

A PUBLIC-DRIVEN MARKETPLACE FOR SUSTAINABLE MICRO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP: EXPLORING VALUE CO-CREATION IN TULUNGAGUNG'S CAR-FREE DAY BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM

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Abstract

Public-driven marketplaces such as Car-Free Day (CFD) events have emerged as informal yet influential ecosystems that support micro-entrepreneurs in many developing regions. However, little is known about how value co-creation unfolds within these socially embedded gig-based environments, particularly when local governments act as facilitators connecting supply and demand. This study aims to examine the dynamics of value co-creation among micro-entrepreneurs supported by the local MSME Office in Tulungagung and operating within the CFD business ecosystem.

Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis to capture the lived experiences, interactions, and collaborative practices among gig-based micro-entrepreneurs. Thematic analysis was used to identify value co-creation mechanisms emerging from everyday entrepreneurial activities, social interactions, and resource integration processes within the CFD setting.

The findings reveal that value co-creation is driven by three interrelated mechanisms: community-based knowledge sharing, spontaneous collaborative problem-solving, and adaptive micro-innovation. These mechanisms enhance entrepreneurial resilience, strengthen network embeddedness, and foster sustainable business practices on both individual and collective levels. The results also show that the MSME Office functions as a hybrid orchestrator—bridging public spaces, market demand, and entrepreneurial capabilities—thus promoting inclusive and community-driven economic participation.

This study contributes to the literature on gig economy ecosystems, sustainable micro-entrepreneurship, and public-sector-enabled marketplaces by providing empirical insights into how informal settings can catalyze collaborative value creation. Practical implications highlight the need for stronger ecosystem facilitation, capacity-building programs, and ethical governance to support long-term micro-entrepreneurial sustainability.

Keywords: Value co-creation; Gig economy; Micro-entrepreneurship; Public-driven marketplace; Car-Free Day ecosystem

INTRODUCTION

Urban economic transitions in the Global South increasingly reveal the significance of public spaces as emerging platforms for grassroots entrepreneurship, particularly within the expanding landscape of the gig economy. As conventional market infrastructures struggle to accommodate the growing number of micro-entrepreneurs, local governments have begun leveraging civic spaces such as pedestrian zones, weekend markets, and car-free areas to foster inclusive, low-barrier business ecosystems that support sustainable livelihoods (Chen, 2023). This shift resonates with broader global concerns regarding sustainable urban development and the need to create economic opportunities that are socially embedded, environmentally conscious, and adaptable to rapidly changing socio-economic dynamics (Alhaddi, 2015; Waskita, 2025). Within this context, Car-Free Day (CFD) initiatives represent a unique intersection of environmental policy, public participation, and micro-enterprise activity, functioning not only as community health and mobility programs but also as organically evolving entrepreneurial ecosystems. Such spaces enable micro-entrepreneurs to engage in episodic, gig-like business activities while interacting directly with consumers, communities, and local authorities—an arrangement that increasingly requires frameworks of value co-creation and collaborative governance to be fully understood (Vargo & Lusch, 2017; Samuvel et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the Tulungagung Car-Free Day has emerged as a notable example of this phenomenon, with the local Department of Cooperatives and MSMEs curating and supporting micro-entrepreneur communities to operate sustainably within a publicly regulated marketplace. This evolving socio-economic arrangement presents a compelling real-world setting for examining how public-driven micro-entrepreneurship ecosystems are formed, sustained, and enriched through collaborative interactions among diverse stakeholders.

Problem Statement

Despite the increasing recognition of public spaces as catalytic environments for micro-entrepreneurship, empirical understanding of how value is collaboratively created within government-enabled, gig-based marketplaces remains limited. Existing studies on the gig economy primarily focus on digital platforms such as ride-hailing, online freelancing, or e-commerce, thereby overlooking gig-like entrepreneurial activities embedded in physical, community-driven contexts where interactions are shaped by social proximity, public governance, and spatial dynamics (Graham et al., 2017; Kuhn et al., 2021). Furthermore, while the literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems highlights the importance of orchestrators and institutional actors (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021), little is known about how local governments in developing regions curate and manage micro-enterprise ecosystems that emerge informally within public events such as Car-Free Day. This gap is particularly salient in settings like Tulungagung, Indonesia, where the Department of Cooperatives and MSMEs actively facilitates and coordinates micro-entrepreneur communities in a public-driven marketplace that functions outside conventional commercial infrastructures. Yet, the mechanisms through which micro-entrepreneurs, consumers, communities, and government actors co-create value especially within a sustainability-oriented and socially embedded urban ecosystem remain empirically underexplored (Vargo & Lusch, 2017; As'ad et al., 2024). Therefore, there is a critical need to examine how value co-creation unfolds in such hybrid environments, how the

