

Intellectual Proletariat Reification in Indonesia's Higher Education - The Impact of Attention Economy in Late Capitalism

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Abstract

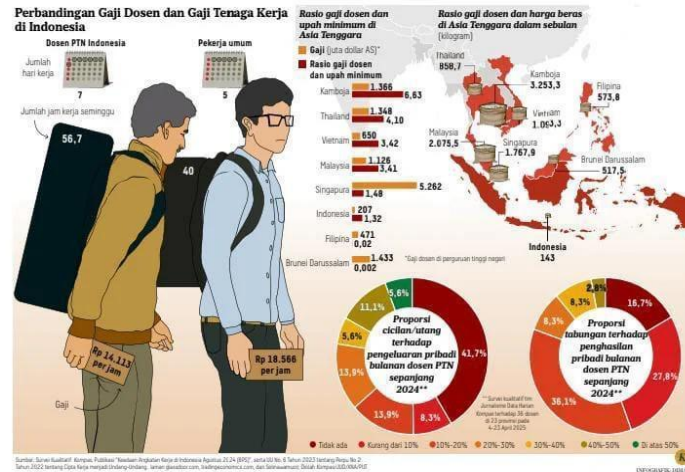
This article examines higher education's crisis due to its declining value among younger generations within the framework of late capitalism entering the phase of neoliberalism, which also marked by the reification of intellectual proletariat in public universities in Indonesia. Using news, data, survey results and literature-based analysis, the attention economy not only fades culture but also produces a paradigmatic shift in how higher education as information is perceived by the younger generations along with the reification of the academic proletariat. The intensifying disparities between labor and remuneration while public university tuitions continue to rise, pushes the youth toward alternative trajectories of what is considered knowledge within the attention economy rather than formal academic study. The study identifies critical gaps in late capitalism such as it advances without meaningful structural reform or resistance. The result explores the potential for collective opposition through Hardt and Negri's concept of Multitude. This article conclude, without criticism and resistance, reification risks threatening the university's role as an intellectual institution dedicated to the cultivation of knowledge and social enlightenment.

Keywords : *Capitalism, Education, Marxism, Multitude, Philosophy of Economy*

Introduction

Dosen Kerja bagai Kuda, Krisis Pengajar Ancam Kampus

Pekerjaan dosen Indonesia makin banyak, libur pun tetap bekerja. Namun, gaji naik perlahan hingga membuat mereka tak bisa menabung. Di sisi lain penambahan jumlah dosen melambat.



JAKARTA, KOMPAS – Tim Jurnalisme Data Harian Kompas menemukan bahwa pekerjaan dosen perguruan tinggi negeri Indonesia makin banyak, meningkat 16 persen pada 2024 dibandingkan dengan tahun sebelumnya. Namun, kenaikan gaji pokok mereka cenderung stagnan, hanya naik sekitar 5 persen tiap dua tahun.

Angka itu menjadi hasil survei kualitatif pada 36 dosen perguruan tinggi negeri (PTN) dari 23 provinsi di Indonesia pada 4-23 April 2025. Responden terdiri dari 18 laki-laki dan 18 perempuan ini mewakili PTN berbadan hukum (BHD), PTN badan layanan umum (BLU), dan PTN satuan kerja (satker).

Menurut hasil survei, sebanyak 64 persen dosen PTN bekerja lebih banyak daripada di tahun sebelumnya. Kompas menghitung pekerjaan dosen PTN dari jumlah penelitian, pengabdian masyarakat, serta kelas yang diampu dari Penguatan Data Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, Sains, dan Tek-

nologi (Kemendiklitristek). Kemudian pekerjaan dosen bersumber dari hal-hal administratif di kampus. Selain mengajar dan menulis, Nanda (30), dosen PTN di Sumatera Barat, mendapatkan tugas tambahan seperti mengelola kuesioner program studi dan menjadi anggota tim akreditasi program studi.

"Saya bersama teman dosen bertugas membuat berita, misalnya ada kunjungan tamu ke kampus. Targetnya setiap bulan minimal 6 berita yang diter-

bitkan," kata Nanda, pertengahan April 2025.

Di sisi lain, kerja dosen PTN ini tidak sepadan dengan gaji pokok yang mereka peroleh. Dari olahan survei, Kompas menemukan, kerja dosen di Indonesia Rp 18.566 per jam, yang disial dari Badan Pusat Statistik pada Publikasi "Kondisi Angkatan Kerja Agustus 2024".

JURNALISME DATA
BACA JUGA: NIM 2

>>> BACA BESOK:
Dosen tombok riset
Separah lebih dosen menggunakan dana pribadi untuk membayai risetnya. Langkah ini diambil supaya kewajiban dosen terpenuhi dan dapat tunjangan.

PEKERJAAN SAMPINGAN

Dosen Muda, Pagi Mengajar Sore "Ngojol"

Gelar "Ir" atau insinyur terpancipang di layar panggilan telepon WhatsApp saat Didi (30) menceritakan kesehariannya. Pukul 0700 hingga 1700 WIB, ia berada di sebuah perguruan tinggi negeri di wilayah Jawa Barat sebagai dosen. Namun, sebelum dan sesudahnya dia mengaspal sebagai pengemudi ojek online.

Jarak tempuh antara rumah dan kampus tempat mengajar sekitar 20 kilometer. Setiap pagi, ia berusaha mendapatkan pelanggan ojek yang searah dengan kampus agar mendapat uang tambahan sedini mungkin.

Bagitu urusan kampus selesai, dia kembali mengaspal. Pesanan membawanya ke berbagai arah, dari ujung Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, hingga Bekasi. "Setidaknya bisa buat makan," ujar Didi, Sabtu (10/5/2025).

Didi lebih memilih bekerja sampingan sebagai pengemudi ojek dalam jaringan karena memperoleh proyek di luar kampus penuh dengan ketidakpastian. Meski tidak seberapa, penghasilan dari ojek online berfariasi rutin setiap hari.

Setiap bulan, sebagai dosen perguruan tinggi negeri (PTN) berstatus calon pegawai negeri sipil (CPNS), dia memperoleh gaji Rp 2 juta-an per bulan. "Di luar besaran, saya bisa mendapatkan penghasilan Rp 100.000-Rp 200.000 per hari dari ojek (ojek online), walaupun kadang-kadang saya dapat di horeh Rp 800.000 per hari," tuturnya.

Penghasilan dari ojek online ia pakai untuk membayar tagihan air dan listrik bulanan serta makan sehari-hari. Didi menjadi tidak sanggup seluruh penghasil rumah yang beranggakan nyah, itu, seorang adik, dan dua leponkan. Adiknya yang lulusan paket C masih bergumul mencari pekerjaan.

