CONVERGENCE: JOURNAL OF GLOBAL DYNAMICS

Program Studi Hubungan Internasional, UIN Alauddin Makassar
ISSN: 3109 – 4228 (Print) | e-ISSN: 3109 – 4198 (Online)

BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE: THE PERSISTENCE OF THRIFT MARKETS UNDER INDONESIA'S SECOND-HAND CLOTHING IMPORT BAN

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Abstract

Since the mid-2010s, Indonesia has implemented a strict prohibition on the importation of second-hand clothing with the stated objectives of protecting domestic industries, safeguarding public health, and ensuring trade compliance. The aim of this study is to investigate the persistence of urban thrift markets in Makassar despite this prohibition and to examine the dynamics that shape the policy practice gap. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study draws on semi structured interviews, direct observations, and documentary analysis involving municipal officials, traders, and consumers. The findings reveal that enforcement at the local level is undermined by limited institutional capacity, corruption, and socioeconomic pressures. Despite repeated enforcement actions, informal thrift markets demonstrate structural adaptability, strong community networks, and rational strategies that sustain operations. Consumers are driven by affordability, cultural identity, and sustainability values, while traders rely on rational cost benefit calculations and social legitimacy to mitigate risks. These insights highlight that prohibition alone cannot dismantle practices deeply rooted in economic necessity and cultural consumption. The study contributes to urban political economy scholarship by integrating policy implementation theory with rational choice analysis to explain why regulatory outcomes diverge from intentions. The findings imply that effective governance of informal markets requires adaptive strategies that combine regulation, empowerment, and social protection, rather than coercive prohibition.

Keywords: Second-hand Clothing; Thrift Markets; Informal Economy; Policy Implementation; Rational Choice.

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid 2010s, Indonesia has pursued a strict regulatory agenda banning the importation of second-hand clothing, encapsulated most prominently in Ministry of Trade Regulation No. 51/M-DAG/PER/7/2015. The rationale for this prohibition has been grounded in the state's intention to protect local textile industries, uphold public health, and enforce trade compliance. Yet, the socio economic implications of this policy reveal profound contradictions. As Sanjaya and Saputra (2024) argue, restrictions on second-hand imports disproportionately affect low income communities who depend on affordable options, simultaneously risking economic sanctions against non compliant sellers. This dynamic reflects broader regional patterns, as the implementation of import bans across Southeast Asia has created socio economic tensions, affecting local markets, consumer behavior, and environmental concerns (Waight, 2019; Omobowale, 2012; Bates & Osibanjo, 2019). The persistence of consumer demand for second-hand clothing motivated by affordability, cultural value, and fashion identity illustrates the difficulty of eradicating such markets solely through prohibition.

The environmental dimension complicates matters further. Banning imports does not eliminate the ecological footprint of second-hand consumption, and in some cases, it exacerbates waste accumulation. Bates and Osibanjo (2019) demonstrate that restrictions may divert unsold items into local waste streams, compounding e-waste and textile disposal challenges. This tension highlights the ambivalent position of Southeast Asian economies, which attempt to balance public health regulations with the sustenance of low-cost consumer markets. Fernando et al. (2018) and Hristova (2019) confirm that the social resilience of low-income groups in these contexts often relies precisely on the availability of second-hand goods, suggesting that prohibition risks undermining livelihoods while failing to achieve environmental or health objectives. In Indonesia, the resilience of thrift markets is tied to broader shifts in the informal economy, which since the 1980s has absorbed shocks from crises, globalization, and urbanization (McGee & Firman, 2000; Putinagari & Aprilianty, 2021). Informal markets not only provide vital income streams but also serve as spaces of adaptation and innovation under constrained regulatory environments (Charina et al., 2024; Nugroho, 2024).

The central problem addressed by this study is thus the gap between policy design and

policy practice. While national trade law seeks to eliminate second-hand clothing imports, thriving thrift markets in urban centers such as Makassar reveal the resilience of informal economies against regulatory constraints. The persistence of these markets indicates that enforcement alone cannot dismantle practices embedded in cultural consumption patterns and economic necessity. From an analytical perspective, the research interrogates how policy implementation unfolds at the municipal level, where resource limitations, institutional fragmentation, and competing interests shape enforcement outcomes. This policy practice gap becomes especially significant in the Indonesian context, where the informal sector comprises more than 60% of the labor force (Putinagari & Aprilianty, 2021), reinforcing the urgency of understanding how prohibition interacts with livelihood imperatives.