state mediates and shapes gig-based micro-entrepreneurship, and why these dynamics matter for achieving inclusive and sustainable local economic development.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to explore how value co-creation unfolds within a government-enabled, public-driven marketplace that supports gig-based micro-entrepreneurship in the context of Tulungagung's Car-Free Day ecosystem. Specifically, the research seeks to (1) investigate the interactions, collaborations, and socio-material practices through which micro-entrepreneurs, consumers, community actors, and local government agencies jointly generate value in a civic space; (2) examine the role of the local Department of Cooperatives and MSMEs as an ecosystem orchestrator that facilitates sustainable micro-enterprise activities within a non-digital, community-embedded gig environment; and (3) understand how these co-creation dynamics contribute to the development of an inclusive and sustainability-oriented entrepreneurial ecosystem. By pursuing these aims, the study intends to extend existing conceptual frameworks of value co-creation beyond digital platforms (Akaka & Vargo, 2014; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015) and contribute empirical insights into the governance of micro-entrepreneurial ecosystems in emerging economies (Roundy, 2016; Guerrero et al., 2021). Moreover, the research aligns with global calls for more context-sensitive investigations into how grassroots entrepreneurship and public-sector innovation can advance sustainability transitions at the local level (Tunn et al., 2019; Markard et al., 2012).

Gap Analysis

Although existing scholarship has extensively examined gig economy dynamics, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and value co-creation, the majority of studies remain centered on digital platforms and technologically mediated interactions (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2018; Meijerink, 2024). Research on gig work predominantly focuses on algorithmic management, platform labor precarity, and online marketplace governance, thereby overlooking offline, community-driven gig environments emerging within public spaces of developing economies. At the same time, literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems highlights the importance of orchestrators, institutional arrangements, and stakeholder interdependencies (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021), yet little empirical work explores how local governments orchestrate micro-entrepreneurial activity in non-digital, civic marketplaces such as Car-Free Day initiatives. Likewise, studies on value co-creation within service ecosystems tend to emphasize firm-customer dyads or digitally enabled multi-actor interaction, leaving a gap in understanding how value is collaboratively constructed through face-to-face, socially embedded, and spatially bounded interactions in public urban settings (Akaka & Vargo, 2014; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). Furthermore, research on sustainable micro-entrepreneurship in the Global South typically focuses on resource constraints or livelihood outcomes, with limited attention to how public-sector facilitation, community participation, and gig-based entrepreneurial practices jointly support sustainability transitions at the local level (Tunn et al., 2019; Ahsan et al., 2021). In response to these gaps, this study contributes by offering an empirically grounded understanding of how a public-driven, government-facilitated gig ecosystem operates within Tulungagung's Car-Free Day context; how value co-creation unfolds among micro-

entrepreneurs, consumers, communities, and government actors; and how such interactions shape inclusive, sustainable, and place-based entrepreneurial ecosystems in emerging economies.

Novelty

This study offers three primary theoretical and empirical novelties that extend current understandings of gig-based micro-entrepreneurship and value co-creation in public, non-digital marketplaces. First, whereas extant gig economy research predominantly centers on *platform-mediated work* such as Uber, Airbnb, Deliveroo, and other algorithmically governed ecosystems (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2018; Frenken et al., 2020) this study shifts the analytical focus toward informal, place-based gig ecosystems that emerge in *offline* public spaces. By theorizing a public-driven marketplace like Tulungagung's Car-Free Day (CFD) as a gig-based micro-entrepreneurial ecosystem, this study expands gig economy discourse beyond the boundaries of digital platforms, addressing a conceptual blind spot in the literature.

