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Kanjuruhan cultural heritage as a catalyst for transformation: From white-label to brand legacy in creative businesses

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Abstract

This study examines the transformative role of the Kanjuruhan cultural heritage as a catalyst for creative businesses transitioning from a white-label model to establishing independent brand identities. Drawing from qualitative research conducted across 25 creative businesses in Malang Raya, Indonesia, this research explores how the integration of Kanjuruhan cultural heritage fosters sustainability and competitiveness. Two thematic frameworks emerged from the data analysis: Local Values for Sustainability and Local Values for Competitiveness. Sustainability is supported through sub themes such as collaboration, resource management, education, and cultural impact, while competitiveness is driven by identity development, market adaptation, customer empowerment, and innovation. The findings emphasize that Kanjuruhan's cultural heritage functions as a foundational element, strengthening social capital and operational efficiency while enhancing brand identity and market differentiation. The proposed framework provides actionable insights into how cultural heritage can drive innovation, authenticity, and resilience within creative industries, positioning businesses for long-term success in both local and global markets.

Keywords: brand legacy, cultural heritage, creative industries, white-label transformation



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Public Interest Statement

Creative firms moving from a white-label approach to independent brand identities have been shown to be aided by the Kanjuruhan cultural heritage in Malang Raya, Indonesia. Based on qualitative research, this study emphasizes how it strengthens brand identification and market uniqueness, promotes sustainability and competitiveness, and positions companies for long-term success in both domestic and international markets.

1. Introduction

The utilization of white-label strategies is becoming increasingly common among creative businesses, particularly during their early stages, as a means to mitigate operational risks while accelerating market entry (Gabison, 2022; Paba, 1986). This operational model enables creative businesses to offer products or services marketed under the brand of an external entity, thereby facilitating market access without requiring significant investment in developing an independent brand (Manjunath, 2015; Saini, 2022). An illustrative example of this model's implementation can be found in the field of digital content creation, encompassing animation, games, or applications tailored to meet diverse client requirements (Gabison, 2022). Despite the benefits of quick market access and substantial revenue generation from client contracts (Bare et al., 2017), the white-label model simultaneously poses significant challenges, particularly concerning competitiveness and long-term sustainability. Over-reliance on client branding often hampers companies from developing a distinct and robust brand identity (Nunes et al., 2022). Gabison (2022) even characterizes this model as fostering a form of "competition illusion," where companies merely act as manufacturers without the capacity to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive landscape.

Moreover, this model tends to lead to task segmentation, which involves deconstructing products or services into smaller components customized to meet specific client demands (Gabison, 2022). While this methodology streamlines operational workflows, it can render companies overly dependent on significant projects or clients. If clients opt to switch to alternative providers or internalize the same services, the impact can be substantial: significant revenue loss and jeopardized operational sustainability (Nunes et al., 2022). Over time, it becomes increasingly evident that creative businesses must cultivate a strong brand identity and deliver unique value as a fundamental prerequisite for long-term sustainability. In this context, transitioning from a white-label model to a heritage brand becomes crucial. This evolution requires not only a sophisticated strategic framework but also the integration of local cultural elements, which can enhance identity while offering uniqueness amid market competition (Pereira & Malik, 2018).

Malang Raya, encompassing Malang City, Malang Regency, and Batu City, is recognized as a region with immense potential for advancing the creative economy in Indonesia (Statistics Station, 2024). The region benefits from a dynamic creative ecosystem that includes higher education institutions, artistic communities, and entrepreneurs operating in sectors such as animation, gaming, and creative design. Nevertheless, challenges related to business sustainability remain a significant concern, especially for emerging creative enterprises, where the majority fail to maintain their operations (Statistics Station, 2024).

Previous studies have indicated that cultural heritage holds considerable potential to support creative businesses by integrating traditional values into products and services. By leveraging local cultural assets and philosophical principles, businesses can establish a distinctive and competitive identity (Surti et al., 2024). Furthermore, entrepreneurship training grounded in cultural principles has been shown to enhance entrepreneurs' ability to develop products that are not only innovative but also globally relevant (Surti et al., 2024). Within the framework of creative ventures, methodologies centered on cultural heritage can serve as strategic mechanisms to drive innovation. Heritage entrepreneurs have demonstrated how leveraging cultural assets can facilitate socio-economic progress through the creation of innovative creative products (Amballoor & Naik, 2024). However, these entrepreneurs often face challenges related to skill management, authenticity, and branding strategies, which can be mitigated through improved cultural literacy and

proficiency in digital technologies (Amballoor & Naik, 2024). Previous reviews have further emphasized the importance of incorporating cultural values into products and services to enhance competitiveness while preserving local identity. Designs based on local culture are proposed to heighten emotional resonance with the market while strengthening the position of creative enterprises amid intensifying competition (Canaan, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to investigate how local culture-based social capital in Malang Raya, particularly derived from the heritage of the Kanjuruhan Kingdom, can be synergistically integrated with contemporary innovation strategies. This approach aspires to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of creative enterprises in the region. Penelitian ini berangkat dari pertanyaan utama yaitu

- RQ 1 : How can the cultural heritage of Kanjuruhan be integrated as a catalyst in the transformation of creative businesses?
- RQ 2 : How can this strategy support the sustainability and competitiveness of creative businesses in Malang Raya?

This study offers a novel perspective on the role of cultural heritage as a driving force in the transformation of creative businesses. By establishing a connection between cultural values within the local environment—particularly the cultural significance derived from the Kanjuruhan civilization, embodied as social capital—and contemporary strategies such as competitiveness and sustainability, this investigation proposes a multidisciplinary methodology related to advancing the creative economy in the Malang Raya region.

