

A Phenomenological Study of Ethnic Entrepreneurship and Business Sustainability among Young MSME Entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of ethnic entrepreneurship among young MSME entrepreneurs in Banjarmasin City. Specifically, it seeks to explore the phenomenon of ethnic entrepreneurship and to examine whether its application influences the sustainability of young entrepreneurs' MSMEs in the city. Data were collected from five key informants selected through a snowball sampling technique. The research employed passive participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and both open- and closed-ended questionnaires as data collection instruments. Emphasizing an emic perspective, the study prioritized the perceptions and experiences of the key informants. A phenomenological analytical approach, as proposed by Miles and Huberman, was utilized to interpret the data. The findings reveal that ethnic entrepreneurship significantly contributes to the sustainability of young entrepreneurs' MSMEs in Banjarmasin City.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan pemahaman komprehensif mengenai implementasi kewirausahaan etnis di kalangan wirausaha muda pelaku UMKM di Kota Banjarmasin. Secara khusus, penelitian ini berupaya mengkaji fenomena kewirausahaan etnis serta menelaah apakah penerapannya berpengaruh terhadap keberlanjutan UMKM yang dijalankan oleh wirausaha muda di kota tersebut. Data dikumpulkan dari lima informan kunci yang dipilih melalui teknik snowball sampling. Proses pengumpulan data menggunakan observasi partisipan pasif, wawancara semi-terstruktur, serta kuesioner terbuka dan tertutup. Dengan menekankan perspektif emik, penelitian ini memprioritaskan persepsi dan pengalaman langsung para informan kunci. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis sebagaimana dikembangkan oleh Miles dan Huberman. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kewirausahaan etnis berkontribusi secara signifikan terhadap keberlanjutan UMKM para wirausaha muda di Kota Banjarmasin.

Introduction

The Sundanese ethnic group has long engaged in migration, often establishing their own communities to create new business opportunities, a phenomenon commonly referred to

as ethnic entrepreneurship. According to Waldinger et al. (1990), ethnic entrepreneurship refers to “a set of connections and regular interaction patterns among people sharing the same ethnic background who migrate to conduct entrepreneurial activities within a specific region or country.” This definition suggests that ethnic entrepreneurship involves entrepreneurial activities undertaken by migrants from the same ethnic background who organize collectively within a host region or nation.

Ethnic entrepreneurship can generally be understood through two main dimensions: opportunity structure and group characteristics. Market conditions and access to ownership shape the opportunity structure dimension. Market conditions are reflected in several factors, including product demand scope, product adaptation, consumer market services, product pricing, and market uncertainty. Meanwhile, access to ownership is influenced by entrepreneurial start-up processes, the availability of ethnic business niches, and various government policies related to licensing and business regulation.

Market conditions play a crucial role in shaping competitive advantage among ethnic Sundanese MSMEs. One key aspect is the ability of their products to meet the diverse needs of customers across different ethnic groups. To remain competitive, Sundanese entrepreneurs cannot limit their market to their own ethnic community; instead, their products must appeal to a broader audience, ensuring acceptance across all social and ethnic segments. Product adaptation is therefore essential—not only among Sundanese MSMEs but also among Madurese ethnic entrepreneurs—so that the goods and services offered can be well-received by consumers from various cultural backgrounds. These two factors are closely linked to market dynamics, as ethnic MSMEs must ensure that both Sundanese and non-Sundanese markets are effectively served. Furthermore, product pricing significantly influences competitive advantage. Prices must be set at an accessible level for all ethnic groups, particularly within the lower-income segments, to maintain competitiveness. However, market conditions are inevitably affected by various forms of uncertainty, including fluctuations in raw material prices, government regulations, and changes in consumer demand.

Access to ownership also affects competitive advantage, beginning from the initial establishment of a business. Enterprises founded by the Sundanese ethnic group differ from those that merely inherit or transfer existing ownership structures. The distinction lies in the degree of accessibility—existing businesses tend to have easier access to ownership rights compared to newly established Sundanese ventures, which often face bureaucratic challenges stemming from government policies. Access to ownership is also related to employment opportunities. The strong sense of kinship among the Sundanese motivates them to prioritize offering job opportunities to fellow ethnic members or to other migrant groups such as the Madurese. Regarding licensing issues, the City of Banjarmasin provides relatively favorable access to business ownership, as the city’s local revenue is significantly supported by the MSME sector. Nevertheless, changes in regulatory policies may still influence the growth and sustainability of Sundanese ethnic enterprises in the region.

