



Branding Regional Products through Local Identity in the Creative Industry

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Abstract

This study examines local identity-based branding strategies in the creative industry and their role in strengthening the competitiveness of regional flagship products in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi. Using a qualitative case study design, the research involved 18 informants, including creative MSME actors, cultural community leaders, cooperative managers, and local policymakers. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, and analyzed thematically with the Miles and Huberman framework. The findings reveal that branding based on local identity is expressed through the use of natural materials, integration of the Bugis language in product names, traditional motifs in visual design, and cultural narratives embedded in digital promotion and local exhibitions]. This approach has increased product value by up to 30% and positioned Bone as a hub for culture-based creative economy. Key challenges include limited capital, weak digital infrastructure, low branding literacy, and complex trademark procedures. Conversely, opportunities arise from growing youth engagement, supportive local government policies, and integration with the tourism sector. Overall, the study underscores the importance of combining cultural preservation with modern marketing strategies to develop a sustainable creative industry that enhances regional competitiveness.

Keywords: Local Branding; Creative Industry; Cultural Identity; Regional Flagship Products; Bone Regency

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INTRODUCTION

The local creative industry is one of the strategic sectors that supports regional economic growth while strengthening the community's cultural identity (Dwiyantri & Al Syahrin, 2018; Dwiyantri & Aryani, 2025). In various countries, the creative sector has proven to drive innovation and job creation by utilizing local cultural potential as a basis for product added value (Andania et al., 2025; Dwiyantri, Syam, et al., 2024). However, the main research problem is that many regional flagship products lack strong and consistent branding strategies, which prevents the cultural value and identity embedded in them from being fully recognized in wider markets (Saharuddin, 2024; Sahid & Hazan, 2024). This weakness reduces product differentiation and competitiveness, leaving creative SMEs vulnerable to commoditization (Kumar et al., 2022; Purnomo et al., 2024; Ramadhona et al., 2023).

This phenomenon is also evident in Indonesia, where over 65% of SMEs in the creative economy sector do not have a consistent brand or visual identity for their products (Fauzi et al., 2023; Karunia et al., 2024; Saputra et al., 2024). As a result, local products are often positioned as ordinary commodities without clear differentiation, resulting in low competitiveness and limited added value for businesses (Dagiliené et al., 2021; Hackshaw et al., 2016). Bone Regency in South Sulawesi is an example of a region rich in cultural potential and creative resources, such as traditional woven fabrics, bamboo crafts, and local cuisine (Dwiyantri, 2022; Dwiyantri, MR, et al., 2024). Yet, initial surveys indicate that more than 70% of Bone's creative products are marketed without a clear brand identity or cultural narrative, showing a gap between cultural potential and market positioning (Andania et al., 2025; Dwiyantri, MR, et al., 2024). This condition underscores the urgency of research to explore how contextually appropriate branding strategies can be applied to strengthen cultural identity while enhancing the competitiveness of creative products (Achmad, 2023; Ananda, 2022; Hendrawan et al., 2024).

International literature highlights that integrating cultural narratives into branding can improve consumers' perceived value and loyalty toward local products (Gupta et al., 2025; Nie & Wang, 2021; Sun & Chen, 2024; Zeng & Kim, 2025). However, most previous studies have tended to focus on design and visual marketing techniques, while little attention has been given to how local creative communities embed cultural values, historical narratives, and identity elements into branding strategies (Bhrammanachote, 2024; Buschgens et al., 2024; Hoaihongthong & Tuamsuk, 2024; Iivanainen, 2017). This gap is important because branding rooted in local identity is not only an economic tool but also a medium for cultural preservation and social empowerment. This study therefore contributes by filling this gap through an in-depth analysis of identity-based branding strategies in Bone Regency's creative industry. The novelty lies in integrating cultural values, community wisdom, and modern marketing approaches to build sustainable branding models that strengthen competitiveness while preserving local identity.