2. Library review

White Label and Business Creative Challenges

The white-label business model is a strategic approach frequently employed by creative businesses to expand their service offerings without requiring substantial development resources (Silva et al., 2020; Pithwa, 2017). Within this framework, organizations are capable of repackaging and marketing products or services developed by external entities (Silva et al., 2020). This strategy facilitates brand proliferation by enabling organizations to market products adorned with their proprietary brand identity, consequently enhancing customer loyalty (Pithwa, 2017). Creative companies often leverage this model to penetrate broader markets more quickly (Silva et al., 2020). However, the white-label model comes with significant risks and challenges. One prominent challenge relates to dependency on key clients (Akerman & Py, 2010). Pithwa (2017) argues that this issue arises due to organizations' heavy reliance on a limited number of critical partners for sales and revenue generation. Another obstacle is the erosion of unique market identity. Within the white-label paradigm, frequent modifications to the identifying information and execution data of original applications occur (Pithwa, 2017). Gabison (2022) describes this phenomenon as an “illusion of competition,” where organizations appear to offer diverse products or services but ultimately source them from a single supplier. This scarcity of genuine competition can lead to price escalation and reduced innovation (Gabison, 2022). According to the Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), creative businesses often exhibit a tangible dependence on certain resources, particularly from critical clients. This theoretical framework explains that organizations strive to reduce such dependencies to facilitate autonomous strategic decision-making and drive innovation (Lu, 2023; Gabison, 2022).

Cultural Heritage as a Strategic Asset in Creative Economy Development

Cultural heritage is an essential asset with significant potential to support the development of the creative economy and establish branding strategies rooted in local identity. As a grand theory, Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory (1986) provides a foundation for understanding how cultural values and heritage can be leveraged to create social and economic benefits. This theory emphasizes that cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, possesses symbolic value that can be transformed into economic value through

creativity and innovation. Previous studies have demonstrated that creativity acts as a mediator between cultural heritage and local economic development. Cerisola (2019) asserts that cultural heritage can inspire creative talents, which in turn has an indirect positive impact on regional economic growth. This aligns with research by Hani et al. (2012), which found that creative industries, such as Saung Angklung Udjo, successfully integrate cultural products with creative business strategies, not only preserving local culture but also creating new economic value.

In the context of branding, cultural heritage can serve as a key element in building brand identity. Groot (2017) explains that multinational companies utilize cultural heritage to enhance brand value through proactive approaches, such as marketing that incorporates cultural stories and values. This is supported by findings from Cerquetti and Ferrara (2018), which highlight that understanding the value of cultural heritage can enhance visitor experiences and promote cultural sustainability. This research is relevant to branding strategies that use local cultural narratives as a means of market differentiation. Furthermore, cultural heritage functions not only as an economic asset but also as a tool for shaping social identity and fostering community cohesion. Hurova et al. (2024) show that the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage can strengthen local identity while supporting sustainable development. In this regard, the indicators and frameworks developed by Jelinčić (2021) are critical for assessing the impact of creative industries on the sustainability of cultural heritage and experience-based tourism.

Ultimately, cultural tourism has emerged as a vital sector within the creative economy, supporting cultural preservation while enhancing local economic appeal. Silberberg (1995) notes that museums and cultural heritage sites can increase revenue through entrepreneurial approaches and strategic collaborations, thereby addressing the challenges of a dynamic economy. Based on these studies, it can be concluded that cultural heritage, through creativity and branding strategies rooted in local identity, holds immense potential to support the development of the creative economy and strengthen community identity in a sustainable manner. With an integrated approach, cultural values can be optimized to create significant social and economic impacts.

Sustainability and Competitiveness Strategy

Teece et al. (1997) state in The Dynamic Capabilities Theory that startups must create and enhance internal capabilities, such as product innovation and operational efficiency, in order to achieve competitive advantage in the market. To achieve competitiveness and long-term sustainability, startups must develop dynamic capabilities that enable continuous innovation and adaptation to market changes (Supriyanto et al., 2024). According to Porter, (1985) Theory on Competitive Advantage, the general strategy of “differentiation and focus” allows small companies to create strong value propositions and survive in competition. According to Pithwa (2017) Integrating sustainability with competitiveness is critical for business. In the modern economic environment, innovation and competitiveness are significant and related concepts (Akar et al., 2024.) Akar et al. (2024) assert that businesses that use innovative practices can create unique goods or services that differentiate them from rivals. This can help them gain greater profits, acquire a larger market share, and create superior competition. Innovation takes many forms, according to Akar et al. 2024, innovation can involve creating new products, strategies, or business models. Diversifying the network of service providers connected to the organization is an effective method to reduce dependency, according to Akerman & Py. (2010). Services must be continuously updated to meet customer demands (Liu et al., 2020). Luo & Liu, (2024) state that digital technology plays a crucial role in driving changes towards service orientation, resulting in improved economic performance and the creation of a productive environment. This change has a significant impact on resource-dependent and capital-intensive industries, as technological innovations create sustainable development. Along with the company’s efforts to balance financial success, sustainability and competitiveness strategies are increasingly being developed. Ideas such as network-based bootstrapping, local value, and entrepreneurial marketing can help you gain a sustainable competitive advantage. According to Rita & Nastiti (2024) Bootstrapping is the process of reducing a company’s

dependence on external funds by using various innovative strategies and maximizing the available internal resources. This network-based process can encourage companies to obtain resources without engaging in conventional financial transactions (Vanacker et al., 2012). Entrepreneurial Marketing emphasizes the integration of innovation, proactiveness, and risk-taking in marketing strategy and focuses on incorporating new ideas and communication techniques to increase competitive advantage (Ratten, 2022). Local value in startup companies is about leveraging local resources, partnerships, and community involvement to drive innovation, sustainability, and economic resilience (Dybdahl, 2019).

Method

Research Design

This investigation employs a qualitative methodology framed within a multisite study design. This framework was chosen to investigate the comprehensive experiences and strategies implemented by white-label-oriented creative businesses in responding to competitive pressures and sustainability challenges within the digital and creative industries. A qualitative research methodology is utilized to articulate, explore, and understand the meanings attributed by individuals or collectives to social or human issues (Creswell et al., 2018). As highlighted by Beaudry & Miller (2016) (cited in Nijjer et al., 2022), the qualitative paradigm enables researchers to gain in-depth insights into participants' perspectives.

The multisite study framework is a qualitative research strategy involving extensive investigation across multiple sites or locations to elucidate a particular social phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Within this framework, the term "site" can refer to various locations, organizations, groups, or even individuals associated with the phenomenon under examination (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). In this study, data were collected from the Malang Raya region, which comprises three distinct areas: Malang City (9 creative businesses), Malang Regency (10 creative businesses), and Batu City (6 creative businesses).

