

BUILDING A CREATIVE ECOSYSTEM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATION AND BRANDING STRATEGIES AMONG PIDIE JAYA MSMES AT THE KABI EXPO EVENT

Zulfan

Universitas Malikussaleh, Indonesia.

Correspondence Author: zulfan.sb@unimal.ac.id

Received : 15 July 2025
Revised : 30 July 2025
Accepted : 10 August 2025

Published : 20 August 2025
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.54443/irpitage.v5i2.3960>
Publish Link : <https://radjapublika.com/index.php/IRPITAGE/>

Abstract

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are a strategic pillar of the Indonesian economy, yet they often face classic challenges such as limited market access, capital, and branding capabilities. Exhibitions like the KABI EXPO in Pidie Jaya serve as a strategic intervention to address these challenges and encourage creativity-based local economic growth. This study aims to analyze the impact of collaboration and branding strategies implemented by participating MSMEs and explore the role of KABI EXPO in building a creative ecosystem in the Pidie Jaya region. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation with key informants, including presenters and committee members, as well as 11 participating MSMEs. The data analysis techniques used were descriptive and thematic analysis (Sugiyono, 2012; Sari & Agustina, 2021). The results showed that KABI EXPO successfully facilitated various forms of informal collaboration, such as cross-promotion and knowledge exchange, which directly impacted business network expansion and innovation potential. Furthermore, the exhibition served as a platform for MSMEs to test and strengthen their branding strategies, both visually (packaging and logos) and non-visually (direct interaction and social media adoption). Overall, these findings underscore that KABI EXPO serves as more than just a sales platform. It acts as a catalyst, planting the seeds of a creative ecosystem through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and brand strengthening. The event's success lies not only in its immediate sales boost but also in building a strong foundation for the sustainability and competitiveness of MSMEs in Pidie Jaya.

Keywords: *MSMEs, Creative Ecosystem, Collaboration, Branding, KABI EXPO.*

1. Introduction

Background of the problem

The role of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia is fundamental and strategic in national economic development (Ambarwati & Sobari, 2020). MSMEs' contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) continues to increase, reaching 60.51% in 2019, absorbing 97% of the total national workforce and 60.4% of total investment (Arivettullatif & Ardina, 2022). This demonstrates that MSMEs are the backbone, not only creating jobs and entrepreneurship but also serving as engines of sustainable economic growth at the local and national levels. Despite their vital role, MSMEs often face various classic challenges that hinder their growth. These challenges include limited capital, access to broader markets, and, most crucially in the digital era, low technology adoption and product marketing and branding capabilities. These challenges are increasingly complex amidst global competition, which requires businesses to possess strong digital competitiveness (Ambarwati & Sobari, 2020). To overcome these obstacles, a creative economy approach presents a solution, where MSMEs are encouraged to optimize intellectual property, creativity, and innovation as their primary assets. In the local context of Pidie Jaya Regency, MSMEs face similar challenges, particularly those in the arts and creative products sector. They have significant potential to preserve local culture and traditions, but require an adequate platform to introduce their products to a wider market. Product exhibitions such as KABI EXPO (Arts and Creative Products) are one of the most effective strategies to overcome these challenges. Exhibitions serve as multifunctional platforms that offer more than just a sales space (Lestari & Suryani, 2021). An exhibition, essentially, is a strategic intervention

designed to build a stronger business foundation for participants. KABI EXPO, in particular, provides a space for MSMEs to introduce their businesses and brand their products, build business relationships, conduct market surveys, and directly increase sales revenue. This activity also serves as a means to encourage collaboration, which is key to significantly improving MSME innovation and performance.

Research purposes

Based on the description above, this research has three main objectives:

1. Analyze the forms and impacts of collaboration between MSMEs participating in KABI EXPO, including its impact on increasing sales and expanding business networks.
2. Analyze branding strategies, both visual and digital, implemented by MSMEs during the exhibition, and evaluate their effectiveness in building brand image and attracting consumer interest.
3. Identifying the role of KABI EXPO as a catalyst in building a sustainable creative ecosystem in Pidie Regency.

