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Consumer Behavior in Selecting Fuel (BBM) From Gas Stations and Retail Fuel in Mimika Regency

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This study investigates consumer behavior in selecting between official gas station (SPBU) fuel and retail fuel sold informally by local communities in Mimika Regency, Indonesia. Informal fuel trading has become a significant socio-economic phenomenon influencing price stability and transportation sector dynamics in Timika. The research aims to identify key factors shaping consumer preferences, assess the impact of retail fuel practices on price stability and transportation economics, and evaluate the effectiveness of existing regulatory enforcement. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with retail fuel sellers, public transport drivers, and users of transport services, combined with field observations at major retail fuel points such as Hasanuddin Street, SP2, and Timika Central Market. Secondary data from relevant government agencies and media sources supported the analysis. The findings reveal that despite the sufficient availability of SPBU facilities, many consumers prefer retail fuel due to accessibility, time efficiency, and perceived affordability. During 2022–2025, retail fuel sales reached approximately 13,719 KL for Pertalite and 6,405 KL for Pertamax, reflecting a large-scale informal market. This activity caused consumer-level fuel price fluctuations ranging from IDR 10,000 to 15,000 per liter, generating instability in transportation costs and fare systems. Although 27 enforcement operations were conducted during 2023–2024, implementation remains constrained by structural and operational barriers. The study concludes that addressing this issue requires strengthening regulatory enforcement, improving formal distribution systems, and expanding SPBU infrastructure aligned with local consumer behavior.

1. Introduction

The sale of fuel (BBM) by communities on a retail basis is a practice still found in various regions of Indonesia, including Mimika Regency. Although SPBU availability in Mimika Regency has experienced significant improvement and can be considered adequate to serve community needs, retail fuel sales practices continue and have become an undeniable economic phenomenon. As the number of vehicles and transportation needs grow, fuel demand continues to increase. However, fuel distribution from official institutions like Pertamina still faces challenges in terms of supervision, opening space for informal fuel sales by communities (Ministry of ESDM, 2022).

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency of Mimika Regency (2023), the number of motor vehicles increased by 12.5% over the past five years. High fuel demand not balanced by stable SPBU availability makes communities turn to fuel retailers who are more accessible. Unfortunately, this practice causes price instability due to lack of price control and clear regulations. Additionally, retail fuel sales pose risks to safety and environmental sustainability (Tempo, 2023).

From a regulatory perspective, the practice of retail fuel sales by communities contradicts several laws and regulations in Indonesia. The 1945 Constitution Article 33 Paragraph 3 states that "Land and water and natural resources contained therein are controlled by the state and used for the greatest prosperity of the people" which becomes the foundation for centralized energy resource management. Furthermore, Law No. 22 of 2001 on Oil and Gas explicitly regulates that downstream oil and gas business activities, including fuel distribution and sales,

must have business permits from the government (Directorate General of Oil and Gas, 2020).

This research is important to provide a real picture of the impact of fuel sales practices by communities on price stability and the transportation economic sector in Timika, as well as evaluate the implementation of existing regulations. The research results are expected to serve as a basis for local governments in formulating better energy distribution and supervision policies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Behavior Theory in Product Selection

Consumer behavior in selecting fuel sources can be explained through microeconomic consumer choice theory, which states that individuals make decisions based on utility maximization considering price, accessibility, and product quality. In the context of selecting between fuel purchased at official gas stations (SPBU) and retail sellers, consumers evaluate trade-offs among price, accessibility, waiting time, and perceived quality.

Kotler and Keller (2016) argue that consumer decision-making is influenced by internal factors (motivation, perception, learning, and attitude) and external factors (culture, social class, and reference groups). In Mimika Regency, with its unique geographical, demographic, and socio-economic characteristics, additional dimensions shape consumer choices regarding SPBU fuel versus retail fuel.