Second, the study provides novelty by examining value co-creation among micro-entrepreneurs themselves, rather than between firms and customers—an orientation that remains underexplored in service-dominant logic and micro-entrepreneurship scholarship. Prior studies have largely emphasized dyadic co-creation between providers and consumers (Akaka & Vargo, 2014; Ranjan & Read, 2016), or triadic interactions shaped by platforms (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2018). This research introduces a multi-actor, horizontally structured co-creation model emerging organically among micro-entrepreneurs who share limited resources, collaborate informally, and collectively sustain a temporary gig marketplace. This adds new insights into collaborative dynamics outside formal organizational boundaries.

Third, the study advances methodological and contextual novelty through its exploration of Indonesia's public-space gig entrepreneurship, a setting seldom investigated in global gig economy and value co-creation literature. Most studies originate from Global North contexts (e.g., the U.S., U.K., and Europe), creating a geographical bias noted by recent meta-analyses (Wood et al., 2019; Abdulrab & Hezam, 2024). By situating the inquiry within a local, culturally embedded, and community-driven business ecosystem, this research contributes to correcting this imbalance and offers a more inclusive, Global South-based perspective on gig work, informal micro-enterprises, and sustainable entrepreneurial practices.

Collectively, these contributions position the study as a novel scholarly effort that expands theoretical boundaries, enriches methodological approaches, and enhances contextual diversity in the study of gig economy ecosystems and value co-creation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study adopts an integrated narrative review approach, which is widely recommended for qualitative and exploratory research where the goal is to synthesize conceptual developments, interpret theoretical linkages, and critically integrate insights from diverse streams of literature (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Snyder, 2019). This approach enables the researcher to draw from multiple disciplines such as gig economy studies, micro-entrepreneurship, service-dominant logic, and informal market dynamics while allowing flexibility to interpret phenomena that are still emerging and theoretically fragmented.

An integrated narrative review is particularly appropriate because research on public-driven marketplaces, community-based gig entrepreneurship, and informal value co-creation remains dispersed across fields and lacks unified frameworks. Instead of rigid protocol-driven screening, the integrated narrative approach allows iterative engagement with literature, aligning with the interpretive-constructivist paradigm of this study (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). It offers the ability to contextualize empirical findings within broader socio-economic transformations and adapt theoretical boundaries during data interpretation—an essential feature when studying informal, social, and emergent ecosystems such as Car-Free Day marketplaces. Sources reviewed include high-impact journals in the domains of management, sociology, information systems, entrepreneurship, and urban studies, such as the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Work, Employment and Society*, *International Journal of Information Management*, and *International Small Business Journal*. This approach provides a robust conceptual foundation and enhances the study's contribution by identifying convergent themes, theoretical tensions, and underexplored relational mechanisms relevant to gig-based micro-entrepreneurship.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs an interpretive qualitative research design, appropriate for exploring the socially constructed meanings, interactional processes, and contextual nuances that shape value co-creation among micro-entrepreneurs operating within a gig-based public marketplace. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suitable for uncovering the embedded logics and lived experiences of actors within informal ecosystems that lack formal governance structures (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Adopting an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, the study seeks to understand how micro-entrepreneurs co-create value through collaborative practices, resource negotiation, and collective improvisation in Tulungagung's Car-Free Day (CFD) entrepreneurial setting. This design aligns with recent calls for qualitative exploration in gig economy scholarship, where complex social dynamics often remain under-theorized (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2018; Abdulrab & Hezam, 2024).

Tabel 1. Research Methodology

| Methodology | Approach | Paradigm | Sampling | Analysis | Validity | Literature Review | Focus |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Research Design | Interpretive qualitative | Interpretive-constructivist | Procedural and analytical | Follows thematic analysis | Triangulation, member checking | Integrated narrative review | Exploring socially constructed meanings |
| Research Procedures | Multi-stage | Contextual mapping | Prolonged field engagement | Member coding | Analytical memo | Constant comparison | Theoretical sensitivity |
| Data Collection Techniques | Complementary qualitative | Indirect semi-structured interviews | Non-participant observations | Document and artifact analysis | Methodological triangulation | Sources: high-impact journals | Focus: Communication patterns |

Source. Authors

Research Procedures

The research followed a multi-stage procedure to ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness. First, the study conducted a contextual mapping of the CFD marketplace to