Pengeluaran lebih besar
Yang dilakukan Didi sejalan dengan olahan data survei kualitatif Tim Jurnalisme Data Harian Kompas pada 36 dosen PTN. Pekerjaan sampingan menjadi salah satu sumber penghasilan bagi dosen untuk memenuhi kebutuhan sehari-hari. Sebanyak 76,5 persen dari mereka memiliki pekerjaan sampingan di luar kampus.

Sekelompok 44 persen dosen PTN menurut olahan Kompas, mempunyai pengeluaran untuk keluarga yang lebih besar dibandingkan dengan penghasilan bulanan. Rata-rata dosen menanggung lebih dari dua anggota keluarga.

Untuk makan siang, Didi mengandalkan jatah dari kampus sebesar Rp 600.000-Rp 900.000 per bulan. Penghasilannya juga digunakan untuk mencicil rumah bersubsidi, tempat tinggalnya saat ini. Karena penghasilannya tidak cukup, ia berencana mengopir kredit pemilikan rumahnya.

Kompas menemukan fakta, sebanyak 50 persen dosen PTN memiliki cicilan untuk membiayai tempat tinggal pribadi. Besaran cicilan berkisar 10-50 persen dari total penghasilan per kapita per bulan.

Demam menabung hidup keluarganya dan menjalankan profesinya sebagai dosen, Didi membawa laptop dan sandal jepit setiap mengemudikan ojek online. Ia khawatir laptopnya rusak karena kebujuran saat mengojek. Jika rusak, ia tidak mempunyai tabungan untuk membeli laptop baru.

"Untuk keluar uang Rp 100.000 saja, saya mikir berkali-kali," katanya.

Apabila bantek dengan jadwal mengajar, memilih, atau pengabdian masyarakat, ia meminta adanya penggantian jadi pengojek online. Ia pernah kelebihan tak sanggup mengajar di kampus. Ia lalu meminta mahasiswa belajar secara virtual. Terkadang, dia merasa tak maksimal dalam menyampaikan bahan ajar karena waktu dan tenaga yang terbatas.

Meskipun demikian, dia bertahan untuk menjadi dosen. "Ada kepuasan tersendiri, khususnya ketika menjadi dosen pembimbing akademik bagi mahasiswa. Saya bisa membantu

(Bersambung ke hlm 15 kol 6-7)

Figure 1. Kompas, Indonesia Newspaper's Front Headline on 19th May 2025 Title: *Dosen Kerja bagai Kuda, Krisis Pengajar Ancam Kampus* (Lecturers Work Like Horses, Lecturers Crisis Threatens Campuses).

The world of education has never ceased to report devastating news about the fate of educators whose hard work is far less appreciated. A journalism report in the Kompas newspaper on May 19, 2025, revealed how the economic conditions of lecturers at state universities were far from prosperous up to this era, even after 20 years of Indonesia's reformation (Figure 1). This irony emerges amid the intense educational transformation accompanying the transition to digital learning and the pursuit of internationally recognized journal publications. As reported on the front page of Kompas under the headline "Lecturers Work Like Horses, Teaching Crisis Threatens Campuses," Indonesia

ranks second lowest in Southeast Asia in the ratio of state university lecturers salaries to the minimum wage, just slightly above the Philippines, an immiseration of intellectual pillars of the country.

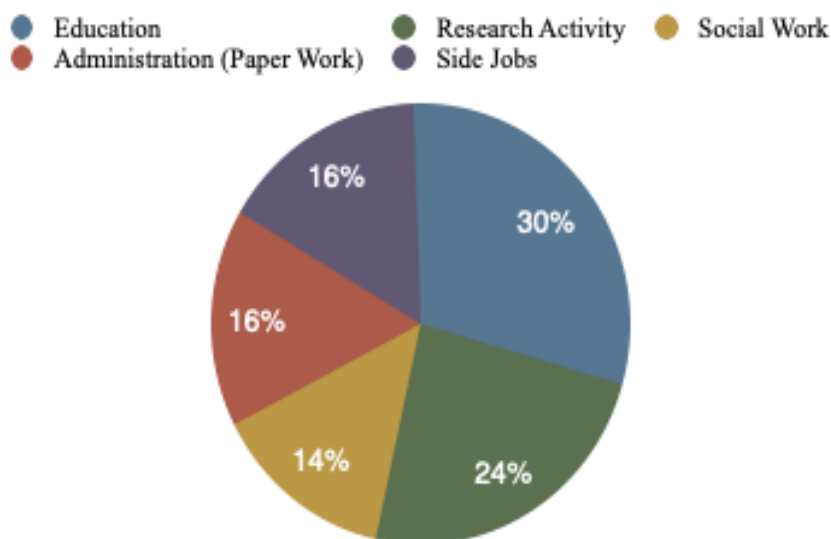
Indonesia, world's largest archipelagic country in Southeast Asia, has a dismal ratio of lecturer salaries to minimum wages at 1.32. With general employee wages at Rp.18,566 per hour, lecturers' wages are only valued at Rp.14,113 per hour (Kompas, May 2025), the number equals less than 1 US dollar. This harsh reality is a portrait of intellectual proletarians today, whose welfare has been disregarded. Their central role has been reified systematically as merely to knowledge production incessantly. This neglect is due to a misplaced shift in priorities of educational institutions, with Indonesian lecturers' base salaries in nearly all public universities increasing by only 5% in every two years.

The impact of the poor financial conditions of university lecturers certainly affects the quality of teaching, which is not optimal and leads to long hours of labor focusing on fulfilling credit requirements, administrative tasks, and other structural requirements, a signal of deep transformation in higher education under late capitalism. How can lecturers give out their best performance when they struggle to even have savings? An immense pressure persists to meet the key performance metrics, such as publication credit scores, bureaucratic administrative tasks, and other institutional indicators. These facts reorient academic labor to a sharp turn from intellectual engagement, toward specific measurable outputs. Indonesia's Kompas newspaper survey (2025) of lecturers in 23 provinces in Indonesia in April stated that 16.7% had no savings from their monthly personal income in 2024. It doesn't end there, in a different column in the newspaper was reported how young public university lecturers with engineering degrees in West Java, Indonesia, had to work double jobs, driving an online motorcycle taxi in the afternoon, and teach in the morning just to make ends meet.

The Kompas Daily Data Journalism Team found that the average working hours of public university lecturers reached from 69 to 64 hours per week throughout 2024 (Kompas, May 2025). Meanwhile, a qualitative survey outlined the allocation of public universities lecturers' working hours per week, including Saturdays and Sundays (*Chart 1*). This not only defies common sense, but also violates with Indonesia's Law No. 6 of 2023 on the Stipulation of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 2 of 2022 on Job Creation, which stipulates that the maximum working hours are 40 hours per week, divided into eight hours per day for five working days (Kompas, May 2025). The mental health of lecturers and their students will also suffer from the side effects of this imbalance. When the world of education increasingly focuses on inhumane patterns of activity in terms of productivity, it is not surprising that this has psychological implications.