With this framework, this study aims to answer two main questions: first, what branding strategies are applied by local creative industry actors in marketing regional products; and second, what challenges and opportunities arise in strengthening local identity through branding in the regional creative industry sector. The problem-solving approach refers to the branding strategy development model that emphasizes the integration of local identity, brand communication strategies, and community-based economic empowerment (Daldanise, 2020). This model enables an in-depth analysis of the interplay between local culture and market dynamics, thereby contributing theoretically to the literature on locality-based branding while providing practical recommendations for enhancing the competitiveness of regional creative products in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design (Yin, 2013) to understand identity-based branding strategies applied in the regional creative industry. This approach was chosen because it can capture the complexity of the creative process, socio-cultural dynamics, and identity narratives that underlie the development of regional superior products. The research focuses on Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, which is known for its distinctive creative products such as traditional weaving, bamboo crafts, and locally based culinary products that have the potential to be developed as regional identities. The location was selected purposively, considering cultural potential, the presence of active creative communities, and local government programs that support the development of a locally-based creative economy.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of various stakeholders in the creative industry ecosystem. A total of 18 informants were involved: creative SME actors, traditional artisans, creative community managers, policy makers from the tourism and creative economy agencies, and local cultural figures with in-depth knowledge of regional identity narratives.

Data collection was carried out through three complementary procedures. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted using an interview guide that covered themes of branding strategies, challenges, and opportunities. Interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and lasted between 45–90 minutes per session. Second, participatory observations were conducted in creative production centers, product exhibitions, and community activities. Observations focused on documenting branding practices, cultural symbols, and interactions between producers and consumers, supported by detailed field notes and photographs. Third, document analysis was performed on promotional materials, local government reports, and archival records related to regional flagship products to triangulate and enrich the primary data.

The collected data was analyzed using Miles and Huberman's thematic analysis technique (2019), which involves three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and iterative conclusion drawing. Coding was conducted manually and assisted with thematic matrices to categorize recurring patterns. Key themes included cultural narratives, visual branding strategies, marketing challenges, and opportunities for community collaboration. The use of Miles and Huberman's framework was justified because it provides a systematic and flexible tool for handling qualitative data in complex community contexts. Its iterative process allows researchers to continuously refine emerging themes, ensuring that findings remain grounded in the field data while capturing the nuanced interplay between identity, branding, and socio-cultural practices.

Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation, where interview results were compared with observation findings and supporting documents. Additionally, member checking was conducted with several key informants to ensure the researcher's interpretations align with field realities. Ethical protocols included informed consent, anonymization of respondents, and limiting data use exclusively for academic purposes.

RESULTS

Branding strategies implemented by creative industry players in marketing regional products

Theme 1: Integration of Local Identity in Branding

The branding strategies implemented by creative industry players in Bone Regency strongly emphasize the integration of local identity as the main element of product differentiation. This identity is manifested through the selection of natural raw materials, the use of local language

names, traditional designs, and cultural narratives conveyed to consumers. This approach aims to create an authentic impression that distinguishes local products from mass-produced items and fosters pride in the region's cultural heritage. This practice is evident in the awareness among creative industry practitioners that the uniqueness of culture-based products can serve as the primary attraction in positioning their brands in both local and national markets. The informants explained this view through the following statements:

"We use natural materials such as palm fronds and lontar leaves from nature to enhance the value of our products." (Bodo-Bodo MSME actor)

"The name of our product, 'Songkok Recca', is taken from the Bugis language to give it a regional characteristic." (Owner of Songkok Recca business)

"This weaving makes our products different from factory-made products." (Bodo-Bodo SME actor)

"At every exhibition, we showcase the manual production process so that the traditional value is visible." (Young creative industry actor)

"Local identity is not just about design, but also how we tell our story on social media." (Youth creative community leader)

The interpretation of these findings indicates that creative industry practitioners utilize local identity not merely as a visual element but as an overarching narrative embedded in their products. The choice of regional names and the use of traditional materials are symbols of cultural pride and an emotional marketing strategy that connects consumers with the story behind the product. The emphasis on manual processes in exhibitions reinforces the perception of authenticity, which is increasingly sought after by consumers in the experience economy. Additionally, using social media to tell cultural narratives demonstrates efforts to blend tradition with modern communication strategies, bridging local values and contemporary market demands. This approach is key to building a brand that is not only competitive but also sustainable, as it is rooted in community identity while remaining adaptable to digital marketing trends.