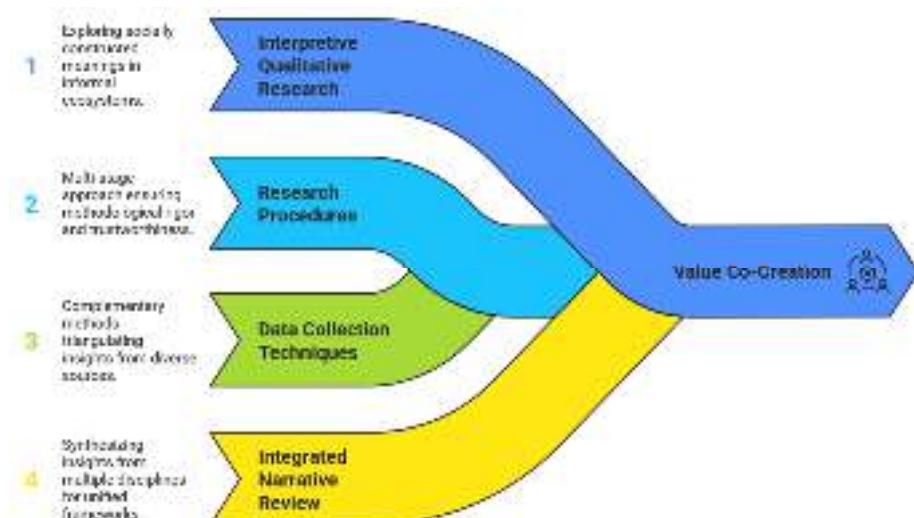
identify key actors, interaction patterns, spatial configurations, and informal rules governing the ecosystem. Second, purposive and snowball sampling strategies were applied to recruit micro-entrepreneurs with diverse product categories, business longevity, and relational embeddedness. These sampling strategies ensure the inclusion of information-rich cases while reflecting heterogeneity across the marketplace (Duan et al., 2015).

Third, data were gathered through prolonged engagement in the field, allowing the researcher to establish rapport, gain contextual familiarity, and observe naturally occurring interactions. Fourth, all qualitative data were transcribed, translated (when needed), and subjected to iterative coding, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis approach. Analytical memos, constant comparison, and theoretical sensitivity guided the interpretation process to ensure conceptual depth and systematic pattern recognition (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Finally, validity strategies including triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were employed to enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Data Collection Techniques

Three complementary qualitative data collection methods were employed: (1) In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews: Interviews were conducted with micro-entrepreneurs, community coordinators, and informal ecosystem facilitators. Semi-structured formats allow flexibility to probe individual experiences, collaborative practices, and perceived value exchanges, while ensuring consistency across interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Each interview lasted 45–90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. (2) Non-participant Observations: Observations were conducted during multiple CFD events to capture real-time interactions, spatial dynamics, and co-productive behaviors among micro-entrepreneurs. Observational field notes allow the researcher to document subtle, unspoken practices often absent in interviews such as tacit coordination, spontaneous cooperation, and resource-sharing rituals (Emerson et al., 2011). (3) Document and Artefact Analysis: Supporting data such as promotional materials, vendor group chats, community announcements, and regulatory guidelines were analyzed to triangulate interview and observational findings. These artefacts provide insights into communication patterns, ecosystem governance, and informal institutional arrangements. Using methodological triangulation strengthens the interpretive robustness of the study and aligns with recommended best practices in qualitative gig economy research (Wood et al., 2019).

Figure 1. Pathways to Understanding Value Co Creation in the Unit Analysis



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Emergent Patterns of Value Co-Creation Among Micro-Entrepreneurs

The analysis reveals that value co-creation among micro-entrepreneurs in the gig economy is shaped by a dynamic interplay between digital platform affordances, peer-to-peer collaboration, and adaptive entrepreneurial behavior. Participants consistently emphasized that their ability to create value did not stem from individual capability alone, but from relational processes embedded within micro-communities on digital platforms. These communities acted simultaneously as knowledge reservoirs, emotional support systems, and informal incubators that facilitated rapid problem-solving and shared learning. The data indicate that micro-entrepreneurs actively engaged in reciprocal interactions sharing tips, co-developing marketing narratives, bundling services, and co-managing fluctuating demand which collectively strengthened their market responsiveness.