Zolin and Schlosser (2011) highlight that immigrant entrepreneurs who engage in international new ventures often exhibit a range of characteristics that facilitate the success of such ventures. In this study, the term young entrepreneurs refers to individuals aged 18 to 35 years, a categorization commonly used in entrepreneurship and youth economic studies to denote early-stage economic actors who are in the formative phase of their entrepreneurial careers. Their findings align with the perspective of Oviatt and McDougall (1994), who argue that, from an opportunity-based standpoint, migrant entrepreneurs may possess human resources highly relevant to the development of new international businesses, including international knowledge, experience, and network connections. International new ventures are defined as businesses that, from their inception, derive substantial competitive advantage from the utilization of resources and the sale of outputs across multiple countries. This line of reasoning reinforces the argument that ethnic entrepreneurship is intrinsically linked to the creation and strengthening of competitive advantage.

This study examines ethnic entrepreneurship among young Sundanese entrepreneurs in Banjarmasin, Indonesia. The research includes both ethnic groups to capture how different internal migrant communities engage in entrepreneurship within the same urban context. Recent studies emphasize that ethnic entrepreneurship in developing countries is increasingly shaped by internal migration, local social capital, and community-based networks rather than international migration alone (Ratten, 2020; Dana and Ramadani, 2023). In Indonesia's multiethnic setting, internal migrant entrepreneurs play a crucial role in MSME development, yet remain underrepresented in empirical research (Pratono et al., 2020).

The Sundanese was selected because they constitute prominent migrant communities in Banjarmasin and are actively involved in micro and small-scale trade, particularly in food services and informal markets. Prior research shows that Indonesian ethnic entrepreneurs rely heavily on kinship ties, shared cultural norms, and trust-based networks to overcome resource constraints and market uncertainty (Nugroho and Setiawan, 2022). These characteristics make Sundanese entrepreneurs theoretically relevant for examining the relationship between ethnic entrepreneurship and business sustainability. The theoretical puzzle addressed in this study lies in the coexistence of resilience and vulnerability among young ethnic entrepreneurs. While many demonstrate business continuity and adaptability, they operate in highly competitive and informal environments with limited institutional support. Recent literature highlights that MSME sustainability is not determined solely by financial performance but also by social embeddedness, cultural legitimacy, and adaptive strategies (Kloosterman, 2021; Dana et al., 2022). However, most sustainability-oriented ethnic entrepreneurship studies focus on Western or international migrant contexts, leaving a gap in understanding internal migrant youth entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia.

This study is timely due to rapid digitalization and post-pandemic economic restructuring, which have transformed how young entrepreneurs access markets and sustain their businesses. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have become

central to marketing, customer engagement, and business survival among youth-led MSMEs (Nambisan et al., 2020; Ratten and Usmanij, 2021). In Indonesia, digital platforms increasingly intersect with ethnic identity and social capital, yet this relationship remains insufficiently explored (Utami et al., 2022).

Banjarmasin provides a meaningful research context due to its role as a regional trading hub with a long history of migration and multicultural interaction. Studies on secondary cities suggest that such contexts offer distinctive entrepreneurial ecosystems that differ from those of major metropolitan centers (Fitriani and Winarno, 2021; Ratten, 2024). Therefore, examining young Sundanese entrepreneurs in Banjarmasin contributes to a more contextualized understanding of ethnic entrepreneurship and MSME sustainability in emerging economies.

Literature Review

A. Ethnic Entrepreneurship

Light and Bonacich (1988), Waldinger (1986), and Waldinger et al. (1990), as cited in Valdez (2002), define ethnic entrepreneurship broadly as business ownership by immigrants and members of ethnic groups. Fundamentally, the literature on ethnic entrepreneurship suggests that ethnic group affiliation, as well as the relationship between ethnic group membership and the surrounding economic opportunity structure, interact to shape entrepreneurial outcomes. Efforts to understand ethnic entrepreneurship have been ongoing since the 1990s, with researchers identifying three key interactive components: opportunity structures, group characteristics, and ethnic strategies. Opportunity structures refer to the external market and institutional conditions that influence entrepreneurial activities, including market demand, access to business opportunities, inter-ethnic competition, and state policies. Group characteristics encompass factors such as cultural values, aspiration levels, resource mobilization capacity, and the strength of ethnic social networks, which shape collective entrepreneurial behavior. Ethnic strategies emerge from the interaction between opportunity structures and group characteristics and represent adaptive approaches adopted by ethnic groups to sustain and develop their entrepreneurial activities within specific socio-economic contexts.

