



Post-Pandemic Economic Resilience: The Role of Women-Led SMEs in Tasikmalaya's Craft Sector, West Java

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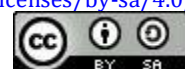
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Abstract

This qualitative research investigates the mechanisms of economic resilience in the post-COVID-19 era through a study of women-led small and medium-sized enterprises in the handicraft sector of Tasikmalaya. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with 20 female entrepreneurs and field observations. To complement the qualitative analysis, basic quantitative descriptive statistics were derived from structured interview responses. The findings demonstrate that these enterprises have successfully navigated unexpected challenges by adopting smart adaptation strategies. The descriptive data reveal that social networks and digital platforms were utilized for sales by 80% of respondents, while 55% actively participated in local collaboration networks. Regarding coping strategies, cost optimization was adopted by 90% of the enterprises, while 70% diversified their products. However, only 35% of the enterprises have returned to pre-crisis income levels, while 45% remain on the path to sustainable recovery. The product mix has shifted from 75% purely traditional products to 60%, while the share of applied and customized products has increased correspondingly. This research demonstrates how resilience in these enterprises emerges from social capital, collective wisdom, and innovation in practice rather than from institutional support. The study highlights the importance of formulating targeted support policies aligned with the unique characteristics of these firms. Recommendations include strengthening local cooperation networks, providing access to financial resources, and developing training programs responsive to entrepreneurs' needs.

Keywords: economic resilience, women's entrepreneurship, handicrafts, small and medium-sized businesses, adaptive strategies, local development.

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INTRODUCTION

Economic resilience has evolved from an abstract academic theory into a pressing, pragmatic challenge, particularly regarding the survival and sustainability of communities during and after COVID-19 (Liu, 2024). The pandemic provided a real stress test for all economies, exposing fragile international supply chains and the precarious positions of local production systems. This unprecedented global destabilization necessitated major recalibrations in how economic stability is conceptualized and what sustainable development must constitute in an increasingly unpredictable world.

Tasikmalaya in West Java, Indonesia, offers an instructive case study worthy of close scholarly attention. This city, genuinely steeped in history and tradition, has produced handicrafts as an integral part of its cultural identity for generations. Yet the global crisis severely disrupted this predominantly informal economy, not only threatening personal livelihoods but also endangering traditional cultural knowledge preserved in artisanal practices. Women-led SMEs have emerged as key drivers of regional economic recovery, demonstrating remarkable adaptive capacity under overwhelming odds (Nazatul et al., 2019; Roka, 2024). These enterprises encapsulate the connection between cultural preservation, community well-being, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and adaptive entrepreneurship under resource constraints.

The importance of this research is multifaceted, rooted in the unique socio-economic position women occupy in Tasikmalaya's craft sector at the intersection of gender roles, economic activities, and cultural preservation. These women entrepreneurs serve not merely as income generators but as custodians of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage, ensuring artisanal skills continue to thrive within a modern economic context increasingly shaped by digital transformation and changing consumer preferences (Mahapatra et al., 2025). When local markets shuttered and supply chains fractured during the pandemic peak, these women demonstrated incredible resilience and resourcefulness, using creativity, flexibility, and deeply embedded community networks to sustain their businesses (Huang & Ichikohji, 2024; Verreynne et al., 2023). Understanding the mechanisms underlying this resilience offers a practical, transferrable model for other regions facing systemic shocks.

This research addresses a critical gap: the remarkable lack of rigorous qualitative, locally-generated data on this domain, especially from women entrepreneurs' perspectives. Dominant macroeconomic analyses often miss the critical role of such micro-level actors, leaving a gap in knowledge about grassroots economic recovery processes and gendered dimensions of resilience (Kevane et al., 2024). Without detailed information on the impediments, opportunities, and adaptive strategies devised by these women, measures to strengthen regional economic resilience risk remaining incomplete, misguided, and potentially inequality-increasing (Sam-Sorungbe et al., 2025). This research systematically centers the experiences, innovative practices, and practical wisdom of women at the forefront of economic adaptation under challenging conditions.