These conditions illustrate how academic labor is increasingly subjected to processes of reification. In this context, reification does not merely refer to an abstract philosophical concept, but to a visible transformation in which human intellectual activity is reduced to quantifiable results as labor-power.

Chart 1. Work-time allocation of Lecturers in Public Universities, 7-days a week (compiled from qualitative survey data of KOMPAS Daily Data Journalism Team, April 4-23,2025)



As Glenn Rikowski (2019) explained in his article further about labor power as the most valuable production and the foundation of the capitalist commodity:

Labor-power is a unique, special commodity ... [and] ... As a commodity, it is the basis of capitalist production: the only commodity capable of creating more value than it takes to maintain and reproduce itself. When put to use in the capitalist labour process, labour-power has the capacity to create surplus-value. (Rikowski, 2019, p. 150)

Academic work once grounded in critical inquiry and intellectual depth is increasingly evaluated through certain metrics which reflects the broader logic of neoliberalism, in which universities operate according to market-oriented rationalities, emphasizing efficiency, competition, and revenue generation.

With the above concept, this study will highlight issues such as: how does the attention economy of neoliberalism in late capitalism lead to the reification of the teaching profession in higher education? Is this a systemic phenomenon, and is it conditioned to be ignored or even maintained as part of the narrative of late capitalism? A narrative that is part of perpetuated hegemony.

It is ironic how teachers, who are respected and emulated, must be tossed about in the back-and-forth fulfillment of their own well-being and decent life, instead of optimally focusing on their role as lecturers. These intellectual proletarians has been alienated for long period of time without conclusiveness. This issue has a strong coherence with the attention economy that dominates the digital realm. How should our society deal with the impact of commodification in higher education amidst the attention economy market domination?

The purpose of this study is to examine the crisis of higher education through two theoretical framework. First, it examines the reification of intellectual proletarians as a systemic condition of late capitalism, in which their labor is increasingly reduced to measurable outputs and subjected to economic rationalities. Second, the rise of the attention economy as the further

transformation of neoliberalism in knowledge valuation, where visibility and engagement are commodified. This alters the younger generations in Indonesia in perceiving the urgency of higher education. Together, these processes illuminate not only the internal conflict inside the universities, but also the shifting external conditions that contribute to its declining social value as the extended chain of effects in what Fredric Jameson called *depthlessness*.

A number of literature sources will be examined to reveal the welfare of lecturers, who have been neglected and undercompensated over their labor and time. Analysis will be conducted within a critical Marxist framework, explaining reification, which is then traced to how late capitalism precipitated the rise of the attention economy. This is important to clarify how false consciousness culturally transforms perception. The cumulative causality of these dynamics ultimately intensifies the practical crisis of higher education. This study seeks to refine the hypothesis that the symptoms of late capitalism dominate particularly through the influential rise of attention economy which undermines the perceived necessity of advanced formal education. Accordingly, challenging the false consciousness produced within the attention economy is anticipated to serve as a precursor to transformative social change. Through the same channel (attention pathway), subversive resistance can be carried out in a *Multitude* (Hardt & Negri, 2000). This resistance is crucial because it disrupts the singular logic of capitalist representation with the production of concern, solidarity, and collective meaning that decentralizes values and opens up alternative spaces for the meaningfulness of education. It is hoped that this can also be a signal for systemic reform for the state in sector of education. Armed with hope, massive and structured communal resistance is believed to one day become a way out to achieve an Indonesia that returns to the progressive path in educating the nation.

Discussion

Late capitalism, the term often dismissed and treated as a ‘cold case’ in the contemporary era, exerts a distinctive impact on developing countries such as Indonesia. Within this condition, developing nations appear to be continuously shaped into forms of stagnation within global hierarchies, while finding it difficult to escape the structures and interesting offers of progressive civilization governed by capitalist corporations.

This article argues that the attention economy fundamentally restructure the market logic of value in late capitalism, thereby with false consciousness marginalizing formal higher education and producing conditions of *depthlessness* in sociological aspects, and intensifying the reification of academic labor, but there is an opening of new possibilities for resistance through the *multitude* through the same path attention economy itself.

As developing countries are simultaneously burdened by a concealed sense of intellectual inferiority, Fredric Jameson (1991) argues, particularly within the economic sphere, this phenomenon is inseparable from late or multinational capitalism, which gradually erodes sociological and cultural dimensions, that appear increasingly neglected within economic interactions in the postmodern or post-Western era, especially in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia.

The fading of cultural values in this case, influences the society’s views, including on formal education. The background of this problem lies in the global perception pressure; constant new forms of cultural production, particularly amid the expansion of the digital attention economy, which has precipitated a crisis in higher education driven by multiple factors, in particular, social hegemony. According to research citing Owen Worth, in *Rethinking Hegemony* (2015) there are two distinct meanings of hegemony: first, as a mechanism whereby one country controls another in the international system, and second as a process that occurs when a dominant class in society

uses its power over others by developing its own ideology that can be defended (Sau, A, 2024:104). Both of these definitions are ultimately applicable in the current era within the Neo-Gramscian tradition.

One implication of social hegemony is reification. Reification, a term that describes the reductive behavior of humans or living beings in two ways, namely working and living in a state of false consciousness (Bell Jr, 2014). Reification among intellectual workers in the higher education sector has become increasingly evident. The objectification of human beings who should be recognized and rewarded in accordance with their labor, is instead continued to be ignored, leading to a condition of alienation, which has been normalised for years, even decades. This mechanism contributes to the nation's relative lag in achieving intellectual equality on the international stage. Jameson further explains how such theoretical dynamics operate within post-industrial or postmodern societies, where they have encouraged the emergence of a nonclassical form of late capitalism that departs from the Marxist tradition, evolving toward what appears to be a fully realized form of capitalism. Such theories have the apparent ideological mission of demonstrating, to their own alleviation of pain, that the new social formation in question no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism, namely, the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle. The Marxist tradition has therefore resisted them with convictions, with the signal exception of the economist Ernest Mandel, whose book *Late Capitalism* sets out not merely to anatomize the historic originality of this new society (which he sees as a third stage, or moment in the evolution of capital) but also to demonstrate that it is, if anything, a purer stage of capitalism than any of the moments that preceded it (Jameson,1991:3).

