, for example. Because I really feel it when I make content like lip-syncing on TikTok; sometimes when I use an Android, my friends say it lags a lot. When I switched to an iPhone, I really noticed the difference; the results were so much better.” (ML, December 9, 2025).

The narratives of LY and ML indicate that the self-confidence of the Zoomer generation in Purwokerto is heavily dependent on the device’s ability to produce images deemed “acceptable” by society. In this context, the iPhone is viewed as a tool for managing one’s self-image, not merely a camera (Djafarova and Bowes 2021). Technical issues, such as lag or corrupted content, are seen as failures in presenting a contemporary and relevant social identity in the digital realm, yet clear visual quality is crucial for building a positive self-image. However, not all informants view the iPhone as the sole factor driving self-confidence. DV states that self-confidence remains within the individual, while the iPhone merely provides an added benefit in certain social situations.

“Not really, actually, I’m still confident using an Android phone, but maybe using this one gives me an extra edge.” (DV, December 3, 2025).

A similar view was expressed by FF, who sees the iPhone as a device that can help with self-expression through the visual quality of its photos.

“In my opinion, the iPhone can support self-expression through photos. Photos taken with an iPhone, even without editing, are already aesthetically pleasing and good.” (FF, December 8, 2025).

However, some informants believe that self-confidence does not entirely depend on using an iPhone. DB stated that various other digital devices or accessories can also boost users' self-confidence.

“It's the same thing, because it's not just about the iPhone, as it turns out. Many other gadgets can also boost confidence, like a digital watch. It doesn't have to be all about the phone.” (DB, December 12, 2025).

Self-confidence does not entirely depend on a specific brand or gadget. According to Deb, one of the informants who disagrees with this view, various consumer goods with symbolic meaning, including other digital devices and accessories, can contribute to self-confidence. In line with the research by (Mulyati and Hariyanto 2021), smartphones are considered symbols of lifestyle that can enhance users' self-confidence in social settings. Therefore, the iPhone is positioned as a component of a product ecosystem typically associated with enhanced status and self-confidence, rather than as the sole source of one's self-image. According to this perspective, symbolic meaning concerns the social role of goods as tools for enhancing one's image in consumer society, rather than being intrinsic to a specific object.

The way symbolic capital shapes users' self-perception is reinforced by the alignment between the device's visual quality and social recognition (Bourdieu 2018). The self-confidence that arises from using an iPhone results from the internalization of the contemporary ideal society associates with the device, not a standalone psychological condition. Consequently, within the current visual culture, the iPhone serves as a tool for affirming identity.

The iPhone as a Means of Integration and Existence in Digital Social Circles

In addition to being interpreted as a symbol of social status and a tool for self-image, iPhone ownership is also perceived by some informants as a means to remain integrated into digital interactions. In the context of zoomers' social circles, which are heavily influenced by social media and digital communication, the devices they use facilitate their

ability to communicate and participate in digital activities with their peers. ML stated that using an iPhone makes it easier to communicate with friends through its various features.

“Yeah, I really feel that way, because everything just feels so much easier now, like chatting is a breeze, and whereas before we might have only chatted on WhatsApp, now we can use iMessage with our friends.” (ML, December 9, 2025).

This statement indicates that the iPhone is viewed as a device that simplifies digital interactions within social circles. Communication features like iMessage allow users to communicate more conveniently with other Apple device users. In addition to interviews, the researcher's field observations revealed that some iPhone users in Purwokerto use various Apple-specific communication features, such as iMessage and FaceTime, in their daily activities. These features allow users to share messages, photos, and videos with relatively consistent quality, making them a frequent choice for casual conversations among friends. Furthermore, beyond communication, some informants also noted that the iPhone's strength lies in its cross-device connectivity within the Apple ecosystem. This was highlighted by DB, who explained that the iPhone can connect with other Apple devices to streamline digital activities.

“The iPhone isn't just about style. For example, the Notes feature can be used to share meeting notes with other Apple users. If we use an iPad or another Apple device, those notes can be shared and collaborated on immediately. Additionally, there's the Find My feature, which can track all the Apple devices we own.” (DB, December 12, 2025).

The integration of the devices referred to as the “DB” embodies the networked society; it is not merely a matter of efficiency (Castells 2011). Those who are not part of the Apple ecosystem face obstacles in exchanging information and forming informal connections within this network. Consequently, the technological ecosystem functions as a new social structure that determines who is “connected” and who is “marginalized” within the digital community. In addition to facilitating communication and technological connectivity, the iPhone is also viewed by some informants as a device that makes it easier to participate in various digital activities, particularly those related to social media trends. This was expressed by EL, an active TikTok user.

