

Between Imagination and Innovation: The Role of Social Media in Craft Artists in South Sulawesi

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This study examines the dualism of creativity and innovation among craft industry players in South Sulawesi, focusing on the tension between traditional imagination and the influence of social media. In the digital era, the local craft industry faces the challenge of maintaining authenticity while meeting modern market demands. The research analyzes how these two approaches shape creative processes, product innovation, and business strategies. Using a qualitative methodology with in-depth interviews, two groups of craft players were identified: traditionalists, who rely on imagination and reject digital influences, and digitalists, who actively use social media for inspiration and business development. The findings reveal that traditionalists emphasize authenticity and artistic integrity, with innovation occurring incrementally. In contrast, digitalists integrate tradition with global trends, using social media as a tool for market-oriented innovation and business sustainability. These results contribute theoretically by enriching the literature on creativity dualism in the creative industry and offer practical implications for craft practitioners. The study suggests the adoption of hybrid strategies that combine the strengths of tradition with digital opportunities. Future research is recommended to explore business models that successfully navigate this dualism and ensure both cultural preservation and market competitiveness.

Keywords: Authenticity; Craft Industry; Creativity; Innovation; Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The craft industry plays a crucial role in the global creative economy and cultural identity, serving as a bridge between past heritage and present innovation (Dhar et al., 2025). In Indonesia, particularly in South Sulawesi, this sector is not only a source of livelihood but also a guardian of tradition through products such as weaving, carvings, and meaningful jewelry. Authentic values and traditional techniques passed down through generations make this industry unique. However, in the face of a constantly changing market landscape, craft practitioners are faced with the challenge of innovating while maintaining the authenticity of their work—a complex challenge in the digital age (Samanta & Ray, 2025).

Historically, the creative process in the craft industry has been driven by intrinsic inspiration. Artists rely on pure imagination, life experiences, and observations of their surroundings as sources of ideas (Budiawan et al., 2020). This approach prioritizes authenticity and artistic integrity, while innovation is more incremental—that is, small improvements and developments of existing techniques, born from personal exploration of materials and traditions (Zhang, 2022). This process is often solitary, allowing artists to connect deeply with their vision without significant external influences.

However, the advent of digital technology has created a paradigm shift. The rise of social media has introduced a massive and easily accessible source of external inspiration. Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest now function as global virtual galleries, allowing artists to monitor design trends, color palettes, and styles from around the world. While access to this information can stimulate new ideas, there is growing concern that over-reliance on social media for inspiration can erode the originality and uniqueness of artwork, potentially turning artists into mere trend replicators (Yang, 2024).

This fundamental difference in sources of inspiration creates an interesting dichotomy within the craft industry in South Sulawesi. On the one hand, some artists consciously reject the influence of social media, choosing to maintain their traditional creative processes to maintain the authenticity of their work. They believe that true creativity comes from the depth of imagination and life experiences. On the other hand, there are craft practitioners who actively use social media as a vital tool not only for inspiration but also for marketing and business development, leveraging these platforms to connect with a wider market and gain direct feedback (Laradi et al., 2024).

While social media is often viewed as a catalyst for innovation, its dual role as both a source of inspiration and a business tool requires careful analysis. Freberg (2020) notes that exposure to new ideas through social media can spark innovative perspectives, but also requires artists to balance this with their own artistic identities. Therefore, this study aims to explore this dichotomy in depth, analyzing how both approaches—traditional and digital—interact and influence the creative processes, product innovation, and business sustainability of craft industry players in South Sulawesi.

This research seeks to answer key questions regarding how craft industry players in South Sulawesi obtain inspiration, how social media influences their creative processes and business strategies, and how they balance authenticity and innovation. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the literature on creativity and innovation management in the digital era, as well as provide practical insights for artists, policymakers, and supporting institutions in formulating strategies that integrate the strengths of tradition with technological opportunities to advance the local craft industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creativity, Innovation, Authenticity in the Craft Industry

The craft industry, as an integral part of the creative economy, stands at a crossroads between traditional heritage and modern market demands. Understanding the dynamics between creativity, innovation, and authenticity is key to analyzing the sector's sustainability and growth. These three pillars are interconnected, yet often create deep tension for artists. Creativity in the craft industry can be understood as the ability to generate original ideas from the artist's imagination. Traditionally, this creativity is intrinsic, born from life experiences, observations of nature, and personal interpretations of cultural heritage. Artists rely on intuition and handicrafts passed down through generations to create unique works (Li et al., 2025). Their creative process is personal and reflective, where inspiration is not sought from external sources but rather drawn from within.

