

Micro-Entrepreneur in Bali Communicate Messages and Brand Values to Influence Brand Image Effectively

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the communication identity of micro-merchants in Bali and its influence on brand image. Using a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm, it examines how micro-merchants craft their communication identity in Bali's unique social and cultural environment. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, while NVivo 12 software was utilized to analyze themes and patterns. The findings reveal that micro-merchants' communication identities are deeply rooted in personal values, cultural preservation, strong customer relationships, and community engagement. Key personal values such as integrity and customer satisfaction are prioritized, alongside efforts to maintain and showcase Balinese culture in their marketing practices. Furthermore, VOSviewer software visualized thematic networks linking communication identity and brand image, offering insights into their interconnectedness. Based on the results, this study recommends enhancing customer communication, providing modern marketing training, and fostering collaborative networks to ensure business sustainability. These steps can empower micro-merchants to strengthen their brand image while maintaining cultural authenticity. Future research should focus on developing business models that integrate cultural values with sustainable marketing practices, offering a framework for micro-merchants to thrive in competitive markets while preserving Bali's rich heritage.

KEYWORDS CTI, micro entrepreneur, personal identity, values, business brands.



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INTRODUCTION

The global marketplace is increasingly competitive, with micro-entrepreneurs facing significant challenges in establishing a distinct brand identity amidst larger corporations and digital transformation (Garcia, 2021; González, 2020; Olden et al., 2021; Petry, 2020; Triolo et al., 2023). This issue is particularly acute in developing regions, where limited resources and access to advanced marketing tools hinder the ability of small businesses to communicate their values effectively. For micro-entrepreneurs, brand image is not merely a marketing tool but a critical determinant of customer loyalty and business sustainability (Hodkinson, 2019; Kayode, 2014; Marchus & Perdhani, 2022; Santara & Arviani, 2023). The struggle to convey authenticity and cultural relevance while competing in a globalized market underscores the urgency of understanding how these entrepreneurs craft their communication strategies.

In Indonesia, micro-enterprises constitute a vital segment of the economy, accounting for over 99% of all businesses and employing a significant portion of the workforce (BPS, 2024). Bali, a prominent tourist destination, hosts 5,035 micro-enterprises, highlighting the island's reliance on small-scale businesses for economic growth. However, the saturation of markets and the rise of digital platforms have intensified competition, forcing micro-entrepreneurs to innovate in their branding approaches (Parengkuan et al., 2023). Despite their economic importance, many lack the expertise to leverage communication identity—a gap that threatens their sustainability in an evolving marketplace.

A specific issue arises in how micro-entrepreneurs in Bali articulate their brand messages and values to influence consumer perceptions. Previous research has explored broader themes such as creativity and self-efficacy in *MSME* performance (Putri et al., 2024) or the communication identity of drug sellers (Hemas et al., 2019), but few studies focus on the intersection of cultural identity and brand image in Bali's micro-enterprise sector. This neglect is problematic, as *Balinese* culture is a unique selling point for these businesses, yet its integration into branding remains underexamined. Without a deeper understanding of these dynamics, micro-entrepreneurs risk losing their competitive edge.

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) provides a framework to analyze how micro-entrepreneurs construct their identities through interactions with customers, communities, and cultural values (Hemas et al., 2019). This theory emphasizes the multidimensional nature of identity, encompassing personal, relational, and communal aspects, all of which shape brand image. In Bali, where cultural preservation and tourism-driven commerce intersect, CTI offers a lens to explore how entrepreneurs balance tradition with modernity to create compelling brand narratives. Such insights are crucial for developing strategies that enhance brand visibility while maintaining cultural authenticity.

The urgency of this research lies in its potential to address gaps in both academic literature and practical business applications. While studies like Bialkova and Paske (2021) examine brand messaging in corporate settings, little attention has been paid to micro-entrepreneurs who operate with limited resources but rich cultural capital. By investigating how these entrepreneurs communicate their values, this study aims to uncover actionable strategies that can strengthen brand image and foster customer loyalty. The findings could also inform policymakers and support organizations in designing targeted training programs for micro-enterprises.

Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable marketing practices by highlighting the role of communication identity in brand building. As micro-entrepreneurs in Bali navigate globalization and digital disruption, their ability to leverage cultural values and personal narratives will determine their long-term success. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this research offers a roadmap for entrepreneurs to thrive in competitive markets while preserving the cultural *heritage* that defines their brand identity.

Table 1. Data on the 10 Provinces with the Most Microenterprises in Indonesia

No	Nama Provinsi	Jumlah Usaha Mikro
1	JAWA TIMUR	115414
2	JAWA BARAT	56736
3	JAWA TENGAH	51887
4	NUSA TENGGARA BARAT	18004
5	DKI JAKARTA	10920
6	SUMATERA UTARA	7368
7	SULAWESI TENGAH	7072
8	BANTEN	6184
9	BALI	5035
10	DI YOGYAKARTA	4736

(BPS, 2024).

Table 1 presents figures on the number of micro enterprises in Bali, reflecting the island's attractiveness as a tourist destination, which creates ample business opportunities for micro-entrepreneurs to advance their businesses. In the face of increasingly fierce competition, companies must develop a planned and integrated marketing communication strategy in order to compete and increase the reach of buyers (Parengkuan et al., 2023). Communicators act as the face or representation of a brand or entity, and through consistent and appropriate communication, they can strengthen brand image and shape consumer perception (Belch & Belch, 2011). However, until now, in-depth understanding of how micro entrepreneurs in Bali implement identity communication and its impact on brand image is still very limited. Previous related research is the Transformation of MSME Performance Improvement Through Creativity, Self-Efficacy, and Entrepreneurial Skills (Putri et al., 2024) which highlights that in the increasingly fierce business competition, businesses are required to continue to develop creativity, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial skills to improve performance and achieve success. Then from the view of CTI (Hemas et al., 2019) aims to reveal how drug sellers display their communication identity. Researchers conducted a bibliometric analysis using VosViewer to find research opportunities and state of the art.

It was found that the opportunities in this study can be developed on the themes of communication theory of identity (Hemas et al., 2019), msme (Andini et al., 2021), entrepreneur (Subagyo et al., 2020), brand image (Lestari & Ekowati, 2020), and also brand messages and values (Bialkova & Paske, 2021). The resulting opportunities reflect some of the main themes found in the analysis using VOSviewer, namely the communication identity of entrepreneurs (especially micro) in Bali in Message Delivery and Brand Values that Influence Brand Image. Moreover, the above can be influenced by communication identity through the way they communicate and market their products (Hemas et al., 2019).

This research is different from the previous ones because it views micro businesses through a self-concept approach with communication identity theory, which emphasizes how brand messages and values are influenced by the communication identity of micro entrepreneurs in Bali. This research will explore how micro merchants convey values and messages that influence their business brand image. Thus, an authentic and relevant communication identity not only differentiates MSMEs from their competitors, but also builds deeper relationships with consumers, as expressed by (Kapferer, 2012) Although the number of micro-enterprises in Bali is significant, this study remains relevant given the sector's immense potential and the existing gaps in understanding and applying communication identity among micro-entrepreneurs. The lack of previous research on this issue presents an opportunity to provide deeper insights. This study aims to explore how the communication identity of micro-entrepreneurs in Bali can serve as a foundation for building a strong brand image. By understanding the relationship between communication identity and conveyed values, effective strategies are expected to be developed to enhance brand visibility and appeal to consumers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a constructivist paradigm within a qualitative approach to explore how the personal identity of micro-entrepreneurs contributes to building brand value. The

communication identity of micro-entrepreneurs in Bali is shaped by their interactions with the social environment, including customers, communities, competitors, and the island’s distinctive local culture.

Qualitative methods used include in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis to examine the personal identity of micro-entrepreneurs in building brand value. These methods provide rich insights and authentic data on behaviors, interactions, and marketing practices. Data analysis focuses on identifying patterns and themes that illustrate how social and cultural contexts influence business practices and brand value.

Key informants are 30 micro-entrepreneurs in Bali from various fields, actively engaged in running micro-enterprises. Interviews were conducted both online and in person, with research questions tailored to collect relevant and detailed data. Selection criteria included a maximum annual turnover of IDR 2 billion to focus on smaller micro-enterprises, and variations in gender and ethnic backgrounds to capture diverse communication identities.

