

Economy Section Article

Empowerment of Used Imported Clothes Traders (Thrifting) Through Micro Entrepreneurship Collaboration System Activities

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript addresses the burgeoning trade in second-hand clothing, colloquially known as thrifting, within the city of Solo, located in central Java, Indonesia. With a population of 522,364, Solo is Java's third most populous city. The study, conducted in collaboration with the BPS Surakarta, sheds light on the multifaceted challenges posed by importing used clothing from developed countries, particularly Japan and the United States. The research aims to comprehensively analyze the impact of thrifting on the growth of the local textile industry, concurrently evaluating the socio-economic implications for the region. The mayor of Solo, cognizant of the potential issues, is actively involved in revitalizing tourism hotspots while simultaneously addressing the nuanced problem of thrifting. The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to investigate quantitative and qualitative data by combining statistical and thematic content analysis of relevant literature and local perceptions. Preliminary findings reveal a substantial growth in the importation of used clothing, indicating a burgeoning market for thrifting, which, while offering affordability, presents challenges to the indigenous textile industry. The discussion unfolds by contextualizing the findings within the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework. It explores potential avenues for policy interventions to reconcile economic aspirations with sustainable industrial practices. Ultimately, this research contributes valuable insights into Solo's socio-economic landscape and the intricate dynamics surrounding thrifting, propelling the discourse towards informed policy-making and sustainable urban development.

KEYWORDS

clothing importation; sustainable development goals; textile industry; thrifting; urban development

1. INTRODUCTION

Solo, situated in central Java, boasts a population of 522,364, ranking as Java's third most populous city (Widyaningsih & Arif, 2022). Referred to as the "Spirit of Java," Solo has revitalized vital tourist attractions, including Solo Safari, Sheikh Zayed Solo Grand Mosque, Ngarsopuro area, and Manahan culinary shelter (Arieza, 2023). Despite ongoing municipal enhancements led by the current mayor, an unaddressed issue pertains to the trade of imported used clothing, commonly known as thrifting (Ezeudu et al., 2021). Indonesia, a primary destination for second-hand clothing imports, initially embraced this practice for its affordability (Payson et al., 2022). However, the sustained importation now poses a challenge, impacting the growth of the domestic textile industry (Farhana et al., 2022).

In recent years, the escalating influx of second-hand clothing imports in Indonesia has raised concerns about its potential impact on the country's economic growth (Rossi & Morone, 2023). Despite providing an affordable clothing alternative for budget-conscious consumers, these imports pose a significant challenge to local textile entrepreneurs, who must contend with cheaper, high-quality foreign products (Raya et al., 2021). To address this, empowering used clothes traders through alternative micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) activities is crucial (Karim et al., 2022). Despite efforts to curb unauthorized imports, the thriving business of second-hand clothes persists, driven by the allure of acquiring low-cost branded items (Pozzo, 2020). The illicit importation of textiles into Indonesia posed a substantial challenge in 2022, with an estimated value reaching US\$ 2.94 billion (IDR 43 trillion) (Arkyasa, 2023).

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play a pivotal role in the Indonesian economy, yet face challenges stemming from global competition, including issues of low quality, limited innovation, and a lack of information and communication technology (ICT) proficiency (Koeswahyono et al., 2022). To improve their competitiveness and sustainability, SMEs must quickly embrace technological advances, prioritize long-term profitability, produce environmentally friendly products, conserve natural resources, and utilize technology efficiently (Efendi et al., 2020). Additionally, upgrading product marketing systems is essential for their growth and success (Adiwijaya et al., 2020). Furthermore, sellers' responsibility in promoting socially desirable behaviour is paramount within marketing as a social process facilitating the exchange of goods and services (Tjandra et al., 2022). The emergence and integration of social networking sites since 1997, exemplified by platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have further shaped corporate strategies and communication dynamics (Suharto et al., 2022).