More recent studies have expanded the concept of ethnic entrepreneurship beyond the context of international migration, particularly in Asian and Indonesian settings where ethnic diversity exists within national boundaries. Contemporary research emphasizes that ethnic entrepreneurship can also be observed among indigenous and internal ethnic groups who mobilize cultural identity, local knowledge, and community-based networks as economic resources. Studies in Southeast Asia demonstrate that ethnic identity functions as social capital that facilitates trust, cooperation, and access to informal markets, especially among micro, small, and medium enterprises. In the Indonesian context, scholars highlight how ethnic values, kinship ties, and local wisdom shape entrepreneurial motivation, business practices, and sustainability among ethnic-based

MSMEs. Recent literature further shows that ethnic entrepreneurship in Indonesia is closely linked to regional culture, inter-ethnic coexistence, and localized opportunity structures rather than cross-border migration. These findings suggest that ethnic entrepreneurship should be understood as a contextual and relational process that operates within both international and domestic ethnic settings, thereby reinforcing the relevance of ethnic entrepreneurship theory for analyzing young entrepreneurs' MSMEs in Indonesia.

B. Sustainability

In this study, sustainability is conceptualized primarily as business sustainability, referring to the ability of an enterprise to maintain economic activities and organizational viability over time. Rather than adopting a broad environmental or corporate social responsibility perspective, this research focuses on economic and socio-cultural sustainability, which are the most relevant dimensions for micro and small enterprises operated by young ethnic entrepreneurs. Recent studies emphasize that MSME sustainability is closely linked to resilience, adaptability, and continuity of income generation in the face of economic uncertainty and structural vulnerability (OECD, 2020; Saebi, Lien, & Foss, 2017; Saebi et al., 2022).

For MSMEs, particularly those embedded in ethnic and community-based contexts, sustainability is reflected in the continuity of business operations, the ability to absorb shocks, and the maintenance of stable relationships with customers, family members, and ethnic networks. Empirical evidence shows that economic sustainability remains a dominant concern for small businesses in developing economies, as it directly affects survival, employment creation, and household income stability (UNDP, 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021). At the same time, socio-cultural sustainability plays a critical role, as shared norms, trust, and collective identity function as informal governance mechanisms that support long-term business endurance (Korsgaard, Müller, & Tanvig, 2020; Zahra, 2021).

Recent entrepreneurship literature further highlights that sustainability among MSMEs is increasingly driven by social capital, embeddedness, and culturally grounded entrepreneurial practices, rather than formal managerial systems alone (Williams et al., 2020; Ratten, 2021). In ethnic entrepreneurship settings, these factors enhance business legitimacy, customer loyalty, and adaptive capacity, thereby strengthening long-term sustainability (Dana & Light, 2020; Rahman, Dana, & Ramadani, 2023). Accordingly, sustainability in this study is understood as the capacity of young ethnic entrepreneurs to sustain their enterprises through resilience, relational capital, and culturally embedded strategies, aligning closely with the lived realities of ethnic MSMEs in urban Indonesia.

C. Ethnic Entrepreneurship and Sustainability

The relationship between ethnic entrepreneurship and sustainability has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years, particularly in the context of MSMEs in developing economies. Ethnic entrepreneurship contributes to business sustainability through the mobilization of ethnic-based social capital, cultural values, and community

networks that enhance resilience, continuity, and long-term survival of enterprises (Dana & Ramadani, 2021; Ratten, 2020). Trust-based relationships, kinship ties, and shared norms within ethnic communities facilitate access to labor, informal financing, market information, and customer loyalty, thereby reducing uncertainty and transaction costs for small businesses (Kloosterman, 2022).

