

Arisan as a platform for social-identity and consumerism in the postmodern era

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Abstract This study examined the transformation of *arisan*, a traditional rotating savings and social gathering practice, into a platform for social identity construction and symbolic consumption among women in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. As a secondary city shaped by rapid urbanisation and a mining-driven economic boom, Samarinda presents a distinctive socio-demographic context where global consumer culture intersects with local communal traditions. Drawing on Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic capital and habitus, this study conceptualises *arisan* as a communicative arena in which social status, identity, and distinction are actively negotiated. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation during *Arisan* activities, and analysis of social media content. The study involved 16 women aged 30-50 from two elite *arisan* groups, Ganbatte and Pretty Woman. The findings revealed a shift in *arisan* from a financial mutual-aid mechanism toward a performative social space characterised by exclusive membership, symbolic consumption, and digitally mediated visibility. While Ganbatte emphasised professional networking and subtle prestige, Pretty Woman foregrounds conspicuous consumption and leisure-based status display. *Arisan* facilitates 'modern independence' primarily through expanded social networks, symbolic mobility, and the freedom to publicly perform identity beyond domestic roles.

Keywords: consumer; conspicuous consumption; lifestyle; self-presentation

INTRODUCTION

The rapid configuration of Indonesian social life is inextricably linked to the synergistic processes of economic liberalisation, urbanisation, and digitalisation that have intensified over the past two decades (Czura & Klonner, 2023). Economic liberalisation has not only broadened market access and bolstered the purchasing power of specific social cohorts but has also institutionalised consumerist aspirations as primary benchmarks of modern success (Hossein & Bonsu, 2023). Concurrently, urbanisation has fundamentally altered social relations by clustering populations in cities and recalibrating everyday practices, values, and interactions around urbanised lifestyles (Lubis & Rahyuda, 2022). Consequently, urban and semi-urban environments now serve as the primary theatres where these societal shifts are most pronounced (Tadesse & Erdem, 2023). In other words, cities function not only as economic centres but also as cultural spaces where global flows of goods, images, and ideas circulate rapidly (Ruwaidah et al., 2021).

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Digitalisation further catalyses these shifts by mediating how consumption is displayed, interpreted, and assigned value (Amaroh & Masykuroh, 2023). Through social media, individuals are empowered to broadcast their lifestyles, effectively transforming consumption into a performance of public communication (Amaroh & Masykuroh, 2023). Within this landscape, visibility functions as a crucial form of social capital, as consumer choices are no longer private but are instead enmeshed in digital networks of recognition and validation (Ahmed & Malik, 2023). As a result, consumption increasingly serves as a social language through which individuals negotiate meaning, identity, and belonging (Umaiyah, 2022). This evolution is particularly evident in Samarinda, where arisan, a traditional vehicle for communal financial support, has been repurposed into a platform for status assertion and social display (Ahmed & Malik, 2023). Viewed from this lens, consumer practices in contemporary Indonesian are deeply entangled with aspirations for social mobility and recognition. Here, goods and services thus function not only as utilities but also as signs that communicate taste, competence, and status within particular social fields (Umaiyah, 2022).

This shift reflects broader theoretical discussions on the emergence of a consumer society (Austin, 2023). In such a society, consumption becomes central to social organisation and self-identification, often surpassing production as the primary source of identity formation (Batool et al., 2023; Siva Kumar & Venkatachalam, 2023). The acquisition and display of commodities are imbued with cultural meanings that signal inclusion, distinction, or exclusion within social hierarchies (Maharani & Hidayat, 2020). Certain consumption practices are designed less for utility than for demonstrating wealth, leisure, and social superiority (Joseph & Ebenade, 2023). In contemporary urban Indonesia, conspicuous consumption manifests not only through luxury goods but also through lifestyle experiences, branded social activities, and curated public appearances (Olawoye-Mann, 2023).

Building upon these observations, the framework of habitus and symbolic capital proposed by Jahangir et al. (2023) offers a more nuanced understanding of how consumption is socially structured. Within this paradigm, an individual's social position dictates specific tastes and consumer practices, which in turn serve to reproduce existing class distinctions (Zambrano et al., 2023b). Consumption thus functions as a mechanism through which social boundaries are maintained and legitimised, often at an unconscious level (Adeola et al., 2023). This is particularly evident among urban middle-class groups, for whom consumption acts as a communicative medium to articulate social status, group belonging, and aspirations towards modernity. As highlighted by Nisak and Sulistyowati (2022), such practices allow individuals to signal their position within emerging social hierarchies by aligning themselves with certain lifestyles, brands, and modes of leisure. These practices operate symbolically, enabling social actors to distinguish themselves from others while simultaneously seeking recognition within specific peer groups (Maitra et al., 2023).