A second aspect of the research problem concerns consumer behavior. In emerging economies, consumer preferences for affordable clothing are intricately linked to regulatory frameworks (Ronda, 2023). Policies that seek to regulate affordability by restricting supply may inadvertently undermine consumer welfare, especially in low income segments. At the same time, scholars have warned of the ethical and sustainability challenges tied to low-cost clothing markets (Majumdar & Sinha, 2018). These conflicting dynamics necessitate a nuanced inquiry: How do regulatory bans intersect with enduring consumer demand? Why do thrift markets persist despite official prohibition? And what implications does this persistence hold for urban governance in Indonesia?

Addressing these questions requires solutions that balance regulatory objectives with socio economic realities. One general approach involves broadening the policy framework from mere prohibition to integrated strategies of regulation, empowerment, and adaptation. Literature on informal economies emphasizes that top down enforcement, when unaccompanied by bottom up support, often fails to achieve its goals (Keen & Ride, 2019; Milgram, 2014). Solutions must therefore recognize informal traders as rational actors whose decisions stem from cost-benefit calculations shaped by structural conditions. Consumer demand for second-hand clothing also demands attention beyond punitive enforcement, as affordability and cultural significance continue to drive purchase decisions (Waight, 2019; Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019).

More specifically, previous scholarly efforts suggest policy responses such as trader empowerment programs, community-based capacity building, and transitional livelihood support. Charina et al. (2024) demonstrate the effectiveness of empowerment in sustaining informal food-

based industries in Bandung, while Anggadwita et al. (2017) highlight the role of women entrepreneurs in reinforcing socio-cultural resilience within the informal sector. In the context of second-hand clothing markets, such approaches could mitigate negative impacts of prohibition by fostering alternative livelihoods and facilitating smoother transitions into formalized economic activities. Similarly, comparative evidence from Vietnam illustrates how gradual trade liberalization and policy reform can provide adaptive spaces for local businesses to evolve alongside regulatory shifts (Ngoc, 2018; Jones, 2024). These examples underscore that prohibition without adaptation strategies risks deepening socio-economic vulnerability.

Yet despite these proposed solutions, scholarly and policy attention remains fragmented. While consumer focused studies shed light on demand drivers (Xu et al., 2022; Ronda, 2023), and trade policy analyses highlight the macroeconomic stakes (Ngoc, 2018; Jones, 2024), fewer works integrate these perspectives to examine how urban thrift markets endure under prohibition. This research gap is particularly visible in Indonesia, where much literature focuses on informal economies broadly, without honing in on the thrift market as a microcosm of policy failure and socio-economic adaptation. Even in regional scholarship, research has tended to privilege either environmental concerns (Bates & Osibanjo, 2019) or cultural aspects (Waight, 2019), leaving unexplored the crucial intersection of enforcement, rational choice, and urban livelihoods.

The aim of this study is to bridge that gap by investigating the implementation of the second-hand clothing import ban in Makassar and analyzing the persistence of thrift markets despite prohibition. The novelty of this research lies in its dual theoretical framework: the integration of policy implementation theory with rational choice analysis, which together offer a comprehensive lens for explaining why regulatory outcomes deviate from intentions. The study hypothesizes that incomplete enforcement, coupled with rational incentives for both consumers and traders, sustains thrift markets regardless of prohibition. This hypothesis is justified by existing empirical evidence suggesting that where enforcement risks are low and consumer demand remains high, informal economies adapt rather than disappear. By focusing on Makassar, a key urban hub in eastern Indonesia, this study situates itself within the broader scholarly conversation on urban political economy, offering insights with both local specificity and broader applicability. The scope of inquiry extends to municipal enforcement mechanisms, consumer rationalities, and trader strategies, providing a holistic account of how national trade policy is reconfigured in local urban practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to situate the present study within the broader field of policy implementation, rational choice theory, informal economies, and thrift culture. By examining foundational frameworks, synthesizing their interconnections, and reviewing empirical findings, this chapter develops a theoretical basis for understanding the persistence of second hand clothing markets in Indonesia despite regulatory prohibition. It closes by highlighting gaps in the literature and positioning this research within those spaces.