Theme 2: Product Design and Visual Differentiation

Product design and visual differentiation are essential in the branding strategies of creative industry players in Bone Regency. These efforts are manifested through selecting business names that reflect local identity, using traditional motifs on packaging, and a combination of modern aesthetics and cultural wisdom to attract consumers across segments. Creative industry players recognize that design protects products and acts as a medium for communicating cultural values and determining market appeal. Eco-friendly packaging, such as woven fabric pouches, is an innovation that enhances functional value while strengthening the premium product image. Additionally, unique visual differentiation opens opportunities for market penetration into souvenir markets and national e-commerce platforms that prioritize visual quality. Informants described this through the following statements:

"Our business name comes from the Bugis language, 'UMKM Mabarakka', so that people will immediately remember South Sulawesi." (UMKM Mabarakka)

"We create reusable packaging designs, woven fabric pouches." (Young creative entrepreneur)

"Product visuals must be modern but still highlight local wisdom." (Creative community leader)

"If the appearance is attractive, local products can enter the souvenir market." (Village government)

"Neat packaging design helps our products enter national e-commerce." (Bodo-Bodo MSME actor)

The interpretation of these findings shows that creative industry players in Bone are trying to combine two branding approaches: highlighting local uniqueness to strengthen identity and adopting modern visual trends to meet urban consumer expectations. Using local language names is an effective way to build geographical associations, while woven fabric packaging design adds value through storytelling and addresses sustainability issues through reuse. Focusing on modern aesthetics is also a strategy to expand the market reach of local products from traditional consumption to premium souvenirs and national e-commerce. This visual differentiation approach demonstrates the awareness of business actors that branding is not just about logos. Still, the overall experience felt by consumers from the moment they first see the product.

Theme 3: Marketing and Promotion Channels

The use of marketing and promotion channels by creative industry players in Bone Regency shows a combination of complementary digital and conventional strategies. Social media, especially Instagram, is used as the leading platform to display product photos and build interaction with consumers. Meanwhile, national marketplaces such as Shopee and Tokopedia are used to reach buyers outside the Bone area, expanding the market from local to national. In addition to online channels, businesses remain active in participating in local exhibitions such as Bone Anniversary as an effective face-to-face promotional tool to introduce products to visitors and tourists. Promotion strategies are also becoming more creative with video content showcasing the production process, highlighting the authenticity of the products, and building a narrative (storytelling) that strengthens the brand image. Creative industry players recognize the importance of combining online and offline channels to maintain their local consumer base while reaching a broader market. This is evident from the following statements from informants:

"We regularly upload photos of our products on Instagram, and more customers come from there." (Bodo-Bodo MSME player)

"We use marketplaces such as Shopee and Tokopedia to reach buyers outside Bone." (Handicraft SME actor)

"Every Bone Anniversary exhibition, we bring our products to the exhibition stand for promotion." (Creative cooperative manager)

"We create video content of the production process so that people can see the authenticity of the products." (Creative community youth)

"Digital promotion is important, but we still combine it with offline direct sales." (Culinary SME actor)

"Assistance from the tourism office was invaluable when we participated in exhibitions." (Weaving SME actor)

"We use WhatsApp Business for quick communication with customers." (Traditional food MSME actor)

Interpretation of these findings shows that creative industry actors in Bone have begun to utilize the digital marketing ecosystem to expand the reach of their products, while still maintaining face-to-face promotional methods that are considered necessary in building trust and emotional relationships with local consumers. This omnichannel strategy allows regional products to access a broader market without losing the personal touch that is the distinctive value of culture-based products. The use of video production and WhatsApp Business features demonstrates the adaptation of businesses to contemporary communication trends that demand quick responses and transparency in production processes. With the support of the local government through exhibition facilitation, this marketing strategy strengthens the position of

local products in competitive markets while emphasizing the importance of collaboration between businesses and policymakers in developing locally based creative industries.