However, these transformations are uneven across Indonesian society, and it would be reductive to assume a homogeneous national experience (Abdallah et al., 2023). The shift toward symbolic and conspicuous consumption is most pronounced in urban environments characterised by rapid economic growth, expanding infrastructure, and high levels of digital connectivity (Zambrano et al., 2023a). In these settings, access to global consumer culture is facilitated by technology, media exposure, and rising disposable incomes, which collectively intensify lifestyle differentiation (Rahmawati & Istianah, 2022). Urban centres serve as critical nodes where global consumption trends intersect with local cultural practices (Zakia et al., 2022). Rather than simply replicating metropolitan consumption patterns, cities outside Indonesia's primary urban hubs often reinterpret global consumer symbols in locally meaningful ways (Lukwa et al., 2024). This process underscores the necessity of scrutinising secondary cities; despite undergoing profound socio-cultural shifts, these locales have historically received far less scholarly attention than their larger counterparts (Puspitasari & Indrarini, 2021).

The province of East Kalimantan, and specifically its capital, Samarinda, provides a compelling case study for exploring these dynamics. As a regional economic hub, Samarinda has undergone accelerated urban transformation over the past decade, largely driven by the mining industry, infrastructural development, and its strategic position within eastern Indonesia (Maharani & Hidayat, 2020). These developments have reshaped the city's social landscape, giving rise to new middle-class formations and consumption-oriented lifestyles. Unlike more established metropolitan centres such as Jakarta or Surabaya, Samarinda represents a

secondary city where modern consumer practices emerge alongside strong communal traditions.

While regional demographic data indicate that Samarinda has a larger population than neighbouring Balikpapan (approximately 828,000 compared to around 688,000 residents), the lack of disaggregated municipal income data makes it difficult to ascertain the relative density of their respective middle classes. Consequently, population size alone cannot be used as a direct indicator of middle-class formation. Instead, class structure must be understood through the lens of household consumption patterns, income distribution, and indicators of socio-economic mobility (Ashari & Athoillah, 2023). It is within this specific socio-economic milieu that a distinctive configuration emerges: one where consumption is negotiated through local social networks rather than solely via market-driven mechanisms. Such conditions render Samarinda an analytically fertile site for investigating how global consumer culture is localised in non-metropolitan contexts (Puspitasari & Indrarini, 2021).

Over the past decade, Samarinda has experienced the emergence of increasingly consumption-oriented lifestyles, particularly among urban women, as social gatherings such as *arisan* have acquired expanded symbolic and performative functions. While *arisan* has historically served as a mechanism of mutual financial support and social solidarity, its contemporary manifestations in Samarinda reveal a significant shift toward practices of status display and identity construction mediated through consumption (Umayyah, 2022). In this transformed context, *arisan* operates as a social stage where taste, lifestyle, and social position are actively performed and negotiated. Groups such as *Ganbatte* and *Pretty Woman* exemplify this transformation by mobilising distinct consumption styles to articulate differentiated social identities.

The *Ganbatte* group constructs a narrative of professional prestige through curated consumption practices associated with career-oriented lifestyles, selective networking, and subtle forms of symbolic capital. In contrast, the *Pretty Woman* group emphasises socialite imagery through more overt forms of conspicuous consumption, leisure-oriented activities, and visible markers of affluence (Nugroho, 2022). These diverging orientations illustrate how *arisan* groups function as micro-social arenas in which social distinction is produced and maintained. Departing from studies that conceptualise *arisan* primarily as an economic or communal institution, this research foregrounds its role as a site of symbolic consumption and identity negotiation within an emerging urban setting (Ruwaidah et al., 2021). By situating *arisan* within broader processes of consumerism and globalisation, this study examines how *arisan* in Samarinda transcend their original economic functions to become instruments for asserting social distinction, negotiating prestige, and constructing modern identities amidst rapid urban transformation.

Ultimately, this study addresses three interconnected inquiries: first, how *arisan* serves as both a site of consumption and a platform for social existence for its members, specifically upper-class women, within a consumer society; second, the ways in which female bonding within the *Ganbatte* and *Pretty Woman* groups reframes *arisan* as a representation of post-industrial regional society; and third, the mechanisms through which *arisan* facilitates the construction of class identities as articulated by women within the landscape of post-industrial consumer culture.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretivist and cultural sociology perspective, which is particularly suited to examining how social actors construct meaning, identity, and distinction through everyday practices (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Rather than treating *arisan* as a fixed economic institution, this approach conceptualises it as a symbolic social arena in which consumption practices are imbued with cultural significance and negotiated through interaction. Qualitative methods are therefore most appropriate for capturing the subjective interpretations, embodied practices, and symbolic dimensions of consumption that cannot be adequately accessed through quantitative measurement (Nimmi et al., 2024).