3.2 Participants and Sampling Process

This investigation involved 25 digital creative businesses in the Malang Raya region that previously operated under the white-label model. The selected creative businesses were from the digital application, animation, and gaming sectors. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling strategy where the researcher identifies participants based on specific attributes or qualifications (Chowdhury et al., 2022). The following outlines the key criteria for participant selection in this study:

Criteria for Selecting Creative Companies as Information Sources:

1. **Managers from Former White-Label Creative Companies**

Creative companies that, during their formative stages, operated as white-label service providers, where their offerings were marketed under clients' brands without establishing an independent brand identity.

2. **Managerial Experience in Strategic Transition**

Creative companies that have undertaken deliberate strategic steps to transition away from the white-label framework. This transition includes reducing dependency on key clients and diversifying their offerings.

3. **Focus on Managers Enthusiastic About the Creative Industry**

Creative companies engaged in domains such as animation, gaming, digital design, or application development with significant potential for implementing strategies rooted in cultural heritage.

3.3 Data Collection

Data is collected through in-depth interviews with the founder or lead manager of each startup. In-depth interviews are one of the main data collection techniques in qualitative research which are often used to gain a deep understanding of the experiences, perspectives and meanings given by participants to a phenomenon.

(Creswell, et al., 2018). Interviews in research are carried out in a semi-structured manner, the definition of semi-structured interview according to Creswell, et al (2018) i.e. the researcher has a question guide, but the questions can be adjusted to suit the context interview. The interviews in this research were designed to explore the main strategies of start-up companies related to business sustainability and competitiveness.

3.4 Data analysis

Research uses Thematic Analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis technique that is often used in research with the aim of identifying patterns or themes that appear repeatedly in the data that has been collected (Creswell, et al.,2018). Based Braun & Clarke (2006) (in Berbekova, et al., (2021) Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for organizing and describing available data by identifying underlying themes. According to Creswell, et al. (2018) thematic analysis research steps:

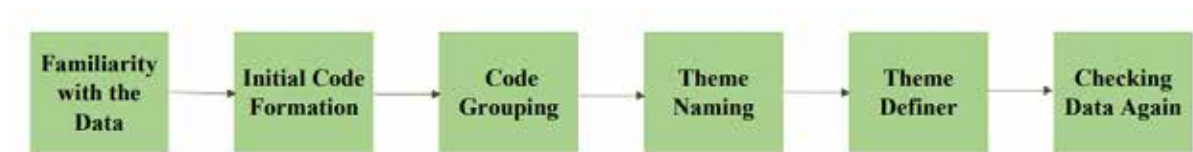


Fig. 1 – Thematic Analysis Research Steps. Source: Creswell (2018)

On research The collected data was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which follows the following steps:

1. Transcription and Familiarization: Interview data was transcribed verbatim and double-checked to ensure accuracy. This step also involves repeated reading to understand emerging patterns.
2. Initial Coding: Each transcript is analyzed systematically to find initial codes that are relevant to the research objectives. This code covers aspects related to financial independence, marketing strategies, and identity development.
3. Theme Grouping: Initial codes were then grouped into main themes, to be specific: Operational Efficiency for Long-Term Competitiveness.

3.5 Data Validity

To ensure the validity of the data, this research uses techniques of data triangulation. Data triangulation was carried out to ensure the trustworthiness of the results by involving several researchers analyzing data to help validate findings and reduce bias (Ranta et al., 2021). Data triangulation uses various data sources consisting of interviews, observations, documents to confirm findings (Creswell, et al.,2018). Apart from that, using techniques member checking videlicet asking participants to provide feedback on the researcher's findings (Creswell, et al.,2018)

Result and Discussion

1. Transcription and Familiarization

The data analysis procedure began with meticulous word-for-word transcription of the in-depth interview results conducted with former creative business professionals operating under the white-label model in the Malang Raya region. This process yielded a compilation of 296 transcripts derived from 56 interviews with key informants. The transcription process was executed with exceptional precision to ensure fidelity to every detail, capturing direct quotations, intonations, expressions, and narratives that encapsulate their transformative experiences from a white-label framework to strategies firmly rooted in local values. The integrity of the transcripts was ensured through a comprehensive re-evaluation process to verify that no critical elements were overlooked or misrepresented.

Following the completion of the transcription phase, the next stage involved thorough familiarization with the data. Researchers engaged in multiple readings of the transcripts to cultivate a deep understanding

of the interview content. This familiarization process not only facilitated the identification of recurring patterns or themes but also uncovered intricate narratives related to how local values function as catalysts in shaping brand identity within creative businesses; and strategies employed by creative companies to achieve sustainability and competitive advantage in the market.

This methodological approach enabled researchers to grasp the broader context and nuanced intricacies of participants' experiences before proceeding to detailed analysis using thematic methodologies. This comprehensive familiarization phase proved to be a critical step in ensuring that all relevant data was identified and included in subsequent analyses, thereby allowing the findings to accurately reflect the complex and contextual realities.

2. Initial and named code

This study identifies that the cultural heritage of the Kanjuruhan Kingdom, encompassing historical artifacts, social values, and life philosophies, serves as a significant form of social capital and a strategic inspiration for creative businesses. Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek (2013) explain that cultural heritage plays a crucial role in building social capital, fostering spaces for community collaboration, and providing shared values that strengthen social bonds within communities. These elements offer a unique foundation for crafting brand identities that not only enhance appeal in local markets but also establish a competitive edge on an international scale.

Initial results from the coding process reveal the following insights:

- i. **Historical Artifacts:** These artifacts are leveraged to create authentic product narratives rooted in local traditions. As Capello et al. (2019) highlight, material cultural heritage, when combined with creativity, can generate significant added value through authentic and innovative storytelling.
- ii. **Social Values:** These values support community collaboration and enhance customer loyalty through harmonious social approaches. Veghes et al. (2012) note that heritage-based marketing holds great potential for fostering social responsibility and building sustainable relationships with local communities.
- iii. **Life Philosophies:** These philosophies are integrated into strategic visions, emphasizing sustainability and a balance between modern innovation and traditional values. O'reilly (2005) stresses that culture-based branding provides a symbolic equilibrium between modernity and tradition, which is central to successful business strategies.

