



Utilization of network resources by SMEs in the creative economy sector in Banyumas Regency, Central Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article provides some research findings investigating the efforts of two small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the creative economy sector at the local level in introducing their businesses to external parties. A qualitative approach with two cases of SMEs utilizing in-depth interviews with ten informants was employed in this study to show that the primary objective of using network resources is to develop their capacity to promote their products for broader markets externally supported by various parties. The two SMEs selected in this research are Batik and *Dablongan* Clothing enterprises. Their products rely on ideas, knowledge, and creativity as the main features of the creative economy. This article shows that network existence plays an important role to promote SMEs in the creative economy sector regarding policy failure. The results show the efforts of SMEs to utilize network resources to improve their market access. Social community, academia, professional organization, diaspora, and commercial banks play an essential role to promote SMEs to address the failure of local government in the development of a creative economy. There are four key roles that various types of network played in supporting development of SMEs, namely (1) to overcome the production process, (2) to explore more potential domestic customers, (3) to expand new markets overseas and to improve the quality of SMEs products, and (4) to bridge internet literacy gaps. Thus, it is essential for the local government to promote SMEs in the creative economy sector by utilizing the power of network resources.

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Introduction

SMEs are the economic backbone of Southeast Asian countries. As stated by the board of ASEAN on the importance of SMEs, various efforts are needed to improve their capabilities to reduce the economic gaps in ASEAN territories (Nandyatama, 2015). The economic integration of ASEAN

Economic Community (AEC) has provided spaces to develop and improve the SMEs' competitiveness mainly by applying the tariff and non-tariff barrier reduction.

Despite the massive promotion and information about the implementation of SMEs, the local or regional governments have not realized the existence of SMEs yet. In fact, the research conducted by ERIA SME Research Working Group (2014) explains that SMEs contribute a quite significant role in the economy of ASEAN countries. This is proven by 89 to 99 percent of the total industrial types being SMEs. These industries have absorbed at least 52 to 97 percent of workers, assisted GDP incomes by 23 to 58 percent and contributed to the total state export by 10 to 30 percent.

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Since the world economy has shifted from goods production to service, information and knowledge have become the main keys for the economic driving force. Howkins (2013) mentions that when the economy is experiencing a crisis of resources and finances, creative solutions are necessary. Some researches stated that industries based on knowledge, information, and creativity have significantly provided contributions to the economy, favorable business climate, environmentally friendly resource utilization, and positive impacts to the society (Simatupang, Rustiadi, & Situmorang, 2012).

The contribution of SMEs in the creative economy sector in Indonesia has also been acknowledged by the government, as to have had a positive impact on national economic growth between 2010 and 2013. Its contribution has reached 7.1 percent to the Product Domestic Bruto and absorbed approximately 10.7 percent or 12 million workers of the total workforce (CNN Indonesia, 2016). The promotion of SMEs' creative economy should not be performed by the government only, but also by the other stakeholders or networks. Moreover, the government's lack of knowledge and experience in managing this sector becomes the main problem to be solved (Atherton & Smallbone, 2010).

There are some underlying reasons due to the importance of social network role in assisting the government in promoting the SMEs in the creative economy sector. Cordell and Ramanow (2006) show that community or social networks may create social capital in the forms of public pride feeling, community cohesion, sustainability, etc. Fitriati (2015) finds that the collective actions made by the role of the social network have stimulated the monitoring and enforcement mechanism to improve the SMEs' competitiveness. The other study conducted by Kantorová, Bachmann, and Hrdinková (2015) shows that social network in the internet era has the function of bridging communication between SMEs and customers.

Banyumas Regency has provided a unique case on the role of social network in promoting the SMEs in the creative economy sector to expand their markets. In Banyumas Regency, creative economy-based SMEs have provided positive contributions to the local economy, such as absorption of workers and more incomes for the local people. Data show that in 2017, the number of SMEs in Banyumas Regency reached 214,329 businesses (98.97%), while the number of large and medium enterprises only reached 2,231 businesses (1.03%) (Satelitpost, 2017). However, local policy through the SMEs' Product Center has failed to promote the SMEs' creative economic products (Radar Banyumas, 2016). The SMEs are more interested in utilizing network resources to gain more access to markets, instead. By using the Banyumas SMEs' cases, this study aims at exploring a significant contribution of network resources to the development of SMEs in the creative economy sector. More specifically the goals of this study are to identify various types of network resources utilized by SMEs and to analyze the roles of network resources in supporting the development of SMEs in the creative economy sector.