The analytical orientation of this research draws upon symbolic interactionism and theories of symbolic consumption, specifically Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic capital. These frameworks inform the research

design by directing attention to how meaning is produced through social interaction, lifestyle practices, and group-based distinction.

The data collection strategy for this study was multi-faceted, incorporating in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore the personal experiences, perceptions, and motivations of the informants, while participant observations conducted during arisan gatherings allowed for the documentation of behavioural patterns and evolving group dynamics. These primary sources were complemented by a systematic analysis of social media postings, group archives, and relevant public records. To bolster the validity of the findings, member checking was utilised; this permitted participants to review and verify the accuracy of the interpreted data. Furthermore, the credibility and depth of the analysis were enhanced through the triangulation of data sources, specifically the synthesis of interview transcripts, observational field notes, and documentary evidence.

The research was conducted in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, which was selected not merely for its rapid social change but for its theoretical significance as a secondary city undergoing accelerated urban transformation. Unlike metropolitan centres such as Jakarta or Surabaya, Samarinda represents an emerging urban context shaped by extractive industries, infrastructural expansion, and increasing exposure to global consumer culture. This positioning renders Samarinda a critical site for examining how symbolic consumption and identity formation unfold beyond Indonesia's traditional consumption hubs, thereby contributing to a more geographically nuanced understanding of consumer society.

The participants are comprised of women who are active members of *arisan* groups in Samarinda and who directly experience the transformation of *arisan* practices. The study employed purposive sampling to select participants based on their relevance to the research objectives, followed by snowball sampling to gain access to additional informants within established social networks. In total, sixteen participants were involved in the study, drawn from two *arisan* groups that represent contrasting consumption orientations: *Ganbatte* and *Pretty Woman*. These groups were selected because they explicitly articulate distinct social identities as professional and socialite, respectively, and actively differentiate themselves from other *arisan* groups in Samarinda.

Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was conducted by the researcher through direct involvement in *arisan* activities, including gatherings, meals, and social events. This allowed for close scrutiny of everyday interactions, consumption practices, and symbolic performances. Fieldwork was carried out over four months, enabling sustained observation and rapport-building.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee prior to data collection to ensure compliance with standards for research involving human participants. All participants were fully informed about the aims of the study, the methods of data collection, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Written informed consent was secured before interviews, and verbal consent was reaffirmed during participant observation in *arisan* gatherings. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all individuals and groups, and while identifying details were removed from transcripts and field notes. Audio recordings and digital documents were stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Given the sensitivity of discussions related to social status and financial practices, a non-judgemental approach was prioritised, ensuring the research upheld the principles of respect, anonymity, and beneficence.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, which allowed flexibility while ensuring consistency across participants. Interview questions explored themes such as motivations for joining *arisan*, meanings attached to consumption practices, perceptions of status and identity, and the role of *arisan* in social networking and self-presentation. Each interview lasted between 60–90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent.

Document analysis included the examination of social media content, group chat archives (where accessible), photographs, and other visual or textual materials related to *arisan* activities. These documents provided additional insight into how consumption and identity are publicly represented and mediated digitally.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Frambach et al. (2013), consisting of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns related to symbolic consumption, status differentiation, and identity construction. Analytical categories were refined iteratively through constant comparison across data sources.

Throughout the inquiry, researcher reflexivity was prioritised by acknowledging the researcher's positionality as an observer participating within elite social spaces. Such a position inevitably influences access, interpretation, and the nature of interactions. To bolster the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed methodological triangulation, synthesising insights from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Furthermore, member checking was performed by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to ensure analytical accuracy. This was complemented by peer debriefing with academic colleagues, a process used to challenge underlying assumptions and further refine the interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Key factors: Social existence

Social existence in the context of social gatherings is not restricted to the mere physical presence of individuals. Rather, it reflects how a person asserts his or her role in the broader societal sphere (Lukwa et al., 2024). *Arisan* in communities such as *Ganbatte* and *Pretty Woman* in Samarinda, serves as a means for individuals to consolidate their presence in the community (van Hemert et al., 2024). These social gatherings transcend simple group solidarity. They function as a mechanism through which individuals claim their position within social stratification (Ardener & Waldren, 2024). Participation in such groups, particularly those perceived as exclusive, serves as a legible indicator of a member's status in the wider community (Ardener, 2024).

The commodities that define social status among the upper society group are relative (Hospes, 2024). The constant influx of new objects, desired for their alignment with shifting fashion creates a competitive dynamic with lower social groups. As these branded objects are pursued by broader segments of society, an 'endless chase' effect emerges: the upper class must continually invest in new, informational, or exclusive goods in a perpetual effort to restore the social distance that previously existed (See Figure 1). This pursuit of distinction is evident in the way members perceive their group's activities and external reputation. For instance, a member of the *Ganbatte* group emphasised a desire for a discreet form of prestige:

"This social gathering group is indeed an addition to gathering during social gatherings, we also often do social services, but for this matter we do not want to be covered. Worry...
"Yes, you know, ma'am. Everyone's view is different in responding to something (Mimi, *Ganbatte Arisan Group*, 15 January 2018).

