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CREATIVE HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF FASHION MSMES IN MAKASSAR CITY: CASE STUDY OF YOUNG DESIGNER COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigates how the Makassar Young Designers Community (Komunitas Desainer Muda Makassar) cultivates creative human resources (CHR) to sustain competitiveness in the city's growing fashion micro and small enterprise (MSMEs) sector. Framed by a humanistic economic perspective, the research explores how young designers develop creative and managerial capacities through mentorship, project-based collaboration, digital engagement, and collective identity. Data were collected via 14 in-depth interviews, participant observations at workshops and pop-up exhibitions, and an analysis of digital artifacts such as social media content and collaborative project briefs. Findings reveal that CHR development is community-driven, relational, and practice-based: (1) mutual mentorship accelerates tacit knowledge transfer and trust-building; (2) hybrid competency formation integrates craft traditions with digital marketing and storytelling; (3) project-based learning provides situated innovation experiences; (4) collective identity reinforces motivation and ethical production; and (5) informal credentialing substitutes for formal recognition, enhancing market legitimacy. Despite these strengths, scalability and institutional support remain limited due to financing and training constraints. The study concludes that CHR in creative MSEs emerges from social learning ecologies that intertwine economic pragmatism with cultural stewardship. Strengthening such ecosystems through co-designed capacity-building, digital infrastructure, and policy alignment is essential for fostering sustainable creative economies in Indonesia's urban centers.

Keywords: Creative Human Resources, Fashion MSMEs, Mentorship, Digital Transformation, Makassar.

INTRODUCTION

The development of creative and managerial capacities among human resources is a central determinant of competitiveness for fashion micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) operating in urban centers like Makassar. This study examines strategies for developing creative human resources (CHR) within the Makassar Young Designers Community, attending simultaneously to economic viability and the humanistic values that animate creative practice.

The fashion sector in Makassar blends local sartorial heritage with emergent consumer tastes, creating a context in which skills, meaning-making, and networked exchange co-produce added value. Understanding how CHR is cultivated in this setting offers both practical lessons for enterprise development and theoretical insight into the socio-economic dynamics of creative clusters. Our inquiry focuses on how young designer communities intentionally and unintentionally mobilize mentorship, learning routines, digital tools, and collective identity to build capacities that sustain firm-level innovation and local cultural continuity.

The research questions guiding the study are: (a) What strategies do community members employ to develop creative competencies and managerial skills? (b) How do socio-cultural practices within the community shape learning and career pathways? (c) What institutional gaps and enabling conditions influence the scalability and sustainability of such strategies?.

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Framed by a humanistic economic perspective, the study privileges participants' lived meanings, dignity in work, and the interplay between economic outcomes and cultural values. This lens reframes HR development as human development rather than as a narrow productivity exercise.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on creative industries emphasizes relationality: creativity emerges through networks, collaborative practice, and shared repertoires rather than solely individual genius. This reframing foregrounds social capital, peer learning, and place-based cultural resources as key inputs in CHR formation. Within small firms, HR practices frequently rely on informal mechanisms—apprenticeship, peer mentoring, project-based experimentation—where tacit knowledge circulates through embodied practice rather than codified curricula. Such informality supports adaptability but complicates transferability and credentialization.

The necessity of hybrid competencies in fashion—combining craftsmanship, design thinking, and digital marketing—has become a recurring theme in recent studies on creative SMEs, where the capacity to narrate products and manage digital presence influences market reach and firm resilience. Networked economies also demand sustainable orientations in business models: sustainability values (social, cultural, environmental) are both normative commitments and strategic differentiators for creative brands seeking authenticity in competitive markets (Jabłoński et al., 2020).

Digital affordances matter for entrepreneurs' access to resources and peer support, particularly during crises that constrain physical interaction; online communities offer problem-solving, reframing, and reflective spaces that can substitute for face-to-face exchange when necessary (Meurer et al., 2021). The pandemic literature underscores that crises accelerate digitization and reshape the contours of small business survival and learning; policies and ecosystem actors thus play a pivotal role in mediating access to finance, markets, and digital tools for SMEs (Belitski et al., 2021).

