

The Construction of Social Reality Among The Thrift Shop Vendors at Senen Market

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ABSTRACT

The enforcement of Minister of Trade Regulation No. 47 of 2025, which prohibits the importation of used clothing, has disrupted the informal economy of thrift shop vendors at Senen Market, Jakarta. The policy, implemented through confiscation measures by Customs and Excise officers, has generated cognitive dissonance among vendors because of the negative labeling attached to their business activities. This study aimed to analyze how thrift shop vendors negotiated their identities and reconstructed social reality to maintain operational legitimacy amid structural pressures. Using a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative case study approach, the study focused on Block III of Pasar Senen. Primary data were collected through in-depth observations and interviews with key informants, including association representatives and affected vendors, while secondary data were obtained from regulatory documents, statistical reports, and media archives. Data were analyzed using Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality and Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery's Relational Dialectics Theory. The findings revealed that vendors actively rejected the stigma of illegality by morally framing their businesses as a source of "halal livelihood" and engaging in discursive resistance to government narratives. In response to legal restrictions that contributed to supply shortages and digital platform blockages, vendors adapted through fragmented, low-visibility marketing strategies conducted in private or semi-private spaces. The study concluded that structural pressures fostered resilient social realities and adaptive hybrid identities among vendors, contributing to a proposed theoretical model of adaptive reality reconstruction and offering practical insights for more inclusive regulatory approaches that take into account the sociocultural realities of informal trading communities.

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the thrifting phenomenon has spread across various regions, not only in Jakarta but also in areas located near international borders and major entry points, particularly in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Batam, and Lampung, where substantial quantities of used goods enter through these routes (Oktawiningsih & Saifudin, 2023). Pasar Senen is one of the oldest traditional markets in Jakarta, established in 1733 during the Dutch colonial period. To this day, Pasar Senen remains an important center of the local economy with distinctive and diverse characteristics (Mirzani & Sudarwani, 2023; Nurhuda & Gandarum, 2025; Sumidartiny, 2024). In recent years, Pasar Senen has developed rapidly as a center for trading imported used clothing, commonly associated with thrifting activities. Purchasing second-

hand clothing is not merely an activity of buying used goods; for many consumers, thrifting also provides a distinctive experience, particularly when they discover rare or branded items (Virginia, 2022).

Throughout the aisles of Pasar Senen, numerous stalls sell branded second-hand clothing at affordable and attractive prices, drawing consumers from various age groups and social backgrounds (Azizah, 2019; Nazarie et al., 2025; Ramadhani, 2025). Younger consumers are particularly prominent among visitors to Pasar Senen and often consider second-hand or thrifted clothing as a means of expressing personal style and enhancing self-confidence (Hayati, 2021).

Thrifting refers to the activity of searching for and purchasing second-hand goods, particularly clothing, based on preferred styles and prices (Luoma, 2025; Mobarak et al., 2025; Sari, 2025; Vicamara et al., 2023; Wadhwa, 2026; Wijayanti et al., 2024). This practice enables consumers to obtain distinctive, good-quality fashion items, including products from well-known brands, at relatively affordable prices (Lestari et al., 2023).

The thrifting phenomenon in Indonesia has grown considerably and has encouraged the development of microenterprises engaged in the sale of imported second-hand clothing, particularly in the Pasar Senen area of Central Jakarta. However, this business activity has been constrained by Minister of Trade Regulation Number 47 of 2025, which reinforces the prohibition on importing used clothing as part of efforts to protect the domestic textile industry.

Government enforcement of the regulation was intensified in 2025 through increased supervision, confiscation, and destruction of illegally imported bales of used clothing by Customs and Excise authorities. Although the policy was intended to strengthen the domestic textile industry, its implementation generated socioeconomic consequences, including threats to the livelihoods of micro-scale vendors and reduced access to affordable clothing among lower- and middle-income consumers. These conditions have prompted resistance among trader communities, which continue to negotiate space for the sustainability of their businesses (Akuoko et al., 2022; Bandauko, 2026; Bandauko & Arku, 2025b, 2025a; Ibrahim et al., 2022).