Table 2. Unit of Analysis

Unit of Analysis	Sub Analysis	Element
Micro-Entrepreneur in Bali Communicate Messages and Brand Values to Influence Brand Image Effectively	Communication Theory of Identity	1) Personal Identity 2) Enactment Identity 3) Relational Identity 4) Communal Identity
	Brand Image	1. Brand strength, 2. Brand Favorability, 3. Brand Uniqueness.

Source: data processed by writer, 2024

One increasingly popular approach to data analysis is using qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo. In the context of research on “Communication Identity of Micro-entrepreneurs in Bali in Messaging and Brand Values that Influence Brand Image,” the use of NVivo will be very useful. This software can help researchers manage data from various sources, such as in-depth interviews with micro merchants, field observations, and marketing document analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Personal Identity

Table 3. Hierarchy of Chart Personal Identity

Codes	Number of coding references	Percentage
Nodes\1. Personal Identity\Commitment	52	15%
Nodes\1. Personal Identity\Cultural Connection	20	6%
Nodes\1. Personal Identity\Cultural Preserver	93	28%
Nodes\1. Personal Identity\Differentiation	75	22%
Nodes\1. Personal Identity\Personal Value	98	29%
	338	100%

The results of data analysis with NVivo show that micro businesses in Bali prioritize personal values (29%) such as integrity and customer satisfaction. Cultural preserver is the second dominant theme (28%), followed by differentiation (22%) which reflects the

uniqueness of branding. Commitment to business and customers was recorded at 15%, while cultural connection was only 6%.

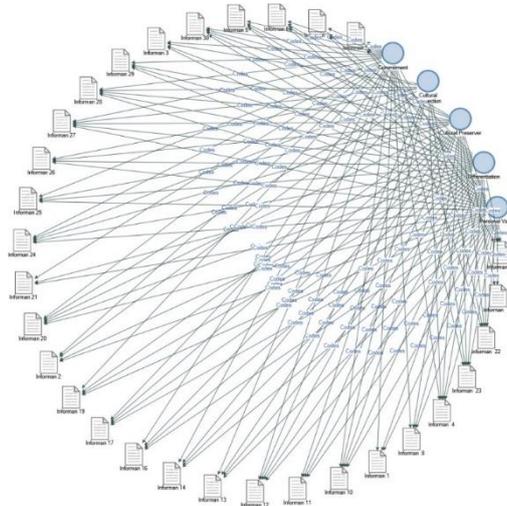


Figure 1. Project Map Personal Identity

The analysis showed that Personal Value and Cultural Preserver had the most connections, emphasizing the importance of personal values and cultural preservation in the identity of micro-entrepreneurs in Bali. Cultural Connection has the fewest connections, indicating that this theme is less dominant.



Figure 2. Word Cloud Personal Identity

Analysis using Word Cloud with NVivo revealed the dominant appearance of the word "always." This word reflects the commitment and adherence of the informants to maintaining quality, providing service, and preserving their business identity. Informant 11: *"I always maintain Balinese traditions and authentic flavors in every lawar I make."* Informant 8: *"I always ensure that our products are safe and of high quality."* Informant 19: *"I always try to give an authentic experience to every customer."*

The dominance of the word "always" illustrates the dedication and consistency of the informants in upholding product quality, service, and customer interactions. This commitment is evident in concrete actions such as selecting the best ingredients, ensuring cleanliness, and

preserving Balinese traditions. Personal values like honesty, cleanliness, and quality reflect their personal identity and influence their business practices. While Cultural Connection and Differentiation are less dominant, these elements remain important in exploring the relationship between products and culture and strategies to differentiate from competitors. The personal identity of micro-entrepreneurs in Bali is shaped through long-term dedication to their businesses, emphasizing commitment to maintaining product and service quality. They also prioritize personal values, such as honesty and integrity, which are reflected in their daily business practices. Additionally, these entrepreneurs act as cultural preservers, integrating local cultural values into their business identity, such as using traditional recipes and Balinese cultural symbols to preserve cultural heritage amidst modernization.