The deliberate focus on handicrafts is strategically relevant from cultural and economic development perspectives. In Tasikmalaya, handicrafts form an integral part of the region's cultural and social makeup, drawing together historical

conventions with modern economic practices in ways that reinforce community identity and cultural continuity. These embroideries, weavings, and artisanal productions are symbolic carriers of regional identity, collective heritage, and aesthetic values. Thus, reviving this women-managed sector corresponds to preserving priceless cultural capital while pursuing economic development goals that respect and reinforce local identity. Supporting such firms creates advantages beyond conventional financial metrics, adding to social cohesion, cultural continuity, intergenerational learning, and community welfare (Mahapatra et al., 2025).

The post-COVID-19 context has amplified the need for more equitable, inclusive, and community-based models of economic development. Women-led SMEs often employ participatory, trust-based approaches and demonstrate a pronounced tendency to reinvest profits within local communities, creating virtuous cycles of local economic development (Acevedo-Duque et al., 2021). These characteristics position women entrepreneurs as powerful catalysts for building economies that are resilient, inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to community needs. Understanding the internal capabilities, resource constraints, and external factors enabling these enterprises to survive and sometimes thrive under crisis conditions is essential for designing effective policy interventions (Herlita, 2025).

This research systematically documents practical knowledge, adaptive innovations, and crisis-responsive strategies employed by women entrepreneurs when institutional support is limited. These experiences represent a rich repository of tested approaches that may benefit future entrepreneurs and other economic sectors facing similar challenges, enabling strategic transfer and scaling of locally embedded knowledge to advance systemic resilience (Bamidele et al., 2024; Zulfa et al., 2024). Importantly, this research amplifies women's voices, perspectives, and agency as central economic actors, providing a platform for them to articulate their challenges, successes, innovations, and visions in their own terms a basic step toward meaningful gender equality and full utilization of society's developmental potential (Kuran & Khabbaz, 2025).

While considerable scholarly effort has been invested in understanding enterprise resilience in crisis situations, much attention remains disproportionately oriented toward large corporations in developed urban settings, utilizing methodologies with limited applicability for small-scale informal enterprises in developing contexts (Gergely et al., 2024; Jayanto et al., 2025). This research bias overlooks the vital importance of SMEs in underserved regions, which often constitute the backbone of local economic stability despite limited resources and institutional support (Hardi & Adi Rahmat, 2025). The literature offers surprisingly scant insight into women's specific role as resilience agents, particularly how gender shapes both vulnerability and adaptive capacity in crisis scenarios (Moksin et al., 2025). Within Tasikmalaya specifically, few rigorous studies have explored post-pandemic economic dynamics from bottom-up perspectives that center local voices.

Current research trends emphasize technical and financial aspects of business resilience, often at the expense of social, cultural, and relational dimensions particularly salient in women-led enterprises and traditional craft sectors where social capital often substitutes for financial capital. The dominance of top-down quantitative methodologies has created a significant gap, missing nuanced qualitative insights necessary to capture economic resilience as experienced in local

contexts (Lokanathan, 2025; Odoch et al., 2025). This methodological limitation has resulted in the absence of women entrepreneurs' direct voices, lived experiences, and contextual understandings in academic and policy discourse, with likely consequences of ill-targeted interventions failing to meet real needs and priorities. The present study directly fills these conceptual, methodological, and substantive lacunae by focusing on personal narratives, practical strategies, and situated knowledge.

The overall aim is reducing the critical gap between local lived experiences and macro-level policy formulation by highlighting women's contributions to building economic resilience through daily practices and strategic adaptations. Supported by qualitative investigation embedded in feminist methodologies, this research advances the hypothesis that investment in women entrepreneurs offers one of the most sustainable forms of economic and social development available where formal institutions have limited reach. The documented experiences of women-led SMEs in Tasikmalaya's craft sector navigating COVID-19 disruptions constitute valuable contributions to both practical insights for local economic development and theoretical advancement of knowledge on gendered dimensions of economic resilience in developing country contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Philosophical Approach