Recent studies in Asian and Indonesian contexts emphasize that sustainability in ethnic entrepreneurship extends beyond economic performance to include social and cultural dimensions. Ethnic MSMEs often aim to preserve cultural identity, traditional knowledge, and community livelihoods while maintaining business viability (Dana et al., 2020; Ramadani et al., 2023). In Indonesia, ethnic values such as gotong royong, mutual trust, and collective responsibility have been identified as key factors supporting business continuity and crisis resilience among ethnic-based enterprises (Sukmawati et al., 2021; Pratono et al., 2020). These values strengthen cooperation, risk sharing, and long-term commitment within ethnic business networks.

Furthermore, sustainability among ethnic entrepreneurs is reinforced through adaptive strategies that integrate tradition with innovation. Young ethnic entrepreneurs increasingly combine inherited cultural practices with modern business tools, including digital platforms, social media marketing, and flexible market strategies, to sustain competitiveness in dynamic environments (Ratten & Tajeddini, 2021; Wahyuni & Saraswati, 2022). Platform-based entrepreneurship enables ethnic MSMEs to expand market reach while maintaining cultural authenticity, which enhances both economic sustainability and cultural continuity. Overall, ethnic entrepreneurship should be understood as a socially embedded and adaptive process that supports the sustainable development of MSMEs. By leveraging ethnic identity, social capital, and innovation capabilities, ethnic entrepreneurs contribute to long-term business sustainability while simultaneously preserving social cohesion and cultural heritage (Dana & Ratten, 2020; Ramadani et al., 2023).

Research Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine ethnic entrepreneurship and business sustainability among young entrepreneurs in Banjarmasin. A qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to explore lived experiences, ethnic-based strategies, and sustainability practices that cannot be adequately captured through structured quantitative instruments. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with young entrepreneurs from the Sundanese ethnic groups who own or manage micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Interviews followed an interview guide developed from established theories of ethnic entrepreneurship and sustainability and were conducted in natural business settings to maintain contextual validity. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The population of this study comprised young Sundanese MSME entrepreneurs in

Banjarmasin. Five informants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria including age (18-40 years), ethnic background, a minimum of two years of business operation, and active involvement in business decision-making. This sampling technique was employed to ensure the selection of information-rich participants with relevant entrepreneurial experience. Semi-structured interviews were chosen instead of questionnaires to allow flexibility and depth in capturing participants' perceptions, meanings, and culturally embedded practices related to ethnic entrepreneurship and sustainability. Questionnaires were considered less suitable due to their limited capacity to explore complex social and ethnic dynamics.

The use of five informants aligns with phenomenological qualitative research, which emphasizes depth rather than statistical representation. Data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged, indicating that the number of informants was sufficient for the analytical objectives of the study. This methodological choice explains the reference to five informants stated in the abstract.

Table 1 explains the development of the semi-structured interview design used in this study. The table outlines the key research variables, their conceptual dimensions, and the theoretical sources that informed the formulation of the interview questions. Specifically, the variable of Ethnic Entrepreneurship is operationalized through dimensions such as opportunity structures, group characteristics, and ethnic strategies, drawing on the framework proposed by Aldrich and Waldinger (1990). Meanwhile, the Sustainability variable is explored through dimensions related to trading knowledge, trading skills, and trading equipment, which are adapted from the sustainability perspective introduced by Pojasek (2007). The function of Table 1 is to demonstrate how abstract theoretical concepts were translated into concrete interview themes. By linking each variable to its corresponding dimensions and sources, the table ensures methodological rigor and transparency in the interview design process. This approach helps ensure that the data collected through interviews are theoretically grounded and directly aligned with the objectives of the study, particularly in examining the relationship between ethnic entrepreneurship and business sustainability among MSMEs.

Table 1
Development of a Semi-Structured Interview Design

Variable	Type	Source
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Ethnic Entrepreneurship	Opportunity structures	Aldrich and Waldinger (1990)
	Group characteristics	
Sustainability	Ethnics Strategies is technical term meaning positioning of oneself to others in order to accomplish one's goal.	
	Trading knowledge refers to an individual's perception of their level of understanding and expertise in conducting commercial activities within wetland areas.	Pojasek (2007)
	Trading skills refer to an individual's perception of their ability to perform trading activities within wetland areas.	
	Trading equipment refers to an individual's perception of the condition of the tools and facilities used in trading activities.	