Despite challenges like resource limitations and modernization pressures, micro-entrepreneurs manage to differentiate themselves by combining tradition and innovation and utilizing modern marketing strategies like social media. Their Cultural Connection is also evident in efforts to maintain relationships with the community and reinforce local values in their products. By emphasizing commitment, personal values, cultural preservation, differentiation, and cultural connection, they successfully build a strong identity, creating products that serve not only as consumables but also as carriers of moral and cultural messages.

Enactment Identity

Table 4. Hierarchy of Chart Enactment Identity

Codes	Number of coding references	Percentage
Nodes\2. Enactment Identity\Digital Expression	31	13%
Nodes\2. Enactment Identity\Experience	75	32%
Nodes\2. Enactment Identity\Expressing Identity	48	20%
Nodes\2. Enactment Identity\Verbal Communication	83	35%
	237	100%

The dimension of Enactment Identity indicates that identity is expressed through various communication channels, categorized into four main subcategories. Verbal Communication is the most dominant at 35%, highlighting the importance of verbal communication in identity expression. Experience accounts for 32%, signifying the significant role of life experiences in shaping identity. Expressing Identity contributes 20%, reflecting identity expression through various forms of non-verbal communication. Digital Expression represents only 13%, indicating the limited role of digital media in identity expression. Overall, verbal communication remains the primary channel for articulating individual identity.

with customers about the production process, so they know..." Informant 19: *"Focusing on direct interaction with customers."* Informant 26: *"I always try to listen to what my customers need."* *"If they're satisfied, they usually come back."*

Through verbal communication, they build close relationships with customers, convey information directly, and share relevant stories about their products and local cultural values. An experience is created by offering friendly and responsive service, ensuring customers feel valued, and delivering a unique shopping experience. Expressing identity is evident in how they position themselves as entrepreneurs who not only sell products but also integrate local cultural values into their daily interactions with customers. These three aspects not only enhance customer loyalty but also serve as a means to strengthen their business identity. Micro-entrepreneurs in Bali manifest their identity through a combination of digital and traditional communication strategies, bolstering their presence in both local and global markets. The use of social media platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp (Digital Expression) enables them to promote their products while expressing Balinese cultural identity through visual content and storytelling. Verbal communication (Verbal Communication) remains the primary channel, with entrepreneurs frequently engaging directly with customers at various events or through private messages, fostering intimate and meaningful relationships. Through this combination, they express their identity (Expressing Identity) by integrating Balinese traditional values with modern innovations, building strong emotional connections with customers, and remaining relevant in global markets while preserving their cultural essence.

Relational Identity

Table 5. Hierarchy of Chart Relational Identity

Codes	Number of coding references	Percentage
Nodes\3. Relational Identity\Customer Relationships	126	52%
Nodes\3. Relational Identity\Family Influence	31	13%
Nodes\3. Relational Identity\Guidance	22	9%
Nodes\3. Relational Identity\Networks	63	26%
	242	100%

The Relational Identity dimension of micro-entrepreneurs in Bali is formed through several interrelated aspects. The first dimension is customer relationships, which contributes the most at 52%. This highlights that relationships with customers are the core of relational identity, where direct interaction, personal communication, and trust are highly emphasized. Micro-entrepreneurs focus on sharing stories and creating positive experiences to build strong bonds with their customers. Next, networks (26%) represent relationships with business communities, suppliers, and colleagues, which help expand market access and support business sustainability. Family influence (13%) also plays an important role, where emotional support and family contributions influence business decisions. Finally, guidance (9%) includes mentorship from family, friends, or experienced individuals who provide direction in overcoming business challenges. These dimensions collectively strengthen the relational identity of micro-entrepreneurs in Bali.

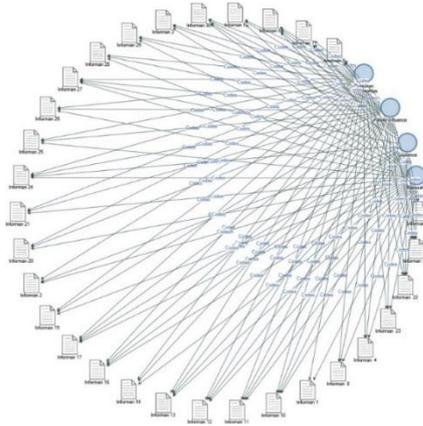


Figure 5. Project Map Relational Identity

Customer relationships as the most dominant dimension. Informants who link to more codes indicate that their experiences are rich in variations of the enactment identity dimension. Dimensions that are less linked to documents indicate more specific areas in the data, such as guidance which may only be relevant for informants who have certain mentors or experiences. From this diagram, it can be seen that the enactment identity of micro merchants is not only determined by one dimension but is the result of the interaction between customer relationships, family influence, guidance, and their social networks.