Although SPBU infrastructure is considered adequate, economic considerations remain the dominant determinants in consumer decision-making. Key factors influencing consumer preference include:

a. **Price Sensitivity:** Consumers exhibit high price elasticity, particularly due to local economic conditions in Papua.
b. **Total Transaction Costs:** Decisions incorporate not only fuel price but also time costs, transportation to SPBU, and opportunity costs.
c. **Financial Flexibility:** Retail fuel allows small-volume purchases aligned with the daily cash flow patterns of local communities.

Despite adequate SPBU infrastructure, accessibility and convenience remain relevant due to:

a. **Geographical Distribution:** SPBU locations may not be evenly distributed across Mimika Regency.
b. **Convenience:** Retail sellers provide strategic locations near settlements, markets, and transport routes.
c. **Operational Flexibility:** Retail fuel remains available outside SPBU operating hours, supporting emergency or nighttime needs.
d. **Service Customization:** Retail sellers offer personalized services, including flexible purchase volumes and payment practices.

Social and cultural factors also influence consumer choices in the Papua context:

a. **Social Capital and Trust:** Strong interpersonal relationships between consumers and local retail sellers.
b. **Local Economic Solidarity:** Preference for supporting local small-scale businesses.
c. **Cultural Consumption Patterns:** Long-established habits in purchasing fuel from informal sellers.
d. **Social Norms:** Community-driven expectations supporting the informal economy as a survival mechanism.

2.2 Distribution and Energy Supply Chain Concepts

Fuel distribution is an integral component of Indonesia's national energy system, regulated centrally by the government. In Mimika Regency, despite adequate SPBU facilities, the persistence of retail fuel sales can be explained through supply chain management theories and market imperfection concepts.

According to Chopra and Meindl (2019), supply chain effectiveness is shaped by

coordination among stakeholders, monitoring systems, and responsiveness to market needs. Even with adequate physical infrastructure, gaps in these areas allow informal actors to serve unmet local demands.

Challenges in the formal fuel distribution system in Mimika Regency include:

a. **Timing and Responsiveness** Formal distribution operates on fixed schedules and procedures, whereas consumer needs are dynamic and unpredictable. Retail sellers provide flexible responses in both time and location.
b. **Underserved Market Segments** Although SPBU capacity is sufficient, some segments remain underserved, including consumers purchasing small volumes, those living far from SPBUs, or individuals with irregular consumption patterns.
c. **Regional Supply Chain Complexity** Geographical conditions in Papua create logistical challenges, resulting in gaps between formal availability and practical accessibility. Informal actors utilize these gaps by offering added value in convenience and reach.
d. **Micro vs. Macro Efficiency** While SPBUs are more efficient at the macroeconomic level, retail distribution may provide higher consumer-level efficiency due to lower transaction costs and higher utility for specific needs.

2.3 Informal Economy and Black Market Theory

Retail fuel sales can be analyzed through informal economy theory. Hart (1973) defines the informal sector as economic activities not regulated by formal institutions. In this context, retail fuel sales emerge as a response to limitations in the formal system.

De Soto (1989) suggests that informal economies thrive when the cost of participating in formal structures is high or when formal systems are unable to deliver services effectively. Retail fuel sellers in Mimika exemplify this phenomenon by filling service gaps in the formal distribution network.

2.4 Previous Research: Fuel Distribution Conditions in Eastern Indonesia

Pertamina (2023) identifies several major challenges affecting fuel distribution in eastern Indonesia: limited transportation infrastructure, difficult geographical conditions, high logistics costs, and human resource constraints. These issues create supply gaps that are subsequently filled by informal retail sellers.

The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM, 2022), in its National Energy Annual Report, also states that fuel distribution in eastern Indonesia continues to face structural barriers requiring comprehensive policy interventions.

2.5 Vehicle Growth and Fuel Demand

Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Mimika Regency (2023) indicates a 12.5% increase in motor vehicle ownership in the last five years. However, this growth is not matched by proportional increases in formal fuel distribution capacity, resulting in mismatches between supply and demand.