Challenges and opportunities in strengthening local identity through branding in the regional creative industry sector

Theme 4: Limited Capacity and Resources

The main challenge in strengthening local identity through branding in the creative industry sector in Bone Regency lies in the limited capacity and resources of business actors. Capital constraints are a fundamental problem that hinders the ability of MSMEs to design professional branding, both in terms of visual design and brand communication strategies. Additionally, limited digital infrastructure, such as unstable internet access in some areas, hinders the utilization of online marketing channels, which have high potential for expanding the market. Low public awareness of the importance of branding also acts as a barrier, as some business operators still rely on the assumption that product quality alone is sufficient without a strong brand identity. Another contributing factor is the fluctuation of local raw material prices, which can increase production costs and weaken price competitiveness. Lengthy bureaucratic processes and high costs for trademark registration are also serious obstacles that discourage some business actors from legally registering their trademarks. The following quotes from informants illustrated this:

"Our capital is limited, so it is difficult to create professional branding." (Culinary MSME actor)

"Digital marketing requires a stable internet connection, which is sometimes difficult to get here." (Bodo-Bodo MSME actor)

"Not all residents understand the importance of branding; they still think that if a product is good, it will sell." (Cultural figure)

"Local raw materials are sometimes expensive, so production costs go up." (Owner of Songkok Recca business)

"We have difficulty obtaining brand licenses because the process is long and costly." (Creative business owner)

Interpretation of these findings shows that the process of strengthening local identity through branding cannot be separated from the structural conditions faced by the local creative community. Limited business capital makes it difficult for MSMEs to access professional design services and modern marketing strategies. Limited digital infrastructure exacerbates this condition by limiting opportunities to utilize social media or marketplaces as primary channels for promotion. Low branding literacy creates a gap between the potential of culture-based products and the ability of business actors to package that value into a competitive narrative in the modern market. Additionally, the high cost of local raw materials and lengthy bureaucratic processes in trademark registration pose risks to the sustainability of regional flagship products' identities. These findings underscore the need for holistic policy interventions, including access to capital, digital infrastructure development, culture-based branding training, and streamlined licensing procedures to support a competitive local creative industry ecosystem.

Theme 5: Opportunities and Impacts of Local Identity-Based Branding

Local identity-based branding serves as a marketing strategy and opens up significant opportunities for strengthening the creative economy in Bone Regency. The tangible impacts of implementing this branding are evident in increased product value, expanded market access, and a shift in public perception of local creative products.

Using logos, attractive packaging, and cultural narratives has enabled MSMEs to increase product prices by up to 30% without reducing consumer interest. Furthermore, this branding strengthens the image of Bone Regency not only as a region with cultural wealth and as a center

for high-value creative products. This awareness has also encouraged young people to get involved in the creative industry because they see promising career opportunities. The local government has also begun to use locally branded products as official souvenirs at regency events, marking formal recognition of these products' economic and symbolic value. This is reflected in the following statements from informants:

"Since we have a logo and attractive packaging, the price of our products has increased by 30%." (Culinary MSME actor)

"This branding has made Bone known not only for its culture, but also for its creative products." (Creative community leader)

"Our products are now sold in souvenir shops in Makassar." (Owner of Songkok Recca business)

"Young people are more interested in creative businesses because the branding is cool." (Youth community leader)

"The local government has started to use our products as official souvenirs for regency events." (Creative business owner)