Collectively, these elements have proven instrumental in supporting creative business strategies to achieve long-term sustainability. Purwanto (2016) further asserts that cultural capital enables entrepreneurs to create innovative products and foster meaningful interactions with customers, thereby promoting sustainable business growth.

a. Collaboration and Partnership

One of the key findings of this study is the central role of the value of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Kanjuruhan Kingdom, in fostering strong collaboration and partnerships. This cultural value has been passed down through generations in Malang Raya, influencing not only interpersonal relationships within the community but also interactions in the business world. The principle of *gotong royong* fosters a sense of solidarity and mutual trust, enabling creative businesses in Malang Raya to build strong operational and collaborative frameworks. For ex-white-label creative businesses transitioning toward an independent brand identity, this value serves as critical social capital. As one informant explained:

Gotong royong has become a part of Malang's culture. I often build businesses with people who believe in this value. (*informant 24 in english language*) —*Gotong royong iki wis dadi budaya neng Malang. Aku sering nyambung bisnis bareng karo wong sing percaya karo nilai iki.* — (*informant 24 in local language*)

Gotong royong teaches you the importance of harmony. When working together, everything becomes easier. (*informant 13 in english language*) —*Gotong royong nggawe awakmu ngerti pentinge harmoni. Nek kerjo bareng, kabeh dadi luwih gampang.*— (*informant 13 in local language*)

I've learned a lot from this culture. In fact, gotong royong has allowed my business to reach international markets. (*informant 25 in english language*) — *Aku sinau akeh saka budaya iki. Nyatane, gotong royong nggawe bisnisku iso nyekel pasar internasional* — (*informant 25 in local language*)

Trust derived from the value of *gotong royong* also strengthens relationships among local business actors. In large-scale projects, this principle facilitates the execution of complex collaborations. Another participant noted:

The culture of trust among local people makes business easier, especially when handling large projects. (*informant 7 in english language*) —*Budaya percaya antar wong lokal iki iso nggawe bisnis lebih gampang, utamane nek gawe proyek-proyek sing gedhe.* — (*informant 7 in local language*)

The strength of gotong royong is what saved my business. My fellow Malang locals, who share the same struggles within the Malang community, were reliable, especially when I was short on funds for a project. (*Informant 11 in english language*) — *Kekuatan gotong royong iki sing nyelamatno bisnisku, konco-konco asli Malang sing seperjuangan nang komunitas Malang iso diandalno opo maneh pas aku kekurangan modal gawe projekan* — (*informant 11 in local language*)

This value is not just for business, but for life. I've witnessed businesses in Malang succeed because the people believe in gotong royong. (*informant 20 in english language*) — *Iki nilai sing ora mung kanggo bisnis, tapi kanggo urip. Aku nyekseni bisnis nang Malang sukses amarga wong-wonge percaya karo gotong royong.* — (*informant 20 in local language*)

The integration of *gotong royong* values from the cultural heritage of the Kanjuruhan Kingdom provides a unique advantage for creative businesses in Malang Raya. These values serve as a **Social Adhesive**, strengthening business relationships at both local and global levels through principles of mutual trust and collaboration. Lukiyanto and Wijyaningtyas (2020) identify *gotong royong* as a form of social capital that helps build trust-based relationships within small and micro-business communities, enabling the stability of long-term partnerships despite challenges such as limited capital. In a business environment that demands dynamic collaboration, the solidarity inherent in *gotong royong* fosters deep connections and supports the stability of long-term partnerships. Furthermore, *gotong royong* enhances **Operational Efficiency** by simplifying project execution and improving teamwork. Wahyuni et al. (2019) explain that team strengthening and coordination based on *gotong royong* significantly reduce technical obstacles, which are critical in large-scale and complex collaborations. This approach ensures the smooth progression of processes across all project stages.

Community Integration is also reinforced through the application of *gotong royong* values, deepening the relationship between businesses and the local community. Suwignyo (2019) highlights that *gotong royong* not only creates strong emotional bonds with the community but also supports the preservation of local cultural values, which, in turn, enhances the authenticity of products and services. By integrating these

values, creative businesses are not only able to overcome operational and technical challenges but also ensure social sustainability and improve their competitiveness in increasingly demanding markets. Simarmata et al. (2020) affirm that the principles of *gotong royong* remain relevant in the modern era, enabling businesses to maintain social sustainability and foster innovative creative collaborations across various sectors.

b. Marketing Strategy

Cultural artifacts such as the Dinoyo Inscription and Badut Temple, as part of the Kanjuruhan Kingdom's heritage, offer unique narratives that can be adapted into branding elements by creative businesses in Malang Raya. These elements not only resonate with the local market but also hold distinctive appeal for international audiences. In this study, the historical and aesthetic values of Kanjuruhan's cultural heritage were frequently highlighted by business actors as a means to enhance the competitiveness of their products. As informant explained:

The folklore from the Kanjuruhan Kingdom era became the main theme of this animation design. Interestingly, international clients found it even more appealing! *(informant 12 in english language)* —*Cerita rakyat sing dicritano teko zaman Kerajaan Kanjuruhan iku tak angkat dadi tema utama desain animasi iki. Klien luar negeri malah luwih tertarik, lho!* — *(informant 12 in local language)*

I created a design using the carvings of Candi Badut, giving this product a distinct local character. (informant 9 in english language) – Aku nggawe desain sing nganggo gambar ukiran candi Badut, dadi produk iki nduwe ciri khas lokal. — (informant 20 in local language)

The integration of visual elements and narratives from Kanjuruhan's cultural heritage also provides a strong foundation for creating emotional branding, strengthening the connection between products and consumers. One informant noted:

People in Malang feel proud when this product incorporates local culture. This increases customer loyalty significantly. *(informant 17 in english language)* —*Wong nang Malang dadi bangga yen produk iki nganggo budaya lokal. Iki nggawe loyalitas pelanggan tambah gedhe.* — *(informant 17 in local language)*