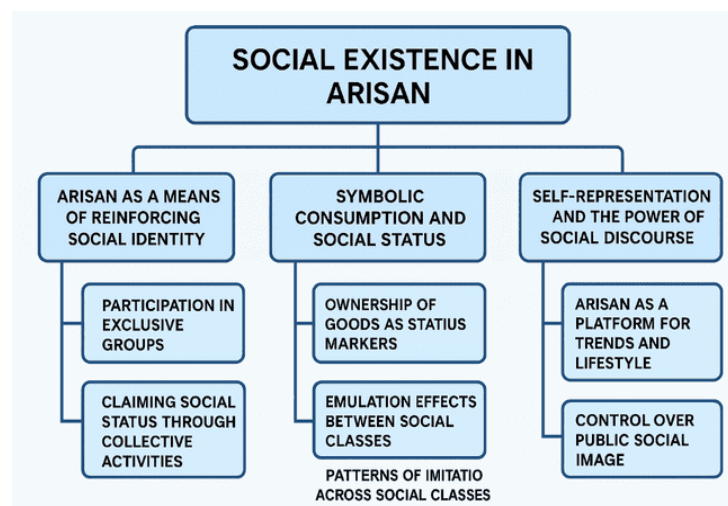


Figure 1. Social existence in *arisan*
Source: Created by author (2026)

"People from Jakarta often join us, but their style is old-fashioned. We're the ones who are the trend setters, aren't we?" (While looking at the other members of the group to agree with his opinion) (Linlin, Pretty Woman Arisan Group, 10 February 2018).

Key Factor: Consumption culture

The consumer culture emerging within *arisan* circles in Samarinda represents more than economic participation. It also signifies a profound shift toward I, a more symbolic consumption pattern. The conspicuous use of branded commodities, the selection of luxury meeting venues, and specific culinary offerings during these social gatherings reflects the transformation from need-based consumption to status-oriented consumption (Sethi, 2024). Consumption in this context is no longer about utility, but about the image that they want to show to others. *Arisan* thus functions as a social stage upon which wealth, prestige, and class are performatively displayed, with material consumption acting as the tangible manifestation of one's social standing.

This study discusses two groups of social gatherings, namely Ganbatte and Pretty Woman, which reflect social bonds between women (female bonding) through social gatherings inspired by celebrity styles. The consumption practices carried out by these two groups show a link between the way they consume resources and the manifestation of social relationships formed among their members.

"Mimi and I have the same tastes when shopping for cosmetics, and actually with other Ganbatte members when shopping for cosmetics, sometimes there are some products that are already favourites, such as Menard from Japan, Chanel, but there are also those that are specifically for doctors or beauty clinics for treatment" (Rara, Ganbatte Arisan Group, 14 October 2017).

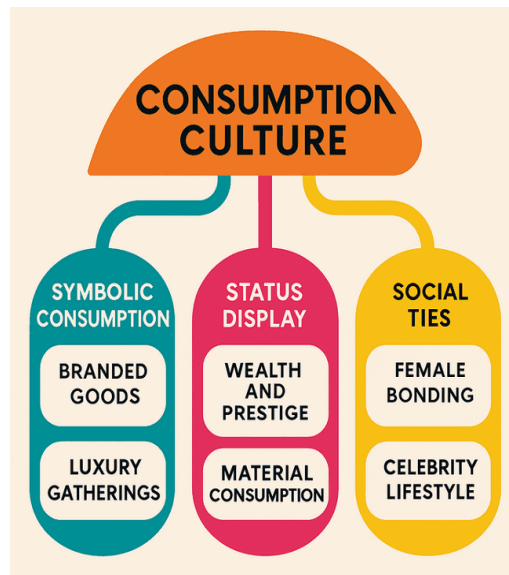


Figure 2. Consumption culture model
Source: Created by author (2026)

These cosmetic preferences extend beyond the acquisition of physical goods to include services at exclusive beauty clinics specialising in facial and dermatological care. The decision to invest in such products and treatments is driven by a confluence of professional demands, the desire to achieve a specific aesthetic ideal, and the pursuit of enhanced self-confidence (Burman & Lembete, 2024). Initially, this requirement for aesthetic maintenance was broadcast via public digital spaces, specifically Facebook and Instagram. This phenomenon is a direct consequence of market pressures in the post-industrial era. As a result, the Ganbatte group and the wider Samarinda community finds their needs increasingly regulated and manufactured by the market (See Figure 2).