Authenticity, on the other hand, is a crucial value that distinguishes craft products from mass-produced goods. Authenticity is not only about the uniqueness of the design, but also about the honesty and artistic integrity of the work. In the digital age, where ideas can be easily replicated, authenticity becomes increasingly valuable and difficult to maintain. For artists, authenticity is often closely tied to their belief in the creative process, where works should reflect personal and cultural identity, rather than simply following trends. However, Rachmad (2023) found that authenticity can also be built and maintained in the digital age. They argue that the brand equity of traditional products can be strengthened through authentic storytelling on digital platforms, where artists can share the stories behind their works (Júnior et al., 2023).

While creativity and authenticity are key pillars, innovation is key to business sustainability in a competitive market. Innovation can be defined as the implementation of a creative idea, which can take the form of a new product, a more efficient production technique, or a unique business model (Morad et al., 2021). Innovation in the craft industry doesn't always have to be radical; it's often incremental, meaning the gradual improvement and development of existing products. However, in the digital age, innovation can also be driven by external factors, such as market trends and consumer preferences accessible through social media. This innovation allows artists to remain relevant, reach new audiences, and ensure that their work is not only aesthetically appreciated but also commercially successful. Thus, these three pillars interact within a complex ecosystem. Creativity is the foundation, authenticity is the differentiating value, and innovation serves as the bridge between the two, ensuring that the craft industry not only survives but also thrives.

Social Media as a Dual Catalyst for Creativity and Innovation

The role of social media in the craft industry has gone beyond its function as a marketing tool; it has now become a dual catalyst that fundamentally shapes the creative and innovation process. On the one hand, social media serves as an "idea laboratory," opening the door for artists to access a limitless source of inspiration. Vieira et al. (2024) found that exposure to diverse creative ideas on social media influences artists' creative self-efficacy and artistic performance. The social interactions and comparisons that occur on these platforms can be powerful motivators for innovation, but they can also create pressure to create something unique amidst a sea of similar content. Similarly, Yang (2024) analyzed how digital platforms have fundamentally transformed the way artists produce and market their work, emphasizing that social media has become a place where artists not only gather visual inspiration but also interact with a global community.

On the other hand, social media also serves as a strategic tool for market-oriented innovation. Crafters can use these platforms to identify emerging trends, validate new ideas, and gain direct feedback from consumers. By posting prototypes or early designs, artists can gauge audience interest before starting mass production, a process that allows them to mitigate risk and ensure that their innovations are relevant to market demand. According to [Popescu and Tulbure \(2022\)](#), social media enables small businesses to drive market-oriented innovation cost-effectively, transforming the creative process from a personal one to a more interactive and adaptive one ([Dwivedi et al., 2021](#)).

Thus, social media has become a dual catalyst. It not only sparks creativity through exposure to new ideas but also guides innovation toward business sustainability through direct communication with the market. Social media is a space where imagination and business reality meet, creating new dynamics that shape the future of the craft industry.

Authenticity and Digital Openness

The dynamics between authenticity and innovation in the modern craft industry create profound tensions, particularly in the context of digital openness. Authenticity, traditionally understood as the uniqueness and integrity of a work born from an intrinsic creative process, is often perceived as at odds with widespread exposure on social media. [Qiu \(2024\)](#) found that social comparison on digital platforms can impact artists' creative self-efficacy. While this exposure can be motivating, it also risks encouraging artists to imitate trends, ultimately eroding originality and artistic honesty.

However, recent literature also offers a more nuanced perspective. Digital openness does not necessarily threaten authenticity; instead, it can be a tool for communicating it. [Júnior et al. \(2023\)](#) argue that the authenticity and brand equity of traditional products can be built and maintained in the digital age through powerful storytelling. Through social media, artists can share the stories behind their works, their creation processes, and the cultural values they embody. This narrative allows consumers to connect emotionally with the product, making authenticity not only an attribute inherent in the work but also a narrative shared digitally.

Thus, the tension between authenticity and digital openness doesn't have to result in one party giving in. Instead, it encourages new strategies where authenticity can become a unique selling point on social media. Craft artists can leverage digital platforms to educate audiences about their traditional values, thereby not only preserving authenticity but also strengthening it and making it relevant in the global marketplace.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aimed to deeply understand complex phenomena from the perspective of participants, namely craft industry players in South Sulawesi. This approach is highly suitable for exploring the subjective meanings and experiences that underlie the creative and innovation process. The case study design was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct an intensive and holistic exploration of the unique context and dynamics of this craft artist group ([Creswell & Creswell, 2018](#)). The subjects of this research were craft industry players in the South Sulawesi region.