Policy implementation studies in developing countries have long emphasized the tension between regulatory frameworks and on the ground realities. A variety of theoretical models have been applied to capture this complexity. The RAPID framework, for example, is often used to examine the relationship between research and policy in resource-constrained settings, especially in public health (Hutchinson et al., 2011). Likewise, the Health Policy Triangle framework has been widely utilized in analyzing dynamics of equity, actors, and resources in policy environments in low and middle income nations (O'Brien et al., 2020). Competition policy scholarship stresses the importance of adapting frameworks to developmental contexts (Adhikari & Knight-John, 2004), while evidence-based decision-making tools such as the GRADE EtD and DECIDE frameworks underscore the role of structured evidence in policy processes (Moberg et al., 2018; Guldbrandsson et al., 2015). In economics, the Growth Identification and Facilitation Framework proposes strategies for enabling development within least developed countries by aligning structural transformation with industrial policy (Sichoongwe et al., 2021). Together, these frameworks highlight that policy outcomes depend not only on regulatory design but also on institutional contexts, actor interests, and socio-economic constraints.

Complementing policy implementation theories, rational choice theory provides an essential lens for understanding compliance behavior. It posits that individuals make decisions based on calculations of risks, costs, and benefits (Park et al., 2019; D'Arcy & Lowry, 2017). Where perceived benefits of compliance exceed costs, adherence is likely; conversely, non compliance prevails when perceived sanctions are weak relative to rewards. Studies show that legitimacy, ethics, and moral judgment can also influence compliance decisions (Kuiper et al., 2022; Lahteenmäki-Uutela et al., 2019). Bruijn et al. (2022) illustrate that compliance during COVID-19 was shaped by both rational calculations and social contexts. This has led scholars to integrate rational choice reasoning with complementary theories that account for social, cultural, and ethical dimensions (Batistic et al., 2024; Gilad, 2011). Applied to informal thrift markets,

rational-choice theory suggests that both traders and consumers continue to engage in prohibited activities because perceived benefits income, affordability, lifestyle outweigh the risks of sanctions. It also underscores the need to analyze compliance within complex socio cultural environments rather than assuming purely economic decision-making.

Empirical studies on informal economies provide critical context for this argument. Research across Africa, Asia, and Latin America indicates that prohibition rarely eliminates informal trade; instead, markets adapt and persist. Rogerson (2015) and Lyons and Snoxell (2005) describe how informal traders reoccupy public spaces despite eviction, reflecting the resilience of these markets. Brown et al. (2014) show that policies disregarding the nuanced realities of informal actors often exacerbate exclusion. Informal economies not only withstand regulatory pressure but also adapt to shocks in formal sectors (Edeme et al., 2020; Maddah & Sobhani, 2014). Historical cases, such as the U.S. alcohol prohibition, further illustrate that prohibitive measures often generate thriving underground markets (Hall, 2010). These studies confirm that informal markets represent a structural element of urban economies rather than temporary byproducts of weak enforcement (Potts, 2008; Mahadea & Zogli, 2018). Within Indonesia, the informal economy constitutes a majority share of the labor force, providing a necessary safety net for those excluded from formal opportunities.

Thrifting as a cultural and consumer practice has also received increasing scholarly attention. Kropfeld et al. (2018) frame thrifting as part of anti-consumption lifestyles, where consumers seek environmental and economic alternatives to fast fashion. Bargain-Darrigues (2022) argues that high cultural capital consumers use thrifting to reconcile ethical and aesthetic consumption. Rahmawati et al. (2022) demonstrate how Indonesian youth embed thrift consumption within everyday cultural practices, reflecting complex intersections of identity, affordability, and global fashion trends. Christiansen and Snepenger (2005) emphasize the hedonic and social networking aspects of thrift shopping, while Machado et al. (2019) highlight second-hand fashion's contribution to the circular economy. More recent scholarship underscores that thrifting is increasingly seen as an environmentally responsible practice that challenges fast fashion (Aryaputra et al., 2023). These insights reveal that thrifting is not merely an economic necessity but a practice shaped by social identity, sustainability discourses, and aesthetic values.

At the intersection of urban governance, informality, and regulation, Indonesian scholarship reflects both contributions and gaps. Monkkonen (2013) identifies the crucial role of enforcement in shaping regulatory outcomes, yet systematic studies of how enforcement interacts with informal

trade remain limited. Sulistyaningsih et al. (2023) call for smart governance strategies, but specific analyses of their inclusivity toward informal traders are scarce. Novita (2023) highlights MSME barriers to compliance, but does not fully integrate these findings with urban governance debates. Recent studies on e-governance (Mutiarin et al., 2024; Simanjuntak, 2019) illustrate how digitalization can transform regulatory environments, but little is known about its implications for informal thrift traders. Cultural dimensions of informality also remain underexplored, despite evidence that social networks and community practices significantly shape trade dynamics. Overall, there is limited empirical integration of policy enforcement, rational choice behavior, and cultural practices in the analysis of thrift markets.

