



WEAVING EFFICIENCY AMID LIMITATIONS: THE SURVIVAL NARRATIVE OF MICRO ARTISANS IN BALI

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Abstract:

Micro craft-based businesses in Bali face a dual pressure in the form of limited human resources, fluctuating market demands, and cultural ties in preserving hereditary businesses. This study aims to explore the survival strategies of micro artisans amid these constraints, focusing on self-developed efficiency practices. The method used is qualitative with a phenomenological approach, involving in-depth interviews and field observations of 12 artisans in various craft centers in Bali. The research results indicate that the main strategies adopted are enhancing the skills of all human resources, reorganizing workflows to be more efficient, and implementing night overtime to address labor shortages and ensure timely completion of work. Moreover, business sustainability is driven not only by economic necessity due to the difficulty of obtaining formal employment, but also by cultural factors, such as the continuation of family businesses across generations as part of family and community identity. These findings affirm that efficiency at the microenterprise level is not merely the result of technical innovation, but also the product of a combination of adaptive capacity (resilience), institutional legitimacy, and cultural values inherent in production practices. However, efficiency practices such as working late at night have the potential to create health risks and reduce long-term productivity if not balanced with external support. The implications of this study highlight the need for culturally sensitive interventions, such as community-based training programs, simple workflow redesigns, micro social protection, and regeneration strategies that encourage young people to continue the business with innovations that still respect tradition. Thus, the results of this study contribute to the theoretical understanding of micro-enterprise resilience while also offering policy recommendations to strengthen the sustainability of traditional Balinese crafts in the modern era.

Keywords: Efficiency, Family-run Businesses, Micro Artisans, Resilience, Survival Strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

The micro-enterprise sector, particularly traditional crafts, plays an important role in the regional economy, especially in Bali, which is known as a world-class cultural tourism destination. Craft products such as textiles, wood carvings, silver, and bamboo weaving not only represent cultural identity but also provide a livelihood for thousands of artisan families. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS Bali, 2023), more than 90% of business units in Bali fall into the micro-enterprise category, with a significant contribution to the absorption of informal labor. However, despite its great potential, micro-artisans still face serious challenges related to limited capital, market access, and low production efficiency.

Amid the tides of globalization and digitalization, the competitiveness of micro artisans is increasingly pressured by mass-manufactured products and cheap imported goods. This situation was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily paralyzed tourism in Bali, thereby reducing demand for handicraft products. Artisans are faced with a dilemma: to survive with limited resources or to be forced to halt production. This condition highlights the significant gap between the narrative of traditional craft sustainability and the economic reality of vulnerable micro artisans. Furthermore, research on MSMEs in Bali often focuses on creative tourism or digital marketing, rather than on the



survival narratives of micro-artisans operating with minimal capital and family-based organizational structures. In fact, understanding how artisans manage limitations, negotiate resources, and weave efficiency is key to formulating contextual empowerment policies.

In addition to limitations in capital and market access, the issue of production efficiency among micro artisans in Bali is also closely related to limited technology and access to innovation. Most artisans still rely on traditional methods with simple tools, so production capacity is limited and it is difficult to meet large demands. On the other hand, micro artisans also face the problem of generational sustainability. Many young people in Bali prefer to work in the formal tourism sector or move away from home rather than continue the family craft business. This phenomenon poses a threat to the preservation of traditional knowledge and the continuity of craft production.

In addition to internal factors, external support through government policies and community involvement also influences artisans' capacity to survive. Local government programs in Bali, in the form of skills training, capital assistance, and promotion of craft products through exhibitions, have been implemented, but their impact is still uneven. Many artisans are not reached by formal programs, making them rely more on social networks and community solidarity to sustain their businesses.