The primary data in this study were collected through in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are an effective method for gathering rich, detailed, and personal information from participants ([Creswell & Creswell, 2018](#)). Interviews were conducted with research

subjects to explore their backgrounds as craft artists; their creative processes and sources of inspiration (e.g., imagination, nature, tradition, or social media); their views on authenticity and innovation; the role of social media in business strategies and interactions with consumers; and the challenges and opportunities they face in running a craft business in the digital era.

This research uses thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report data in the form of themes or patterns in the form of conclusions and interpretations through the process of coding, data selection, and data grouping which can produce detailed and in-depth data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Rozali, 2022)

To ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative data, this study employed data triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data with brief observations (where possible) of the artists' work processes and analysis of their works. This was done to validate that what they conveyed aligns with their practices. Additionally, member checking was conducted, in which research findings were reconfirmed with participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations aligned with their experiences.

RESULTS

Profiles of Respondents

This study involved nine craft artists from South Sulawesi, representing various types of crafts such as wood carving, pottery, weaving, accessories, paintings, and leather products. Respondents were predominantly middle-aged, with business experience ranging from three to twenty-three years. Their sources of inspiration varied, ranging from imagination, nature, and inherited traditions to digital platforms such as social media.

Table 1. Descriptive Profile of Respondents

No	Name	Gender	Age (year)	Type of Craft	Year of Business	Sources of Inspiration
1	HN	Male	49	Wood Carvings	5	Imagination, nature
2	AT	Male	45	Wood carvings, wall hangings, paintings	5	Imagination, experience, nature
3	MR	Female	53	Accessories	5	Imagination
4	GH	Male	48	Pottery, paintings	12	Social Media
5	UM	Male	55	Pottery	23	Imagination and Legacy
6	GR	Female	47	Accessories	20	Local philosophy and raw materials
7	AR	Female	27	Accessories	3	Social Media
8	RS	Male	36	Leather accessories	6	Social Media
9	DR	Female	45	Weaving	4	Social media and legacy

Source: Processed Data (2024)

Based on the interviews, craft industry players in South Sulawesi can be grouped into two main categories according to their sources of inspiration and approaches: traditionalists and digitalists.

Traditionalists: Inspiration from Imagination and Legacy

The first group, identified as traditionalists, relied on imagination, nature, and inherited techniques as their primary sources of creativity. For example, HN, a wood carver, explained:

“Inspiration isn't sought on my phone. I prefer to be quiet, meditate, and look at nature, the sea, and then an idea pops into my head. That's what makes my work different.”

Similarly, AT emphasized the importance of authenticity by stating:

“My work must be honest with me. If I copy something on social media, it's no longer my work, but someone else's.”

For traditionalists, innovation occurred incrementally through subtle modifications in motifs, textures, or materials. GR, who creates accessories, stated:

“The technique is the same, inherited from my grandparents. But I try to play with the texture of the surface. Or I add small details that weren't there before.”

This group regarded authenticity and artistic integrity as more important than popularity or market trends. While they did not reject social media entirely, its use was limited to promotion rather than as a source of inspiration.

Digitalists: Inspiration from Social Media and Market Trends

The second group, identified as digitalists, actively used social media platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram to access global ideas and track consumer preferences. AR, an accessories designer, shared:

“Every time I want to create a new collection, I always open Pinterest. I create boards specifically for crafts, fashion, and architecture. From there, I mix and match ideas to create something new.”

Similarly, DR, a weaver, explained how she combined traditional motifs with digital trends:

“If I didn't check social media, I wouldn't know what jewelry trends are right now. I combine traditional motifs with trending designs. This isn't copying, but inspiring.”

Digitalists not only used social media for inspiration but also for market validation and business development. GH, who works with pottery and paintings, revealed:

“I saw a Japanese ceramic bowl design on Instagram and was inspired to combine it with Toraja motifs. The result is unique and highly sought after.”

These respondents highlighted the role of social media as both a creative laboratory and a business tool. Feedback from online audiences was used to refine product design, while direct interaction with consumers strengthened their brand positioning.