Figure 6. Word Cloud Relational Identity

One of the most dominant words that appears is "if" (Indonesian: "kalau"). The repeated occurrence of this word reflects the communication patterns of micro-entrepreneurs when interacting with their customers. The word "if" is often used to explain conditions, actions, or approaches taken to maintain customer relationships. Examples from several informants illustrate the context of this usage: Informant 15: "If the materials are natural, I tell them they're natural. If there are minor flaws because it's handmade, I let them know." Informant 14: "If it's good, people will definitely come back." Informant 6: "If someone asks for a revision, I fix it right away." Informant 11: "If customers trust me, they'll definitely return." Informant 19: "If guests are satisfied, they'll tell others."

The use of "if" reflects how micro-entrepreneurs in Bali build transparent, responsive, and adaptive relationships with their customers. This word signifies efforts to understand

customer needs and strengthen mutual trust. For example, "If they ask about materials or products, I always try to be open," highlights a commitment to transparency that enhances customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Additionally, the word "if" also demonstrates the entrepreneurs' flexibility in leveraging their social and professional networks. For instance, "If someone needs something, I can help through a friend who has the stock," shows how they utilize relationships to support their business. This word also illustrates the role of family in their ventures, such as "If I'm busy, my family helps with packing products," emphasizing the operational, moral, and creative support families provide in running the business. The relational identity of micro-entrepreneurs in Bali is heavily influenced by strong connections with family, friends, and the local community, which mutually support business sustainability. Family plays a crucial role in providing operational support, creative ideas, and flexibility in overcoming market challenges, serving as a foundational pillar for the sustainability of micro-businesses. Furthermore, support from friends and the local community strengthens relational identity through word-of-mouth promotion and broader customer networks, fostering trust-based relationships that significantly benefit micro-entrepreneurs.

The local community network also makes a significant contribution through participation in various cultural activities, such as festivals and traditional markets, which enable micro-entrepreneurs to showcase their products and expand their networks. Involvement in these activities helps entrepreneurs maintain their cultural identity while remaining competitive in the market. Additionally, close relationships with customers are built through personal and trust-based communication, both directly and via digital platforms, which enhances customer loyalty and supports long-term business growth. Through networks of family, friends, and community, micro-entrepreneurs in Bali have successfully built a relational identity that strengthens social and cultural ties while creating a sustainable business ecosystem.

Communal Identity

Table 6. Hierarchy of Chart Communal Identity

Codes	Number of coding references	Percentage
Nodes\4. Communal Identity\Challenging	6	3%
Nodes\4. Communal Identity\Contribution	47	25%
Nodes\4. Communal Identity\Representation	67	36%
Nodes\4. Communal Identity\Values	66	35%
	186	100%

Representation highlights how communities project their identity internally and externally through symbols, attributes, or other means to strengthen their presence and gain recognition. Shared values contribute the most (35%) to shaping this identity, followed by member contributions (25%), while challenges play a minor role (3%), indicating they are rarely addressed. These elements challenges, contributions, representation, and values interconnect to form a comprehensive view of communal identity. Large nodes for categories like contributions and challenges show a focus on how identity is built and maintained through

balance between tradition and modernity, creating a strong collective identity that allows Balinese society to adapt while preserving their cultural roots.

The relational identity of Balinese micro-entrepreneurs is deeply influenced by local cultural values, community contributions, and adaptability to modern challenges. The *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy, emphasizing harmony between humans, nature, and God, serves as a guiding principle in maintaining social relationships and preserving traditions. Micro-entrepreneurs integrate these values into their business practices, balancing traditional principles with the demands of contemporary entrepreneurship. Their contributions are evident in sectors like ecotourism, where they combine local wisdom with modern strategies such as green marketing and digital branding. This not only appeals to sustainability-conscious tourists but also strengthens social ties within local communities.