The interpretation of these findings indicates that local identity-based branding has a dual effect: strengthening product competitiveness in the market while building the region's image as a center of creative economy. The increase in selling price without reducing consumer appeal shows that consumers value the cultural value embedded in the products. The local government's recognition of creative products as official souvenirs also strengthens the legitimacy of local branding and opens new distribution channels to formal events and tourism. Business operators feel this impact and create a more inclusive creative ecosystem involving youth and cultural communities. These findings demonstrate that local identity-based branding can be a sustainable regional development strategy, combining cultural preservation with creative economic growth.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show how the local identity-based branding strategies implemented by creative industry players in Bone Regency are not merely marketing techniques, but also reflect significant socio-cultural transformations. The findings indicate a shift from a conventional product-focused approach to one that emphasizes cultural narratives, visual differentiation, and hybrid promotional channels to build the image and competitiveness of local flagship products. The integration of local identity emerges as the core of the branding strategy employed. Business actors consciously utilize the Bugis language, natural raw materials, and manual production processes as markers of product authenticity. These efforts not only differentiate their products from mass-produced goods but also create an emotional connection between consumers and the cultural values embedded in the products. This practice aligns with the concept of place branding, which emphasizes the importance of representing geographical identity in building competitive advantages in the global market (Ananda, 2022; Saputra et al., 2024), as well as the experience economy trend, which highlights consumers' search for authentic experiences that cannot be replicated by mass-produced industrial products (Bhrammanachote, 2024; Buschgens et al., 2024). In Bone, this strategy also serves as a means of cultural preservation, as the local narratives incorporated into the branding help extend the lifespan of traditions and local wisdom.

In addition to identity integration, product design and visual differentiation are other essential elements strengthened by creative industry players. The use of local weaving motifs on reusable packaging, the selection of business names in the local language, and the blend of modern and traditional aesthetics reflect the process of glocalization, where local cultural elements are adapted into formats that align with modern market tastes (Andania et al., 2025). This approach aligns with the findings of Daldanise (2020) that combining contemporary design with traditional

motifs enhances the appeal of local products in the premium segment. This innovation provides space for creative products from Bone to enter the premium souvenir market and national e-commerce platforms, while addressing sustainability issues through environmentally friendly packaging. The awareness that visuals are not merely aesthetic functions but also part of cultural value communication indicates a shift in SME actors' understanding of branding as a holistic experience consumers feel from the moment they first see the product (Purnomo et al., 2024; Ramadhona et al., 2023).

Using marketing and promotional channels in Bone's branding practices also demonstrates an interesting adaptation. Businesses combine digital promotions through Instagram, marketplaces such as Shopee and Tokopedia, and WhatsApp Business with face-to-face promotions through local exhibitions such as Bone Anniversary Day. This combination of online and offline strategies forms an omnichannel approach that allows local products to reach a broader market without losing their connection with local consumers (Sahid & Hazan, 2024; Saputra et al., 2024). This trend aligns with the findings of Achmad (2023) and Dwiyantri, MR, et al. (2024), where creative SMEs leverage digital channels for expansion while maintaining personal interactions to build trust. Creating video content highlighting the authenticity of products is also in line with content marketing theory, which emphasizes that authentic content can increase consumer engagement (Fauzi et al., 2023; Hendrawan et al., 2024). This adaptation demonstrates how businesses in Bone can respond to the demands of the digital market despite facing resource constraints.

Limited capacity and resources are significant structural challenges in strengthening local identity through branding. Limited capital makes it difficult for businesses to obtain professional design or participate in ongoing training, while uneven digital infrastructure limits online marketing optimization. Lengthy bureaucratic processes and high costs for trademark registration also add barriers, causing some businesses to refrain from trademark legalization despite recognizing its benefits. This situation is consistent with the findings of Dagilienė et al. (2021) and Karunia et al. (2024), which indicate that low sustainability literacy and limited access to modern resources hinder the transformation of creative MSMEs. Additional challenges arise from fluctuations in the prices of local raw materials, which increase production costs, forcing businesses to balance product quality with market purchasing power. The low awareness among some community members about the importance of branding—where products are considered marketable solely based on their physical quality—also creates a gap in understanding between cultural potential and modern marketing strategies (Hackshaw et al., 2016; Sun & Chen, 2024).