Reification in Late Capitalism

In Peter Berger's definition, reification is defined as a state of amnesia in which the individual "forgets" the human origins in the world, socially. Social phenomena are apprehended instead; "as if they were something else than human products: such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:89). The analysis of reified consciousness is thus separated from the analysis of the particular social relations that are reified, and translated into a cultural and historical universal. This interpretation slightly contains similarities with the view of reification, which was multidimensional and reciprocal between the social structure and social consciousness (Burris, 1988). Within the context of higher education, this means that lecturers are not only positioned within reified structures, but also participate in reproducing them. The demand to continuously produce measurable outputs reinforces a form of consciousness in which academic value is equated with productivity and visibility. In this sense, reification operates not only at the level of economic conditions, but also within the processes of academic production itself. Intellectual activity is fragmented, standardized, and aligned with institutional demands, thereby limiting the possibility for critical and reflective engagement.

Lukács (1923) wrote a separate chapter entitled *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* in his *History of Class Consciousness*.

Lukács's opinion is that while the bourgeoisie has a false consciousness does not automatically mean that the proletariat has a consciousness for revolution, but it does have more possibility of seeing through fetishism or objectified commodities. Lukács' other perspective, for example, is present in formulations such as those that say the consciousness of the proletariat is still chained by reification. Late capitalism intensifies this condition by expanding the forms

through which reification operates. As Fuchs (2020,p.208) argues, capitalism simultaneously generates a “quantitative increase of the forms of reification” while also containing the potential to undermine them. In the case of Indonesia's higher education, however, the dominance of performance metrics and institutional pressures suggests that reification continues to deepen, shifts both the conditions of academic labor and the meaning of knowledge itself which will lead to the depthlessness induced strongly by the attention economy. This intersects with Deloitte's findings from the 2025 survey, which revealed that 39 percent of Gen Z in Indonesia did not proceed to college due to unaffordable costs (Deloitte, 2025). The data involved a total of 23,482 respondents from 44 countries, with Indonesia accounting for 535 respondents, 326 of whom were Gen Z. When asked about their concerns, around 30 percent of Gen Z respondents answered that they were skeptical about the return on their college investment (*Figure 2*). They are aware of the importance of pursuing higher education as a gateway to the job market, but there are doubts about whether universities will provide the practical experience they can offer in the future (*Figure 3*).

This shift in perception is in line with the sporadic and massive market for other skills, such as content creation, the presence of artificial intelligence (AI), and other skills that they may not be able to optimally acquire by paying excessively high university tuition fees. If the cost of attending university is unaffordable, while lecturers' salaries and welfare are also not guaranteed, then this gap should be suspected as a form of reification in late capitalism. The value of knowledge is assessed primarily through its exchange value rather than its intrinsic or intellectual significance.

This process of reification, which has long been overlooked, may be challenged by broader economic forces, including those that initially gave rise to it.

“..what role was played from among all the forces controlling society by the purely economic forces in so far as they can be said to have existed in a 'pure' state in the strict sense of the word” (Lukacs, 1971,p.238).

When Lukacs mentions the “pure” state, he is referring to a pure logic of capitalism, regardless of the well-being of the human, particularly the proletarian condition.

More importantly, however, the question we should be raising is whether the continued commodification of the intellectual proletarian labor will threaten the growing marginalization of higher education lecturers within society?. Will the intellectual proletarian merely be considered solely as supporting objects in the network of economic activities in the commodified higher education market? The Indonesia higher education, especially the public university market is currently known to begin experiencing symptoms of a crisis in soliciting participation.

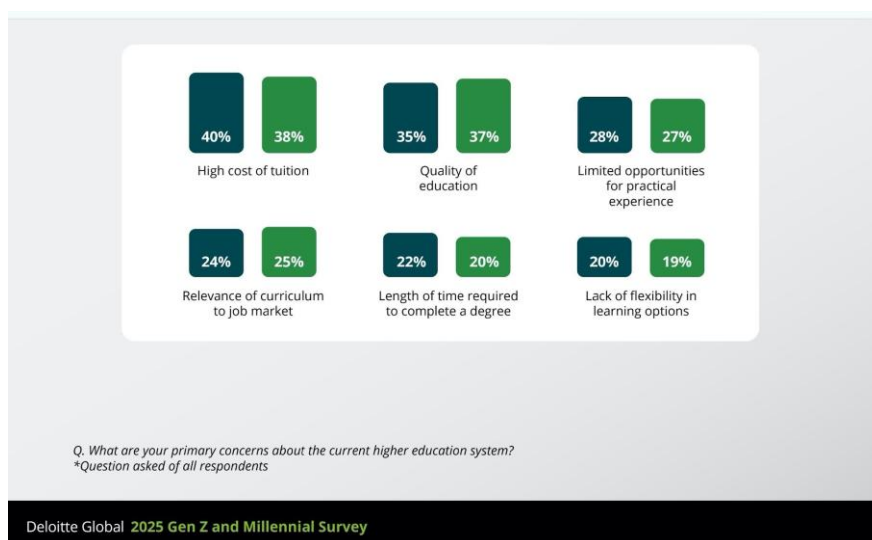


Figure 2. Deloitte Global 2025 survey on Gen Z skepticism toward higher education.

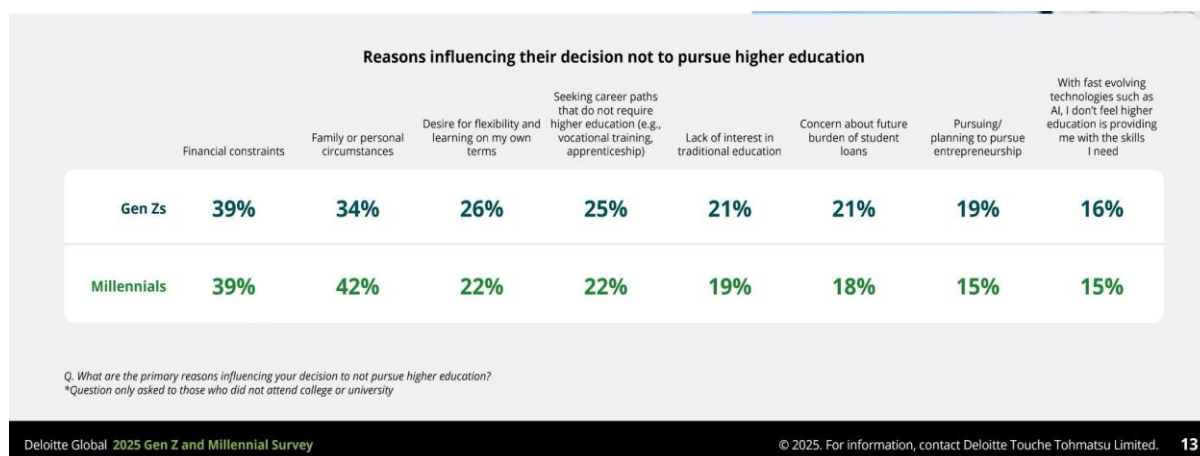


Figure 3. Deloitte Global Survey 2025: Reasons why Gen Z and Millennials do not pursue higher education.