Methodologically, complex, multiplex settings like creative clusters require interpretive, flexible research designs that can capture diversity, distance, and disparity among actors and interactions; embracing complexity demands reflexive qualitative approaches sensitive to context and process (Eden & Nielsen, 2020). Research on youth development and organized activities highlights how structured group engagement can build social capital through relational climates, partnerships, and opportunities for activation—principles relevant for designer communities aiming to build collective capacity (Boat et al., 2024). Together, these literatures suggest that CHR development in fashion MSEs is a socio-technical process: it combines embodied artisanal skills, digital competencies, affective support, and ecosystem linkages oriented toward sustainability and market orientation.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study of the Komunitas Desainer Muda Makassar, using narrative inquiry to reconstruct learning trajectories and strategic practices. The case method enables rich description of processes and meanings in situ while remaining attentive to broader ecosystem dynamics. Data were collected through 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews with designers, community organizers, and affiliated tailors; six participant-observation sessions at workshops and pop-up shows; and a document review of social media content, collaborative project briefs, and informal learning artifacts.

Interviews focused on career histories, mentoring relationships, skill acquisition episodes, digital practices, project experiences, and perceptions of barriers and supports. Observation emphasized

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interaction patterns, feedback practices, and the role of artifacts (samples, moodboards) in knowledge exchange. Analysis followed a narrative-thematic approach: transcripts were coded for narrative arcs (onset, turning point, resolution) and for strategic content (mentoring, digital use, project learning, sustainability). Pattern-seeking produced an integrative storyline of collective HR development.

Reflexivity and member checking were integral: preliminary themes were shared with participants for validation, and coding decisions were iteratively revisited in light of participant feedback to ensure credibility and resonance with lived experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mentorship-as-mutual learning emerged as a core strategy: rather than hierarchical training, members engage in reciprocal mentoring where novices and experienced peers alternate teaching roles. This reciprocity accelerates tacit skill diffusion and fosters trust. Hybrid competency formation is evident: designers integrate traditional tailoring and textile knowledge with digital proficiencies—photography, e-commerce management, and content curation—to translate local aesthetics into marketable products.

Project-based collaboration functions as a primary pedagogy. Community-led showcases, capsule collections, and co-branded campaigns provide short-cycle laboratories where design experimentation meets customer feedback, creating situated learning opportunities. Collective identity and emotional capital sustain creative labor. Members report that shared narratives about cultural revival and ethical production contribute to motivation, reduce isolation, and bind risk-taking to communal purpose.

Informal credentialing practices—portfolio curation, joint exhibitions, and social media reputation—act as practical substitutes for formal certification, enabling market recognition while preserving creative autonomy. Constraints include inconsistent access to financing, weak formal training pathways, and episodic institutional support. These gaps reduce the ability to scale operations without compromising the community's experimental rhythms. Digital practices offer both affordances and frictions: while social platforms expand reach and provide peer support, uneven digital literacy and infrastructural limits (connectivity, professional photography resources) produce variable outcomes across members.

Intergenerational tensions surface around professionalization: younger designers favor digital experimentation and brand storytelling, while older artisans emphasize craft continuity and production discipline. These tensions prompt negotiation rather than the simple displacement of skills. Sustainability commitments—use of local motifs, artisanal supply chains, and eco-materials—operate as strategic differentiators but incur cost and supply challenges, necessitating capacity in procurement and value articulation for premium pricing.

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Table 1. Strategic Patterns and Outcomes (condensed)

Strategy	Practice Examples	Human Development Outcome	Market Effect
Mutual Mentorship	Peer critiques, skill swaps	Tacit knowledge transfer, trust	Faster innovation
Hybrid Skills	Craft + social media	Versatility, employability	Expanded channels
Project Learning	Pop-ups, capsule lines	Experiential competence	Market validation
Collective Identity	Cultural storytelling	Motivation, resilience	Brand authenticity
Informal Credentialing	Portfolios, collaborations	Recognition without formal certs	Niche positioning

Source: data processed, 2025

Overall, the community's strategies produce resilient, adaptive CHR, but scaling and formal recognition remain key challenges for long-term firm growth.