Results and Discussion

A. Young Entrepreneurs

The findings show that young entrepreneurs in South Kalimantan represent a new generation of MSME actors who integrate local cultural resources with digital platforms and sustainability-oriented practices. Rather than relying on traditional extractive sectors, they develop businesses grounded in local wisdom, digital competence, collaboration, and social responsibility.

Local cultural elements such as sasirangan textiles, Martapura gemstones, and wetland-based products function not only as cultural symbols but also as sources of product differentiation and market identity. One informant noted that “products with Banjar identity are easier to accept because people feel represented,” indicating how cultural embeddedness strengthens market legitimacy. At the same time, entrepreneurs rely heavily on Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook as primary sales channels, reflecting their position as digital natives who expand market reach beyond local boundaries.

Collaboration also emerged as a dominant pattern. Entrepreneurial communities facilitate knowledge sharing, joint promotions, and collective problem-solving, reducing individual business risks. In addition, environmental awareness and community empowerment were evident through practices such as recycled packaging and local labor inclusion. These characteristics collectively form the foundation for sustainable entrepreneurial behavior among young MSME actors in South Kalimantan.

B. Ethnic Entrepreneurship

Ethnic entrepreneurship in this study is understood as the strategic use of ethnic identity, networks, and cultural knowledge to build and sustain business activities. The findings indicate that opportunity structures play a central role in shaping entrepreneurial success. Local markets tend to favor culturally specific products that are difficult to imitate by external actors, such as Banjar cuisine, traditional clothing, and culturally themed digital services. One respondent explained that “local customers trust businesses that understand Banjar values,” highlighting how cultural familiarity creates market protection. Beyond local markets, access to broader networks enables

entrepreneurs to scale their businesses through exports, partnerships with hotels, and digital platforms targeting diaspora consumers. These opportunity structures allow ethnic-based products to enter regional and national markets without losing cultural authenticity.

Ethnic strategies further strengthen sustainability outcomes. Young Sundanese entrepreneurs operating in South Kalimantan actively position themselves by adapting language, appearance, and communication styles to different stakeholders. Incorporating Banjar cultural philosophies into branding narratives fosters trust, while digital storytelling allows entrepreneurs to merge tradition with innovation. This strategic positioning enables them to balance cultural integration with entrepreneurial competitiveness, reinforcing long-term business continuity.

C. Sustainability

The findings reveal that sustainability among young ethnic entrepreneurs is closely linked to learning processes, social acceptance, and adaptive collaboration. Initial limitations in trading knowledge, particularly in wetland-based economic contexts, are addressed through direct engagement with local practitioners. Entrepreneurs emphasized learning from fishermen, traditional traders, and local craftsmen as a way to build both technical competence and social legitimacy.

One informant stated that “respecting local ways is more important than forcing new systems,” illustrating how humility and cultural sensitivity facilitate trust-building. By involving local youth in business operations and positioning themselves as partners rather than outsiders, young Sundanese entrepreneurs gradually transform perceptions and strengthen their economic role within the community.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that ethnic entrepreneurship contributes to sustainability not merely through profit generation, but through the alignment of cultural respect, social integration, and adaptive innovation. This relationship enables young entrepreneurs to sustain their businesses while simultaneously supporting local identity and community resilience.

Conclusion

This study explores ethnic entrepreneurship from a phenomenological perspective by focusing on young Sundanese entrepreneurs operating MSMEs in Banjarmasin. The findings indicate that ethnic entrepreneurship is shaped not only by ethnic background, but by the strategic use of cultural identity, social networks, and local knowledge to access market opportunities and sustain business activities.

Empirical evidence shows that locally embedded opportunity structures enable young entrepreneurs to develop culturally distinctive products and services that strengthen market acceptance and competitiveness. Ethnic strategies such as cultural adaptation, identity-based branding, and context-sensitive communication contribute to sustainability by fostering trust, social legitimacy, and long-term business continuity. Sustainability is further reinforced through adaptive learning and collaboration with local communities, allowing entrepreneurs to integrate traditional values with digital innovation.

Overall, this study extends ethnic entrepreneurship research beyond migration-focused contexts and demonstrates its relevance to youth entrepreneurship and MSME sustainability in Indonesia. The findings highlight cultural embeddedness as a critical

resource for sustaining young ethnic entrepreneurs in multiethnic urban settings.

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