Key Factor: Gender identity

Gender identity remains a pivotal determinant in the practice of collective gatherings, as these activities are predominantly frequented by women who utilise *arisan* as a medium to cultivate and consolidate gender-based bonds (Castro-Cosío, 2024). These circles offer a dedicated social space for women to exchange experiences, bolster solidarity, and reaffirm their societal roles. Within communities such as *Pretty Woman*, gender identity transcends the mere adherence to patriarchal norms (See Figure 3). Instead, members leverage these gatherings to demonstrate both financial and social autonomy. Consequently, *arisan* serves as more than a vehicle for strengthening interpersonal relationships; it also functions as a critical platform for women to assert their agency and influence within the broader socio-economic realm.

The importance of these gatherings as a countermeasure to the fragmentation of modern life is particularly evident in the motivations of the *Ganbatte* group. For these women, the structured nature of the *arisan* acts as a vital safeguard against the professional and personal pressures that might otherwise erode their social networks:

The initial purpose of the social gathering in *Ganbatte* was for us to gather because of the extraordinary busyness of worrying about forgetting that a friend existed, so there must be a routine event so that we can continue to gather.... Yes, although it is difficult for the complete formation, but the birthday is usually the most complete (Mimi, *Ganbatte Arisan Group*, 12 December 2016).

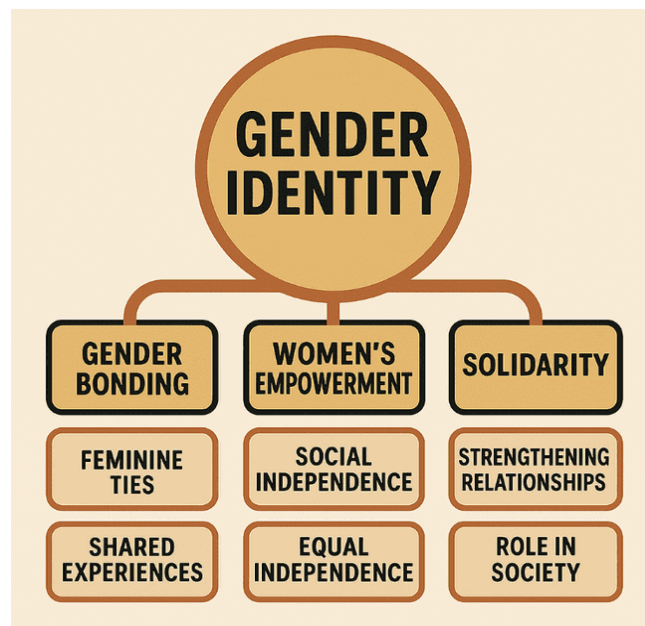


Figure 3. Gender identity
Source: Created by author (2026)

Sub factors: Consumption symbolism

Consumption symbolism is an important sub-theme in modern *arisan*, especially in elite communities in Samarinda. The items consumed in social gatherings, from branded clothing to exclusive location choices, have symbolic meanings that go far beyond their function (Kamran & Uusitalo, 2024). This consumption signifies the prestige and social status that its members want to project. Jean Baudrillard posited that objects of consumption are not just material objects, but signs that convey messages about one's identity and social position. In the context of social gatherings, this consumption symbolism is a means for community members to distinguish themselves from other social groups (See Figure 4).

"Jakarta often joins us, their style is old-fashioned. We're the ones who are the trend setters, aren't we?" (While looking at the other members of the group to agree with his opinion) (Linlin, *Pretty Woman Arisan Group*, 18 February 2018).

"Look at this... (While showing the diamond bracelet that is wrapped around Linlin's wrist that Vivi pulls) This looks like a small ordinary, but you know this is Frank & Co. It costs 20 million!!" (Vivi, Pretty Woman Arisan Group, 22 February 2018).



Figure 4. Consumption symbolism
Source: Created by author (2026)

Social media

Social media serves a vital function in reinforcing the arisan as a symbol of both social status and existence. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook transcend their primary communicative roles; they are utilised as stages upon which arisan activities are broadcast to a wider public audience (Anang & Dagunga, 2024). Through the digital curation of meeting photographs, the arisan is transformed into a visual performance, one that showcases the opulent lifestyles and exclusive social networks shared by its members (See Figure 5). Consequently, social media has recalibrated these gatherings from private, closed meetings into public-facing events that are open to external scrutiny and commentary.

This digital visibility is often leveraged to challenge perceived regional hierarchies, particularly in relation to the national capital. By projecting a sophisticated image online, members of the Samarinda elite seek to subvert the 'provincial' or 'rural' labels often associated with secondary cities:

"Samarinda is a small city and is often said to be a village with Jakarta, indirectly through social media we want to know that we are cooler, more fashionable than them" (Eer, member of Pretty Woman Arisan group, 12 February 2018).