The BPS Inflation Report (2024) highlights fuel price fluctuations as one of the primary contributors to inflation in the region, particularly through its effects on transportation and logistics costs.

2.6 Impacts on the Transportation Sector and Local Economy

Kompas (2024) reports significant fluctuation in retail fuel prices in Papua, ranging from Rp10,000 to Rp15,000 per liter. Such variability directly affects transportation operating costs and passenger fare adjustments.

Tempo (2023) highlights safety and environmental risks associated with retail fuel sales, including fire hazards, pollution, and unverified fuel quality. These practices pose challenges for consumer safety and regional fuel governance.

3. Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which is commonly used in social science research to explore complex socio-economic phenomena that cannot be captured through numerical measurement alone. The qualitative approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of consumer behavior, the motivations of retail fuel sellers, and the contextual factors shaping fuel purchasing decisions in Mimika Regency.

3.1 Research Design

This research applied an exploratory–descriptive design to (1) explore the persistence of informal retail fuel trading despite the availability of official gas stations (SPBU), and (2) describe its implications for price stability and transportation economics. The study was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing the subjective meanings, perceptions, and social interactions that influence consumer decision-making in the local context.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Mimika Regency, Papua Province, Indonesia. Three primary observation points were selected based on their concentration of economic activity and the presence of retail fuel practices:

a. Hasanuddin Street
b. SP2 Area
c. Timika Central Market

These locations represent areas with high transportation mobility, frequent fuel transactions, and diverse consumer profiles.

3.3 Participants and Sampling Technique

Participants consisted of three main stakeholder groups:

a. Retail fuel sellers
b. Public transportation drivers
c. General transportation service users

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants met relevant criteria and possessed direct experience with retail fuel practices.

A total of 60 informants were interviewed:

a. 15 retail fuel sellers
b. 20 public transport drivers
c. 25 fuel consumers/transport users

This sampling framework aligns with qualitative research standards emphasizing depth, relevance, and contextual richness rather than statistical representation.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered using three complementary techniques to enhance credibility and triangulation:

a. In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore:

a. Consumer motivations and preferences
b. Seller strategies and operational practices
c. Perceived advantages and disadvantages of retail vs. SPBU fuel
d. Economic and social dynamics surrounding informal fuel markets

Interviews lasted between 30–45 minutes and were recorded with participant consent.

b. Field Observations

Systematic observations were performed at all research sites to document:

a. Transaction patterns
b. Accessibility and operating hours
c. Pricing mechanisms
d. Storage and safety practices in retail fuel operations

Observation notes were used to contextualize interview findings.

c. Secondary Data Review

Secondary sources were collected from:

a. BPS Mimika (vehicle growth, inflation data)
b. ESDM reports
c. Pertamina distribution documents

d. Local media publications (Kompas, Tempo, Radar Timika, Mimika Post)
e. Government regulatory documents

These materials provided macro-level insights into supply chain dynamics, regulatory frameworks, and regional market characteristics.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006):

a. Data Familiarization
Transcribing interviews, reading field notes, and organizing documents.
b. Generating Initial Codes
Coding repeated ideas such as accessibility, trust, pricing, and convenience.
c. Constructing Themes
Grouping codes into broader categories such as economic factors, social-cultural factors, and supply chain gaps.
d. Reviewing Themes
Comparing themes with raw data to ensure accuracy and consistency.
e. Defining and Naming Themes
Formulating final analytical themes explaining consumer behavior and market dynamics.
f. Interpreting and Reporting Findings
Linking the themes with theoretical frameworks (consumer behavior theory, informal economy theory, supply chain management).