Folklore elements also serve as a profound resource for building an authentic brand identity. One example is the utilization of the narrative of King Gajayana in a marketing campaign:

The legend of King Gajayana is very powerful. I told the story to strengthen my brand identity. Foreign clients even started asking about the history. *(informant 8 in english language)* —*Legenda Raja Gajayana iki kuat banget. Tak critakake kanggo nguatke identitas merekku. Wong luar negeri malah takon-takon sejarah iku.*— *(informant 8 in local language)*

The integration of the Kanjuruhan Kingdom's cultural heritage into marketing strategies provides a unique competitive advantage for creative businesses in Malang Raya. These cultural elements serve as the foundation for crafting a distinctive **Visual Identity**. For example, the carved ornaments from Badut Temple and the aesthetic elements of the Dinoyo Inscription act as visual markers that set creative products apart in the market. Wang (2023) emphasizes that visual designs based on cultural heritage not only enhance aesthetic appeal but also create a deeply embedded sense of authenticity in consumers' minds. In addition, Kanjuruhan's cultural heritage enriches the **Cultural Narrative** within marketing campaigns. The folklore and historical legacy of the kingdom provide strong emotional resonance for brand identities, helping creative businesses forge deeper connections with customers. As highlighted by Saffira (2022), the use of cultural narratives, such as the application of Songket Palembang for international markets, can embed a strong cultural identity in branding strategies, fostering profound emotional attachment among customers.

The integration of these cultural elements also creates a robust **Local and Global Appeal**. Hakala et al. (2011) demonstrate that local cultural elements can be leveraged to expand global appeal without compromising authenticity, through symbols and visual representations that enrich brand identity. Meanwhile, Zhu and Azahari (2024) underscore the role of digital technology in integrating local cultural elements into modern branding strategies, enabling creative products to capture global market attention while retaining their original cultural essence. Through this approach, creative businesses in Malang Raya can expand their market reach without losing their inherent cultural identity, achieving a balance between local values and global relevance.

c. Cultural Heritage as Social Capital

The cultural heritage of the Kanjuruhan Kingdom not only provides visual and narrative inspiration but also functions as critical social capital, supporting business and community relationships. Values such as trust (*kepercayaan*), togetherness (*kebersamaan*), and wisdom (*kebijaksanaan*), passed down from Kanjuruhan culture, form the foundation for creating strong connections between creative entrepreneurs and their customers, partners, and local communities. As informant explained:

Kanjuruhan's cultural heritage is rich. I use the values of trust and togetherness it passed down as capital to grow my business (*informant 4 in English language*) — *Warisan Budaya Kanjuruhan iku kaya. Nilai kepercayaan lan kebersamaan sing wis diturunke iku tak gawe modal kanggo ngembangno bisnis.* — (*informant 4 in local language*)

These historical stories are not just design inspirations but also tools to unite communities. (*informant 7 in English language*) — *Cerita sejarah iki ora mung inspirasi desain, nanging iso dadi alat kanggo ngumpulke komunitas.* — (*informant 7 in local language*)

If colleagues understand these cultural values, business relationships become stronger. People are not just thinking about profit but also trust and collaboration. (*informant 10 in English language*) — *Nek kanca-kanca ngerti nilai budaya iki, hubungan bisnis dadi luwih kuat. Wong-wong ora mung mikir untung, tapi uga percaya lan kerjo bareng.* — (*informant 10 in local language*)

The integration of cultural heritage as social capital has been implemented across various operational aspects of creative businesses in Malang Raya, creating strategic opportunities to build competitiveness and sustainability. One such implementation is evident in **Collaborative Projects**, where local businesses work together on initiatives centered around cultural themes. Pickerill (2021) explains that collaborative projects leveraging cultural heritage can establish sustainable partnerships with significant economic, social, and cultural impacts while strengthening solidarity among business actors. These collaborations result in products and services that collectively reflect cultural values, thereby enhancing cultural relevance in local markets. In addition, the cultural heritage of the Kanjuruhan Kingdom has been integrated into marketing strategies through **Brand Storytelling**. Narratives highlighting the history and heritage of the kingdom add depth and authenticity to brand identities. Bhattacharya and Dutta (2022) emphasize that incorporating cultural narratives into marketing strategies captures customer attention by fostering deep emotional connections while reinforcing brand identity through rich cultural stories. These narratives help creative businesses bridge local culture with global audiences, broadening the appeal of their brands.

To further strengthen customer relationships, **Customer Loyalty Programs** have been designed with a focus on celebrating cultural identity. Loulanski and Loulanski (2011) note that loyalty programs based on local values—such as cultural celebrations and rewards for customers supporting heritage-based products—enhance community engagement and foster meaningful business relationships. This approach not only boosts customer loyalty but also reinforces the bond between businesses and local communities. By

combining culture-based collaboration, authentic storytelling, and loyalty programs rooted in local identity, creative businesses in Malang Raya are able to ensure cultural relevance in their operational practices. Veghes et al. (2012) stress that heritage-based marketing contributes to sustainable community development while enhancing business competitiveness in both local and global markets.

d. Operational Efficiency

The operational success of creative businesses in Malang Raya is significantly influenced by the implementation of **local cultural values**, particularly those inherited from the Kanjuruhan Kingdom. Values such as **gotong royong** (mutual cooperation) and **trust** within teams have proven instrumental in minimizing internal conflicts and fostering seamless collaboration. As informant explained:

If the team understands the value of solidarity, all work goes smoothly. There's no need to fight over responsibilities. (*informant 3 in English language*) — *Nek tim kerja ngerti nilai solidaritas, kabeh kerjo dadi lancar. Ora perlu rebutan tanggung jawab.*— (*informant 3 in local language*)

The culture of mutual trust helps reduce conflicts in large projects. (*informant 13 in English language*) — *Budaya saling percaya iku mbantu ngurangi konflik nang proyek-proyek sing gedhe.* — (*informant 13 in local language*)

The integration of these cultural values results in several operational advantages for creative businesses. The spirit of *gotong royong* inherited from Kanjuruhan culture plays a crucial role in fostering harmony and efficiency within teamwork. This value instills a sense of collective responsibility that simplifies task delegation and reduces potential internal conflicts, resulting in streamlined teamwork. Endro and Meilasari-Sugiana (2024) highlight that *gotong royong* serves as a foundational principle for building team integrity in modern work environments. This collective value cultivates mutual trust, which is essential for team success, particularly in the context of complex projects.