“It's a huge help, because I'm a TikTok user, and whenever there's a 'velocity' trend, I create content with my friends, so using an iPhone really makes things easier.” (EL, December 5, 2025).

This quote suggests that the iPhone can create digital content aligned with social media trends. In this context, the device used can influence an individual's ability to participate in digital activities with their friends. In some cases, iPhone ownership is also influenced by friendship dynamics. LY revealed that most of her friends use iPhones, so she feels different when using another device.

"Since most of my friends use iPhones, I end up feeling like, 'Oh, I'm the only one with an Android.'" (LY, December 2, 2025).

This statement suggests that mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion in digital interactions are linked to iPhone ownership. This situation can be interpreted as an imbalance in capital distribution, in which individuals who do not own certain devices may face symbolic exclusion from their social circles. This suggests that, beyond serving as a communication tool, technology is not neutral but rather contributes to the reproduction of social stratification and power structures in the digital realm. However, not all informants view iPhone ownership as a primary factor in social relationships. Some informants assessed that the type of device used does not significantly affect social interactions, so the use of an Android or an iPhone is not an issue in their social relationships. One such view was expressed by ND, who believes that the type of device does not significantly influence their social interactions.

"It doesn't really matter, because maybe since I'm a guy, I'm just more laid-back about it." (ND, December 10, 2025).

ND's lack of interest in the brand suggests that consumers are reevaluating their gender identities. According to Kimmel and Holler (2017), the ND's attitude of symbolic distancing is a form of masculinity performativity that reflects a concern that following trends is "less masculine." This study demonstrates that gender constructions can still function as a filter for society in determining the value of a commodity, regardless of the robustness of the digital capitalist structure.

A synthesis of these findings confirms that for some informants, the iPhone is perceived as a device that facilitates integration into digital interactions and supports participation in various social media activities. However, this meaning is not uniformly felt by all informants. Some informants believe that social relationships can still be maintained effectively regardless of the device used.

The iPhone as a Representation of a Consumerist Lifestyle

Based on the research findings, iPhone usage among the Zoomers generation in Purwokerto is not merely related to technological functions, but is also linked to consumption practices that reflect a specific lifestyle. Owning an iPhone is perceived as a status symbol, a reflection of self-image, and a means of participating in digital interactions that are becoming increasingly dominant in daily life. In this context, the iPhone functions not only as a communication device but also as a medium for representing social identity in digital spaces and in social interactions. These findings align with research by Indria et al. (2025), which indicates that consumers choose the iPhone not only for its technological capabilities but also for the brand's symbolic meaning. In this study, people view the iPhone as a representation of a modern lifestyle that can enhance their self-perception and strengthen their identity within their social circles.

Based on field findings, the high price of the iPhone is often justified by arguments regarding its performance, quality, and brand strength. Marcuse (2013) argues that this situation illustrates the phenomenon of “false needs,” in which the desire to own an iPhone arises not spontaneously but is created by the capitalist system through the symbolic meaning attached to the product. This is evidenced by repeat purchases (upgrades) and the informants’ loyalty to the Apple ecosystem, even though their old devices still functioned well.

This consumption pattern isn’t limited to buying devices; it also includes mandatory financial expenses, such as installment payments and subscriptions to monthly digital services like iCloud, as well as related accessories. This phenomenon relates to the concept of false needs, which holds that the capitalist system creates needs that feel necessary to fulfill but are actually unimportant. Although some members of the Zoomer generation attempt to justify these consumer expenditures as a necessity for productivity in today’s digital work era, such as content creators with the ability to generate income, this justification deserves criticism. In reality, various devices can perform basic social media and communication functions just as well as smartphones do without requiring someone to follow trends. These choices are heavily driven by social pressure, aligning with Belk (1988), who states that consumption in the post-industrial era is driven solely by representations of lifestyle and image, not by the need to fulfill practical physical needs.

Overall, the data suggests that iPhone usage among Generation Z in Purwokerto represents a negotiation between technological needs and the pressure of symbolic standards. This continuous cycle of consumption, ranging from device upgrades to reliance on additional services, demonstrates how digital capitalism has successfully shaped societal needs. Thus, iPhone ownership becomes part of a social control mechanism that operates subtly through the normalization of a consumerist lifestyle and strategies of self-representation within modern culture.