Literature Review

Network Resource Concept

The utilization of network resource is highly essential for business sustainability, especially to the SMEs and this fact, has received much attention (Carter & Jones-Evans, 2012; Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). To further understand the concept of network resources, Huggins (2010) has classified them into two types: social capital and network capital. These concepts are used to describe and comprehend the resources and capital resulting from inter-company network. Also, there is the main difference between network capital and social capital. The main difference between both concepts is generally that "social capital consists of social relations and networks made by individuals", while "network capital consists of the strategic and calculative relations in which the companies make the network."

Regarding practical use, Munshi (2014) mentions that community or social network provides several solutions to the incomplete markets. First, the community network may support their business activities. They may dominate the trading activities as they have a strong relationship among them to control their business activity. Secondly, the community network plays a vital role in providing and securing jobs for their members. Thirdly, the community network may provide social insurance particularly for their members in critical times.

In the perspective of resource dependence theory, the external relations, such as organizational partnership and the network, may contribute success and profitability to the parties involved in building the connections (Street & Cameron, 2007). Due to the increasing social media usage, SMEs should also develop their business and network by utilizing the digital social media (Cole, DeNardin, & Clow, 2017; Scuotto, Giudice, & Omeihe, 2017), such as Blog, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Some studies find that social media plays an essential role in improving the SMEs' competitive advantages (Cole et al., 2017; He & Lu, 2016).

Creative Economy and SMEs

Howkins (2013) has introduced the term of a creative economy. He mentions that a creative economy is an economic activity whose inputs and outputs are in the forms of ideas. The intended ideas are those original ideas which intellectual property rights protect.

The Indonesian government defines creative economy as the new economy based on ideas born from the creativity of human resources (people's original ideas) and based on the use of science, including cultural and technological heritage (Ghazali & Nadinastiti, 2015). Hence, the creative economy is a concept placing creativity and knowledge as the main assets in running the economic activities (Pangestu, 2015). In particular, creative economy sectors include architecture; interior design; visual and communication design; product design; film, animation, video, and photography; craft; culinary; music; fashion; application and game developer; publishing; advertising; television and radio; performing art; and art.

SMEs in Indonesia reflect the dominant part of all firms working inside the Indonesian economy. The general concept of SME is a firm which has fewer than 30 workers, 10 billion rupiahs in assets, and 50 billion rupiahs in turnover. Most of the firms in Indonesia are classified as SMEs. The Bank of Indonesia revealed that in 2018 the number of creative SMEs reached 8.2 million and has the potential export value of USD 19.9 million (Kompas, 2018). Ironically, SMEs face many obstacles in their development. Fashion subsector like Batik, for example, still experiences the main obstacle such as how to obtain raw materials and to protect property rights. In fact, Batik enterprises are amongst the top two highest contributors for Indonesia's GDP from the fashion sub-sector. This situation shows that although Batik products are seen as the essential creative economy sector, they do not obtain any significant support from the Indonesian government to compete in the global market (Sulistianingsih & Pujiono, 2018).

Methodology

Banyumas Regency of Central Java Province has been selected as the research location since this region shows a dynamic development of SMEs in the creative economy sector, particularly in fashion subsector. The data were collected from April to September 2017. For analytical purposes, this study employed a qualitative approach with a case study method. Two case studies represent the SMEs in the creative economy sector that has extended their markets to the regional level. They are Pringmas Banyumas Batik and *Dablongan* Clothing enterprises. From all 16 subsectors of the creative economy in Banyumas, three subsectors have local potential, namely fashion, craft, and culinary. The focus of this paper is on the fashion subsector. There are two kinds of style in Banyumas in the process of developing and having great potential, Batik Banyumas in Papringan and *Dablongan* clothing. Fashion is one of the subsectors in the creative economy which is full of innovative works by way of design and creativity. It is a form of art and has become an identity of a person.

In-depth interviews were also conducted by purposively selected ten informants who represent SMEs' actors, local government officers, local activists, and village development activists. These interviews focus on the network resource types they have utilized, network resource benefits, and the roles of a network resource. This study also combines in-depth interview method with observatory research to fully present the data.

The data are analyzed using an interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013), consisting of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion. This study employs a source triangulation technique in which the data collected from various data sources are compared to obtain a mutually strengthening confirmation and to maintain its data validity.

Results

Case A. Pringmas Batik Enterprise

Batik-making traditions of Pringmas Batik Enterprise have long been developed and have become the source of side

jobs for most of the females in Papringan village, who formerly worked overseas as Indonesian Female Workers. Previously, most batik makers worked for batik business owners in the other sub-districts because they did not have adequate capital and facilities to develop their batik businesses. Moreover, their incomes as batik workers are considered very low. Unfortunately, the batik motifs created by the batik makers do not have any intellectual property right protection, so their creations have no potential to earn any royalties.