The Emergence of a Dualism

The findings indicate a clear dualism in the creative approaches of South Sulawesi craft artists. Traditionalists emphasize authenticity, intrinsic creativity, and incremental innovation rooted in tradition, while digitalists emphasize adaptive creativity, market-oriented innovation, and the strategic use of social media. Despite these differences, both groups contribute to the sustainability of the craft industry: one by preserving cultural heritage, and the other by ensuring commercial relevance in the digital era.

DISCUSSION

Dualism of Creativity in the Craft Industry

The findings of this study confirm the existence of two dominant orientations among craft artists in South Sulawesi: traditionalists and digital adopters. Traditionalists emphasize imagination, experience, and inherited techniques as their primary sources of inspiration. Their statements highlight the importance of authenticity and artistic integrity as the foundation of creative work. This is consistent with [Auger and Woodman \(2016\)](#), who argue that intrinsic motivation fosters creativity that is original and personally meaningful. For these artists, innovation is incremental, focusing on improving techniques or adding subtle new elements, in line with [Zhang's \(2022\)](#) notion of incremental innovation as a sustainable driver of creativity.

On the other hand, digital adopters perceive social media as a catalyst for creativity and innovation. Their interviews reveal how platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest serve as virtual libraries, enabling them to observe global trends and adapt them to local contexts. This corresponds with [Abhari et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Laradi et al. \(2024\)](#), who note that digital platforms can provide not only inspiration but also market-oriented innovation pathways. For these artists, authenticity is not diminished by digital influences; rather, it evolves by integrating traditional elements with contemporary aesthetics.

Authenticity and Market Relevance

A central debate identified in this study is the tension between preserving authenticity and achieving market relevance. Traditionalists stress that imitation through social media erodes authenticity, while digital adopters argue that authenticity can be redefined through creative adaptation. This aligns with [Rachmad \(2023\)](#) and [Júnior et al. \(2023\)](#), who demonstrate that authenticity can be communicated digitally through storytelling and consumer engagement. In this context, social media is not merely a threat to originality but a tool to narrate and strengthen the cultural identity embedded in craft products.

Social Media as Business Strategy

Beyond its role as a creative tool, social media is also a strategic medium for digital adopters. The ability to test prototypes, receive real-time feedback, and engage directly with customers provides them with a competitive advantage. [Rehman et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasize that such interactions support integrated marketing communication and brand building. The interviews confirm that digital adopters use this mechanism to align product designs with consumer preferences, thereby enhancing business sustainability. In contrast, traditionalists may limit social media use to promotional purposes rather than as a driver of creativity.

Towards a Hybrid Model

The dualism observed in this research should not be viewed as a dichotomy but as complementary strengths. Traditionalists safeguard cultural roots, authenticity, and craftsmanship, while digital adopters ensure adaptability and business continuity in a

global market. As [Kofler and Walder \(2024\)](#) note, innovation in crafts often emerges from blending traditional methods with modern technology, resulting in what is termed “traditional digital craftsmanship.” Therefore, hybrid strategies that combine imagination-driven creativity with digital adaptability could provide the most sustainable pathway for the South Sulawesi craft industry.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the existence of a significant dualism in the creativity of craft artists in South Sulawesi. The first group relies on imagination, life experiences, and inherited techniques as their primary sources of inspiration. For them, creativity is an intrinsic process that upholds authenticity and artistic integrity, while innovation emerges incrementally through gradual refinement of traditional practices. Although they recognize the presence of social media, its role is limited to marketing rather than shaping the creative process.

Conversely, the second group of artists positions social media as a central tool to spark creativity, identify market trends, and develop innovations. For these artists, creativity is adaptive and externally influenced, with innovation oriented toward market needs and business sustainability.

The findings affirm that neither approach is superior; both represent valid forms of creativity and innovation in the contemporary era. This dualism underscores the ongoing challenge for craft artists: maintaining cultural authenticity while simultaneously adapting to the dynamics of the digital marketplace.

LIMITATION

This study employed a qualitative approach involving a limited number of craft practitioners in South Sulawesi. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to the broader population of the Indonesian craft industry. While the insights obtained provide rich and in-depth understanding within the local context, they do not offer wide statistical representation. In addition, the study reflects a snapshot in time. Considering the rapid advancement of social media and digital technologies, as well as the continuous shifts in user behavior and platform algorithms, the dynamics of digital-based creativity may evolve significantly in the future.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study prior to depth interview. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their rights to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses.

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