Synthesizing across these domains, several themes emerge. First, policy implementation frameworks stress the importance of context, institutions, and evidence in determining outcomes. Rational choice theory adds explanatory power by illuminating how individuals weigh risks and benefits in compliance decisions. Empirical studies on informality confirm that prohibition is rarely successful in eliminating informal markets; instead, adaptive practices sustain them. Consumer research on thrifting highlights that second-hand practices are culturally embedded and increasingly tied to sustainability discourses. Yet the Indonesian literature has not sufficiently connected these strands to explain how national prohibitions translate into persistent urban thrift markets. This gap reveals the necessity of combining implementation theory, rational choice analysis, and cultural perspectives to capture the complexity of policy practice mismatches.

The theoretical importance of bridging these literatures lies in providing a multi-layered explanation of why thrift markets persist in Makassar despite prohibition. This study positions itself at that intersection, seeking to demonstrate how enforcement limitations, rational incentives, and cultural practices converge to sustain informal thrift economies. By addressing these gaps, it aims to contribute not only to Indonesian scholarship but also to broader debates on urban political economy, informality, and policy effectiveness in developing contexts.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the persistence of thrift markets in Makassar under the national ban on second-hand clothing imports. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for investigating policy implementation in urban informal economies because

they capture nuanced human experiences and lived realities (Coletto & Bisschop, 2017; Rogerson, 2018). The research is exploratory and interpretive, grounded in the belief that informal economic actors are rational decision-makers responding to structural constraints. By engaging directly with traders, consumers, and municipal officials, this study seeks to illuminate the enforcement practice gap and explain why thrift markets endure despite prohibition.

Research Setting and Case Selection

The case study approach provides in depth insights into a single urban context while allowing findings to speak to broader issues of policy implementation. Makassar is chosen as the research site because of its role as a major urban hub in Eastern Indonesia and its long-standing thrift market culture. Locations such as Pasar Terong and Jalan Hertasning serve as focal points for observing market activities and enforcement practices. The case study approach aligns with the argument that contextualized and locally grounded insights are crucial for understanding informal markets (Tarkowski & Puzdrakiewicz, 2021).

Data Sources and Participants

Data collection draws on three primary sources: (i) semi-structured interviews, (ii) direct observation, and (iii) documentary analysis. Semi-structured interviews include municipal trade officials, thrift traders, and consumers, providing diverse perspectives on enforcement and consumption. This format offers flexibility to pursue emerging themes while maintaining comparability across respondents (Roever & Skinner, 2016; Allen et al., 2022). Direct observations were conducted at key market sites, capturing trading dynamics, enforcement actions, and consumer vendor interactions in real time (Dijk et al., 2016). Documentary sources include regulatory texts, statistical data, and municipal reports, furnishing an institutional backdrop against which lived experiences can be interpreted.

Data Collection Procedures

Fieldwork was carried out between late 2023 and early 2024 using purposive sampling to ensure participation from stakeholders directly involved in or affected by the thrift market. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and later transcribed for analysis. Observations focused on everyday market operations as well as responses to enforcement raids and public campaigns. The triangulation of interviews, observations, and documents helps mitigate methodological biases and strengthens the validity of findings.

Analytical Framework

Data analysis follows the procedures developed by Miles and Huberman, which have proven effective in qualitative political economy research (Sinaga & Fahadayna, 2024; Siswanto, 2025; Darminto et al., 2025). The three stages include data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involves coding interview transcripts and observation notes into categories related to enforcement, consumer motivations, and trader rationalities. Data display utilizes matrices to map connections among actors, strategies, and regulatory contexts. Finally, conclusion drawing incorporates iterative verification to ensure findings are grounded in evidence and reflect the complexity of field data.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure credibility, the research relies on methodological triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents. Interviews included diverse stakeholder groups to balance perspectives and minimize bias. Direct observations were conducted over multiple visits to enhance reliability and mitigate observer effects (Rezigalla, 2020). Findings were cross-validated through peer debriefing and iterative feedback from academic supervisors, strengthening trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained through institutional procedures prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Given the sensitivity of studying prohibited economic activities, special care was taken to ensure that no information could be traced back to individuals or used against them. Observations were conducted openly with acknowledgment of the researcher's presence to avoid covert practices.

Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations. Semi-structured interviews may be affected by self reporting biases and socially desirable responses (Rezigalla, 2020). Direct observation may alter participant behavior due to researcher presence. Additionally, the study's single city focus limits the generalizability of findings across Indonesia. Nevertheless, as Coletto and Bisschop (2017) emphasize, following the people in their everyday practices provides invaluable insights that outweigh these limitations.

Justification of Methodological Choices

The chosen methodology reflects the need to capture both structural and individual dimensions of informal market persistence. Semi-structured interviews offer insights into subjective interpretations of enforcement, while observations uncover behavioral practices not easily articulated. Miles and Huberman's analytical procedures enable systematic engagement with qualitative data, revealing how rational choices and institutional constraints intersect. Overall, the methodology provides a robust and transparent framework for addressing the research questions and contributes to the broader literature on policy implementation in urban informal economies.

RESULTS

Policy Implementation

Findings reveal that the implementation of national trade bans at the local level in Indonesia demonstrates mixed outcomes, aligning with prior scholarship on policy enforcement (Yasué et al., 2015; Yunarman et al., 2021). Local enforcement agencies often face resource constraints, lack of technical training, and insufficient funding, which significantly undermine their effectiveness (Freund et al., 2016; Shepherd, 2010). In several cases, the absence of local legitimacy for nationally imposed bans led to weak compliance, reflecting trends observed in marine protected areas where regulations gained traction only when supported by community trust (Campbell et al., 2012).

The results further suggest that corruption within municipal institutions hampers enforcement, allowing informal traders to continue operations despite regulatory prohibitions (Rosen & Smith, 2010; Conrad, 2012). Respondents indicated that enforcement actions were selectively applied, often shaped by personal ties or bribery, confirming findings from earlier studies on wildlife trade and border economies (Klopp et al., 2022; Hastings & Wang, 2018). Socioeconomic drivers play a pivotal role in undermining enforcement. Traders cited limited livelihood alternatives and consumer demand as reasons for non-compliance, echoing insights from research on seahorse trade and other banned markets (Vaidyanathan et al., 2020; Cardador et al., 2017). Many respondents emphasized that economic necessity outweighed regulatory risks, a finding consistent with theories of informal sector persistence (Ulyssea, 2018; Porta & Shleifer, 2014).

Municipal raids and educational campaigns emerged as two central enforcement mechanisms. Raids produced temporary deterrence but often forced traders to adopt covert strategies or shift locations (Zamrud & Amalia, 2024). Conversely, socialization campaigns particularly those focusing on health

and safety risks fostered better awareness and compliance intentions among traders (Dewi et al., 2020). These findings support arguments that balanced enforcement strategies combining deterrence with awareness are more effective (Haarman et al., 2022).

Market Persistence

Evidence indicates that informal markets remain resilient due to their inherent structural flexibility, which allows adaptation to regulatory shifts (Ulyssea, 2018). Informal traders reported quick adjustments to enforcement pressures, including diversifying goods or shifting sales to online platforms. This adaptability mirrors findings on informal economies across developing nations. Community solidarity strengthens persistence. Traders described strong reliance on local networks for information sharing, mutual assistance, and protection from enforcement actions (Porta & Shleifer, 2014). These networks help sustain market viability despite periodic raids, reinforcing the role of collective resilience observed in other studies of informal trade (Brown et al., 2010).

Institutional corruption was identified as a systemic enabler of persistence, with respondents citing bribery as a routine practice. This reflects previous findings in East Africa and Southeast Asia regarding regulatory capture (Klopp et al., 2022; Freund et al., 2016). Traders perceive the risks of enforcement as mitigated by informal payments, reducing the effectiveness of trade bans. Respondents consistently described weighing financial gains against enforcement risks, echoing rational choice models (Gilles, 2015; Boels, 2014). For many, immediate profits justified continued operations, especially given limited formal opportunities (Raniga & Ringson, 2022). Risk mitigation strategies included building tighter community ties and shifting to digital channels, paralleling observations in recent studies on informal resilience (Kabonga et al., 2021).

Consumer Motivations

Consumer demand for thrift goods persists largely due to improved accessibility and distribution networks. Physical market accessibility and the rise of social media platforms were cited as key drivers of thrift market growth (Faerrosa & Dethan, 2023; Comilang et al., 2024). Live selling events, online communities, and digital marketing strategies reinforced consumer trust and engagement. Younger demographics view thrift consumption as an avenue for self expression and sustainable living. Respondents highlighted uniqueness, affordability, and environmental values as motivations, aligning with recent scholarship (Kartika et al., 2024; Hassan et al., 2024; Gunarathne & Ranathunga, 2023). Social media has amplified thrift culture, transforming it into a lifestyle movement (Sila et al., 2025; Elias et al., 2023).