Therefore, this study attempts to fill that gap by exploring the survival narratives of micro artisans in Bali. Using a qualitative approach, this study highlights how they weave efficiency amid constraints, through simple innovations, business diversification, and social solidarity practices within local communities. These findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the study of MSMEs in the context of the creative economy, as well as practical implications for local governments and stakeholders in formulating strategies for more inclusive and sustainable artisan empowerment.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The traditional Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective (Barney, 1991) argues that sustainable competitive advantage stems from the ownership of valuable, rare, and hard-to-imitate resources. However, for micro artisans facing severe resource constraints (limitations in financial capital, technology, and market access), this logic seems inapplicable. In fact, this framework modifies the RBV with the proposition that such constraints themselves can act as a catalyst for creating unique resources. The lack of access to standard industry raw materials forces artisans to utilize overlooked local resources, which then become distinctive features of their products. The inability to purchase high-tech machines hones manual craftsmanship skills, which in fact become the main selling point. Thus, limitations are not seen as weaknesses, but as a context that gives rise to forms of creative efficiency and originality that are difficult for large-scale competitors to replicate (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

To explain the mechanism by which artisans respond to constraints, Resourcefulness theory, particularly the concept of Bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005), serves as the backbone of this framework. Bricolage is defined as the practice of making something out of what is available, by combining resources at hand to solve new problems. In the context of Balinese artisans, bricolage manifests in various actions: utilizing wood or fabric scraps to create new products, repairing old tools instead of buying new ones, or leveraging family networks for marketing. Efficiency is not about minimizing costs with optimal inputs, but about creating maximum value from inputs that are limited and often considered worthless. The survival narrative is essentially a narrative of bricolage about how artisans continuously and persistently (resourcefully) reassemble limited resources to survive and even discover niche market opportunities.

Resilience in social-organizational studies is understood as more than just the ability to bounce back; it encompasses the capacity to absorb shocks, adjust operations in times of disruption, and in many frameworks, to transform practices to become more adaptive in the future. The socio-ecological perspective positions resilience as the system's capacity to maintain essential functions even under pressure and to change form when necessary. Classical studies in this field affirm these dimensions and link them to learning capacity



and resource diversity, which is relevant when considering artisan communities that depend on local ecosystems and the tourism market (Folke, 2006). Resilience is often conceptualized as a set of organizational capabilities or even as a meta-capability, which is a higher-level ability that coordinates more specific capabilities such as threat detection, rapid response, post-crisis learning, and process reengineering. Duchek (2020) describes resilience as a meta-capability consisting of three sequential processes: (1) anticipatory capacity and sensing (detecting and preparing), (2) coping/adaptive capacity (managing impact), and (3) recovery/transformational capacity (recovering while also transforming the operating model if necessary).

Furthermore, the perspective of Institutional Theory helps explain how cultural norms, social rules, and government policies influence the survival strategies of artisans. This theory argues that organizational practices are determined not only by economic efficiency but also by social and cultural legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In the context of Balinese crafts, institutional pressures come from societal expectations for cultural preservation, global market demands for quality standards, and local government policies that encourage the promotion of local products. Research by Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) states that human resource management, including employees' cognitive abilities, role flexibility, and learning practices, is an important determinant in building that resilience capacity.

3. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach with the aim of understanding the lived experiences of micro artisans in Bali in weaving efficiency amid limitations. The phenomenological approach is chosen because it focuses on the subjective meanings formed by the actors (artisans) regarding their socio-economic reality, thereby producing rich narratives that cannot be captured by quantitative methods. The research was conducted in several craft centers in Bali, representative of three locations: Denpasar City, Badung Regency, and Gianyar Regency. The study population consists of micro artisans (household/family-scale businesses) who are actively producing traditional or modern crafts in Bali. This study used purposive sampling with a total of 12 respondents based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) micro-enterprise status (operating for ≥ 1 year), (2) located in village/craft communities, (3) willing to participate in in-depth interviews. Data collection techniques included: 1) Semi-structured in-depth interviews: focusing on survival experiences, efficiency strategies, resource access, the role of social networks, and perceptions related to policies/institutions; 2) Participatory/field observations: documenting production processes, tools used, family work patterns, and distribution flows. Field notes and videos (with permission) were used for contextualization; 3) Relevant local documents and archives.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research results indicate that the main strategy to optimize the production process for greater efficiency is by enhancing the skills of all human resources and reorganizing the workflow effectively, thereby improving work efficiency. These findings are in line with the Resource-Based View and Human Capital Theory: skills are intangible assets that are difficult for competitors to imitate and can become a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Becker, 1964). Operationally, upskilling micro-artisans means more than a one-time technical training; it entails building sustainable capabilities: more efficient production techniques (e.g., mastering material-efficient dyeing techniques, eliminating non-value-added steps), simple quality management (in-line quality checks), problem-solving abilities (on-the-spot problem-solving), as well as micro-managerial skills (simple record-keeping, raw material planning). From an organizational resilience perspective, skill enhancement strengthens coping and transformational capacity—artisans with higher skills tend to adapt quickly to demand fluctuations and implement improvisational solutions when disruptions occur (Duchek, 2020; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