There are limited facilities and capabilities owned by the Batik enterprises, and the coloring waste management sites are still inadequately managed. The batik managers realize that they cannot discard waste in unspecified locations since it may pollute the environment. Fortunately, due to developed networks, the Pringmas Batik Enterprise has received training on program facilities from competent external parties to manage batik waste. The following is an excerpt of experiences told by an informant related to the assistance provided by an external party in managing batik waste.

"Due to the assistance of our partners, we are introduced to a competent institution known as the Main Center for Handicrafts and Batik of Yogyakarta. Through that institution, we are becoming more familiar with the management of clean products concerning how to handle batik production waste management. By improving our knowledge on batik production waste handling, we understand better on how to manage the production's waste. (IS, personal interview, June 14, 2017)

After obtaining the government assistance program (the Community Empowerment National Program) for three years, precisely in 2013, the Pringmas Batik Enterprise has no longer received supporting funds. Fortunately, the Bank of Indonesia holds various empowerment programs, one of which is located in Papringan village. They provide some facilities, such as the establishment of a gallery building to display Pringmas batik creative products, holding some production management training, conducting comparative studies to batik businesses made in the other regions, opening market accesses, and optimizing the promotion of Pringmas batik through exhibition activities.

However, there are some occurring challenges in the development processes of Pringmas batik businesses. Those challenges include batik prices, product qualities, capacity to meet the demanded orders in a large quantity, business competitions with the printed batik, batik model innovations, marketing network expansion and development, and online marketing.

To overcome those challenges, the Pringmas Batik Enterprise has made various efforts to make some cooperation with multiple parties, such as hotel industries, academicians, Indonesian workforce networks, and the local agency of education, youth, and sports as well as blogger groups. In response to the cooperation, hotel industries have provided batik display rooms for the Pringmas Batik Enterprise, such as in the Santika dan Aston hotels. Through those display facilities, many people will acknowledge the existence of Pringmas batik products. Meanwhile, many academicians, especially the Center for Research and Community Services of Jenderal Soedirman University, provided management training and market access development in the Aston Hotel for

Pringmas Batik organizers. Additionally, the local agency of education, youth, and sports also has provided overseas marketing access to the countries where Indonesian workers are working, such as in Hongkong and Taiwan. Similarly, the utilization of social media such as Twitter, Instagram, and Whatsapp also will facilitate the communication of SMEs' actors with the other stakeholders.

The bloggers and village development activists also promote the Pringmas batik products through their blogs and even bring them as souvenirs when the bloggers are traveling overseas. The television industries similarly promote the Pringmas batik to be well acknowledged by society, particularly in Central Java. Thus, the assistance provided by various partners has a positive influence on the Pringmas batik products, both at local and national level.

Case B. Dablongan Clothing Enterprise

This is similar to Batik, *Dablongan* Clothing businesses require creativity, especially in dealing with the image and text designing. Driven by some young entrepreneurs, this business is considered a unique company due to utilizing images and texts adjusted to contemporary socio-cultural dynamics. The idea in developing this business is not a new thing since in other regions, such as Yogyakarta and Bali, they have long expanded this kind of clothing business. This business has also become a signature souvenir for many tourists visiting those regions.

Dablongan T-shirt marketing ranges not only to various areas in Banyumas but also to Taiwan and other ASEAN territorial areas. By utilizing social media, such as Instagram and Whatsapp, the overseas customers are becoming familiar with *Dablongan* T-shirt products, especially the Indonesian workers from Banyumas who are joining the communities under the local agency of education, youth, and sports. Diaspora communities or those working in other areas are exceedingly proud to promote *Dablongan* T-shirt products to their friends. They are not only pleased with products showing the character of Banyumas culture, but they also think that wearing a *Dablongan* T-shirt may lessen their longing for their hometown. This regional sentimental feeling is raised by the *Dablongan* Clothing Enterprise to ensure the cooperation of those who are working out-of-town, to become *Dablongan*'s broader market segments.

The promotion strategies of *Dablongan* clothing businesses also utilize the network power of blogger communities. In some bloggers' activities, *Dablongan* clothing provides an endorsement by providing T-shirts for the participants of their events. With this strategy, the *Dablongan* products are promoted by the bloggers in their web blogs.