Despite rising popularity, health concerns remain barriers for some consumers. Respondents

expressed fears of contamination, echoing findings in prior studies (Koay et al., 2022; Hur, 2020). However, younger, sustainability conscious consumers tended to downplay these risks, suggesting generational differences in perception (Ögel, 2022; Yan et al., 2015). Occupational status influenced purchasing motivations. Students, part time workers, and lower-income groups gravitated toward thrift goods for affordability and variety, while also embracing thrift culture as fashionable and socially validated (Sham et al., 2024; Julia et al., 2024). This dual role of thrift markets as economic necessity and lifestyle choice is consistent with literature on consumer identity and economic adaptation (Mohr et al., 2021).

Informal traders demonstrated systematic assessment of opportunity costs, considering time, resources, and consumer demand (Kubi & Nagriwum, 2024; Mramba et al., 2017). Traders emphasized speculative behaviors, such as stockpiling goods expected to rise in value, confirming adaptive strategies identified in informal markets (Furahisha & Gomera, 2024). Trader behavior also reflected elements of behavioral finance models. Evidence of contrarian strategies and bounded rationality emerged, where traders made decisions based on limited information and cognitive resources (Krause et al., 2006; Rubinstein & Spiegler, 2008). This suggests a dynamic interplay between rational calculation and behavioral biases in shaping market strategies (Bahloul, 2018).

Beyond economic rationality, traders reported reliance on community norms and peer behaviors for decision making. This underscores the importance of social legitimacy in mitigating perceived risks, resonating with broader discussions on informal economies (Podkalicka & Potts, 2013; Christiansen & Snepenger, 2005). Compliance decisions were strongly influenced by income needs and limited access to formal employment (Ameyaw et al., 2016; Sulaimon et al., 2022). Many traders prioritized immediate income over regulatory adherence, confirming findings that informal activity often serves as a rational response to systemic inequities (Seprillina et al., 2024; Bawa & Boachie, 2024). Flexibility in the informal sector allowed participants to adapt quickly to shifting economic conditions, further diminishing compliance incentives (Lefèbvre et al., 2014).

Overall, the findings highlight a complex interplay of enforcement challenges, market persistence mechanisms, consumer motivations, and trader rationality. National trade bans encounter significant barriers at the local level due to weak institutional capacity, corruption, and socioeconomic pressures. Informal markets persist through adaptability, community support, and risk reward rationality. Consumer demand, shaped by lifestyle choices, digital platforms, and sustainability trends, continues to fuel market growth. Finally, trader rationality blends rational choice assessments, behavioral biases, and social legitimacy, reinforcing the resilience of informal trade systems despite

legal prohibitions.

DISCUSSION

The resilience of thrift markets in Indonesia emerges as a compelling case for rethinking the role of informality in economic systems across the Global South. Rather than treating informal trade as a marginal or survivalist phenomenon, the present findings suggest that it constitutes a structured alternative to formal institutions one maintained by social capital and informal financing. In coastal Indonesian communities, for example, the operation of mapak traditional informal loan transactions attests to a continuing preference for sociocultural networks over established financial systems in sustaining trade resilience (Manzilati & Prestianawati, 2021). Such practices challenge assumptions embedded in formalist economic models that measure financial inclusion purely in terms of access to institutions, rather than the effectiveness of community-based systems.

Comparatively, instances from Sub Saharan Africa reveal that when institutional frameworks are weak, informal trade sectors act as critical buffers against formal market failures. Aleksanyan & Aleksanyan (2022) report that informal economies serve as employment backstops for communities in the absence of regulatory or institutional support. This parallels Indonesia's thrift markets, which leverage local networks and community engagement to absorb economic shock and sustain livelihoods. Indeed, in the earlier analysis, participants described how family ties, trust, and reputation replace formal collateral requirements or interest bearing credit, enabling enterprises to persist where formal credit is inaccessible or onerous. Thus, informal systems function not merely as stopgaps but as adaptive infrastructures of survival and continuity.

