

The Escapist Generation: Big Market for Capitalist Industry

News:

Early August, the Indonesian Minister of Youth and Sports - Dito Ariotedjo launched the Youth Mental Health Center to support the mental health of Indonesia's young generation. This is based on a survey by the Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS), that 1 out of 3 Indonesian youth aged 10-17 years has mental health problems (Sindonews). According to the Minister, this mental health program was also designed to enhance youth development programs.

Comment:

Policy makers in Indonesia need to look at this problem more closely, not just stop at the downstream aspects, so that they are trapped in a partial repair syndrome. The root causes of mental health that affect adolescents and youth actually occur more systemically and need to be seen from a larger lens, not just treated as personal cases.

All this time, millions of teenagers and young people in Indonesia have been raised by foreign technology and entertainment products. They are targeted to become connoisseurs/consumers of the lifestyle industry from various global technology platforms. Based on the 'State of Mobile 2023' report, Indonesia has been named the country most addicted to scrolling cellphones in the world -with gadget use spending more than 5.7 hours a day. The report also reveals that Indonesia is the third largest mobile game market in the world, with a total of 3.45 billion mobile game downloads in 2022 alone. Not only that, Indonesia also leading consumption in Southeast Asia for over-to-top (OTT) movie streaming platforms such as Netflix, Viu, Prime Video or Disney Hotstar. One in three Indonesians watch OTT content and they consume 3.5 billion hours of content every month.

On the other hand, adolescents and young people in Indonesia, which is the largest Muslim country, also experience multi-dimensional pressures in life, both from an economic, educational and social perspective. The higher cost of education, the dense curriculum, and the flexing lifestyle on social media which causes social frustration, not to mention the phenomenon of dysfunctional Muslim families which is increasingly prevalent. This depressive life is actually a real consequence of how far young people are from Islam, as the word of Allah Ta'ala emphasizes in the Quran: ﴿وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ أَعْمَى﴾ ***“But whoever turns away from My Reminder will certainly have a miserable life, then We will raise them up blind on the Day of Judgment.”*** [Surat Tāhā [20]: 124].

The complex interaction of the above factors, namely the pressure of multidimensional life and the marketing flow of capitalist entertainment technology products, has created a serious symptom known as ‘**escapism**’ among the youth. Escapism is a psychological coping mechanism which leads the behaviour to avoid

(escape) the bitterness of reality or the complexity of problems in the real world, by escaping to another world (generally in digital world) with entertainment or other sources of pleasure. This phenomenon of escapism is also marked by the intense 'ticket wars' among Indonesian young people to be able to attend music concerts in Indonesia, especially from Western and Korean music performers. Escapism that occurs en masse can be a dangerous alarm for a country, it is lost generation's threat which shows the loss of problem solver capabilities of the future generation.

Ironically, a Muslim country like Indonesia does not yet have strong regulations to protect its generation, due to economic and technological dependence on the globalization free market. Even if there is an ITE Cyber Law, it is more dominant in regulating freedom of expression, which tends to be a tool for the state to silence people from being critical, instead of controlling foreign digital platforms.

As a result, asymmetric digital imperialism takes place without significant obstacles. Techno-capitalism platforms with their algorithmic regimes can freely control what content is attractive to young people, including content on liberalism, materialism, feminism and LGBT that ruins morale and exploits the *shahwat* (desires) of the young people. This is also supported by the high level of internet penetration in Indonesia, that already reaching 78% (the number of internet users in Indonesia has reached 213 million out of a population of 280 million).

Thus, many platforms of techno-capitalism have stepped into this country with a red carpet since the last three decades and have brilliantly preyed on the younger generation of Muslims. They distract the sharp passion, vibrant enthusiasm, also prime energy of the Muslim youth towards moral decline. They have also ruined productive nature amongst young Muslims, made Muslims youth mentally frail and loss their bright future with Islam. Then where's the presence of the state? Where's their role in protecting young Muslims from these real dangers? Yet the Prophet (saw) said: «إنما الإمام جنة يقاتل من ورائه ويتقى به» ***“Verily the Imam is but a shield from behind which the people fight and by which they protect themselves.”*** [Sahih Muslim]

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