When it comes to higher education, which tends to be commodified as property of a certain social structure, institutions that are viewed differently in this era of late capitalism, initially aimed to be a means of pursuing knowledge, but then manifested themselves as becoming more than just a requirement for eligibility in the field of work. Academic degrees are positioned as status symbols for consumers and are determined by the reputation of the educational institution providing them. Educational institutions tend to adopt business strategies such as aggressive marketing and the development of new academic programs or tutoring services to maximize revenue (Sukandi & Yelli Eka Sumadhinata, 2024). The commodification generated implications such as increasing social inequality, the narrowing of the curriculum into subjects deemed less directly relevant to the job market (reflected mostly by the demand from the attention economy), which are often marginalized or even removed altogether. They do this to cover costs and expand capital. Not only on tuition fees, but commodification comes in a form of partnerships with private or foreign entities which inserted a conflict in putting the student's interest first, and distorting the foundation and integrity of educational purposes (Sari, K. A, et,al, 2025). In addition to access to the job market, belonging to a certain class network with

similar academic background, often becomes the basis for acceptance in social structure, especially in the level of postgraduate. Economic disparities, in terms of education tuition, are an effect of the capitalist logic of commodification. Semester tuition and college monthly expenses were still far from affordable. Therefore, the current challenges faced by Indonesian higher education cannot be grasped solely as issues of national policy or institutional management. Rather, they reflect broader dynamics of late capitalism, in which neoliberal rationalities reshape the production, distribution, and valuation of knowledge. In this process, the actors within higher education, especially lecturers as intellectual proletarians, their roles are reduced to functional components within a larger economic system increasingly growing beyond the attention economy. This then became the core analysis question in this study: how should we interpret and respond to the transformation of higher education under late capitalism? According to Jameson (1991), there are various positions on postmodernism, as follows:

1. The apologia position. The celebration or defense of freedom, supporting the logic of the free market that leads to the justification of capitalism. Choosing to be non-reactive or remain passive for the sake of economic stability also falls under this position.
2. The stigmatization position, or skeptically condemning postmodernism as a cultural downfall, something that only exists on the surface. In terms of education, this is the shallowness of glorifying academic titles without seeing the real crisis of humanism or the sustainability of the processes that occur within it. Postmodernism and what follows are associated with something instantaneous, like an economic cycle that erodes humanity, eliminates history, and causes reification in society.
3. And the last one is: the position of ambivalence. This is the position adopted by Jameson on the form of critical reflection because of how we appear to be in

it, but could not seem to get our way out of it completely. He does not reject postmodernism but is skeptical and critically reflective on a number of symptoms of social and economic transformation in the world, namely the development of capitalism.

The ruling class continues to perpetuate capitalism and the eclipse of norms, and it is not even known who is behind the mask of this narrative.

Faceless masters continue to inflect the economic strategies that constrain our existences, but they no longer need to impose their speech (or are henceforth unable to); and the post-literacy of the late capitalist world reflects not only the absence of any great collective project but also the unavailability of the older national language itself (Jameson, 1991: 17).

Without the need for verbal coercion, society has been naturally led into a world of late capitalism based on consumerism and the threat to its survival. In Marxist, false consciousness, a term coined by Friedrich Engels (1893), and explored further by Lukacs, causes lecturers to fall into a reification mode, working seven days a week to meet skyrocketing administrative demands, in addition to teaching and conducting research that cannot be completed in five working days like common workers in other sectors.

Education ultimately became a product of postmodern cultural consumption, creating a society of cultural consumers with declining sensitivity, dominated by the processed euphoria of high-tech information celebrations. Much of the euphoria of postmodernism derives from this celebration of the very process of high-tech informatization, the prevalence of current theories of communication, language, or signs being an ideological spinoff of this more general “worldview” (Jameson, 1991: 25,276).

This cultural production creates an appearance or a fantasy in the name of following the market logic as a whole or in general. In reality, when education becomes part of the “elite cultural package” at the request of the market, what

happens is that the costs are high, and only certain groups can access quality education. Meanwhile, higher education lecturers are not given proper recognition, because their value is determined by the logic of the market, not their moral or social contributions. In this context, academic knowledge became subject to processes of simplification and acceleration. The pressure to produce visible and accessible outputs often prioritises immediacy over depth, contributing to what Jameson characterizes as *depthlessness*. Consequently, higher education risks becoming oriented toward the production of symbolic value, such as degrees, rankings, and institutional prestige, rather than sustained intellectual inquiry. We can reflectively observe this kind of euphoria currently as a practice of late capitalism in a form of attention economy.

Attention Economy: The Commodity of “Attention” Diverting the Importance of Higher Education

In the 1960s, a concept emerged known as the *Yellow Economy*, first proposed by Herbert Simon, a computer scientist and laureate of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1978. This concept of Yellow Economy highlighted the occurrence of information overload as an economic problem. The visionary thinking of that era has now transformed into the attention economy interacting with internet algorithm markets. The term ‘attention economy,’ coined by Davenport and Beck, refers to an approach to information management that treats human attention as a commodity and applies economic theory to solve various information management problems. We are increasingly living in an ‘attention economy’ rather than an ‘information economy’ (Suryandari, 2023). Attention has become a commodity with increasingly high consumer preference, especially in the algorithmic market on digital platforms and the economic cycle that occurs within them. In the so-called attention economy, multiple voices compete simultaneously just to be seen, which leads to their

content becoming the main vector of authority, engagement, and algorithmic relevance (Davenport & Beck, 2001). It is also said that attention has become a scarce commodity, a product that is sought after in strategic content for professional branding, for example on specialised platforms such as LinkedIn, or in more random and broad segments such as Instagram. This may be understood as the consequence of a new configuration of capitalism that affects multiple dimensions: positively, by offering efficiencies in the use of time and energy, yet simultaneously, and often unconsciously, by exerting detrimental effects on the human dimension. Due to the pressure, which seeks to maximise profits, there has been a disorientation of individuals in society, as described by Jameson: the inauguration of a whole new type of society, most famously baptised “post-industrial society” (Daniel Bell), but often also designated consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society or high tech, and the like (Jameson, 1991: 3). This also a concerning matter when it comes to Artificial Intelligence particularly in chambers of universities which can lead to an immense decrease of authentic intellectual work of researches and literatures.

Daniel Bell, a sociologist quoted by Jameson, had a visionary view of the advent of a high-tech society, which today is literally a virtual society (the internet). Anyone can become part of this society simply by registering an account, instantly feeling empowered to speak out and seemingly recognised by the whole world, with an equal opportunity to be acknowledged. Moreover, like utopian life, society then provides a descriptive picture through modes of experience in the pursuit of *eudaimonia* and economic exchange on the internet without any educational prerequisites.

This is something that cannot be verified or identified epistemically, but is merely a shallow simulation of unlimited information exchange in the virtual world. This portrayal of life, creates more than just the feeling of new opportunities in younger generations, but also a different form of disorientation.

