



New Rich: Upward Vertical Mobility of Illegal Cigarette Sellers in Pamekasan Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the unique social climbing phenomenon among illegal cigarette sellers along with its various dynamics, as well as to describe the resulting social and economic phenomena. The urgency of this research stems from the increasing circulation of illegal cigarettes and the resulting shifts in social structures within rural communities, which have not been sufficiently explored in previous studies. The method used is field research with a qualitative descriptive case study approach, employing data collection techniques such as non-participant observation and comprehensive interviews. The research was conducted in two villages in Pamekasan Regency, with three illegal cigarette sellers as research subjects. Data analysis follows the Miles and Huberman model. The results of the study show: (1) A lack of social sanctions from the community regarding the circulation of illegal cigarettes; (2) Social climbing behavior arises because individuals highly value social status and perceive social appreciation as closely tied to symbols of wealth; (3) Social climbing is related to the individual's self-concept and their ability to accept their life circumstances. Strengthening gratitude attitudes is essential so that the pursuit of livelihood considers not only financial gain but also psychological well-being and lawful behavior. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the understanding of deviant economic practices and their social impacts, providing insights for policymakers in formulating more effective social and legal interventions to reduce illegal trade activities.

Keywords: New Rich People, Illegal Cigarettes, Social Climbing

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami fenomena unik *Social climbing* di kalangan penjual rokok ilegal dengan segala dinamikanya, serta menggambarkan bentuk-bentuk fenomena sosial dan ekonomi imbasan dari menjual rokok ilegal. Urgensi penelitian ini terletak pada maraknya peredaran rokok ilegal yang berdampak pada perubahan struktur sosial masyarakat, namun belum banyak dikaji secara ilmiah. Metode yang digunakan yakni Penelitian lapangan dengan pendekatan studi kasus dalam deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi non partisipan dan wawancara komprehensif. Lokasi penelitian 2 Desa di Kabupaten Pamekasan dan subjek penelitian tiga orang penjual rokok ilegal. Analisis data hasil penelitian menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian yakni 1) Kurangnya sanksi sosial oleh masyarakat terhadap keberadaan rokok ilegal. 2) Sosial climbing terjadi karena individu sangat mengagungkan status sosial dan keyakinan bahwa pernghargaan dari masyarakat karena adanya symbol kekayaan. 3) Sosial climbing berkaitan dengan konsep diri individu dan kemampuan penerimaan diri akan kondisi yang dimilikinya. Diperlukan Kemampuan mensyukuri setiap keadaan sehingga dalam mencari nafkah tidak hanya berdasar pada besaran nominal yang didapat, namun juga perlu memperhatikan aspek ketenangan psikologis dan tidak melakukan tindak pidana. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi dalam



Introduction

The demand for cigarettes is quite high, and the market price of excise-duty cigarettes ranges from IDR 20,000 to IDR 40,000, which is not affordable for everyone. Moreover, individuals facing various pressures, such as increased prices of necessities, rising fuel costs (BBM), post-pandemic economic impacts, and limited job opportunities, are forced to adapt quickly to their circumstances. As a result, the availability of illegal cigarettes becomes one of the community's alternatives. Legal sanctions for illegal cigarette sellers are outlined in Article 54 of Law No. 39 of 2007, which imposes a penalty of imprisonment for 1 to 5 years and/or a fine of 2 to 10 times the excise tax that should be paid (*Berita - Ombudsman RI*, n.d.). However, these criminal sanctions have not been effective in curbing the circulation of illegal cigarettes in society. The widespread view that "you're not a real man if you don't smoke" has normalized cigarette consumption as a basic need, just like other daily necessities. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2021, people, especially in East Java, spend more money on cigarettes than rice (Fathirny, 2022). The specific problem examined in this study is how economic pressures and social perceptions contribute to the normalization of illegal cigarette consumption, and how these behaviors form new social and economic patterns within the community. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between the accessibility of illegal cigarettes, resistance to regulation, and the construction of social values around smoking in local communities.

Madura Customs secures 1,382,000 illegal cigarettes with potential state losses of around Rp. 985,172,520 (*Official Website Direktorat Jenderal Bea Dan Cukai*, 2022). Illegal cigarettes are priced at Rp. 4,000 - Rp. 8,000 per pack with a taste that is not too different from other legal cigarettes, so they get attention from the public. The category of illegal cigarettes is that they do not include the city of production, Prices around Rp. 5,000 - Rp. 10,000, do not have excise stamps, use fake excise stamps, or use used excise stamps

(Blora, 2022). Illegal cigarette distributors earn a profit of around Rp. 50,000 – Rp. 100,000 for one pack (Madura, 2022). Illegal cigarettes are not only produced in cigarette factories/warehouses, but there are also many illegal cigarette businesses in village areas and distributed outside the city, for example to West Java, Kalimantan Island, and other areas.