This research addresses the challenges posed by the increasing importation of second-hand clothing in Indonesia. The study recognizes the vital role of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the Indonesian economy and seeks to enhance their competitiveness and sustainability. By exploring innovative approaches, such as micro-entrepreneurship collaboration system activities, the research aims to empower used clothes traders facing economic pressures due to the influx of imported goods. The novelty of this research lies in proposing alternative MSME activities as a solution, emphasizing technological adaptation, long-term profitability, environmental considerations, and efficient use of technology. Furthermore, the study contributes to the academic discourse on the social responsibility of sellers in marketing, shedding light on the challenges faced by MSMEs and offering practical insights into upgrading product marketing systems for their growth. Overall, the research contributes to the broader understanding of sustainable economic practices and the empowerment of local businesses.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article employs a literature search methodology to aggregate relevant materials and discuss research findings on the impact of used clothing imports on domestic textile entrepreneurs in Indonesia. The data analysis, derived from a comprehensive review of literary sources, is descriptive and analytical, addressing key research questions (Ansari et al., 2022). In addition to analyzing the synthesized information, the study carefully selects literature related to the research focus, such as books, journals, and related publications (Fan et al., 2022). Limitations of the research include its sole reliance on written sources omitting additional field research methods like interviews or surveys (Chang et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study's scope is confined to examining the impact of used clothing imports solely on domestic textile entrepreneurs without exploring broader factors that might influence the Indonesian textile industry.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Saputra et al. (2022), the term “empowerment,” stemming from the word “*daya*”, signifies the endowment of ability or authority. Defined by The Big Indonesian Dictionary as a procedural or act of empowerment, the term broadly encapsulates the process of authorizing a community or group to take action, addressing challenges and enhancing their standard of living (Suswadi et al., 2023). The interpretation of empowerment varies based on contextual socio-economic conditions, prompting different strategies in diverse communities (Suhendah et al., 2022). It remains challenging to offer a specific definition as the concept evolves depending on the context.

3.1. Micro Entrepreneurship Collaboration System

According to Fauzia (2022), micro-entrepreneurship encompasses small-scale business activities typically managed by an individual or a compact team, emphasizing agility and individualized attention to niche markets. Collaboration in micro-entrepreneurship, a pivotal strategy for contemporary firms, involves individuals or small businesses working together to attain shared objectives, pooling resources, and capitalizing on collective strengths for mutual gain. Essential facets of collaborative entrepreneurship encompass heightened flexibility, innovation, collaborator initiative, and risk acceptance. Increasingly integral to entrepreneurial success, collaboration transcends competition, allowing entrepreneurs to distribute workloads and enhance prospects of success. Micro-entrepreneurship examples span diverse professions, such as freelancers, graphic designers, writers, programmers, photographers, and service providers.

Collaboration in the realm of micro-entrepreneurship offers numerous benefits. These benefits encompass resource sharing, effective risk management through distributing burdens, promoting innovation, and facilitating valuable networking opportunities. According to Marsaoli and Kusumasari (2022), micro-entrepreneurs, often operating as sole proprietors or in small teams, distinguish themselves from small businesses by focusing on specialized services, niche markets, and lower annual revenue. This nuanced distinction underscores the unique dynamics of micro-entrepreneurship within the broader entrepreneurial landscape.

Several salient factors emerge in micro-entrepreneurship collaboration within the imported clothes trading sector, commonly known as thrifting. According to Ray and Nayak (2023), the Gen-Z demographic emerges as a pivotal market for thrifting, driven by social media influences and technological connectivity. Thrifting and swapping activities and

internet campaigns promote sustainable initiatives, striving to reshape consumer habits towards more eco-conscious choices. Entrepreneurial skills and innovation are paramount in the fashion industry, where individuals adept at creativity and innovation can navigate the competitive landscape effectively.

Despite its rise, thrifting presents a dichotomy of challenges and opportunities. While it may contribute to a shift towards quantity-focused spending practices, it concurrently offers the potential for a sustainable fashion revolution and the cultivation of guilt-free, eco-friendly shopping habits. According to [Hanadhyas and Wulandari \(2022\)](#), collaboration within the micro-business landscape involves resource sharing and knowledge exchange, fostering effective partnerships. Thrifting activities, encompassing shopping at thrift stores and flea markets, cater to consumers who seek unique items, embrace creative dressing, and prioritize budget-conscious, value-driven shopping experiences ([Irawan et al., 2023](#)). Beyond individual preferences, these sustainable initiatives aspire to address socio-economic impacts associated with excessive consumption and production, fostering a fashion revolution and promoting conscientious shopping practices under the guise of social awareness.