Discussion

This study confirms that the iPhone has evolved from a mere communication tool into a symbolic product that reflects the social system. The reciprocal relationship between field data and Bourdieu's theory (2016) indicates that Generation Z's consumption patterns in Purwokerto constitute habits that maintain social class through practices of differentiation, rather than merely economic activities. By forming symbolic capital, social actors use this technique to negotiate their positions within the social context.



Picture 1. Generation Z Using iPhone at a Cafe in Purwokerto

Source: Researcher Informant, September 26, 2025

According to Fiske's (2010) perspective on popular culture, the iPhone symbolizes success and modernity. The adjustments informants made to their visual content to align with digital aesthetic standards demonstrate the dynamic nature of this symbolic value. This illustrates how commodities are now valued in consumer culture based on their ability to convey social meaning, both in public spaces and in the digital realm, including when used to support the narrative of digital productivity, such as in the case of content creators rather than on their practical utility.

The research findings also indicate that iPhone usage is often linked to the need for social recognition and acceptance within friendship groups. These results align with research by Djafarova and Bowes (2021), which demonstrates that young people use social media to develop a positive self-image and gain social recognition from peers. In this regard, the level of confidence consumers have when presenting themselves online can be influenced by the visual quality of content created using technological devices.

This phenomenon can be understood through the concept of “false needs” proposed by Marcuse (2013), in which modern society creates socially constructed needs to sustain the system of consumption. In this context, the desire to own an iPhone is based not only on technological needs but also on the desire to conform to the evolving standards of digital lifestyle in society. This is reflected in the informants’ freedom to express themselves through digital content, as well as a sense of illusory financial independence in purchasing gadgets. The ease of credit schemes or monthly installments for purchasing high-end devices allows the Zoomer generation to feel free to make life decisions, yet this “freedom” also feels burdensome, as it ties their finances to long-term debt and mandatory additional expenses, such as monthly iCloud subscriptions. Thanks to technology, they can express their creativity, yet this expression remains constrained by market logic that demands ownership of specific equipment to achieve aesthetically pleasing results. Ultimately, following social media trends (such as TikTok’s Velocity feature) or forcing oneself to buy devices beyond one’s financial means becomes a strategy to claim freedom of expression while still conforming to industry norms. In addition to being a local phenomenon in Purwokerto, the tendency to adhere to these cultural sector standards reflects global consumer trends. This is consistent with research by De Guzman et al. (2022) on Generation Z in the Philippines, who remain excited about Apple products even when they are in use. This situation mirrors the reality on the ground, where the proliferation of the secondhand iPhone market indicates that the desire to keep up with global pop culture trends has outpaced people’s financial means. The iPhone’s symbolic significance has been internalized as a “mandatory need” to prevent social alienation in global popular culture, supporting Marcuse’s argument that the digital capitalist system has successfully established uniform requirements across geographical boundaries.

Furthermore, Hall’s (2024) perspective on identity helps explain how individuals construct their identities through representational practices within cultural systems of meaning. Here, individuals shape and negotiate their identities through symbols, images,

and visual content shared on social media as a space for representation. In the context of the Zoomer generation, the iPhone's visual quality and camera capabilities serve as means to create self-representation and construct narratives as modern, relevant individuals aligned with the evolution of digital culture. Thus, the iPhone functions not only as a technological tool but also as both a commodity and a medium in the process of identity formation and expression within modern popular culture.

CONCLUSION

This study seeks to understand how the Zoomer generation in Purwokerto perceives the iPhone as a social and digital experience and as a communication tool. The findings reveal that iPhone use among the Zoomer generation in Purwokerto is a consequence of the systemic development of digital capitalism, not merely a logical, independent lifestyle choice. The iPhone has evolved from a useful communication tool into a tool of social control that establishes norms of existence and class representation in the digital social sphere by engineering false demands. Ultimately, this practice of symbolic consumption leads to what is known as repressive desublimation, where individuals are trapped in a routine of financial exploitation that they normalize in order to gain social recognition, all under the guise of freedom of expression and easy financial access, such as credit schemes.

In a broader research context, these findings suggest that technology consumption among Generation Z in Purwokerto is a social practice that is not purely rational but also involves identity and the dynamics of the digital social environment. This study has explored the meanings attributed to the iPhone by involving both users and non-users; however, it remains limited in terms of the number and characteristics of the informants and has not yet conducted a systematic comparison. Therefore, future research is expected to uncover a more comprehensive understanding of the meanings of technology among Generation Z through a broader scope and more diverse approaches.

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