Cultural identity

Cultural identity also plays an equally important role in the practice of *arisan* in Samarinda. Groups such as Pretty Woman, which are predominantly composed of women of Chinese descent, utilise these social gatherings to strengthen and affirm their cultural identity in society (Lowenstein, 2025). In this context, *arisan* functions as a medium that connects cultural values with modern social dynamics. The enduring nature of the *arisan* tradition reflects a strategic maintenance of social practice amidst rapid modernisation, allowing the community to retain distinctive cultural elements while navigating urban change.

Within the Pretty Woman group, the leadership seeks to explicitly highlight a Chinese socialite identity. As the group's coordinator, Sisi aims to demonstrate to the wider Samarinda public that the ethnic Chinese community has transitioned from a position of historical marginality to one of significant social and economic influence. This visibility is often achieved through the curated display of global brands, as noted by a member of the *Ganbatte* group,

"Posing in front of a famous product is able to indirectly show our identity" (Rara Ganbatte, September 2017)

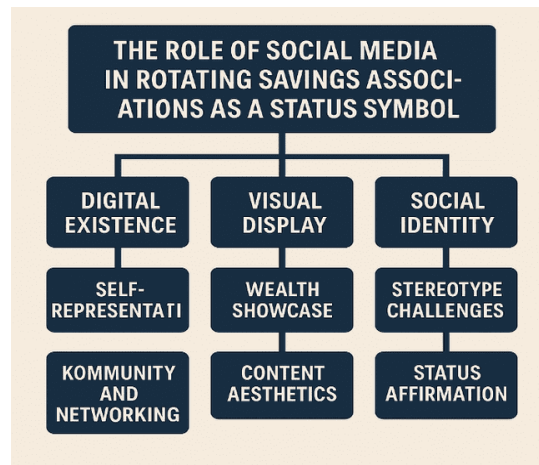


Figure 5. Social media

Source: Created by author (2026)

Consequently, the lifestyle industry, for the most part is the appearance industry. Apprilia and Dwijayanti (2021) explain that 'outward appearances' constitute a primary site for lifestyle construction, where visual signifiers often supersede internal substance, and aesthetic design takes precedence over utility. For the Pretty Woman group, adhering to these visual standards is not merely a choice but a prerequisite for maintaining social bonds.

These social characteristics are inextricably linked to materialistic influences, where the appearance of wealth functions as a 'magnet' for social capital. For instance, the possession of a private swimming pool is framed not as a luxury but as a necessity for socialites aspiring to regional success. In this context, lifestyle is defined by external perception, which is the process of crafting an image for the 'other' to reflect one's held social status. Thus, specific status symbols are essential for reflecting consumer behaviour, as the act of consumption becomes a process of personal and structural identity formation.

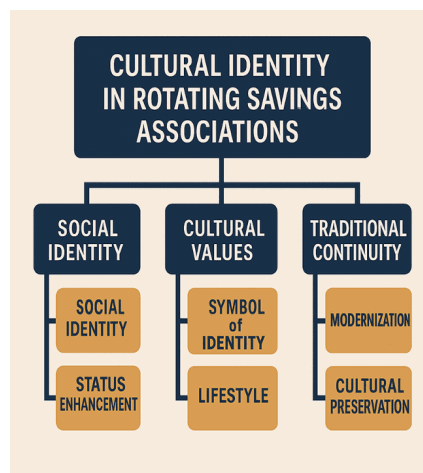


Figure 6. Cultural identity

Source: Created by author (2026)

Furthermore, high-class women in Samarinda, particularly those within these exclusive *arisan* circles, prioritise 'classy' goods, defined by their international provenance. There is a discernible preference for foreign-made commodities over domestic products; indeed, it is rare to find members who seek out Indonesian goods as an expression of national affinity. Instead, consumers are frequently 'carried away by the current' of global branding, where the foreign origin of a product is its primary selling point and a non-negotiable marker of prestige (See Figure 6).

Table 1. Social existence in Ganbatte and Pretty Woman Groups

Aspect	Ganbatte group	Pretty Woman group
Membership criteria	Professional women, critical thinkers, career-focused	Women with strong socialite image, linked to leisure and luxury
Social purpose	Networking and maintaining professional prestige	Showcasing social elite status and lifestyle
Status symbol objects	Subtle luxury (e.g., minimalist branded goods, professional achievements)	Prominent luxury (e.g., designer handbags, jewellery, beauty treatments)
Visibility strategy	Low-profile public appearance, internal solidarity emphasis	Active social media presence, public celebration of lifestyle
Mechanism of status maintenance	Professional recognition and strategic consumption	Continuous acquisition of fashionable goods to lead trends

Source: Created by author (2026)

The comparative dynamics of social existence within the *Ganbatte* and *Pretty Woman* groups in Samarinda reveal that, while both utilise *arisan* to assert social standing, they operate through distinct logics of distinction. These differences are manifested across several key dimensions, from membership criteria to the semiotics of their consumption (See Table 1).