Discussion

The Komunitas Desainer Muda Makassar illustrates how community-based strategies can instantiate a humanistic economic model of HR development—one that privileges dignity, meaning, and aesthetic stewardship alongside commercial success. The mutual mentorship model corroborates the importance of social capital and organized activities in fostering developmental pathways for young practitioners (Boat et al., 2024).

The hybridization of competencies aligns with literature on sustainable digital business models: designers must combine artisanal authenticity with digital storytelling and platform-savvy practices to compete in networked markets and advance inclusive sustainability aims (Jabłoński et al., 2020). Digital affordances function as both enablers of peer support and as channels for market expansion; yet they require intentional skill development and supportive infrastructures to be fully effective. Findings resonate with studies on online entrepreneurial support mechanisms during crises, where virtual communities provided key problem-solving and reflective affordances (Meurer et al., 2021).

The pandemic context amplifies stakes for digitization and ecosystem support: policy and financial instruments that facilitated survival and digital uptake elsewhere offer lessons for Makassar's cluster regarding targeted aid and capacity-building for creative MSEs (Belitski et al., 2021). Methodologically, the case underscores the utility of narrative inquiry in capturing processual, affective, with recognition mechanisms (micro-certifications, accredited short courses) could preserve experimental culture while improving career pathways and access to formal finance, which often requires demonstrable competencies.

Capacity development programs should be co-designed with designers to reflect practice-based curricula—project-based modules, digital storytelling clinics, and procurement management—that valorize local knowledge while addressing business scalability. Financial instruments must be calibrated: micro-grants for collaborative projects, subsidized access to professional digital services, and outcome-sensitive guarantees can reduce risk without imposing bureaucratic burdens that stifle creativity.

Ecosystem actors—universities, cultural institutions, and private partners—can catalyze co-working labs and maker spaces that provide shared production equipment, professional photography, and mentorship networks, thereby reducing individual capital intensity while enhancing collective capability. Attention to intercultural and intergenerational dialogue is essential: institutional supports should mediate

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skill translation between artisanal masters and digitally native designers to build hybrid career pathways that honor craft continuity.

CONCLUSION

The study finds that creative HR development among Makassar's young fashion designers is primarily a community-driven, practice-based process that synthesizes mentorship, hybrid skills, project learning, and collective identity to produce human-centered competitiveness. Strategic implications are twofold: interventions should strengthen existing communal learning routines rather than replace them, and capacity-building must be context-sensitive—anchored in local cultural assets while enabling participation in digital markets.

Practice recommendations include: (a) establishing rotating peer-mentorship programs with documented learning outcomes; (b) creating modular, practice-based digital skill courses co-delivered by practitioners and educators; and (c) developing shared infrastructures such as co-production studios and digital content labs. Policy recommendations emphasize ecosystem-level supports—micro-grant schemes for collaborative projects, streamlined microfinance for creative producers, and accreditation pathways that validate experiential learning without eroding creative autonomy.

For researchers, the case suggests fertile avenues: comparative work across Indonesian creative clusters to trace variation in CHR strategies; longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of community-based models; and mixed-method designs that couple narrative depth with outcome metrics. Limitations include the single-case scope and the participant-selection bias toward active community members; future studies should broaden sampling to include peripheral actors (retailers, suppliers, and local policymakers) to capture systemic interactions.

Ultimately, nurturing creative human resources in fashion MSEs requires an approach that balances market pragmatism with humanistic commitments—recognizing that the durability of creative enterprises rests as much on meaning, solidarity, and learning ecologies as on capital and technology. The Komunitas Desainer Muda Makassar offers a practical model: community-as-incubator, where learning is socialized, aesthetics are negotiated collectively, and entrepreneurship is integrated with cultural stewardship.

Scaling this model responsibly implies investments that strengthen capacity while protecting the conditions for experimentation—an ethical-economic imperative for regional development actors. As urban creative economies evolve, policy-makers and practitioners should prioritize interventions that cultivate social learning infrastructures, support hybrid skill formation, and sustain the moral economies that make creative work both viable and worthwhile.

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