Micro artisans in Bali often choose to work overtime at night to complete their tasks on time, reflecting an adaptive strategy in coping with limited human resources. Practically,



overtime becomes an instant solution when demand rises, deadlines are tight, or the workforce is limited. From the perspective of Resilience Theory, this strategy can be understood as a short-term coping mechanism that allows artisans to continue meeting market commitments even if internal conditions are not ideal (Duchek, 2020). By working longer hours, production capacity can be increased without the need to add new workers, which would require additional costs or training time. However, the practice of overtime also has multidimensional implications. On the positive side, overtime provides time flexibility and maintains production continuity, especially in family-based micro enterprises where capital to hire additional workers is very limited. This aligns with the theory of Institutional Isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), where small businesses imitate work patterns believed to be effective in maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of customers and the market. However, in the long term, overtime has the potential to cause physical fatigue, a decline in marginal productivity, and occupational health risks.

Micro-artisans in Bali choose to continue their craft businesses not merely because of economic optimism, but due to a combination of two structural and cultural factors: (1) the limited opportunities for formal employment in the local market, especially after the tourism shock, making home-based businesses a rational choice to secure livelihoods; and (2) the inheritance of family-run businesses that embody values of identity, traditional knowledge, and family responsibility. Within the framework of the Resource-Based View, intangible assets such as distinctive skills and cultural legitimacy make craft enterprises a feasible 'way out' for households when the formal labor market is unavailable (Barney, 1991). On the other hand, the Socio-Cultural Embeddedness lens emphasizes that artisans' economic decisions are deeply embedded in family and community norms to continue family businesses, not merely as work, but as part of identity obligations and cultural reproduction (Granovetter, 1985).

5. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that micro-artisans in Bali are able to survive amid limited resources by developing efficiency strategies rooted in a combination of skills, process adaptation, and inherited cultural values. The main strategies identified include enhancing the skills of all human resources, rearranging workflow to reduce wasted time and effort, and implementing night overtime as a practical measure to address labor shortages. Although overtime provides a short-term solution, this practice has negative implications for health and productivity if carried out continuously.

In addition to technical factors, this study affirms that the sustainability of micro craft businesses is also supported by structural and cultural factors. Difficulties in obtaining formal employment encourage artisan households to continue relying on home-based businesses, while the cultural dimension of hereditary work strengthens their motivation to persist. Thus, micro craft businesses are not merely economic activities, but also a manifestation of family and community identity closely tied to Balinese socio-cultural values.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings enrich the literature on resilience and institutional theory by showing how efficiency arises from the intersection of constraints, adaptive innovation, and institutional pressure. From a practical standpoint, this research emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive interventions, such as community-based training, simple workflow redesign, micro social protection support, and regeneration programs that foster innovation without eliminating traditional values.

Overall, this study concludes that efficiency amid constraints is not merely the result of technical strategies, but a layered survival narrative—integrating economic needs,



cultural values, and adaptive capacity. Therefore, efforts to strengthen micro artisans in Bali require a holistic approach that combines technical empowerment, policy support, and appreciation of the cultural identity that forms the foundation of their sustainability.

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