3.2. Thrifting Merchants

Within the domain of imported clothes trading, commonly referred to as thrifting, the influence wielded by brands emerges as a pivotal determinant in shaping consumer behaviour and market dynamics. Thrifting is increasingly acknowledged as a sustainable alternative to fast fashion, emphasizing reduced environmental impact and clothing reuse. Brands actively championing sustainable initiatives and ethical practices resonate strongly with consumers participating in thrifting activities, reflecting a desire to align personal values and the brands they endorse ([Ong et al., 2021](#)).

The evolving perception of thrifting, particularly among younger demographics, underscores the transformative influence of brands in portraying thrifted items as viable and fashionable choices. Consumer advocacy for thrift items is gaining momentum, driven by brands that effectively engage with the primary thrifting market, the Gen-Z demographic. Financial considerations further amplify the impact of brands, with thrifting promoted as a financially prudent and environmentally conscious choice. In this dynamic landscape, brands hold the potential to sway consumer behaviour, shaping the trajectory of the thrifting market ([Aulia, 2023](#)).

The market segments within the realm of imported clothes trading, particularly in the thriving thrifting activities in Indonesia, reveal a multifaceted landscape influenced by various perspectives and considerations. Government regulations and perceptions play a crucial role, with Indonesia expressing concerns about potential health risks associated with second-hand clothing imports. While the thrifting business is not prohibited, adherence to government guidelines is essential. The impact on the traditional textile industry is noteworthy, as thrifting and the influx of used clothing imports challenge its growth, potentially indicating a shift in consumer preferences amid the evolving market dynamics. Import trends showcase the popularity of thrifting, evident in the significant increase in used clothing imports, with fluctuations observed from 2012-2022 and a notable peak in 2019. Despite challenges, the forecasted substantial growth in all segments of Indonesia's apparel market underscores potential market dynamism and sustained consumer demand ([Dharma, 2023](#)).

Consumer behaviour and market segmentation are integral factors shaping Indonesia's apparel industry, driven by a combined top-down and bottom-up approach. Factors such as consumer spending, shopping behaviour, and performance indicators contribute to the

diverse nature of the market. However, protests staged by traders of imported used clothes in Jakarta highlight potential concerns and challenges within the industry. The government's commitment to maintaining the textile and apparel segment as a significant export highlights ongoing efforts to address economic challenges and foster stability in the sector (Bui et al., 2023).

Government regulations and perceptions in Indonesia regarding the importation of second-hand clothing have raised concerns related to potential health risks associated with these items. However, it is noteworthy that thrifting remains permissible in Indonesia, as long as the traded used goods adhere to the government's guidelines and are not prohibited. This nuanced approach allows for the continuation of thrifting activities while ensuring compliance with health and safety standards, reflecting the government's balanced stance in managing the second-hand clothing trade (Syahrivar et al., 2023).

The impact on Indonesia's textile industry is a subject of scrutiny, particularly in the context of the industry's growth since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent threats posed by thrifting and the influx of used clothing imports suggest a potential paradigm shift in consumer preferences and market dynamics, posing challenges to the traditional textile sector. Import trends and the significant surge in used clothing imports, notably in 2022, underscore the popularity of thrifting in Indonesia, contributing to fluctuations in the market. Despite challenges, the forecasted significant growth across all segments of the Indonesian apparel market signals potential resilience and sustained consumer demand. Concerns within the industry, exemplified by protests staged by traders of imported used clothes, highlight the need for ongoing government support to maintain stability, preserve the textile and apparel segment as a vital export, and address economic challenges (Syahrina & Kusumasari, 2020).