Regarding membership, *Ganbatte* emphasises the inclusion of professional women who demonstrate intellectual agency and active career engagement; conversely, *Pretty Woman* focuses on those who embody a refined socialite aesthetic, prioritising leisure-oriented lifestyles and the overt display of luxury. Consequently, their social purposes diverge: *Ganbatte* functions as a conduit for professional networking and the maintenance of occupational prestige, whereas *Pretty Woman* serves as a platform for the performance of elite status, where visible lifestyle displays take precedence over professional advancement.

The symbolic objects of status also differ significantly between the two cohorts. *Ganbatte* members tend towards more understated expressions of success, favouring minimalist branded commodities and professional accolades that align with a 'quiet' elegance. In contrast, members of *Pretty Woman* opt for conspicuous luxury; they prominently feature designer handbags, high-end jewellery, and invasive aesthetic treatments as indispensable markers of their elevated social position.

These differing orientations extend to their respective visibility strategies. The *Ganbatte* group maintains a relatively discreet public profile, focusing on internal solidarity without the need for extensive external validation. Conversely, the *Pretty Woman* group actively leverages social media platforms to publicise their gatherings and consumer choices, thereby enhancing their visibility and reinforcing their rank within the local social hierarchy. Finally, the mechanism of status maintenance differs: *Ganbatte* relies on a blend of professional recognition and strategic, moderate consumption, while *Pretty Woman* preserves status through the relentless acquisition of fashionable goods and luxury experiences in response to the volatile nature of trendsetting.

Ultimately, this comparison highlights that while both groups utilise *Arisan* to consolidate their social existence, their methods of identity construction are mediated by two differing paradigms: one rooted in professional capital and the other in performative consumerism

Discussion

Social gatherings in Samarinda, particularly the *Ganbatte* and *Pretty Woman Arisan* groups, function as much more than simple venues for interpersonal interaction; they represent strategic arenas for the negotiation of social existence, status, and identity (Lowenstein, 2025). Membership within these elite groups signals access to exclusive networks, thereby reinforcing stratified social (Athory, 2020). By participating in *arisan*, women actively construct visibility and social capital, transforming what was traditionally a mutual saving mechanism into a sophisticated site of social performance (Firnando, 2025).

Consumption remains central to these performances. Rather than fulfilling mere material needs, consumption practices ranging from branded goods to luxury venues function as communicative symbols of prestige (Sibly & Haerudin, 2023). While *Ganbatte* members emphasise subtle luxury and professional recognition, while *Pretty Woman* members engage in conspicuous consumption and social media visibility to assert elite status (Asmin et al., 2021).

This distinction demonstrates that status expression is contextually mediated, reflecting different logics of professionalism, leisure, and visibility (Sibly & Haerudin, 2023).

Gender identity intersects dynamically with these practices (Mapfumo & Sibindi, 2025). *Arisan* enables women to display economic independence, professional success, and social influence, challenging traditional patriarchal expectations (Mapfumo & Sibindi, 2025). Drawing on the work of Athory (2020), participation in consumption-based social spaces allows women to navigate and redefine femininity, creating environments where communal solidarity and individual distinction coexist (Shetty et al., 2025).

Technology further amplifies these dynamics. Social media transforms *arisan* into a public performance, extending social visibility beyond local networks and integrating global consumer culture into Samarinda's semi-urban context (Asaad, 2015). Kim and Chatterje (2021) said that the digital mediation of status also exacerbates tensions, as performance pressures and comparative displays can marginalise members unable or unwilling to meet escalating consumption expectations.

Cultural identity is simultaneously negotiated through *arisan* practices (Saharuddin, 2022). For example, Pretty Woman members, predominantly of Chinese descent, use these gatherings to assert ethnic prestige and cultural visibility within the wider community, demonstrating how consumption can reinforce both modern social status and cultural belonging (Jackson & Luther Osabutey, 2025).

Despite these affirmations, contradictions emerge. *Arisan* embodies a paradox of solidarity and exclusion. While fostering communal bonds and social cohesion, it imposes consumption and performance demands that may exclude less resource-endowed participants (Zafar & Shair, 2025). Likewise, *arisan* mediates empowerment and stratification: women gain agency and visibility, yet this empowerment is stratified, as status depends on adherence to elite consumption norms (Sharma & Chandrakar, 2025).

The observed preference for imported luxury goods is not merely an aesthetic choice but a strategic marker of social differentiation, reflecting a deliberate negotiation of one's position within the local hierarchy (Kouandou & Kabré, 2026). Importantly, these practices demonstrate how local traditions (*arisan*) hybridise with global consumer culture, creating new forms of social expression that are both performative and relational (Guha et al., 2026).