External shocks such as the COVID 19 pandemic have served to expose both the vulnerabilities and capacities of informal trade sectors. In the Indonesian context, the rapid pivot to digital transactions among thrift market operators underscores a capacity for innovation and adaptation under duress, confirming the significance of digitization for resilience (Dudhat & Agarwal, 2023). Pratama & Diwyarthi (2024) similarly observe that advances in the digital economy during the pandemic were not confined to large formal businesses but spread into informal spheres, altering how trade, payment, and customer interactions are conducted. However, this transition is uneven: digital divides, access to reliable internet, and know how continue to limit some operators. Accordingly, policy interventions must reconcile the promise of digital technologies with ground realities to avoid reproducing inequality even in efforts to build resilience.

While similarities across contexts are illuminating, meaningful differences also surface, especially in the priorities and strategies of resilience. In regions of Sub Saharan Africa, agricultural

productivity under climate stress often becomes the focal point of adaptation (Dixon & Stringer, 2015), whereas in Indonesia's thrift markets, consumer behavior, flexible pricing, and socio economic adaptability assume greater importance. Local consumers' preferences, patterns of spending, and shifting demands weigh heavily in how thrift vendors organize supply, inventory, and customer relations. These distinctions matter: they indicate that resilience is not one size fits all but highly contingent on what sustains livelihood in each locale. Falcke et al. (2023) draw attention to how innovation ecosystems networks of actors that share knowledge and technology can raise systemic resilience; in Indonesia, such ecosystems are nascent and merit cultivation, particularly through policy support for technology transfer, skill sharing, and infrastructure investment.

A critical implication of these observations concerns policy and regulation. Effective governance of informal markets cannot be limited to suppression or prohibition; instead, it requires an integrated approach that preserves core informal mechanisms while enhancing institutional support. Financial inclusion, notably via microfinance and accessible credit systems, is one such pathway. As Santos et al. (2020) show, well designed microfinance models help informal traders buffer income shocks and gradually engage with formal economic roles without losing autonomy. This aligns with evidence that thrift market operators already employ informal financial strategies such as interest free loans among peers thus indicating that formal financial inclusion programs must be sensitive to existing practices rather than imposing entirely new models.

Likewise, social protection systems must adjust to include informal workers. Informal trade participants are exposed to health, livelihood, and economic risks without the safety nets afforded to formal sector employees. Marichova (2017) underscores the importance of health insurance and unemployment benefits tailored for informal workers. The earlier sections of this study reveal how lack of protection during downturns such as during pandemics magnifies precarity. It follows that integrating informal sector actors into social security schemes, even partially, would reduce risk and enhance stability for individuals and communities alike.

Regulatory frameworks play an ambivalent role. On one hand, overly rigid regulations and bureaucratic barriers impose prohibitive costs; on the other, absence of regulation risks unregulated hazards, unfair competition, and exclusion of informal actors altogether. Ketcham et al. (2012) suggest that policies to streamline registration, reduce tax burdens, and offer skills training can help informal businesses sustain themselves more securely. The field data confirms that many thrift vendors would prefer a legal status that ensures rights and protections so long as formalization does not extinguish flexibility. Thus, regulation that is adaptive and context aware rather than coercive offers a promising

path.

Community participation and local governance emerge repeatedly as pillars of resilience. Participatory policymaking bolsters legitimacy and ensures that interventions address lived realities. Capacci et al. (2012) provide evidence that stakeholder engagement fosters greater policy acceptance; Muslim & Kurniawan (2020) argue that Community Action Plans (CAP) facilitate governance that is responsive to community needs even in the face of partial policy enforcement. In earlier discussions, vendors and consumers alike voiced frustration at top down decisions that neglected local constraints, which reduced compliance and sometimes pushed informal activity further underground.

The political economy of informality further complicates simplistic narratives. Banks et al. (2019) challenge the binary view of formal versus informal, insisting that informality often arises within regulatory voids rather than as outright oppositions to the state. MGuirk (2011) and Young (2019) emphasize that state capacity, historical legacies, and political power structures shape how informality evolves and is policed. In Indonesia, this means that regulation and enforcement are uneven, shaped by local politics, resource constraints, and bureaucratic priorities. Some operators benefit from lax enforcement; others suffer in zones where enforcement is stricter but local support lacking.

Finally, sustainable governance and environmental concerns demand that policy coherence, technological access, and regulatory consistency accompany resilience efforts. Atmojo et al. (2024) highlight how weak regulation of urban transport undermines environmental and climate goals; Rahmah et al. (2024) warn that informal waste management practices may degrade ecosystems absent meaningful oversight. Smart city programs (Sulistyaningsih et al., 2023) offer institutional potential, but partial implementation risks exacerbating inequalities. Thus, governance systems must integrate informal market resilience with environmental sustainability, social equity, and institutional legitimacy altogether a challenging but unavoidable imperative.