3.3. MSME Merchant Empowerment

The implementation performance of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) merchant empowerment policies in the context of imported clothes trading (thrifting) activities in Indonesia is influenced by diverse factors and governmental initiatives. The Government of Indonesia, through various measures, has demonstrated substantial support for MSMEs, such as increasing the allocation of MSME loans to enhance their contribution to the national economy. This concerted effort reflects a strategic move to fortify the role of MSMEs engaged in thrifting activities, potentially influencing their performance within the economic landscape (Rahmawati et al., 2023).

The Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs has actively reviewed MSME financing activities to optimize their role in the national economy, emphasizing stakeholder collaboration and coordination. These initiatives signify a comprehensive approach to fostering MSMEs, potentially impacting their performance, particularly those involved in imported clothes trading. However, challenges within the industry, as indicated by protests staged by traders of imported used clothes, necessitate a thorough understanding and strategic resolution to ensure effective policies aimed at empowering MSMEs engaged in thrifting activities (Surya et al., 2021).

To further support MSMEs, the Government has introduced programs targeting women entrepreneurs during the pandemic and providing assistance to micro-enterprises. These initiatives are designed to bolster the MSME sector and can significantly impact the performance of those involved in imported clothes trading. The empowerment of MSMEs is grounded in principles emphasizing family values, honest performance, environmental preservation, and independence, contributing to a balanced economic system. Focusing on financial literacy, economic stability, and inclusive financial practices is essential to ensure

the success and resilience of MSMEs in Indonesia's evolving economic landscape. Efforts to expand financial inclusion, promote financial literacy, and address barriers to accessing formal funding sources are crucial for the sustained growth and prosperity of MSMEs engaged in thrifting activities (Mohamed, 2020).

Implementing the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) merchant empowerment policy in Indonesia can significantly impact sales profit in the realm of imported clothes trading, commonly known as thrifting. The government's commitment to fostering MSMEs, as evidenced by initiatives aimed at increasing the portion of MSME loans to contribute more substantially to the national economy, signifies a strategic move to enhance access to financing. This heightened accessibility can empower businesses engaged in imported clothes trading, potentially leading to increased investments and driving sales profit within this sector (Sinurat, 2023).

Furthermore, the revised definition of MSMEs in Indonesia, now encompassing retail and wholesale trade, expands the eligibility for priority sector lending. This inclusion benefits many retail and wholesale traders, offering improved financial options and support for structured business growth. For entities involved in imported clothes trading, this expanded eligibility may translate into enhanced economic opportunities, contributing to the potential augmentation of sales profit (Mujianto et al., 2023).

As the Indonesian trade climate continues to rely on the productivity of MSMEs for overall economic prosperity, the government's ongoing support for MSME empowerment is poised to create a conducive business environment. This condition, in turn, is expected to foster growth and potentially increase sales profit for businesses engaged in imported clothes trading. The alignment of government policies with the needs of MSMEs reflects a holistic approach to economic development, emphasizing the pivotal role of these enterprises in driving sustainable business activities and overall economic vibrancy (Apridar & Meutia, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research findings illuminate the intricate landscape of imported clothes trading, specifically thrifting, in Solo, Indonesia. The investigation, driven by a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic impacts, reveals that the surge in second-hand clothing imports poses a dual challenge for the local textile industry and provides affordable clothing options for the burgeoning population. The study successfully addressed its research objectives by delineating the economic consequences of thrifting while recognizing its role in meeting the consumer demand for cost-effective attire. As a recommendation, a balanced approach is advocated, wherein policies should be crafted to stimulate local textile production and innovation while fostering the sustainable growth of the thrifting market. Policy implications underscore the necessity for a nuanced regulatory framework promoting economic development and environmental sustainability. Local entrepreneurs and artisans need to be supported as part of the mayor's ongoing revitalization efforts to mitigate the potential adverse effects on the indigenous textile industry. Future research endeavours should delve deeper into the consumer behaviour dynamics driving thrifting, exploring the intersections of affordability, sustainability, and cultural influences. Additionally, a longitudinal study tracking the evolution of the thrifting market and its broader societal impacts could provide valuable insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders. This research contributes not only to the understanding of Solo's challenges but also offers a template for other cities grappling with similar economic and environmental conundrums in the wake of globalization and changing consumer preferences.

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