Changes in the business environment have also been reflected in national trade data. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), imports of used clothing under HS 63090000 increased substantially during January–July 2025, reaching US\$1.31 million, an increase of 177% compared with US\$473,340 during the same period in the previous year. This increase indicates that demand for imported used clothing remained substantial despite regulatory restrictions. The post-prohibition situation consequently created tension and inconsistency in how second-hand clothing vendors perceived and negotiated their business identities.

The prohibition and threat of legal sanctions against illegally imported clothing bales disrupted the identities of vendors who had previously positioned themselves as providers of affordable, distinctive, and branded imported second-hand clothing. Under these circumstances, identity negotiation became a complex communicative process through which individuals and groups sought to construct, maintain, and legitimize their social and economic existence.

Several previous studies have examined second-hand clothing consumption. Vinnawaty Sutanto (2025), for example, examined second-hand clothing as a representation of Generation Z lifestyles and found that thrifted clothing was perceived as distinctive, affordable, and relevant to the consumption preferences of younger consumers. Another study conducted by Jione Oktabriana Sari (2025) examined the effects of price, brand, and product quality on purchasing decisions for second-hand goods.

The study found that purchasing decisions for thrifted products were influenced primarily by price, followed by brand and product quality. These findings indicate that affordability represents a major consideration in attracting consumers, while brand recognition and product quality function as supporting factors in purchasing decisions. Another study examining Generation Z consumers' motivations and perceptions toward thrifting was conducted by Deden Ramdan (2025). The study found that economic and aesthetic considerations encouraged second-hand shopping behavior, while exposure to digital content and sustainability campaigns gradually contributed to increased environmental awareness.

This study addresses a research gap by exploring the subjective experiences of second-hand clothing vendors in responding to and negotiating government policies prohibiting the importation of used clothing. Its main focus is on how vendors interpret regulatory changes and reconstruct their social realities in response to them. Through Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality, this study examines the dialectical processes through which vendors seek to preserve their identities, livelihoods, and social legitimacy amid structural pressures.

Using the theory of the social construction of reality developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, this study views government policy not merely as a static regulation but as a form of structural intervention that may influence how vendors perceive government authority and their own social positions. A mismatch between formal regulatory objectives and vendors' subjective realities—including the meaning attached to thrifting as a source of livelihood and identity—may contribute to resistance during policy implementation.

The government also needs to consider that Pasar Senen is not merely a center for second-hand clothing trade but also a marketplace with historical value and a social identity that has developed over decades. Therefore, implementing regulatory policies without a clear transition mechanism may contribute to distrust among vendors and the wider community. In the long term, such conditions may increase social vulnerability and affect the stability of local trading communities.

The changes experienced by the thrift vendor community at Pasar Senen reflect not only transformations in economic structures but also the emergence of complex relational tensions between vendors as economic actors and the government as a regulatory authority. Viewed through Relational Dialectics Theory developed by Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery, this phenomenon reflects a tension between the need for predictability and the demand for novelty. Vendors seek predictability through business continuity, stable supplies of goods, and income security that have been established over decades. Conversely, stricter regulatory enforcement disrupts this predictability by introducing uncertainty regarding supply availability, business continuity, and the risk of enforcement actions.

To examine how these tensions are interpreted and managed by vendors, this study integrates the theory of the social construction of reality with Relational Dialectics Theory. The former is used to examine the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, while the latter is used to analyze interactional and relational tensions. This theoretical integration provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how the thrift vendor community at Pasar Senen negotiates social contradictions and reconstructs its reality and identity amid regulatory pressure. The urgency of this study lies in the transition experienced by the vendor community following the enforcement of the prohibition on imported used clothing. This phenomenon involves not only economic consequences but also social and communicative dynamics that affect vendors' business continuity and social identities. Furthermore, this study seeks to amplify the perspectives of vendors, which are often underrepresented in public policy discourse.