Illegal cigarette sellers in the villages have become a common thing encountered by the community. Promising profits can change their economic and social status. The increase or decrease in status or income of an individual is known as social mobility. There are two types of social mobility, namely upward vertical social movement or social climbing and downward social movement or social sinking (Soekanto & Dr. Budi Sulistyowati, 2017). Social climbing is the movement of individuals who have low status to a higher status, both in terms of social (social interaction, social status, lifestyle, etc.) and economic (work, income, assets owned, etc.). Several families suddenly become rich because of illegal cigarette businesses, who initially worked as fried food sellers, after choosing to become illegal cigarette entrepreneurs were able to have various assets of vehicles, houses, quite high incomes, and even many workers. In their study on the illegal cigarette trade in Cianjur Regency (Wiharma et al., 2023) found that while illegal cigarettes cause significant economic losses for the state, they are widely accepted by the local community due to their affordability, offering an alternative amidst rising living costs. The study highlights the dual impact of illegal trade—boosting individual economic growth while challenging legal regulations. However, their focus was on urban areas, leaving a gap in understanding rural dynamics. This research fills that gap by exploring how illegal cigarette trade in rural villages becomes a means of upward mobility in areas with limited economic opportunities.

In a vertical social hierarchy group, an individual will make more efforts to achieve or simply maintain their status in the eyes of the social audience, namely the desire to gain appreciation from the environment and the need for self-actualization (Hays, 2012). This makes individuals in a certain social hierarchy try hard to get a "ticket" into a higher social order, social climbers refer to the condition of individuals who do various things to be able to climb the social ladder. (Bardoscia et al., 2013).

This study attempts to span the unique problems and phenomena of Social climbing in illegal cigarette sellers with all its dynamics. The researcher will describe the forms of

social and economic phenomena resulting from selling illegal cigarettes and the logical consequences of the New Rich Family (OKB) in the scope of community life.

Method

Field research with a case study approach in qualitative descriptive by understanding the problem in depth. (Arikunto, 2013). Case studies are intended to study intensively the background of the problem, the condition of an event that is currently taking place, as well as the interaction of the environment of a particular social unit that is pure/as is (Hasanah et al., 2022). The data collection process in this study was carried out by means of non-participant observation and comprehensive interviews (Wahyuningrum, 2020). The problem of illegal cigarettes is a criminal act, so the confidentiality of the research subjects and specific locations are kept secret. Three illegal cigarette sellers were selected as research subjects by purposive sampling.

Table 1. Research Subject Information

Research Subjects	Initials	Age	Job Before Becoming an Illegal Cigarette Seller
Subject 1	DK	42 years old	Tobacco warehouse worker
Subject 2	NK	38 years old	Workshop Mechanic
Subject 3	HN	58 years old	Porter in Tobacco Warehouse

The research location is 2 villages in Pamekasan Regency which are indicated as illegal cigarette producers. Data analysis of the research results using the Miles and Huberman model, namely data analysis is carried out interactively and intensively to produce comprehensive data. The activities in data analysis are; data collection; Data reduction; Data presentation; and drawing conclusions and verification (Matthew B. Miles, 1994).

Result and Discussion

Baudrillard tries to examine the symptoms of consumerism as part of a contemporary lifestyle in society that can create differences or differentiation in each individual according to their social class (Mahyudin, 2017). Having social attributes as an effort to gain recognition and an image as an individual with a different social class, even in a way that breaks the rules, is the meaning of social climbing. (Ketrin, 2019). Significant changes in the conditions of research subjects cannot be separated from the profession of selling/distributing illegal cigarettes to various regions.

Subject 1 (DK)

Working for a long time as a laborer in a tobacco warehouse, increased DK's insight in understanding the quality and distribution of cigarettes. Learning to become a collector of illegal cigarettes that are produced at home, to then be distributed to the West Java region using delivery services or private cars/Elf, DK can reap profits every week of around Rp. 2,000,000 without bearing the risk of loss, because DK applies a buying and selling system, namely every cigarette sent must be paid for in advance by the buyer. DK has been running an illegal cigarette distribution business for approximately 1 year, the changes in economic status experienced by DK are; 1) an increase in income up to 10 times the income of his previous profession. 2) Able to buy 1 unit of 4-wheeled vehicle. 3) able to renovate a house at a cost of around Rp. 25,000,000. The changes in financial improvement experienced by DK and his family are also able to increase social mobility, namely DK often interacts with people who were previously considered to have a caste/social structure above him. The following are the results of an interview with subject 1:

“In the past, I was only able to provide for my wife during the tobacco season, which was once a year, because I worked in a tobacco warehouse. My income used to be around 10 million every time the tobacco season ended. My daily routine when I was not working was cleaning the house, because my wife had a job selling crackers to meet her daily needs. However, after I sold illegal cigarettes to the West Java region, I was able to have many things because of the large income I had. I didn't have to take the risk, because I would send it if the money had been paid in advance, because once the cigarettes I sent were caught in a raid on the West Java toll road and at that time the total price of the cigarettes was 25 million. Because I had received the money, so I was safe and not harmed”.