In large-scale and complex projects, the trust nurtured by *gotong royong* principles helps reduce friction among involved parties. Tjosvold et al. (2003) found that conflict management based on collaboration not only strengthens inter-team relationships but also enhances team effectiveness. The cooperative and harmonious values embedded in *gotong royong* are highly relevant in addressing challenges related to conflict management in large-scale project environments. Furthermore, this collaborative work culture improves resource and time management efficiency, directly impacting productivity. Simarmata et al. (2020) emphasize how *gotong royong* fosters a supportive work culture that minimizes internal friction and accelerates task completion. By reducing unnecessary conflicts and facilitating closer collaboration, teams can operate more effectively, ensuring operational optimization when tackling large-scale project challenges. Dewantara (2018) asserts that *gotong royong* as a cultural value not only strengthens team harmony but also enhances productivity by creating close-knit and efficient cooperation at every stage of a project.

Working with people who understand gotong royong simplifies task distribution. (*informant 8 in English language*) — *Kerjo bareng karo wong sing ngerti gotong royong iku nggampangno distribusi tugas.*— (*informant 8 in local language*)

Large projects often have a lot of friction, but with trust, everything becomes easier. (*informant 6 in English language*) — *Proyek-proyek gedhe biasane akeh gesekan, tapi nek ana rasa percaya, kabeh dadi gampang.* — (*informant 6 in local language*)

This efficiency changes the way the team works. Time and resources become more efficient. (*informant 9 in English language*) — *Efisiensi iki ngganti cara kerja tim. Waktu lan sumber daya dadi luwih efisien.* — (*informant 9 in local language*)

Identity Development

The transformation of creative businesses from a white-label model to independent brand identities requires the integration of Kanjuruhan cultural heritage as a foundational element in identity development. By leveraging the values, narratives, and historical significance of the Kanjuruhan Kingdom, creative businesses craft unique and authentic brand identities that captivate both local and international markets. One key strategy involves utilizing **cultural narratives** as part of branding. Many creative businesses adapt the legends and folklore of Kanjuruhan into their marketing strategies to strengthen local identity while appealing to global audiences. As one informant explained:

“The name of the brand I created now uses the philosophy of Kanjuruhan folklore. Locals can recognize this as an authentic Malang product.” (informant 10 in English language)

— “Jeneng merek sing aku gawe saiki nganggo filosofi saka cerita rakyat Kanjuruhan. Wong lokal iso ngenali iki produk asli Malang.” (informant 10 in local language)

The deep historical roots of Kanjuruhan also provide a robust foundation for fostering brand resilience in the face of intense competition. **Fostering brand resilience through cultural foundations** has become a critical factor in creating brands that not only endure but also thrive. Another informant stated:

“I believe that without a strong identity, this product will not survive. I use the history of Kanjuruhan as the foundation of my brand.” (informant 15 in English language)

— *“Aku mikir, nek ora ono identitas sing kuat, produk iki ora bakal bertahan. Sejarah Kanjuruhan iki tak pakek dadi pondasi merekku.”* (informant 15 in local language)

Visual elements from Kanjuruhan heritage, such as motifs from Candi Badut, are integrated into brand identities, adding aesthetic value while reinforcing cultural authenticity. **Visual and philosophical identity** are pivotal in creating brands that reflect local values in a modern and relevant way. One informant shared:

“I designed a logo inspired by the carvings of Candi Badut, giving it a strong cultural feel.” (informant 9 in English language)

— *“Aku nggawe logo sing inspirasi saka ukiran candi Badut, dadi nduwe rasa budaya sing kuat.”* (informant 9 in local language)

This integration of cultural identity has a profound impact on brand development. By embedding cultural narratives and visual elements into their brands, businesses create **authentic and sustainable brands** that differentiate them from competitors while building customer trust. As one informant noted:

“Products that incorporate cultural philosophy are not only appealing but also build trust in the brand.” (informant 12 in English language)

— *“Produk sing nganggo filosofi budaya iki ora mung menarik, tapi nggawe wong percaya karo merek.”* (informant 12 in local language)

Brands inspired by Kanjuruhan heritage successfully bridge local and global audiences, offering universal appeal through unique stories and designs. **Connecting with local and global audiences** has proven to be an effective strategy, as illustrated by an informant who said:

“Foreign clients even ask about the folklore that inspired my design.” (informant 14 in English language)

— “Klien luar negeri malah takon soal cerita rakyat sing dadi inspirasi desainku.” (informant 14 in local language)

Moreover, culture-based branding creates emotional connections that go beyond mere transactions, strengthening customer loyalty and long-term engagement. **Strengthening emotional bonds with customers** has been a key to success for many creative businesses, as highlighted by an informant:

“The Kanjuruhan stories make customers feel a deeper connection to the product.” (informant 11 in English language)

— “Cerita Kanjuruhan nggawe pelanggan rumangsa nduweni hubungan sing luwih dalem karo produk.” (informant 11 in local language)

Integrasi warisan budaya dalam strategi branding terbukti memberikan keunggulan kompetitif yang signifikan bagi bisnis kreatif. Chen et al. (2014) menunjukkan bahwa narasi budaya dapat memperkuat identitas merek melalui resonansi budaya yang menciptakan hubungan emosional yang mendalam antara konsumen dan merek. Hal ini didukung oleh Saffra (2022), yang menemukan bahwa adaptasi cerita rakyat dengan inovasi lintas budaya dapat meningkatkan daya tarik merek di pasar internasional tanpa kehilangan relevansi lokal. Selain itu, Moreno (2020) menyoroti bahwa warisan budaya berperan penting dalam membangun komunitas yang kohesif sekaligus menciptakan merek yang tahan lama dan berkelanjutan. Elemen desain visual berbasis budaya, seperti yang dijelaskan oleh Wang dan Wang (2021), juga berkontribusi pada penguatan identitas merek dengan menampilkan atribut budaya yang unik dan estetika, sehingga meningkatkan daya tarik konsumen. Kombinasi narasi budaya, resiliensi merek, dan desain visual ini menjadi fondasi strategis bagi bisnis kreatif untuk menjembatani audiens lokal dan global, menciptakan merek yang autentik dan relevan secara modern.