2. Conceptual Framework and Research Methods

Conceptual Framework

This study uses several key concepts as a theoretical basis for analyzing existing findings. **Creative Economy and Creative Ecosystem.** The creative economy is defined as an economic concept that intensifies information and creativity, relying on ideas and knowledge from human resources as the primary production factors (Arivetullatif & Ardina, 2022; Hasanah, 2015). Creative spaces that support this concept can create a competitive and profitable environment for business actors. A creative ecosystem, on the other hand, is a holistic environment that supports innovation, production, and the exchange of ideas among various stakeholders (Mulyana, 2016; Ghani, 2020). In this context, KABI EXPO can be analyzed as a temporary creative space that aims to create interactions and an environment that supports the realization of such an ecosystem.

Strategic Collaboration Between MSMEs. Collaboration is not just about working together; it's a proven effective strategy for driving innovation in products, services, and business models (Nuratri & Sofiaty, 2024). Collaboration allows MSMEs to gain access to external resources, such as technology, knowledge, and market networks, that they might otherwise struggle to obtain internally. Studies show that long-term collaborations tend to be more successful in creating sustainable innovation due to the deeper exchange of information and experience (Nuratri & Sofiaty, 2024). **Branding and Brand Image.** Branding is the process of creating and differentiating a brand from competitors (Arifudin et al., 2021). Strong branding not only increases sales and market share but also builds consumer trust. Brand image consists of three main components: corporate image, user image, and product image (M. Masrukhan & Pratama, 2025). Visual elements such as logos and packaging play a crucial role in this process, as they serve as non-verbal communication tools that convey complex messages and enhance the product's selling value. Attractive packaging can enhance a product's added value and even serve as a marketing tool that can sell itself (Destrina et al., 2022).

Research methods

Research Approach and Design. This research employed a qualitative-descriptive approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen due to its relevance in understanding social phenomena in-depth and holistically, making it highly suitable for analyzing the processes and meanings behind community service activities. Descriptive analysis was used to factually describe the findings, while thematic analysis was used to identify patterns or themes emerging from the collected data (Sugiyono, 2012; Sari & Agustina, 2021).

Location and Time. The research was conducted in Pidie Jaya Regency, Aceh Province, coinciding with the KABI EXPO activities held on February 22-23, 2025. **Informants and Respondents.** Research data was collected from key informants and respondents who were directly involved in KABI EXPO.

- **Key Informants:** Ms. Nur Eva Hasan, Deputy Regent of Pidie Jaya; Ms. Helina Maghfirah, Chairperson of Persikindo Pidie Jaya and speaker; and Mr. Zulfan, S.Sy., Msc., speaker on Branding and Digital Marketing.
- **Respondents:** Eleven (11) MSMEs participated in the exhibition, namely: Jaga Image, Rahma Souvenir, Rumoh Jahit, Dee Blooms, Sabunjia, HM Craft, Keunebah Endatu, Lima Collection 92, Mochina, RMC Aceh Craft, and Istana Kue.

Data Collection Instruments. Data collection is done through:

- **In-depth Interview:** Conducted with key informants to gain strategic perspectives on the goals and impacts of the event, as well as with MSMEs to understand their experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits.

- **Participatory Observation:** Direct observations were made of interactions that occurred at the exhibition booth, product arrangement strategies, use of social media, and the dynamics of collaboration between participants.

Table 1: Profile of MSME Participants in KABI EXPO Pidie Jaya

No.	Name of MSME	Type of Business/Main Product	Special Notes
1.	Maintain Image	Documentation and Photography Services	Utilizing events as a means of promoting works.
2.	Rahma Souvenir	Coconut Shell Crafts	Unique creations such as traditional bags, bowls, decorative lamps, piggy banks, and key chains.
3.	Sewing House	Fashion (Clothing Design and Sewing)	Focus on modern fashion creations that adapt traditional fabrics such as batik and woven fabrics.
4.	Dee Blooms	Accessories (Handmade Bracelets)	Presenting bracelet products with a variety of beads and unique designs.
5.	Sabunjia	Cleaning Products (Soap)	Produces various types of soap (dishwashing, vehicle washing) with identified packaging and branding.
6.	HM Craft	Knitted Handicrafts	Production of knitted dolls and souvenirs in various shapes and designs.
7.	Keunebah Endatu	Food (Tamarind)	Packaging traditional tamarind products with modern and hygienic packaging.
8.	Lima Collection 92	Handicrafts (Souvenirs)	Producing various types of souvenirs and handicrafts.
9.	Mochina	Culinary (Mochi and contemporary snacks)	Focus on trending snack products.
10.	RMC Aceh Craft	Acrylic Crafts	Production of custom souvenirs and crafts made of acrylic such as award plaques.
11.	Cake Palace	Culinary (Traditional Snacks and Cakes)	Presenting products such as dodol and other traditional snacks.