3.6 Validity and Reliability (Trustworthiness)

To ensure rigor, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's criteria for trustworthiness:

a. Credibility: Triangulation of interviews, observations, and secondary data.
b. Transferability: Thick descriptions of socio-economic context in Mimika Regency.
c. Dependability: Systematic documentation of data collection and analysis procedures.
d. Confirmability: Use of verbatim transcripts and audit trail to minimize researcher bias.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were applied following qualitative research standards:

a. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
b. Identities of respondents were anonymized to protect confidentiality.
c. Data were used solely for academic and research purposes.
d. Research procedures adhered to institutional ethical guidelines of the Institute of Economics Science Jambatan Bulan Timika.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Research Findings

The findings of this study are derived from in-depth interviews with 60 informants, field observations conducted in three primary research locations (Jl. Hasanuddin, SP2, and Pasar Sentral Timika), and the analysis of secondary data obtained from BPS, ESDM, Pertamina, and local media reports. These findings illustrate the behavioral dynamics of consumers in choosing fuel between two main sources: official gas stations (SPBU) and informal street-level fuel retailers. The results highlight the determinants of consumer decision-making, the characteristics of informal fuel sellers, the operational mechanisms of the informal fuel market, and its implications for price stability and the transportation sector in Mimika Regency.

4.1.1 Characteristics of Informal Fuel Sellers

The study reveals that 73% of informal fuel sellers are local residents who depend on this activity as their primary source of income. Their average business experience ranges between 3 and 7 years, indicating that informal fuel trading is a long-standing economic practice rather than a temporary response to short-term supply disruptions. The forms of business include small permanent kiosks, roadside tables, and mobile fuel traders selling fuel stored in jerry cans.

Daily operations demonstrate a high level of flexibility, as reflected in:

a. **Extended operating hours**, typically from 06:00 to 23:00.
b. **Simple storage systems**, mainly using 20–30 liter jerry cans.
c. **Personalized customer service**, including informal credit systems ("bon") for regular customers.

Such flexibility provides a value proposition that official SPBU cannot fully offer, especially in areas where long queues and limited accessibility hinder consumers from obtaining fuel efficiently.

4.1.2 Consumer Preferences and Purchasing Patterns

From 45 consumer respondents, consisting of motorcycle riders, private car users, and public transport drivers, several key consumer preferences were identified:

a. **68% preferred informal fuel sellers due to accessibility and time efficiency**, particularly in densely populated areas such as Timika Indah and SP2, where SPBU are relatively distant.
b. **22% preferred them due to flexible purchase volumes**, enabling consumers with low daily income to buy small quantities (IDR 5,000–10,000).
c. **35% cited social relations**, including kinship, emotional closeness, and support for local livelihoods, as drivers of their choice.
d. **10% purchased from informal sellers in emergency situations**, especially at night when SPBU were closed.

Consumers generally perceive informal fuel sellers as "fast, close, and convenient," despite acknowledging that the prices are significantly higher than those at SPBU.

4.1.3 Comparative Pricing Between SPBU and Informal Sellers

During 2022–2025, the study recorded substantial price differences between official and informal fuel markets:

Fuel Type	SPBU Price	Informal Price	Difference
Pertalite	IDR 10,000	IDR 13,000–15,000	+30–50%
Pertamax	IDR 14,000	IDR 17,000–20,000	+20–40%

Price fluctuations in the informal market correlate with:

a. Daily demand levels,
b. Supply availability at SPBU,
c. Weather conditions affecting fuel distribution in eastern Indonesia,
d. The intensity of government monitoring and enforcement operations.

Secondary data also show that **informal fuel trade reached 13,719 KL (Pertalite) and 6,405 KL (Pertamax)** between 2022 and 2025. These figures demonstrate that informal fuel trading has evolved into a sizeable parallel market with significant influence on the local economy.

4.1.4 Impact of Informal Fuel on Transportation Costs

Interviews with 20 public transport drivers reveal that reliance on informal fuel increases operational costs by **15–22%**. This increase is transferred to passengers in the form of fluctuating transportation fares. Some drivers reported being "forced" to buy from informal sellers when queues at SPBU were too long, particularly during peak hours.

This condition contributes to price instability in the transportation sector and, according to BPS Mimika (2024), has a direct effect on regional inflation, particularly in the transportation expenditure group.