Furthermore, micro-entrepreneurs successfully represent cultural values through their products and services, using cultural authenticity as their main selling point. Initiatives like transforming traditional markets and developing tourist villages demonstrate how they blend local traditions with modern marketing tools. These efforts ensure the preservation of Balinese culture while supporting local economic sustainability. Despite economic and social challenges, micro-entrepreneurs adapt without losing their cultural roots, solidifying their position in a competitive tourism industry. Through contributions, representation, cultural values, and resilience in facing challenges, they maintain a strong relational identity while preserving the uniqueness of Balinese culture in a globalized world.

Brand Image

Brand image analysis of micro-entrepreneurs in Bali reveals how they leverage unique products and services to build strong, appealing, and distinctive brands in a highly competitive market. Their brand strength lies in the integration of Balinese traditional values with modern approaches, creating products that reflect sustainability and local culture. For instance, products like sediment-free *arak* and natural-material *canang sari* embody local traditions, while innovations like Korean cakes and hand-painted clay mugs showcase creativity and personalization. Sustainability and high quality are key pillars, with fresh ingredients sourced from local farmers and hygienic production processes enhancing consumer trust in their brands as honest and reliable businesses.

Brand appeal grows through emotional branding, fostering strong emotional connections between entrepreneurs and their customers. Balinese micro-entrepreneurs achieve this by sharing meaningful stories, such as the philosophy behind *canang sari* or the authenticity of Balinese *kebaya*. These narratives add depth to the shopping experience, introduce consumers to local culture, and strengthen their affinity and loyalty to the brand. Brands that emphasize values like sustainability, honesty, and local tradition successfully build customer loyalty, reinforced through experiences that reflect these values.

Brand uniqueness is a crucial factor in distinguishing these brands from competitors, establishing a strong identity, and nurturing emotional ties with consumers. Balinese micro-entrepreneurs combine local culture and traditions with modern elements to create unique value that deepens emotional connections with customers. Innovation and the use of digital technology also help them remain relevant without losing their original identity. By leveraging

personal branding that reflects values such as honesty and authenticity, they create brand images that are both genuine and relevant.

Within the framework of the Communication Theory of Identity, these entrepreneurs utilize social interaction and communication to shape a strong and authentic brand image, fostering customer loyalty and competitiveness in the market.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that micro-entrepreneurs in Bali have successfully built strong personal, relational, and communal identities through the integration of local cultural values and sustainable business practices. Their personal identity is shaped by values such as honesty, commitment to quality, and authenticity, which serve as the foundation for building an authentic and trustworthy brand image. By understanding and articulating their personal values, entrepreneurs can create deep emotional connections with customers, enhancing loyalty and trust in their products. Relational identity is reflected in close and trust-based relationships with customers, where personal communication and direct interactions create intimate and authentic customer experiences. Family and local community support play a significant role in strengthening these social relationships, supporting business sustainability, and enhancing brand image. Transparent and responsive communication is a key element in creating personalized experiences, increasing customer loyalty, and building a positive brand image. Their communal identity is shaped by shared values and contributions from community members, such as the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy, which emphasizes balance between tradition and innovation. By preserving local culture through their products and services, micro-entrepreneurs create a strong collective identity and support the sustainability of *Balinese* culture. Consistency in conveying values and brand messages rooted in their personal, relational, and communal identities results in a unique and competitive brand image, strengthening customer relationships and increasing market competitiveness. Micro-entrepreneurs in Bali are encouraged to continue improving transparent and responsive communication with customers, which can be achieved through the use of social media and other digital platforms to reach a wider audience and provide clear information about their products and values. Additionally, offering training programs on modern marketing strategies and sustainable business management is essential, including the use of digital tools, effective marketing techniques, and maintaining product quality. Encouraging micro-entrepreneurs to build collaborative networks with fellow entrepreneurs and local communities is also important, as collaboration enables sharing resources, knowledge, and experiences, strengthening communal identity and supporting business sustainability. Further research can be conducted to develop business models that integrate local cultural values with sustainable business practices, aligning with the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy that emphasizes balance between humans, nature, and God. In-depth analysis of the impact of cultural values on business practices and micro-enterprise sustainability is also necessary to provide insights into how entrepreneurs can more effectively leverage cultural values to create a competitive advantage in the global market.

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