Interview results about changes in financial and social conditions of Subject 1, here are the interview results;

“Now my wife and children can wear expensive clothes, I have a car, I bought bicycles in cash for all my children. Alhamdulillah, the results of selling cigarettes have made me and my family a well-off and sufficient family. I can give my wife money for daily shopping, repair the bathroom, and some parts of the house. I have many friends visiting almost every night, even some from the Lora group. I can buy my wife the things she wants.”

The interview about Subject 1's self-awareness regarding his illegal cigarette business is as follows;

“I know that illegal cigarettes are not allowed, I often feel scared every time I hear that my friend's goods have been caught in a raid, especially since I hear that customs is actively confiscating illegal cigarettes. However, this business is promising and if I don't have money, I feel like someone who has no power. Every job has risks, so as long as I can I want to keep doing this business.”

Subject 2 (NK)

Working as a mechanic in his own personal workshop, was considered insufficient to meet the daily needs of his family. Various side jobs were done to increase income, until finally NK worked for an illegal cigarette entrepreneur who had quite a large network. No more than 2 years as an illegal cigarette distributor, he was able to change NK's financial condition. Able to have 2 4-wheeled vehicles, and 1 new unit with an estimated price of approximately 300 million and 1 used car unit used as a means of transportation for sending illegal cigarettes with an estimated price of 40 million. In 2023, he was able to send his entire family of 4 people on the Umrah pilgrimage. The area where NK was sent was to Kalimantan by employing professional drivers who had been involved in sending illegal cigarettes for years. Financial changes also changed the social mobility of NK's family, namely one of them, NK's wife joined several socialite associations of branded clothes with a minimum price of 1 million.

The following is the result of an interview with subject 2:

"Initially, I was seen as a useless husband and son-in-law because of my meager income. I was looked down upon not only by my neighbors, but even more painfully by my own in-laws. I made various efforts to increase my income until finally I could be this successful because of selling cigarettes. I can buy a new car, my family goes on the Umrah pilgrimage, my children buy whatever they want, even my wife's clothes are no longer like they used to be. She can wear expensive clothes and I support my wife to buy and do anything with her friends. Now my wife often goes out of town with her friends. However, I am afraid that if all this wealth is lost, I am afraid that other people will no longer see me as a great person who is capable of doing many things."

The interview about subject 2's self-awareness regarding his illegal cigarette business is as follows;

"I realize that what I do is risky, but every job has its risks. I have had my goods raided several times during shipping, and it cost me quite a bit of money. But because I have a partner, if anything happens, there is someone to help me."

Interview results about changes in financial and social conditions Subject 2, here are the interview results;

"Yes, as you can see for yourself, I already have things that I couldn't even dream of before. My wife and family can go on the Umrah pilgrimage, whatever my wife wants I can buy it for her, and so can my child. Here no one has an electric bike, my child already has one. It feels like my life is different now, my friends, I am so happy and should be grateful for this extraordinary condition. Keep in mind, my

neighbors don't want to know how I got rich, for them the important thing is that I have money and am rich. That's enough."

Subject 3 (HN)

Of the three research subjects, drastic financial changes were experienced by HN. Her previous profession as a porter in a tobacco warehouse and the wife of a fried food seller in a traditional market changed after HN was involved in the illegal cigarette business for several years. The assets owned are quite a lot, namely 3 units of 4-wheeled vehicles and one of them is a luxury car, several 4-wheeled vehicles used for transportation of illegal cigarette shipments, houses, gold, and other wealth assets. HN is not only involved in illegal cigarettes, but also distributes excise cigarettes to various regions. The surge in assets owned by HN and his family also changed HN's social mobility, even HN and his family are known as rich people and are quite reckoned with in the village where they live, especially HN is one of the donors who is known to be generous to people who need it. HN's wife is also active in various associations of cigarette business mothers.

Here are the results of the interview with subject 2:

"Carrying a burden on your back is hard, not only hard on your back but hard on your heart. But I was forced to do it because I have a wife and children to feed. For years I survived working at my brother's warehouse and saw the luxury he had. I also wanted to live like that. Being called Pak Haji, having a car, having my wife and children respected, having respect from neighbors, if a neighbor needed help I could help, being able to sit with respected people, clerics, Lora, etc. Alhamdulillah now I can do it. Neighbors will not see my work but will see what I have. I did many things, but they were full of tears. Now Alhamdulillah my wife and I have performed the Hajj, Umrah, bought a car, and others. My wife can wear clothes that she didn't even dare to think about before. Now I can just buy this and that easily. It's nice to be someone with money, even wherever I go I am called Haji and people can respect me."