Platform-Driven Coordination as an Enabler of Co-Creation

Digital platforms served as the primary coordination mechanism that enabled micro-entrepreneurs to align resources, synchronize workflows, and negotiate value propositions. Participants reported that algorithmic visibility, rating systems, and platform-based communication channels shaped their strategic decisions and interpersonal collaborations. Rather than functioning merely as transactional marketplaces, platforms acted as socio-technical infrastructures that structured opportunities for co-creation. Entrepreneurs leveraged platform analytics to refine customer targeting, benchmark service quality, and identify potential collaborators. However, this coordination was not purely digitally mediated; informal WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, and offline meetups further reinforced trust-building and co-learning.

Collaborative Innovation and Adaptive Micro-Practices

The findings indicate that micro-entrepreneurs co-created value through iterative micro-innovations that emerged from shared experimentation. Collaborative practices included co-designing promotional bundles, jointly responding to shifts in customer taste, and exchanging content creation strategies to enhance digital visibility. These micro-innovations were driven by a high degree of agility and improvisation, reflecting how gig-based work environments require continuous adaptation. Participants described their entrepreneurial journey as “learning through the crowd,” wherein practical solutions were generated collectively rather than individually. This process amplified their capacity to innovate despite resource constraints.

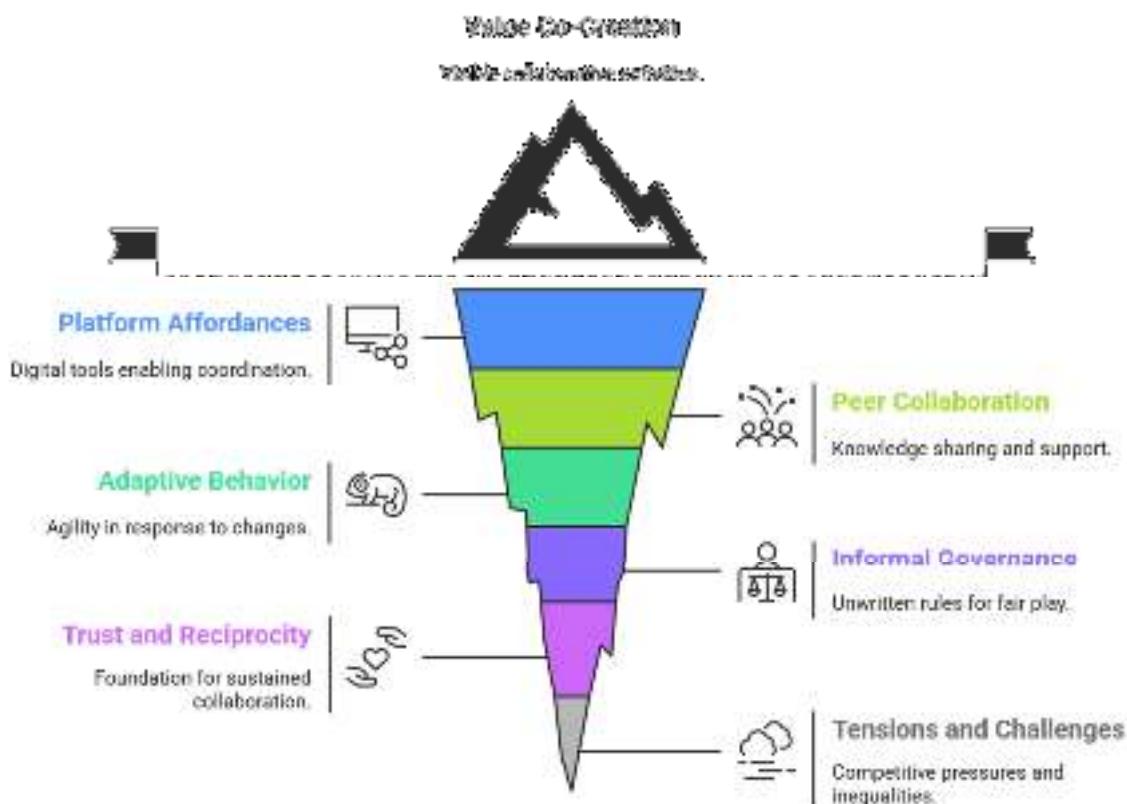
Trust, Reciprocity, and Informal Governance Mechanisms

Trust emerged as a foundational element of value co-creation. Micro-entrepreneurs cultivated trust through consistent knowledge-sharing, transparent communication about customer experiences, and mutual support during peak demand periods. Informal governance mechanisms such as unwritten rules for fair competition, shared norms of professionalism, and peer monitoring within community groups played an instrumental role in sustaining collaboration. These relational mechanisms mitigated risks associated with opportunistic behaviors and fostered a sense of communal identity, which many participants described as “solidarity among freelancers.”