Data Analysis Techniques. Data obtained from interviews and observations were analyzed using descriptive and thematic methods (Sugiyono, 2012; Sari & Agustina, 2021). The stages include: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data; (2) initial coding; (3) theme search; (4) reviewing and refining themes; and (5) defining and reporting findings (Sari & Agustina, 2021). This process allows for the identification of hidden patterns and meanings that would not be readily apparent using other methods.

3. Results and Discussion

Analysis of Collaboration Between MSMEs

Participation in KABI EXPO not only boosted direct sales but also created a strong foundation for collaboration among MSMEs. This collaboration, while largely informal and spontaneous, took several forms and had a significant impact. **Forms of Collaboration that Occur:** Observations and interviews revealed collaboration in the form of cross-promotion, knowledge exchange, and networking. For example, the Jaga Image MSME, which specializes in event documentation, not only takes photos for committee publications but also actively documents the products of other MSMEs. A similar pattern was observed between Rumoh Jahit and Dee Blooms; Dee Blooms, which provides accessories, is often recommended to complement Rumoh Jahit's fashion products.

This dynamic aligns with findings that exhibitions serve as a platform for building relationships between sellers and consumers, as well as opening up opportunities for future business collaborations (Lestari & Suryani, 2021). The interaction among attendees during the two-day event naturally facilitated the exchange of ideas and contacts, which is a crucial first step toward long-term collaboration (Nuratri & Sofiaty, 2024). **Impact of Collaboration on Performance:** Collaborations established during the exhibition demonstrated positive impacts extending beyond simply increasing sales (Nuratri & Sofiaty, 2024). These collaborations triggered what can be

BUILDING A CREATIVE ECOSYSTEM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATION AND BRANDING STRATEGIES AMONG PIDIE JAYA MSMEs AT THE KABI EXPO EVENT

Zulfan

called "non-product innovation," namely, improvements in marketing and business processes. For example, interactions between MSMEs producing physical products (food, crafts) and service MSMEs such as Jaga Image (photography) and RMC Aceh Craft (acrylic souvenirs) created a micro-ecosystem within the exhibition itself (Ghani, 2020). Product MSMEs require quality visual content and merchandise branding to strengthen their image. These needs were directly met by the attending service MSMEs, creating a mutually beneficial causal relationship. These interactions also pave the way for potential sales increases and network expansion (Nuratri & Sofiati, 2024). While difficult to quantify in the short term, interviews with participants indicated that they felt they had gained new networks that could potentially become future business partners or suppliers. This type of collaboration enhances MSME competitiveness by providing access to resources and networks that may not be available internally.

Table 2: Forms of Collaboration and Their Impact on KABI EXPO Participating MSMEs

Name of Participating MSMEs	Identified Forms of Collaboration	Impact Felt
Maintain Image	Cross promotion with other MSME products.	Portfolio enhancement and client network expansion.
Sewing House	Customer recommendations with accessories SMEs.	Increased customer confidence and ideas for product packaging.
Dee Blooms	Cross promotion with fashion MSMEs.	Market expansion to new consumer segments.
RMC Aceh Craft	Potential partnerships with other MSMEs for merchandise.	New product ideas and custom business opportunities.
Keunebah Endatu	Sharing experiences with other culinary MSMEs.	New knowledge about marketing and packaging strategies.
All Participants	Exchange of contacts and marketing information.	Networking and potential for long-term collaboration.