4.2 Theme Grouping

The process of theme grouping involved organizing the initial codes into broader thematic categories that align with the objectives of the research. The themes are derived from the coding of data related to the integration of Kanjuruhan’s cultural heritage into creative businesses in Malang Raya, focusing on two key dimensions: **Sustainability** and **Competitiveness**. These themes are presented in the form of two visualizations.

First Theme Grouping: Local Value for Business Sustainability

The integration of Kanjuruhan cultural heritage plays a pivotal role in supporting the sustainability of creative businesses in Malang Raya, as reflected in the overarching theme of **Local Value for Business Sustainability**. This heritage functions not only as a historical asset but also as a foundation for business practices that promote economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The first subtheme, **Collaboration and Partnerships**, highlights how cultural values are utilized to foster long-term relationships and mutual support between businesses and the community. By adopting the principles of *gotong royong*, rooted in Kanjuruhan traditions, creative entrepreneurs build collaborative ecosystems that strengthen stakeholder solidarity. Next, **Finance and Resource Management** emphasizes the application of trust and efficiency—core values of Kanjuruhan culture—in sustainable resource management. These principles enable creative businesses to maintain financial stability while ensuring that resource utilization remains effective and responsible. The role of cultural heritage extends to **Education and Training**, where local value-based training empowers communities and enhances workforce skills. By aligning skill development initiatives with cultural values, creative businesses cultivate a competent workforce while supporting the preservation

of local traditions. Finally, the subtheme **Cultural Impact and Sustainability** underscores the importance of integrating cultural elements into business practices to ensure socially and environmentally sustainable operations. By embedding Kanjuruhan heritage into operational strategies, creative businesses not only preserve local culture but also ensure that their activities have a positive impact on society and the surrounding environment.

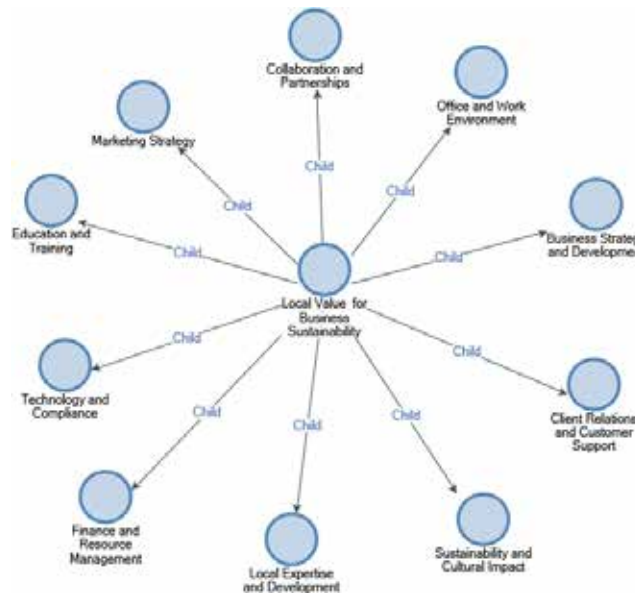


Figure 1: Local Value for Business Sustainability
Sources: Data Analysis of the Research (2024) Using NVivo

This visualization illustrates how the cultural values of Kanjuruhan form the core of business sustainability. The core node, **Local Value**, connects to the four subthemes, showing the interplay of collaboration, resource management, education, and cultural impact. The integration of cultural heritage into creative businesses has proven to be a vital foundation for supporting economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Hurova et al. (2024) emphasize that strategically integrated local cultural elements can strengthen the identity of creative businesses while promoting sustainability across multiple dimensions. In the context of collaboration, Jelinčić (2021) highlights that creative ecosystems involving local communities play a crucial role in fostering reciprocal relationships that enhance solidarity and cultural preservation. Regarding resource management, Trimarchi (2004) underscores the importance of efficient and sustainable resource utilization to ensure the financial stability and long-term viability of creative businesses. Additionally, Loulanski and Loulanski (2011) found that education and training programs based on local cultural values empower communities, enhance workforce skills, and contribute to the preservation of traditions. Finally, Ciampa (2023) notes that culture-driven creative regeneration generates positive social and environmental impacts, positioning creative businesses as key stewards of local cultural heritage.

Second Theme Grouping: Local Value for Competitiveness

The cultural heritage of Kanjuruhan significantly contributes to the competitiveness of creative businesses in Malang Raya, as reflected in the overarching theme of **Local Value for Competitiveness**. The cultural values inherited from Kanjuruhan provide a strategic foundation that helps creative businesses establish uniqueness and appeal in highly competitive markets. The first subtheme, **Identity and Reputation**, highlights how creative businesses build unique brand identities rooted in Kanjuruhan’s cultural heritage. This identity acts as a strong differentiator, enabling businesses to stand out amidst competition. By integrating cultural elements such as folklore and the distinctive wood carving art of Kanjuruhan, businesses create meaningful and authentic brand reputations that resonate with audiences. Next, **Responsiveness and Market Adaptation**

underscores the role of local values in helping creative businesses respond to changing market demands. These cultural principles offer a framework that allows businesses to remain relevant and adaptive without compromising the authenticity of their identities. This approach provides flexibility while staying grounded in traditional values. **Customer Experience and Empowerment** emerges as another key subtheme, where customer experiences aligned with cultural values are crafted to foster long-term loyalty and engagement. By delivering experiences that reflect local cultural values, creative businesses can cultivate deeper and more memorable connections with their customers. Finally, **Innovation and Technology** explores the integration of cultural elements into modern technologies and innovative practices. By combining tradition with advanced technologies, creative businesses develop products and services that are not only relevant and appealing but also deeply connected to their cultural roots. This culture-driven innovation ensures that traditional elements remain vibrant in a modern context while sustaining market appeal.