The three research subjects have their own construction of reality, have hopes and enthusiasm to have a better life in the present and the future. Bierstedt in his book *Communication Mosaics* in (Pambayun, 2013) "*Social climbing is the process of trying to increase personal status in a group by winning the approval of high status member*". This means that social climbing can be attempted to gain a stronger position in a participation either individually or in a group. Financial conditions that change massively in a certain period of time can change the lifestyle and standard of living of research subjects.

The increasing income from selling illegal cigarettes indirectly means that their social status in society has not been said to have increased if their standard of living does not

change. The need for attention from the community for their satisfaction, by using accessories attached to them. So to get that social status, a person tends to try to change their behavior, interests, way of dressing, and other things so that they can match the desired social class. This is not only to meet physiological needs, but to create self-identification and to show their role in society.

After the physiological needs of the research subjects are met, namely clothing, food and shelter, the research subjects, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of individual needs, will tend to increase their needs to the next stage, namely affiliation needs, esteem needs and self-actualization, namely psychological needs for the desire to be loved, accepted, respected and cared for by their surroundings. (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010; Qoyyimah & M, 2016). Social climbing behavior in research subjects is related to their self-concept, which is the whole of the thoughts and feelings that individuals have regarding their perception and self-awareness of what I am (awareness of being) and what they can do (awareness of function), in the need for positive regard from the people closest to them. (Amalia, 2014).

The acceptance of the surrounding environment regarding the financial condition of the research subject by ignoring the source of income from the illegal cigarette sales business, makes the research subject act in denial about the nature and truth that fulfilling the needs of life is not only related to the amount of income, but is also associated with the rules that have been set by the government. Denial is a self-defense mechanism in fighting anxiety against anxiety that threatens (Hasanah et al., 2021). The research subjects carried out the illegal cigarette sales business with caution because they understood that what they were doing was against criminal law, as long as the income was able to meet physiological needs and was able to increase social strata, then it would continue to be done.

Motivation for wealth can also be called materialistic motivation, namely self-satisfaction based on the value of a product that is considered to be able to represent itself and expects appreciation in public. (Yu & Uk, 2014). One form of materialistic motivation is the consumerist behavior of the third wife of the research subject in buying clothes. Clothes are not only a physiological need, but also an identity for them. The price of clothes is quite fantastic, namely the price above 10 million rupiah, even for the hijab alone it is around 1.2 million. Social climbing and individual consumerist behavior towards branded products are the desires of each person which are formed by the social environment and influenced by reference groups, family, and status (Kotler & Keller, 2012). *Brands or branded clothing are*

considered as signals of social status, and are seen as a reflection of a person's capacity from the products they own. (Han et al., 2010).

Individuals no longer carry out the act of consuming an object based on need or pleasure, but rather to obtain social status from the value given by the object. (Mahyudin, 2017). It is a kind of creating fantasy and acting to show a luxurious lifestyle and following lifestyle trends. There is a lack of self-confidence and worry about not being accepted in his new environment if the symbols of wealth are not attached to him.

Social climbing can subjectively harm individuals because it tends to increase feelings of envy and anxiety, to remain part of the social hierarchy they want to achieve. Outward appearance for social climbers is a necessity for them, products with high visibility such as clothing, vehicles, etc. as a manifestation of social status symbols to gain recognition (show off) in the social competition they are in. Individuals do not have to receive awards and attention from others, it would be better if the individual respects himself and gives appreciation for all the conditions he experiences (unconditional positive regard). Doing work without violating government regulations and religious values will make individuals respect themselves and accept their conditions well (Self-acceptance) to achieve their psychological needs.

Conclusion

The existence of illegal cigarettes is commonplace and considered normal because of the lack of social sanctions by society. Behavior that violates criminal law is only a discourse as long as it generates large income and is able to meet the needs of oneself and one's family and to increase one's social hierarchy. Social climbing occurs because individuals greatly glorify social status, that they will be appreciated and viewed by society as long as they have symbols of wealth. Social climbing is related to the individual's self-concept and the ability to accept oneself (self-acceptance) of the conditions they have.

Suggestion

The ability to be grateful for circumstances needs to be possessed by individuals so that in earning a living it is not only based on the nominal amount obtained, but also needs to pay attention to aspects of psychological calm and existing regulations. Further research needs to expand the scope of the area and the number of research subjects so that it can be found out more accurately and reduce subjectivity in understanding the motivational

behavior of selling illegal cigarettes and the factors behind the emergence of social climbing behavior.

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