The Roles of Network Resources

This research finds that various communities have been widely developed in Banyumas and play an essential role in promoting SMEs' creative economic products. However, the Regency Government of Banyumas has not utilized those opportunities yet. The Banyumas bureaucrats' mindsets are still dependent on the project and budget approach. If not well allocated and well programmed, the cooperation opportunity

seems to be challenging. The problem is well described by two prominent figures of creative economy as follows:

“Banyumas is gifted with social power in the forms of creative economic communities in cooperation with the Village Development Movement Forum consisting of bloggers, arts and cultural activists, village activities which then meet their interests to develop the village and its economy. However, the existence of those communities has not been well acknowledged by the Regency government of Banyumas. Similarly, funding supports provided by the Regency government of Banyumas are still at the minimum limit to facilitate the development of a creative economy”. (PP, BD, personal interviews, May 14, 2017)

The communities and their networks may attract external sources' attention in the forms of funding, knowledge, and the other capitals not depending on the government budget. The creative economic promotions including batik still depended on network power. For example, Pringmas' batik has been taken to the city of London and performed on stage at the Aston Hotel by involving some national designers without the participation of the regional government. The following are excerpts of interviews from several informants.

“Blogger communities have important roles in marketing the products of SMEs' creative economy. There are various benefits obtained by the bloggers when promoting those unique products since they have many followers. During this time, their roles are not maximally utilized institutionally by the Regency Government of Banyumas”. (ES, personal interviews, May 31, 2017)

“The marketing strategies are traditionally made and supported with the utilization of information technology in the forms of social media as well as the cooperation with wider blogger communities. The products are also well marketed to all Banyumas people working out-of-town and overseas through domestic and overseas workforce”. (SM, IS, personal interviews, June 12, 2017)

“Marketing strategies apply traditional ways and information technology in the forms of social media and cooperation with bloggers. The bloggers support the product marketing at the star hotels in Purwokerto area”. (MA, personal interviews, June 17, 2017)

Discussion

This research shows that SMEs have been able to utilize the network resources either from community groups, local agency, banking, or professional institutions. The availability of network resources provides positive impacts on the product market expansion and product quality development. This study finds that there is excellent attention from various parties regarding the development of creative economy sectors. Such an atmosphere is then utilized by SMEs' actors to improve their social networks in supporting their business.

The collaboration between communities and SMEs'

creative economy may show social capital at the local level. The SMEs' actors greatly trust the role of the social network to support the development of a creative economy positively. The strategic partners provide the information, knowledge, and social support resources in cooperation with the SMEs. Those resources greatly impact the development of creative economic business at the international level as shown by the distribution of diaspora communities, who are acting as both overseas customer and reseller for the creative economic products. The local creative economy actors' competence to obtain more overseas partners surely provides business transaction acceleration with the overseas costumers (Jones, Coviello, & Tang, 2011). Afsar (2014) also finds that the diaspora power as the overseas partner may be utilized to open opportunities and new ways to export the SMEs' products.

The utilization of network resources becomes greater as obtained through the power of social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, and blogs considered as popular social media utilized by the SMEs' actors. A study conducted by Durkin, McGowan, and Murray (2014) found that social media may provide the added values to improve the relationship and communication between SMEs and the banking party. In our case study, we also find that the presence of social media provides greater access for SMEs' actors to introduce profitable products to various regional markets.

This study finds that network resources from various organizations may be considered advantageous for the development of SMEs' creative economy. The external relations created by the SMEs have already provided access to wider markets and develop technical skills to improve the quality of the products (Ludmila & Stanislava, 2015). Community-based SMEs may face various problems and then provide solutions to overcome the difficulties by utilizing network resources.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study explored and analyzed a significant contribution of network resources to the development of SMEs' creative economy. The findings of the study showed that various types of network resources have been utilized by SMEs to improve their business and market access. Social community, academia, professional organization, diaspora, and banks play an important role in promoting SMEs to address the failure of local government in the development of a creative economy. There are four key roles that various types of network played in supporting the development of SMEs. The first is overcoming the production process problems. The second is exploring more potential customers from the domestic area. The third is expanding new markets overseas and improving the quality of SMEs products. The last is bridging internet literacy gaps. These roles resulted in the improvement of SMEs' business and market access.

This study suggests that the local government should use various local institutions as network resources to provide a valuable contribution to the SMEs' markets and competence development. These network resources may also be utilized for more strategic partners to formulate the workable framework for the policy dealing with the development of a

creative economy. Social community, academia, professional organization, diaspora, and banks may assist the local government with their respective resources to improve the regional market access as well as skills for SMEs' actors.

This research studied the role of various network resources in the development of SMEs in the creative economy sector. However, this research only included two cases of SMEs representing fashion subsector of a creative economy. Future research should consider more SMEs from various subsectors of creative economy that utilize network resources for their business development.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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