Figure 2: Local Value for Competitiveness

Sources: Data Analysis of the Research (2024) Using NVivo

This visualization maps how cultural heritage serves as the foundation for competitiveness. The core node, **Local Value**, connects to the four subthemes, demonstrating how identity, market adaptation, customer empowerment, and innovation are interconnected with local culture. The integration of cultural heritage into creative business strategies has proven to be a crucial element in fostering competitiveness and sustainability. Morley and McMahon (2011) emphasize the importance of leveraging cultural heritage elements to build authentic brand identities, enhance reputation, and create exclusive appeal in modern markets. Similarly, Hakala et al. (2011) highlight that the adaptation of cultural elements allows brands to remain relevant amidst changing market demands. Wang and Wang (2021) further illustrate how graphic design technology can be utilized to incorporate cultural values into innovative products without compromising authenticity. In the context of customer experience, Sammour (2020) notes that brand identity designs rooted in cultural heritage forge deep emotional connections between customers and brands, thereby strengthening customer loyalty. Zhang (2024) additionally underscores the role of culture-driven innovation in creating sustainable social impacts, ensuring that traditional elements remain vibrant and relevant in contemporary contexts. The visual model encapsulates the holistic impact of Kanjuruhan’s cultural heritage on creative businesses in Malang Raya. By anchoring business practices in the values of sustainability and competitiveness, these businesses not only achieve market success but also contribute to the preservation and revitalization of local culture. This framework serves as a roadmap for leveraging cultural heritage as a strategic asset in modern creative industries.

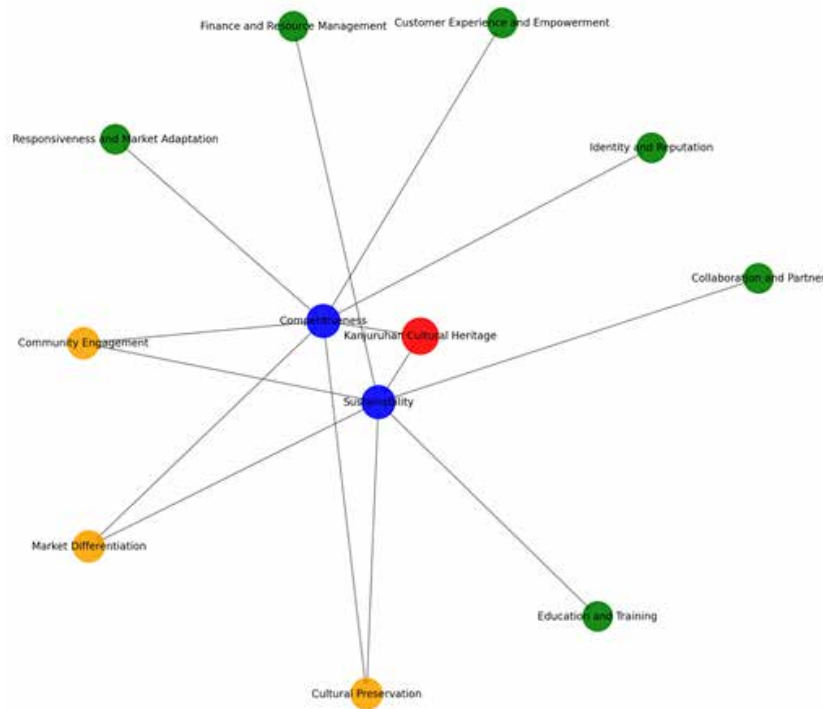


Figure 3. Model Encapsulates The Holistic Impact of Kanjuruhan’s Cultural Heritage

Sources: Data Analysis of the Research (2024) Using KNN

The visualization of the “Kanjuruhan Cultural Heritage” serves as a vivid representation of how this heritage acts as a vital, living core connecting diverse themes and ideas. At its heart, the model highlights the intricate balance between sustainability and competitiveness, enriched by sub-themes that ground these concepts in practical, actionable dimensions. The interconnections—like “Cultural Preservation,” “Market Differentiation,” and “Community Engagement”—serve as bridges, emphasizing how these elements converge to strengthen the essence of cultural heritage. This constellation of relationships mirrors the complexity and beauty of cultural dynamics, where each component, whether a sub-theme or an overarching theme, plays a critical role in sustaining and evolving the legacy of “Kanjuruhan Cultural Heritage.” It invites us to see cultural heritage not as a static relic of the past but as an active, synergistic force that shapes and is shaped by the modern world. In essence, this visualization is more than a diagram—it’s a call to action, a reminder of the power of collaboration, thoughtful resource management, and cultural preservation in creating a legacy that is not only remembered but lived and celebrated.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the transformative impact of the Kanjuruhan cultural heritage on the evolution and sustainability of creative businesses transitioning from a white-label model to independent brand identities. By embracing core values such as **gotong royong** (mutual cooperation), trust, and authenticity, businesses in Malang Raya have successfully built strong foundations that balance sustainability and competitiveness. In terms of sustainability, the integration of Kanjuruhan cultural values facilitates the creation of collaborative ecosystems, efficient resource management, and culturally aligned training programs. These initiatives not only enhance economic performance but also ensure the preservation of local traditions and cultural heritage. On the dimension of competitiveness, businesses that incorporate Kanjuruhan’s rich narratives and aesthetics have developed unique brand identities, adapted to evolving market demands, and established deep emotional connections with their customers. This approach to culture-driven innovation ensures that

businesses remain relevant and resilient in an increasingly competitive market landscape.

The strategic integration of Kanjuruhan heritage offers creative businesses a unique advantage, effectively bridging the divide between preserving local culture and appealing to global markets. By embedding cultural heritage into their operations and branding strategies, these businesses are able to sustain their competitive edge while actively contributing to the revitalization and preservation of their cultural roots.

Looking forward, future research could investigate the broader economic implications of integrating cultural heritage into business practices and explore the adaptability of such frameworks to other regions and industries. This study demonstrates that cultural heritage is far more than a historical relic—it is a dynamic and strategic resource that fosters modern business innovation and long-term sustainable growth.

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