The unlimited access of information, combined with the visibility of newly established career paths, promote a condition that higher education may be unnecessary or inefficient. However, this perception is induced by similar mode of production that reifies academic proletariat: knowledge is evaluated in its ability to generate income, or recognition, rather than its critical or intellectual dimension.

Claudio Celis Bueno (2017) mentions Michael H. Goldhaber analysis in 1997 of how the emerging economic possibilities of information and knowledge as a central commodity implicates scarcity in the attention resources. This has a significant impact on perceptions of higher education, which is considered incapable of keeping up with the standards of knowledge that are scattered across the internet in various formats. Carlo Vercellone call this as part of an accumulation of the laws of capitalism which serves as direct consequences from its internal contradictions, not its technical progress (Bueno, 2017:29). Cognitive capitalism as Bueno explains is not oriented towards the aim for the sake of knowledge itself rather a mode of production where knowledge became an active element of production, valorization, and accumulation of capital (Bueno, 2017). This provides a clear comprehensive state, that attention economy is undoubted, a result of late capitalism and triggered the *depthlessness* which inflicted on how higher education is perceived nowadays. This fact is also permeated within the exhausted and reified intellectual proletarians.

Depthlessness in High-Tech Society

Higher education is at risk of being eroded and displaced in terms of its necessity, becoming a tertiary category. The attention economy in the global narrative is swaying the existence of Indonesian culture and identity in trends and algorithms whose mechanisms are unclear to the general public (apart from

frequency and aesthetic factors), and it has a massive impact on how education is being perceived. Attention economy has become a vehicle for the rolling wheel of algorithms, with the space for validation and recognition offered as a psychological bonus craved by the younger generation. The preference for earning opportunities in the digital realm and the overflow of information without boundaries makes jobs in the attention economy flexible to achieve, without formal higher education requirements, an investment that is currently beyond the financial means of many families in Indonesia. Therefore, we must acknowledge the consequence of this: superficiality wins this competition over intellectuality. This is what Jameson refers to as *depthlessness*; when life simulations in the attention economy have anonymous cultural initiators exchanging information in short social media videos, the designed imagery attracts algorithmic markets and garners “attention” for profit valuation, resulting in shallow intertextuality. To observe that here too, depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces (what is often called intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth). (Jameson, 1991:12).

Representations of reality in the virtual world exist only on the screen surfaces. The play of images has become more important than substance. As a result, there is no longer any “depth of meaning” to be explored—only a play of signs to satisfy intertextuality in the new culture. Psychological depth in interactions of the attention economy is also no longer considered important; only syntagmatic relationships are emphasized, so that subjectivity and self-centered representations often arise. This result of *depthlessness* deceives us once again, as the validation initially offered by the late capitalism turns out to be circular, returning to the alienation of the individuals within it, leading to reification over time as they must chase the target of producing information for trade, the classic traits of neoliberalism. The affirmation of choices other than education continues with the emergence of influencers who are known to have no background in higher education, proving that they are capable of making a

name for themselves and establishing their existence. Even more than that, the illusion of success and happiness from representations and symbols of victory and popularity has permeated a culture that has eroded the historical and cultural identity of Indonesian society, which has long been nurtured by formal education. Internet users have sunk into false consciousness from algorithms that label people based on their appearing surfaces, such as KOL or influencers, and buzzers throwing out instant ideas and trade attention for views and engagements. What is actually happening is that they too have become new proletarians of the trends circulating in the world of social media, chasing ad-sense or other forms of commission offered by giant internet companies. The increasing *depthlessness* of superficiality on screens sold in the attention economy provides more space for the illusion of display commodities. Higher education, which seems outdated and long-term, has been replaced by a number of online short courses that offer international certification with manageable time-access and affordable costs.

Bueno explained in *Attention Economy* the assumption of Bentham's panopticon system adopted by Foucault as a form of surveillance and discipline of society by institutions. How individuation occurs in the attention economy is rooted in observations made in controlling the productivity of society in the form of continuous attention (Bueno, 2017: 444-452). Individuation here is an individual that internalized power relations and can be held accountable for his or her activity, and in this case is how people entangled themselves in the internet with their own consent, including the data and information which they have shared.

Late Capitalism Erodes The Value of Higher Education: A Global Competition Held by Imperialism.

Late capitalism is another stage which generates itself after World War II. It is characterized with the significant rise of multinational corporations, global financial markets, and the commodification of culture. Coming from the era of post-modernism, Jameson explains, culture has become so thoroughly integrated into economic production that it's impossible to separate the two. The impact on cultural have also influence on how the market perceives trends, social perception, technology and certainly changes the meaning of education.

In late capitalism, everything becomes a commodity – not just goods and services, but experiences, identities, and even resistance movements. The Nike swoosh is more than just a brand logo, it's a lifestyle identity. Regions, institutions are in competition to brand themselves for the sake of capital accumulation. In attention economy of internet specifically, even critique and rebellion get packaged and sold back to consumers as a commodity (Urban Studies, 2024).

Apparently in developing countries this has occurred for the last few decades in public schools and universities. Where education for the public turns to an unequal opportunity or *cherry picking* of financial abilities, which undermines financial solidarity. The impact on public services may be exacerbated by cuts in public sector resources, which reduces the quality of the public service and encourages those who can pay to buy more resources for themselves from the private sector (Hill, 2006). In Costa Rica and Malaysia, the quality public education has been a major factor in social equity and prestige. In South Africa, social bifurcation is exacerbated when schooling has to be paid for. Since 1994, schools have been permitted to charge fees according to family means (Hill, 2006). In Indonesia, high-ranking public universities even have their own checking system into the social status of the student's parents to determine the

precise tuition, as part of cross-subsidy mechanism they claimed to be helpful to support students who are less fortunate. As protested during National Education Day in early May 2026, the disparities between higher educational tuition which seems to be getting higher, while state budgeting percentage in education sectors are getting lower (Bustomi, Kompas,2026).

The Public universities continue to sustain ambitiously high-standard ranks as their ideology with false consciousness, leading to reification of their academic labors. These aspects of false consciousness reinforce human commodification in higher education to fulfill even faster each day as they chase the production system wheels of capitalism. The concept of false consciousness lives within Lukacs's reification where it derives as the long extension of commodities fetishism. False consciousness according to Georg Lukács (1971), does not simply mean that people are mistaken or irrational; rather, it describes a condition where individuals understand their social reality in a limited or distorted way because they fail to perceive the total structure of society shaping their lives.

By relating consciousness to the whole of society it becomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were able to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society. That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation (Lukacs,1971,p.51).