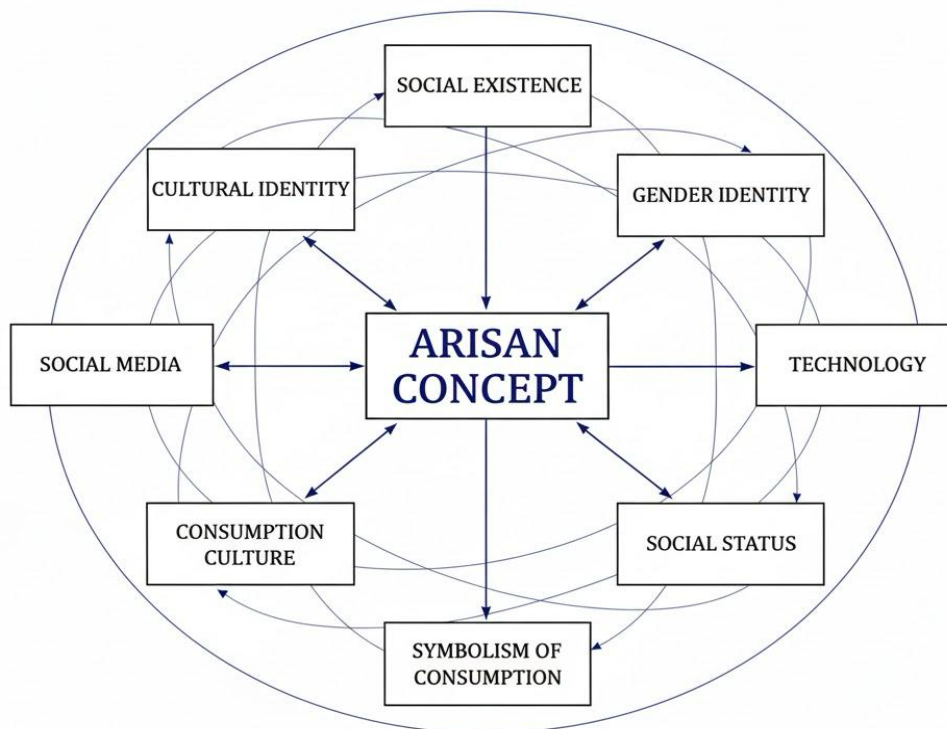


Figure 7. *Arisan* model
Source: Created by author (2026)

This study also highlights differences between Ganbatte and Pretty Woman. Ganbatte emphasises professional achievement and moderated consumption as markers of prestige, while Pretty Woman foregrounds visible luxury, leisure, and social media engagement (Ruwaidah et al., 2021). These contrasts illustrate that symbolic consumption is not monolithic; it is shaped by group norms, occupational orientation, and strategic social positioning (Jackson & Luther Osabutey, 2025; Shetty et al., 2025).

This study refines and extends classical frameworks of consumption and social identity in several important ways. First, it advances Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption by demonstrating that, within a semi-urban context, status display operates not only through overt and extravagant luxury but also through subtle forms of professional prestige and controlled visibility, thereby challenging the assumption that conspicuousness is uniformly ostentatious. Secondly, it develops Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital and habitus by showing that secondary cities such as Samarinda generate hybridised forms of distinction, where global consumer symbols are selectively appropriated and reinterpreted through local communal traditions such as *arisan*. Thirdly, by conceptualising *arisan* as a communicative arena, the study contributes to symbolic interactionism, highlighting how identity is continuously negotiated through ritualised consumption and digitally mediated performance, where social media functions as a contemporary mechanism of symbolic capital accumulation. Finally, the findings complicate gender and consumer culture scholarship by revealing a dual dynamic of empowerment and stratification: while *arisan* enables women to expand networks and perform modern independence, access to symbolic recognition remains structured by class-based resources (See Figure 7).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *arisan* in Samarinda has shifted from a mutual-aid financial practice into a communicative arena in which social identity, distinction, and status are strategically produced through symbolic consumption and digitally mediated visibility. Addressing the research question, the findings demonstrate that *arisan* functions as a platform for negotiating professional, gendered, and cultural identities: Ganbatte articulates prestige through restrained, career-oriented symbolic capital, whereas Pretty Woman relies on conspicuous luxury and social media performance to sustain elite recognition. Theoretically, the study refines Veblen by showing that conspicuousness in a secondary city may operate subtly rather than ostentatiously, extends Bourdieu by evidencing hybridised forms of symbolic capital shaped by local communal traditions, and positions *arisan* as an interactional field where empowerment and stratification coexist. Thus, in a semi-urban Indonesian context, global consumer logics are not merely adopted but locally reconfigured through ritualised social practice.

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