Against the background of the prohibition on imported used clothing and its implications for the economic stability of Pasar Senen vendors, this study seeks to explore the communication strategies employed by vendors to maintain their identities and business sustainability. The research focuses on how vendors interpret regulatory changes and respond to government pressure. While previous studies have predominantly examined economic, legal, and consumer behavior aspects of thrifting, this study positions vendors themselves as the primary subjects of inquiry. Accordingly, the study examines this phenomenon under the title "The Construction of Social Reality Among the Thrift Shop Vendors at Pasar Senen."

The benefits of this research are threefold. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of communication studies, particularly in the areas of social construction of reality and relational dialectics, by proposing a conceptual model of adaptive reality reconstruction within the informal economy. Practically, the study provides insights for policymakers in designing more inclusive and adaptive regulatory approaches that take into account the sociocultural realities and subjective experiences of informal trading communities, thereby potentially reducing social friction and resistance. Methodologically, this study offers an integrative analytical framework combining the theory of the social construction of reality and Relational Dialectics Theory that may be applied in future studies examining structural change, identity negotiation, and community adaptation.

METHOD

This study employed a constructivist paradigm as its philosophical foundation because it was consistent with the objective of understanding how the thrift vendor community at Pasar Senen interpreted regulatory changes following the enforcement of the ban on imported used clothing. The study used a qualitative case study approach to examine the experiences, meanings, and negotiation processes of vendors within their specific social and regulatory context. The analysis was informed by Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality and Relational Dialectics Theory.

The research was conducted from June to August 2026 in Block III of Pasar Senen, Jakarta, which served as the primary setting for examining the interaction between government regulation and established informal trading practices. Primary data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with actively operating imported second-hand clothing vendors who had at least five years of trading experience and had been

directly affected by the policy. Secondary data were obtained from regulatory and policy documents, statistical data and official reports from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), media archives, and relevant scientific literature. These sources were used to support data triangulation and contextual interpretation. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis was guided by the theory of the social construction of reality and Relational Dialectics Theory. Data credibility was strengthened through source, method, and time triangulation, as well as member checking and peer debriefing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Field Observation Results

Field observations conducted by researchers in the Block III area of Pasar Senen revealed the sociocultural dynamics and economic activities in the field after the re-enforcement of the Ministry of Trade's rules. These observational data are tabulated and mapped into three stages of the dialectical moment of the construction of social reality by Peter

Berger & Thomas Luckmann as follows:

Table 1. Results of field observations

Dialectics Momen	Observation Aspect	Description & Sociocultural meaning in the field
Externalization (A form of self-expression and a form of physical space resistance)	Spatial & physical patterns of the store	Retail stalls are arranged with high density that is only centralized on the 2nd floor of Block III. The way of displaying clothes is made very tight as if covering several stores whose stock is running low. This is a form of resistance made by traders to maintain their existence which shows that the market remains alive and operating.
Externalization (A form of self-expression and a form of physical space resistance)	Discourse on Social Control	There was an appeal banner to maintain the order of the market environment from Pasar Jaya. This shows that there is a mediation of control in the physical space of the market so that the social turmoil of traders can be dampened properly.
Objectification (Legal reality that manifests into a fact experienced by traders)	Concealment of Business Capital	It can be seen that many sacks of <i>the presidential election</i> are deliberately hidden or have not been opened freely. This is a real form of fear and legal reality of the threat of raids by law enforcement officials.
	Decrease in economic intensity	There is a noticeable decrease in the intensity of visitors on weekdays . There was a bargaining process between buyers and sellers that was observed to be running very a lot as a result of the price