Individuals seem to pursue what they believe to be their own mission. It is a part of having their autonomy and freedom without realizing their actions soon reproduce broader social and historical objectives and are carved into the existing system. In this matter, false consciousness is not judged merely by what people think or feel at any given moment, rather what is missing in the system between the immediate subjective awareness and the objectivity of their

position in society that they have not yet understood. False consciousness perceives the existing social relations, in this matter is the academia, as mandatory, or legitimate, while what lies beneath the structure, which is domination and exploitation, remain obscured. This scene relates closely to reification because reified proletarians and their social relations nowadays appear to the academic proletarian as objective realities, rather than historically produced arrangements, without even reconsidering or even recognizing the contingents and socially constructed character.

Lecturers' reification inflicted the quality and meaning of higher education in sustaining the true intention of procuring knowledge. The symptoms are polished by the standard imposed by an imperialism phenomenon of university's international high scoring. Many ranking systems favor campuses that use English as the language of instruction because it is considered the "language of science". This methodology is also generally considered to be indifferent to the diversity of higher education institutions. This indifference leads to a one-size-fits-all approach—an attempt to portray the heterogeneity of higher education institutions through a homogeneous lens (Rachman & Fathana, 2022). Regardless these efforts of climbing the rank, universities' reputation still clashed with the persuasion of the attention economy which raises the bar of market logic in instant mechanism of profiting from content creation and other opportunities in the internet, which can potentially undermine the importance of conventional ways in higher education. These phenomena created a specific tension. On one hand, universities exert the reification of lecturers in order to compete globally in the ranking systems; on the other hand, the struggle becomes increasingly contradictory and meaningless with the forms of value that dominate the attention economy. The pressure on standardized results and long-term academic production contrasts with the rapid, and cheaper forms of knowledge circulating on digital platforms. When knowledge produced within universities appears slow, inaccessible, or disconnected from the

dynamics of visibility —that characterize the attention economy, the content creation and digital entrepreneurship gain more conformity. In this sense, the attention economy indirectly influenced higher education perception because it amplifies the effects of reification. Knowledge is evaluated simply through an exchange value of *depthlessness*, whether in the demands of institutional rankings or digital attention. These demands that were pursued with false consciousness in late capitalism inflicted the production mode in higher education to push the lecturers working long hours in fulfilling the gap. The tension between reification of the proletarians and the attention economy exposure, implicates the devaluation of conventional higher education due to scarcity of attention and scarcity of the academic labor as seen in the diagram (**Figure 4**). Universities now often link their success to increased use of social media technology. Attracted by the currency of algorithms, this social hegemony involved mostly in the wave of neoliberal capitalism activities. Faculty and students too often use social media in connection with their work at the university.

“The depressed and the lonely, who have entered the purview of policy-making now that their problems have become visible to doctors and neuroscientists, exhibit much that has gone wrong under the neoliberal model of capitalism.” (Di Leo, J., 2017: xx).

This phenomena exhibit further evidence, the casualties of late capitalism.

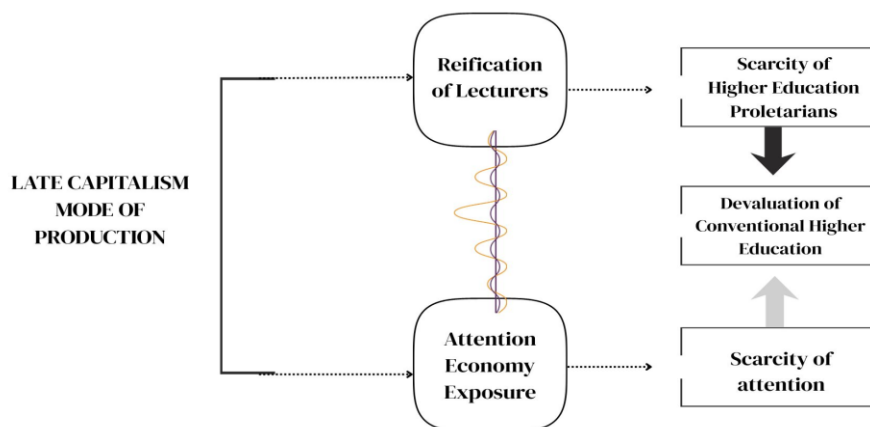


Figure 4: Diagram of Higher Education Devaluation in Late Capitalism.

Multitude: Joint Resistance on the Way Forward

The invasion of social media and online productivity rolling like a snowball, using algorithms as a form of sovereignty that currently determines the economic behavior of society, including the increasingly unaffordable cost of public higher education. This raises a critical gap in the literature: as tuition fees increases, how are the welfare of the lecturers remained marginalized?

A mystification that has never been connected and whose root causes have never been explored critically. This requires resistance and demystification that exposes the false consciousness within the veil of late capitalism. The dialectic offered by Hardt and Negri (2000) in *Empire*, on class struggle, particularly labor in late capitalism, is the multitude as a form of liberation. How multitude mechanism can contribute in the effort to break free from the territorialization of power is explained in the following excerpt:

The struggles that preceded and prefigured globalization were expressions of the force of living labor, which sought to liberate itself from the rigid territorializing regimes imposed on it.....With the force of living labor, its restless activity, and its deterritorialising desire, this process of rupture throws open all the windows of history. When one adopts the perspective of the activity of the multitude, it's production of subjectivity and desire, one can recognize how globalization, in so far as it operates a real deterritorialization of the previous structures of exploitation and control, is really a condition of the liberation of the multitude? (Hardt and Negri, 2000:52).

When liberation is historically a narrative of materialism, globalization exerts pressure until the nature of sovereignty emerges from the relentless movement that desires transformation from modern to post-modern and beyond. There is an emerging force that seeks to break free and form a multitude. It resists structures that are full of control and exploitation leading to reification. In the

analogy of *the mole and the snake*, Hardt and Negri (2000) explain how the proletariat today is not the same as it used to be. The mole, or the underground rat, represents the proletariat of the past, fighting slowly, quietly, and cautiously “underground” to plan the Revolution as the ultimate goal. The underground rat always moved under the party and tended to follow Marxism as a class struggle. Today's proletariat movements should be more like a snake: slippery, unpredictable in its attacks, but widespread in its resistance. This is what is referred to as decentralization, where the network is transnational and uses digital platforms as a vehicle for solidarity struggles, such as the resistance campaign carried out by campus labor unions in Indonesia to save the reification of higher education lecturers. A number of *KOLs* (Key Opinion Leaders) have also spoken out in promoting the trend of higher education, mothers who question the evaluation of the curriculum, and tweets on social media that voice the pressure of publication demands that are calculated in such a way as to symbolize the performance of lecturers. These are acts of resistance that expose the practice of reification of the intellectual proletariat utilizing diversified channel, including where attention economy is being distributed, the internet.