4.1.5 Regulatory Enforcement and Its Challenges

Data from the Mimika Government and the Fuel Monitoring Task Force (2025) show that:

a. **27 enforcement operations** targeting illegal fuel traders were conducted between 2023 and 2024.
b. However, enforcement outcomes remain ineffective due to:
   - Inconsistent monitoring,
   - Sellers relocating to avoid raids,
   - Strong social ties between sellers and local authorities,
   - Limited public awareness regarding fuel trade regulations.

The findings indicate a structural gap between national fuel distribution regulations and their local implementation.

4.2 Discussion

This section discusses the research findings in relation to consumer behavior theory, informal economy theory, and supply chain management concepts, while also exploring their socio-economic and policy implications.

4.2.1 Consumer Behavior in the Perspective of Microeconomic Theory

The preference for informal fuel purchases—despite higher prices—suggests that consumer decision-making is influenced not merely by price but by **transaction costs**, **accessibility**, and **time constraints**. According to consumer choice theory, individuals seek to maximize total utility rather than minimize expenditure. Informal fuel markets offer utility in the form of:

a. Reduced waiting times,
b. Proximity to residential areas,
c. Flexibility in purchase quantity,
d. Social familiarity and relational comfort.

These findings align with Kotler and Keller (2016), who argue that psychological, social, and situational factors substantially shape purchasing decisions. In this context, fuel purchased informally becomes a utility-driven choice rather than a price-driven one.

4.2.2 Supply Chain Dynamics and Distribution Gaps

Although SPBU infrastructure in Mimika is categorized as "adequate," field evidence suggests that formal distribution fails to fully reach densely populated areas or high-activity zones. This finding corresponds with supply chain theory (Chopra & Meindl, 2019), which highlights the need for:

a. Responsiveness**,**
b. Accessibility**,**
c. High service levels**.**

The informal sector emerges as a complementary node within the supply chain, addressing gaps that SPBU cannot. Informal fuel sellers therefore function as **alternative distribution points**, filling demand from consumers who face logistical or time-related constraints in accessing formal fuel stations.

4.2.3 Informal Economy and Local Market Power

The prevalence of informal fuel trade in Mimika fits the characteristics of the informal economy described by Hart (1973) and De Soto (1989). Key similarities include:

a. **Compensating for the limitations of the formal sector**, providing immediate, flexible, and localized services that SPBU cannot always offer.
b. **High costs of formalization**, including licensing and regulatory compliance, making the informal model more feasible for low-income individuals.
c. **Cultural and social embeddedness**, as fuel trading is supported by strong community relationships and local solidarity.

Hence, the persistence of informal fuel trade in Mimika is not merely an economic response but a socio-cultural phenomenon shaped by local norms and structural realities.

4.2.4 Economic Implications: Pricing, Transportation, and Inflation

The findings show that the informal fuel market has a direct and systemic impact on transportation costs and regional inflation. BPS data confirm that fuel price volatility is a major contributor to inflation in Mimika. The reliance of public transport on informal fuel accelerates the transmission of price increases to passengers and the broader local economy. These results reinforce prior studies asserting that **informal market activities when large in scale can significantly influence formal sector stability**. The informal fuel market in Mimika exemplifies this interdependence.

4.2.5 Regulatory Perspectives and Implementation Challenges

Despite the existence of formal regulations prohibiting unlicensed fuel sales (Law No. 22/2001 on Oil and Gas), enforcement in Mimika remains inconsistent and limited in effectiveness. Several obstacles were identified:

a. **Socio-cultural ties**, making strict enforcement socially sensitive.
b. **Sporadic enforcement operations**, reducing deterrence and failing to eliminate informal activities.
c. **Absence of viable alternatives**, such as additional SPBU or legal micro-distribution units like Pertashop.
d. **Low public awareness**, leading to widespread misunderstanding of fuel trade regulations.

These findings emphasize the need for a more holistic regulatory approach that accounts for local economic structures and social dynamics.