		<i>of the presidential capital</i> having soared.
Internalization (The process of absorbing the reality of the crisis that gives birth to behavioral adaptation)	Communal vigilance	There is a sensitive gesture and high vigilance from traders when someone discusses the origin of the dismantling of <i>balpres</i> so that traders consciously absorb that their position as <i>thrifting traders</i> is very vulnerable.
	Shifting distribution patterns	The emergence of a wholesale purchasing pattern of <i>resellers</i> who collect branded clothes at Pasar Senen to be diverted to the digital <i>platform</i> path . This is a form of tactic in seeking existence by adapting the spread of more risks so that goods sell quickly.
	Commodity substitution (New products / local products)	It was observed that there was a phenomenon where some stalls began to display or display new products from local convection. This is a form of compromise made by traders to get around the scarcity and high cost of imported <i>balpres</i> so that stores still have a display of goods and keep their economy spinning.

Source: Researcher (2026)

In-Depth Interview Results

Externalization Moments

At the stage of externalization of traders *Dredging* Pasar Senen expresses subjective awareness and its existence to the outside world which is a form of responding to labeling *Negative* or the legitimacy of illegality from the government.

Framing the morality of the business "Seeking Halal Sustenance"

After the re-enforcement and confiscation of *presidential ballots* in various regions, the government contracted these imported used clothing traders as a form of activity that could harm the country. However, on the part of the merchants, they actively reject stigmas such as harming the state and they redefine their actions within the ethical moral framework as follows

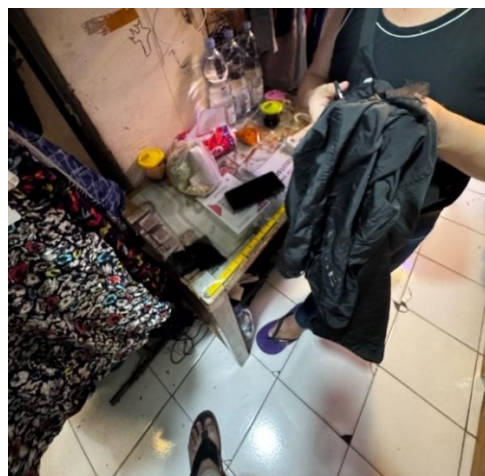


Figure 1. Interview of the trousers merchant

Source: Researcher (2026)

"So yes... The most important thing is that we sell, work, and make a living with halal. He didn't steal like that. "Taxes are levied on the people, and taxes are levied..." (INF-A)

"If you start a fish trade ... It's the same as making a living. The government sometimes thinks differently, money keeps thinking about it." (INF-D)

The narrative given by these traders is a form of externalization of the form of defense that places the words "halal" and "hard work" as a form of sociocultural legitimacy that can overcome the positive limitations of formal law.

Critical of China's import and sector promises

Pasar Senen *thrift*ing traders externalized their disappointment with the government's rhetoric which was considered just a form of sweet narrative in the media. Therefore, they refute the narrative that this *thrift*ing is the culprit of the bankruptcy of the domestic textile industry, but rather they point to very cheap imported goods from China as the main cause as follows:

"Later they will be given new goods, some also say they will be given capital... For example, it doesn't exist until now, right? Now in the news media... That's why our government is saying prayers. The result is non-existent" (INF-A).



Figure 2. Hoodie Trader's Wawawawa

Source: Researcher (2026)

Traders provide a defense or point of view against their own group by claiming that it is the destruction of the domestic textile industry because of the flood of products from China that can dominate the wholesale market rather than the second-hand clothing trade

"Actually, *thrift*ing is not the reason for our factory to close. Our factory is closed, Chinese goods are cheap, that's the red land. So what makes our factory bankrupt is not *thrift*ing. Why is it always *thrift*ing." (Hoodie & Trousers Trader)

"They would rather have their money run to thugs than to taxes.... Even though we agree to pay taxes so that it is recognized." (INF-F)

A Moment of Objectification

The moment of objectification occurs when legal regulations and actions taken by law enforcement carry out action at the Port or Warehouse which can be an objective reality experienced by the *thrift*ing traders of Pasar Senen