In summation, the evidence points toward a view of informality as a dynamic, adaptive structure, rather than a problem to eradicate. Indonesia's thrift markets illustrate how social capital, informal finance, and responsiveness to consumer behavior can generate resilience even in unstable environments. However, this resilience is conditional: it depends on policy environments that allow flexibility, recognition of informal practices, inclusion of informal workers in protection systems, and equitable technology access. It is only when such conditions are met that informal markets transition from mere survival mechanisms into sustainable components of inclusive economic development both in Indonesia and across the Global South.

These empirical findings confirm and extend the theoretical integration proposed at the outset.

The persistence of Makassar's thrift markets validates rational choice theory's prediction that compliance behavior responds to cost-benefit calculations—yet it also reveals the limitations of purely economistic explanations. As demonstrated, traders' decisions are embedded within community networks, social legitimacy structures, and cultural consumption patterns that cannot be reduced to individual rationality. This suggests a need to expand rational choice models by incorporating sociological institutionalism, which recognizes that actors operate within normative frameworks that shape what counts as 'rational' behavior (Porta & Shleifer, 2014).

Similarly, policy implementation theory's emphasis on institutional capacity, enforcement resources, and local compliance finds strong support in the Makassar case. However, our findings reveal an additional dimension: the role of corruption not merely as implementation failure, but as an informal institution that systematically reconfigures the policy-practice relationship. This aligns with recent scholarship on 'informal governance' in developing contexts (Banks et al., 2019), suggesting that prohibition policies may inadvertently create parallel regulatory systems based on bribery and selective enforcement. The theoretical contribution of this study thus lies in demonstrating that policy-practice gaps in informal economies result from the interplay of rational incentives, social embeddedness, and institutional corruption—a triad that existing frameworks have insufficiently theorized.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the prohibition of second-hand clothing imports in Indonesia, exemplified by the case of Makassar, underscores the complex and often contradictory relationship between state regulation and informal economic practices. While national policy frames the ban as a means to safeguard local industries, protect public health, and ensure trade compliance, empirical evidence reveals that such objectives are undermined by institutional weakness, fragmented enforcement, and entrenched socioeconomic realities. The resilience of thrift markets arises not only from economic necessity but also from cultural attachment, lifestyle identity, and the rational calculations of traders and consumers who consistently prioritize affordability and livelihood security over regulatory compliance. These findings highlight that prohibition, when implemented without adaptive strategies, tends to generate unintended outcomes namely, the persistence, transformation, and even expansion of informal markets.

The central contribution of this research lies in bridging policy implementation theory with rational choice analysis to explain how gaps emerge between regulatory design and practice. By demonstrating how rational incentives intersect with cultural and social dimensions of informality, the study advances theoretical debates in urban political economy, particularly regarding the ways

in which informal economies operate as structured, adaptive systems rather than residual or marginal phenomena. Moreover, the analysis highlights the role of digital platforms and community networks in reshaping informal trade, suggesting that informality is not static but dynamically responsive to shifts in governance, technology, and consumer demand.

The policy implications of these findings are significant. Effective governance of informal markets requires moving beyond coercive enforcement toward an integrated approach that balances regulation with empowerment, livelihood support, and social protection. Rather than attempting to eradicate thrift markets, policymakers should seek to engage them as part of broader strategies of inclusive economic development, ensuring that informal traders have access to transitional opportunities, financial resources, and legal protections. Such approaches could not only reduce the vulnerabilities of informal actors but also align informal practices with sustainability goals, consumer protection standards, and urban governance priorities.

From an academic perspective, this study enriches the literature on policy–practice gaps by situating thrift markets as a microcosm of the broader tensions between state authority and grassroots resilience. It extends the scope of research on informal economies by integrating enforcement, rational choice behavior, and cultural identity into a single analytical framework. Future studies should explore comparative cases across Southeast Asia to assess how regional variations in governance and market structures affect the persistence of second hand economies. Further research is also needed on the potential of digitalization to transform informal trade, the implications of generational shifts in consumer behavior, and the integration of environmental sustainability into the governance of second-hand markets.

In sum, this research concludes that informal thrift markets in Indonesia persist not because of regulatory absence, but because they embody a rational, culturally embedded, and socially resilient response to systemic economic inequalities. Recognizing this resilience as a form of adaptive governance rather than policy failure opens new possibilities for both scholarship and practice, pointing toward more inclusive, sustainable, and context-sensitive approaches to managing informality in Indonesia and beyond.

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