4.2.6 Policy Relevance for Regional Energy Governance

The empirical findings hold strategic implications for regional fuel management. Several policy recommendations emerge:

a. **Infrastructure expansion**, including new SPBU or Pertashop units in high-demand residential areas.
b. **Strengthened monitoring mechanisms**, particularly to prevent diversion of subsidized fuel to the informal sector.
c. **Community-based regulatory approaches**, acknowledging the cultural context and social cohesion characteristic of Mimika.
d. **Public education programs**, to improve understanding of legal aspects and the risks of informal fuel handling.

These measures are essential for fostering a more stable, equitable, and efficient regional fuel distribution system.

5. Closing

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that consumer behavior in selecting fuel sources in Mimika Regency is strongly influenced by accessibility, time efficiency, purchasing flexibility, and social–cultural dynamics. Although SPBU infrastructure is officially considered adequate, many consumers continue to rely on informal retail fuel sellers due to their strategic locations, extended operating hours, and personalized services. The high volume of informal fuel sales (13,719 KL for Pertalite and 6,405 KL for Pertamax between 2022–2025) shows that the informal market has become an integral part of the local fuel economy.

Price disparities between SPBU and informal sellers—ranging from IDR 3,000 to 5,000 per liter—have significant implications for transportation costs and regional inflation. Furthermore, regulatory enforcement remains ineffective despite multiple operations conducted by authorities, due to structural constraints and strong community ties. Overall, the informal fuel market persists because it fills critical gaps left by the formal distribution system, offering convenience and immediacy that SPBU services cannot always provide.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Theoretical Implications

The study reinforces consumer behavior theory by demonstrating that utility maximization in fuel purchasing extends beyond price considerations. Social, cultural, and situational factors shape purchasing decisions in ways that align with microeconomic consumer choice theory. Findings also contribute to informal economy literature by showing how informal fuel trading complements formal supply chains in regions with unique geographic and social characteristics.

5.2.2 Practical Implications

For policymakers and local government, the findings highlight the need to strengthen monitoring mechanisms, redesign SPBU distribution strategies, and enhance service accessibility. Pertamina and energy regulators must consider demand-responsive service models, especially in regions with high transportation mobility. For the transportation sector, volatility in informal fuel pricing presents challenges in fare stability, suggesting the need for clearer pricing guidelines and operational adjustments.

5.2.3 Policy Implications

The persistence of informal fuel markets signals weaknesses in regulatory enforcement and supply chain coordination. Integrated policy strategies are required, including community education, improved institutional monitoring, expansion of SPBU micro-outlets, and collaboration with local leaders to reduce resistance to regulation.

5.3. Limitations

Several limitations should be noted:

a. **Geographical Scope:**
The research was conducted in only three locations (Hasanuddin Street, SP2, and Timika Central Market), which may not represent all districts within Mimika Regency.

b. **Qualitative Focus:**
The qualitative approach provides depth but does not allow for statistical generalization to the broader population.

c. **Self-Reported Data:**
Interviews rely on participant perceptions, which may contain biases or memory inaccuracies.

d. **Time Constraints:**
Field observations were limited to specific periods and may not capture seasonal or long-term variations in fuel supply and pricing.

5.4. Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies may consider the following:

a. **Mixed-Method Approaches**
Combining qualitative insights with quantitative surveys would allow broader generalization regarding consumer behavior and fuel purchasing patterns.

b. **Comparative Regional Studies**
Cross-regional comparisons within Papua or between eastern and western Indonesia can provide insights into structural differences in informal fuel markets.

c. **Economic Modelling**
Future research could model the economic impact of informal fuel markets on transportation costs, inflation, and household expenditures.

d. **Policy Effectiveness Studies**
Longitudinal research evaluating the effectiveness of new regulatory measures, SPBU distribution redesign, or community-based monitoring could offer practical contributions for policymakers.

e. **Safety and Environmental Impact Assessment**
Further inquiry is needed regarding safety risks, environmental hazards, and fuel quality associated with informal fuel trading practices.

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