In Althusser's logic, reification is a symptom of alienation, which, in Mandel and Novack's reading of Marx, is also a symptom of labor in the wage scheme. ...When alienation involves schematic work and mechanistic work activities that make humans surrender their lives to ensure material fulfillment (Mandel & Novack, 2010:57). This triggers various individuals to see their peers through the lens of whatever economic relationship they have with others (Bell Jr, 2014). The true multitude can be fought for, and is capable of overthrowing exploitative domination or oppression, with precise calculations and composition, without needing to be driven by individuals of the same social stratum as long as this community has the same interests.

The Campus Workers Union (*Serikat Pekerja Kampus*) was formed and became more actively involved in reification matters with the gatherings of lecturers from various campuses (*Figure 5.*). These workers are fighting the economic front (academic labor welfare) to restore the dignity of higher education lecturers whose rights had been neglected. They entered a number of lines and social media platforms, news portals, starting from their official websites, echoing what was really happening and clarifying the rights and obligations of higher education teachers who had been reified (Putri & Arjanto, tempo.co, 2024).



Figure 5. Serikat Pekerja Kampus (The Campus Workers Union) actively campaigning as a form of multitude resistance of lecturers reification.

A paradoxical idea emerges in this politically urgent situation, in today's attention economy, some struggles are unable to communicate their actual demands due to the ambiguity surrounding on who is truly behind the new power. We must first recognize that what we lack, such as reach, duration, or communication capabilities, will only allow those in power to intensify their strength. As was the case with the demonstrations over lecturer performance allowances in Jakarta and other cities, which were also organized in a structured mechanism through social media, the pressure and duration were not significant enough. In February 2025, around 300 lecturers from Aceh to Papua, provinces of Indonesia who are members of the *Alliance of Science and Technology Lecturers throughout Indonesia* (ADAKSI), also staged a demonstration. The demonstration protested against performance allowances that had not been paid since early February 2025. The government seemed to be stalling, as this was not the first protest; previously, there had been demonstrations involving the sending of funeral's flower bouquets to symbolically express disappointment. ADAKSI put forward three demands. First, the government was asked to immediately issue a presidential regulation governing civil servant's lecturer performance allowances. Second, the government was asked to ensure that the budget allocation for civil servant's lecturer performance allowances was immediately included in the 2025 State Budget. Third, the government is asked to provide a definite schedule for the realization of civil servant's lecturer allowances. Demonstrations by lecturers, especially the civil servants, are actually uncommon. It is rare to see civil servant lecturers staging demonstrations, let alone demonstrations performed directly in front of the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education office and inside the UGM campus (Gatra, Kompas.com, 2025). These were how the force of Multitude acts in an unsuspecting mechanism that leads coercive measures towards the target. The demands were ultimately successful, as in March 2025, the regulations and management of performance allowances within the Ministry

of Research, Technology, and Higher Education were officially signed into law through Presidential Regulation No.19 (Harianjogja.com, 2025).

Conclusion

The presence of attention economy in late capitalism, as concluded in this article, is a manifestation of neoliberalism that is inevitable. Its implication is the abandonment of certain cultures, in this case is intellectual proletarian reification and undervalued formality of higher education. The difficulty of finding employment opportunities that require a bachelor's degree is slowly diminishing the hopes of the younger generation in particular. In the narrative of advanced capitalism, there is no shared awareness of the situation, especially in the context of education, where each generation, based on their experiences, makes decisions based on different perceptions. As a consequence of the use of the attention economy to gain political power and profit, the enthusiasm for higher education in the form of traditional lectures is fading. Reflective from Marxist thought, there is criticism of the internet from the perspective of workers, which should also inherently see it as more than just a new form of labor but also a form of power apparatus that can reproduce a new social order (Bueno, 2017: 54), reminding us of social hegemony.

An analysis can be drawn from this phenomenon of commodification, namely that when reification gives rise to alienation among public university lecturers, it is not impossible that a crisis in the sustainability of campus activities will occur, following a shortage of teaching staff as an effect that further adds to the polemic. The lure or illusion played out in the attention economy is exchanged as part of a narrative that changes society, causing it to fall into a life of emotional shallowness, a characteristic of capitalism that no longer feels the need to value formal education. Everything is compensated with the synthetic frills and thrills of instant conveniences displayed in virtual centers. The internet

is where transnational forces of neoliberalism combine to play out a single market logic. Dave Hill in an interview with *Critical Education* explains:

Neoliberalism (which is simply the current phase of capitalism, one typified by intensified class war from above) wants to produce and reproduce this labor power - workers - at less and less cost to capital, by cuts in public spending, and where possible, transferring the costs of education (such as university education) from the state to the “consumer,” the student.And because the capitalist class controls the media, or almost all the media, the television, the newspapers, because it controls much of what goes on in universities and schools, then what Louis Althusser called the *ideological state apparatuses* are at work on behalf of that neoliberal, that cruel, that brutal ideology which is in essence anti-humanist and anti-education (Marmol, Hill, Maisuria et al, 2015).

If the wheels of the economy in this neoliberalism phase are not criticized immediately and reformed, the market will claim many victims in terms of well-being of many generations and particularly, the proletariat in the future. Not only individuals who do not have the opportunity to be educated, but even highly educated intellectual workers are at risk of being stripped of the true meaning of education due to unequal demands and wages. When lecturers are treated as service providers, students as customers, and knowledge as a product, it won't be long before the capitalist mentality enters academia in a dangerous stage of alienation and increasingly greedy accumulation of profits, driven by the labor of intellectual workers who are being exploited.

Further on, to understand that we are not mere machines on an assembly line, nor projecting the world as an object of private exploitations, Marxism in phenomenological experience describe how humans are often forgotten:

We are interpolated by the capitalist system and in the process we realize the forms of exploitation while, but at the same time social relations and even our own conceptions

of ourselves become more thing-like. Thus, reification can best be comprehended as forgetting what precipitates from our participation in the system (Bell,2014).

When taken for granted, we would be drifting on the *depthlessness* of cultural degradation in valuation of higher education and fall into the risk of the abyss of false consciousness.

In reminding the world of the objectification in this mode of consciousness, resistance in a form of multitude is a progressive way out, moving along the same path: the internet, which is currently the preferred option. In its massive power, resistance can come not through revolution, but through adaptive subversive forms from various directions, like a snake, with deeper demands for a more humane reform of the higher education system. Demands such as rejecting hyper-productivity in working hours, creating collective workspaces that prioritize caring for one another beyond competition including rankings in publications, the pursuit of certification, and others are being requested sporadically. Late capitalism unconsciously quantifies time to the point of neglecting the importance of depth of thought and critical reasoning in academia. Resistance with intensity has the ultimate goal of reclaiming autonomy against social hegemony over time, welfare over reification, and true freedom today, in order to rebuild public trust and confidence in higher education institutions and the meaning of the true intellectual strive.

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