On the other hand, significant opportunities have been identified from the positive impact of local identity-based branding on the regional creative economy. Using logos, attractive packaging, and cultural narratives has been proven to increase product selling prices by up to 30% without reducing consumer interest. This branding also plays a role in strengthening the image of Bone Regency, which is now not only known for its culture but also for its competitive creative products. This phenomenon reinforces the findings of Gupta et al. (2025) and Hoaihongthong & Tuamsuk (2024) that culture-based branding has a dual effect: increasing the economic value of products while strengthening the destination's image. Furthermore, strong branding attracts the younger generation's interest in engaging in the creative industry, encourages the regeneration of entrepreneurs, and creates a more inclusive creative ecosystem (Kumar et al., 2022; Nie & Wang, 2021). Formal recognition from the local government, which has begun to designate locally branded products as official souvenirs, signifies the legitimacy of identity-based branding and opens up opportunities for broader integration with the tourism sector and local events (Zeng & Kim, 2025).

The integration of cultural identity and modern branding strategies in the context of Bone has several important implications. First, these findings enrich the literature on place branding and the creative economy by emphasizing that the success of regional branding depends not only on visual design, but also on authentic cultural narratives and local community participation. Second, this research demonstrates that culture-based branding can serve as an inclusive development tool that combines cultural preservation with economic value creation. Third, this study indicates the need for a holistic policy approach, encompassing the strengthening of creative capacities, digital infrastructure development, access to capital, and the simplification of legal procedures to support the legitimacy of local products in broader markets. Local governments can utilize these findings by developing sustainable cultural branding training programs, establishing creative centers integrated with digital marketing facilities, and encouraging collaboration between business actors, artistic communities, academics, and the private sector to form a competitive and sustainable branding ecosystem.

The findings of this study are also relevant to broader regional development strategies. By positioning locally-based creative products as part of cultural tourism promotion, local governments not only strengthen Bone's image in the eyes of tourists but also create a value chain linking the tourism sector, the creative economy, and cultural preservation. This opens opportunities for developing thematic tourism packages that combine cultural experiences and purchasing creative products, providing direct economic benefits to local communities. Such an approach aligns with the national development agenda, which prioritizes the downstream processing of local products to enhance competitiveness and economic self-reliance based on regional potential.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the local identity-based branding strategy implemented by creative industry players in Bone Regency has successfully combined cultural values with modern market needs through the use of natural materials, local languages, traditional designs combined with contemporary aesthetics, and the use of hybrid marketing channels that include social media, marketplaces, and local exhibitions. This approach enhances product competitiveness in the national market and strengthens Bone Regency's image as a culture-based creative economy hub. Integrating local identity into branding has proven to create economic value, attract youth engagement, and spark community pride in their products. However, this success is still limited by challenges such as capital constraints, digital infrastructure, branding literacy, and lengthy bureaucratic processes in trademark registration, which hinder the optimization of the potential of local creative products in broader markets.

Although this study provides an in-depth overview of local identity-based branding practices, several limitations should be noted. The study focuses on a single district, so generalizing the results to other regions should be done cautiously, as each area has distinct cultural characteristics and creative industry ecosystems. The qualitative approach provides depth of analysis but cannot yet measure the quantitative impact of branding on income growth, sales volume, or market penetration. Additionally, the relatively short data collection period does not fully capture long-term dynamics, particularly changes in consumer behavior and business actors' adaptation to new policies or evolving market trends.

Further research is recommended to expand the geographical scope by comparing branding practices in other regions with similar or different cultural characteristics, thereby identifying more comprehensive patterns and models. A mixed approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods can also provide a more holistic understanding, not only from the process

perspective but also in terms of economic impact. Further studies on consumer preferences for locally identified products and exploring the integration of branding with the tourism and digital economy sectors are also crucial for designing more adaptive and sustainable marketing strategies. Additionally, future research could highlight multi-stakeholder collaboration mechanisms, including the roles of the private sector and academia, in building a branding ecosystem that strengthens local identity while competing in global markets.

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