Supply chain paralysis and presidential capital surge

The tightening of supervision of used clothing imports by DJBC is a form of reality that will force suppliers to hold back supply to the market which can trigger a surge in the price of *balpres* at the wholesale level which can reach tens of millions of rupiah



Figure 3. Market Situation Senen Block III

Source: Researcher (2026)

"When we order goods on the spot, they usually say they don't dare to take out bang. Again Hot" (shorts trader)

"If the Korean one is already 10,500,000, it's very high. It's hard now." (INF-B)

"14 million Japanese shirt bales now.. The capital is huge.. When things stopped, there was nothing you could do. The capital of 1 bale is already 14 million." (INF-F)

"Expensive hoodie balls are now 7 million, the goods are difficult to find anymore, there are no more goods, just starving to pray." (INF-D)

"When the stop time was not available, there were expensive items. So many stores have changed people because they are no longer strong." (INF-F)

Institutionalization of *the status quo* and barriers to digital platforms



Figure 4. Interview of Pasar Jaya Manager

Source: Researcher (2026)

At the management level, Pasar Jaya Blok III provides positions to traders with a measurable leave (*status quo*). And at the DJBC level they are only as enforcers of the rules of the ministry of trade, meanwhile at the level of digital marketing, traders are faced with legal realities related to systematic blocking on digital *platforms*.

"For block III, they only sell at retail, so we also as long as there is no derivative or legality from the board of directors that there is no prohibition, we still allow them to sell... automatically as a manager we still allow and traders continue to sell as usual if we say *the status quo* " (PPJ-G)

"At Customs, they received deposits from other ministries of the Institution... in accordance with Article 53 of the Customs Law. So actually Customs only receives deposits from the Ministry of Trade. (DJB-H)

This legal reality is further emphasized in the digital space by providing restrictions in the form of blocking marketing activities carried out in the digital space.

"Online is constantly blocked... You can't look at the brand. Now I can't live the usual life.. Blocked, I don't want to be blocked anymore". (INF-D)

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of identity disruption among second-hand clothing vendors in Block III of Pasar Senen following the enforcement of Minister of Trade Regulation No. 47 of 2025, this study concluded that the construction of a new social reality did not occur passively but emerged through structural friction and complex relational tensions. Legal intervention generated cognitive dissonance that encouraged vendors to continuously negotiate social legitimacy and sustain their businesses through three interrelated dialectical moments: externalization, expressed through the moral framing of “halal livelihood” and resistance to state narratives; objectivation, reflected in their confrontation with restrictive legal conditions, including supply chain disruptions, balpres prices reaching up to IDR 14 million, the threat of raids, limited institutional support from Pasar Jaya, and social media restrictions; and internalization, manifested through tactical adaptations such as shifting toward private and low-visibility marketing channels. Consequently, this study proposed an adaptive reality reconstruction model, indicating that asymmetrical tensions between state regulation and informal trading communities can foster sociocultural resilience and hybrid identities among vendors. These identities combine symbolic resistance with pragmatic operational compromises and include a willingness to transition toward greater legal and administrative compliance, including tax obligations.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. The government and policymakers should adopt a more inclusive and participatory regulatory approach by involving informal vendors in policy formulation, providing a clear transition period and feasible legalization pathways for thrift-related businesses, and avoiding stigmatizing labels that may intensify social resistance. The management of Pasar Jaya should facilitate dialogue between vendors and government representatives, provide business development assistance and alternative legal supply channels, and create a supportive trading environment that takes into account the sociocultural realities of the vendor community. Thrift vendors should strengthen collective organization and advocacy capacity, diversify their business strategies, and proactively engage in formalization and regulatory compliance to enhance business

sustainability. Future research should conduct comparative studies across different traditional markets, employ mixed-methods approaches to measure the socioeconomic effects of regulatory policies on vendors, and further examine the adaptive reality reconstruction model to assess its applicability across other informal economy contexts.

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