Export to Spreadsheet

Analysis of MSME Branding Strategy

KABI EXPO provides a platform for MSMEs to practice their branding strategies directly, which not only increases brand awareness but also the overall brand image. **Visual Branding Strategy (Logo and Packaging):** Several participating MSMEs demonstrated a strong awareness of the importance of visual branding. MSMEs like Sabunjia and Keunebah Endatu have invested in more modern and attractive packaging designs. Keunebah Endatu, for example, packaged tamarind, a traditional product, in modern packaging. This action demonstrates a shift in mindset from simply producing to building a brand. Good packaging not only protects the product but also serves as a product identity, increasing its selling value and creating a positive, immediate impression on consumers (Destrina et al., 2022). Logo design is also a crucial element. Some MSMEs already have well-designed logos, which help consumers visualize and differentiate their products from the competition. MSME owners realize that a quality product is not enough; a strong brand image is needed to differentiate themselves and instill consumer trust. **Non-Visual Branding Strategy (Interaction and Digital Marketing):** In addition to visual aspects, MSMEs also implement effective non-visual branding strategies. Direct interaction with visitors at the booth is a valuable form of brand education (Lestari & Suryani, 2021). MSMEs explain their business profiles, product manufacturing processes, and values, contributing to a positive company reputation and consumer loyalty.

The digital aspect was also a major focus. A material session delivered by Mr. Zulfan, S.Sy., Msc., on Branding and Digital Marketing provided practical knowledge to participants. This session encouraged MSMEs to optimize the use of social media, especially Instagram, which is considered superior in reaching a broad and interactive audience. The speaker emphasized that social media is an efficient tool for building brand image and facilitating direct interaction with consumers through testimonials and flexible communication. Participation in the KABI EXPO, supported by training and experience sharing, serves as a "bridge" for MSMEs to enter a broader market. Through the exhibition, they not only increase brand awareness but also build credibility, which is essential

for establishing future partnerships with e-commerce platforms and distributors. This indicates that branding at the exhibition is not just a promotional activity, but a strategic investment for long-term growth.

KABI EXPO as a Creative Ecosystem Builder

KABI EXPO successfully fulfilled its role as a catalyst in building a creative ecosystem in Pidie Jaya Regency. This event not only brought sellers and buyers together but also created an environment conducive to the exchange of ideas, innovation, and collaboration. **Meeting and Interaction Facilitator.** KABI EXPO provides a physical space where various stakeholders can connect. This unique event brings together MSMEs with key stakeholders such as the government (Deputy Regent), academics (presenters), successful entrepreneurs, and consumers. This gathering is a tangible manifestation of ecosystem development, where each element plays a role in supporting and strengthening each other. **Catalyst for the Exchange of Ideas and Innovation.** The most important part of the KABI EXPO is the material and experience-sharing sessions. The sessions, moderated by Mr. Zulfan, S.Sy., Msc., and Mr. Saryulis Terfiadi, transform the exhibition from a mere sales venue into a "learning center." Through these sessions, MSMEs acquire hard skills (such as digital marketing) and soft skills (such as the importance of collaboration) that are vital for innovation. They learn to adapt to market trends and utilize technology to increase competitiveness, in line with the needs of the digital era (Ambarwati & Sobari, 2020; Zamzami & Hastuti, 2018). Overall, KABI EXPO creates an environment conducive to innovation and creativity. The exhibition not only showcases products but also educates and empowers MSMEs, providing them with the knowledge and networks necessary for growth. This aligns with the primary goal of the creative economy: to create prosperity through the utilization of individual creativity, skills, and talents (Hasanah, 2015).

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

The KABI EXPO in Pidie Jaya Regency has become an effective platform for fostering collaboration and strengthening branding among local MSMEs. The collaboration, while informal, has planted the seeds for networking and innovation. MSME participation in the exhibition also demonstrates a growing awareness of the importance of brand image, both through more modern product packaging and more strategic use of social media. Fundamentally, KABI EXPO serves as a catalyst for building a sustainable creative ecosystem in Pidie Jaya. The exhibition successfully facilitated interaction, knowledge exchange, and skills development necessary for MSMEs to not only survive but also thrive in the current economic climate. The success of KABI EXPO must be seen in its long-term impact, namely building a strong foundation for MSMEs to become more independent, adaptive, and competitive in the broader market.

Suggestion

Based on the findings and analysis that have been carried out, the following are several suggestions put forward for the sustainability and optimization of similar activities in the future:

For KABI EXPO Organizers:

1. **Follow-up Assistance:** Organizing more structured and focused post-exhibition workshops and mentoring, especially in the areas of digital marketing and business/brand legality.
2. **Formation of Digital Platform:** Develop a digital platform or directory specifically for Pidie Jaya MSMEs as a follow-up to the exhibition, so they can continue to collaborate and sell products online.
3. **Strategic Partnership:** Building strategic partnerships with national e-commerce platforms or distributors to facilitate broader market access for ready MSMEs.