Tensions and Challenges in Co-Creation Practices

Despite the collaborative nature of value co-creation, several tensions emerged. Participants reported competitive pressures driven by algorithmic ranking systems, inconsistent platform policies, and unpredictability of market demand. These factors occasionally disrupted collaborative efforts and generated conflicts between personal goals and collective expectations. Moreover, unequal digital literacy levels created discrepancies in participation, leading some micro-entrepreneurs to become value takers rather than value co-creators. These structural challenges highlight the fragile balance between collaboration and competition within the gig economy ecosystem.

Figure 2. Value Co-Creation Among Micro-Entrepreneurs in the Gig Economy



Discussion

The findings of this study underscore that value co-creation among micro-entrepreneurs in the gig economy is not merely a transactional or platform-driven phenomenon, but rather a relational and socially embedded process that extends beyond conventional understandings of gig-based interactions. The emergent patterns of collaborative learning, mutual support, and adaptive innovation demonstrate that micro-entrepreneurs co-create value through a fluid interplay between digital affordances, community-based knowledge exchange, and informal governance norms. These results align with, yet extend, existing service-dominant logic literature by illustrating how resource integration occurs not only between entrepreneurs and customers, but also horizontally among peer entrepreneurs operating under high uncertainty. More importantly, the data reveal that co-creation is shaped by micro-level practices such as collective problem-solving, real-time improvisation, and peer-driven capability development.

that are often overlooked in mainstream gig economy research. This nuanced interpretation suggests that value co-creation in the gig context is inherently interdependent, evolutionary, and contingent upon the quality of social ties and trust networks that entrepreneurs build over time.

CONCLUSION

This study offers a nuanced understanding of how value co-creation unfolds within a public-driven marketplace that supports sustainable micro-entrepreneurship in the gig economy context. By examining the Car-Free Day business ecosystem in Tulungagung, the research reveals that co-creation practices are not solely driven by market transactions or digital platform mechanisms, but are deeply rooted in community-based interactions, shared learning, and informal collaborative norms. Micro-entrepreneurs engage in dynamic resource integration processes ranging from knowledge sharing and collective problem-solving to adaptive innovation that enable them to enhance resilience, expand capabilities, and sustain their business activities within an uncertain and highly competitive environment. These insights advance existing theoretical discourse by illustrating that gig-based micro-entrepreneurship is fundamentally relational, interdependent, and embedded in social structures that shape both economic and non-economic value creation.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening social capital, enhancing micro-entrepreneurial networks, and institutionalizing community-driven support systems within public marketplaces. Local governments, community organizers, and ecosystem enablers can play a strategic role by facilitating knowledge exchange platforms, providing capacity-building initiatives, and developing regulatory frameworks that protect and empower micro-entrepreneurs operating in informal gig settings. At the same time, fostering a culture of collaboration rather than competition can significantly accelerate sustainable entrepreneurial growth and strengthen the resilience of local creative economies (Waskita et al., 2024).

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its qualitative scope, localized setting, and reliance on self-reported insights, which may not fully capture the broader complexities of gig-based ecosystems in other cultural or structural contexts. Future research should expand to multi-site comparisons, employ mixed-method designs, or explore longitudinal dynamics to better understand how value co-creation evolves over time and across diverse gig environments. Additionally, investigating how digital technologies, algorithmic governance, and platform policies intersect with community-driven practices may provide deeper theoretical enrichment.

Overall, this research affirms that value co-creation within gig-based micro-entrepreneurship is a powerful mechanism for sustaining livelihoods, strengthening community resilience, and promoting inclusive economic participation. Ensuring ethical, equitable, and socially responsible practices in these ecosystems is essential, particularly as gig economies continue to expand and redefine the nature of work, collaboration, and entrepreneurship.

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