For MSMEs:

1. **Taking Collaborative Initiatives:** Take the initiative to establish more formal collaborations, such as product co-branding or structured joint promotional programs, to increase leverage.
2. **Branding Optimization:** Continue investing in product branding development, from logo design, packaging, to creative and interactive social media content.
3. **Increase Knowledge:** Actively participate in training and mentoring programs provided by the government or related parties to continuously improve competence and competitiveness.

REFERENCES

- Ambarwati, M., & Sobari, S. (2020). *Peran Ekonomi Kreatif dalam Pengembangan UMKM di Indonesia*. Jurnal Ekonomi Syariah.
- Arivetullatif, M., & Ardina, P. (2022). *Peran Ekonomi Kreatif dalam Pengembangan UMKM di Indonesia*. JOSEE.
- Arifin, Z., & Handayani, S. (2021). *Analisis Pengaruh Strategi Pemasaran terhadap Brand Awareness pada UMKM*. Jurnal Bisnis dan Manajemen, 12(1), 75-90.
- Arifudin, E., dkk. (2021). *Pentingnya Peran Logo dalam Membangun Branding pada UMKM*. ResearchGate.
- Astuti, R., & Nugroho, R. (2021). *Studi Kasus: Strategi Pemasaran T-Shirt Omah Oblong dalam Membangun Brand Awareness*. Jurnal Ekonomi Kreatif, 9(2), 113-126.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Destrina, R., dkk. (2022). *Pentingnya Peran Logo dalam Membangun Branding pada UMKM*. ResearchGate.
- Ghani, M. (2020). *Strategi Kolaborasi sebagai Pendorong Inovasi dan Kinerja UMKM di Indonesia*.
- Hasanah, U. (2015). *Konsep Ekonomi Kreatif*. Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar.
- Lestari, P., & Suryani, D. (2021). *Membangun Brand Awareness Melalui Event dan Sponsorship pada UMKM*. Jurnal Manajemen dan Kewirausahaan, 16(1), 22-35.
- M.Masrukhan, & Pratama, A. P. (2025). *Strategi Promosi UMKM Dalam Membangun Brand Awareness: (Studi Kasus Jogja T-Shirt Omah Oblong)*. Musytari: Jurnal Manajemen, Akuntansi, dan Ekonomi, 15(5), 1-10.
- Mulyana, F. (2016). *Dampak Jejaring Kolaborasi dan Kapabilitas Inovasi terhadap Kinerja*. EKOBIS, 19(1), 49-58.
- Nuratri, D., & Sofiati, R. (2024). *Strategi Kolaborasi sebagai Pendorong Inovasi dan Kinerja UMKM di Indonesia*. ResearchGate.
- Prasetyo, M.A.M. (2022). *Pengaruh Kepemimpinan Inovatif dan Iklim Sekolah Terhadap Mutu Layanan Pendidikan pada Pondok Pesantren MAS Jeumala Amal di Kabupaten Pidie Jaya Provinsi Aceh*. ResearchGate.
- Pristian Fitri Astuti & Stevani, M.A. (2022). *Peningkatan Kualitas Produk Melalui Kolaborasi pada UMKM Batik*.
- Rezky, A., dkk. (2021). *Pentingnya Peran Logo dalam Membangun Branding pada UMKM*. ResearchGate.
- Sari, F., & Agustina, R. (2021). *Pengaruh Promosi Melalui Media Sosial terhadap Brand Awareness UMKM di Yogyakarta*. Jurnal Bisnis dan Kewirausahaan, 17(3), 145-160.
- Sugiyono. (2012). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Suryana, K. (2017). *Peran Umkm Dalam Membangun Dan Menumbuhkan Ekonomi Kreatif Di Era Revolusi 5.0 Menuju Ekonomi Global*. Jurnal Metansi, 2(2), 268-278.
- Syam, N. & Rakib. (2016). *Pengembangan Masyarakat*.
- Tulusan, F., & Londa, V. (2014). *Pendapatan Masyarakat*.
- Tunnikmah, N. (2020). *Penggunaan Instagram dalam Medan Sosial Seni Rupa*. Laporan Akhir Penelitian Dosen ISI Yogyakarta.
- Zamzami, Z., & Hastuti, R. (2018). *Peran Ekonomi Kreatif dalam Pengembangan UMKM di Indonesia*. JOSEE.