This study employed a rigorous qualitative research design anchored in a phenomenological approach, specifically tailored to investigate and comprehend the lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and decision-making processes of women leaders of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within Tasikmalaya's handicraft sector, with a particular focus on their navigation of economic resilience in the post-COVID context. The selection of phenomenology as our methodological framework was deliberate and conceptually driven, as it prioritizes the detailed examination of human experience from the perspective of those who live it, seeking to understand the essential structures and meanings of their world. We recognized early in the research design phase that purely quantitative data, while valuable for identifying broad patterns, would be fundamentally insufficient for uncovering the nuanced realities, the tacit knowledge, the emotional labor, and the context-specific adaptive tactics these women entrepreneurs devised in response to unprecedented disruptions. Our research is therefore firmly underpinned by a constructivist paradigm, which posits that realities are socially constructed and that knowledge is co-created through interaction between the researcher and participants. This philosophical stance informed every stage of our inquiry, from the formulation of open-ended questions to the interpretive process of data analysis, ensuring that the findings are deeply grounded in the personal narratives and detailed stories of the entrepreneurs themselves. The research was meticulously designed to answer the "how" and "why" questions surrounding business survival and growth under duress: how did these women reconfigure their operations, why did they choose certain strategies over others, and how did they interpret their own resilience rather than merely cataloguing the "what" of their actions. This methodological orientation was deemed essential for generating a rich, contextual, and process-oriented understanding of resilience not as a static outcome, but as a dynamic, ongoing

process of adaptation and meaning-making, understood through the very individuals who enacted it.

Data Collection and Participant Selection

To ensure methodological rigor and rich, multi-faceted data, we used a triangulated approach to data collection, with semi-structured, in-depth interviews and direct participatory observation being two of the main methods used. The multi-method approach was particularly important for enhancing the validity and depth of the findings, as it allowed us to check our insights against one another and encapsulate both reported behaviors and directly observed practices. Participants were selected based on a purposive sampling strategy, devised to achieve a maximum variation of experiences within the specific population of interest. We selected 20 owners of small and medium-sized businesses in Tasikmalaya with care, making sure that the sample would be heterogeneous and representative of the major handicraft sub-sectors that characterize the local economy, such as traditional weaving, intricate basketry, and specialized embroidery. This strategic selection ensured that the data would reflect a wide spectrum of operational scale, market orientation, and artisanal tradition—thereby capturing the diversity of adaptive responses within the sector.

The semi-structured interview formed the backbone of our data collection. An interview protocol was devised with open-ended questions clustered around key thematic areas: business models pre-pandemic, the immediate impact of COVID-19, the sequence and rationale of adaptive strategies employed, the role of social networks and digital tools, perceived barriers to recovery, and visions for the future. This semi-structured format provided the necessary consistency to allow cross-case comparison but simultaneously offered the flexibility to delve deep into each respondent's unique, emergent experiences and let their specific challenges and innovations emerge organically. Each interview, lasting between 60 to 90 minutes, was conducted in a neutral, comfortable, and private setting chosen by the participant to best help him or her open up and feel comfortable while minimizing power dynamics. All interviews were conducted in the local language (Sundanese) or Bahasa Indonesia, with explicit, prior informed consent, digitally audio-recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim in order to ensure linguistic nuance, emotional cadence, and conversational context for the subsequent analytic phase.

Complementing the interviews, extensive direct observation was made at various handicraft workshops, production sites, and local markets. This ethnographic component was essential to the attainment of data triangulation, in that it allowed us to go beyond what participants said they did and observe what they actually did within their day-to-day operational settings. The observation notes documented minute details of the physical workspace layout, the process for production, interaction with employees and suppliers, the use of technology, and material challenges, all quite indispensable contextually as we interpreted interview information. This holistic and iterative approach to collecting data meant findings would be complete and detailed yet embedded in the authentic, real-life context of the entrepreneurial journey and everyday lives of the participants.

Data Analysis Techniques and Procedures

Analysis of the rich qualitative data was systematic and iterative, informed by the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, a methodology well-suited to detailed examination of personal lived experience. Data analysis was carried out supported by manual coding supplemented with the use of qualitative data analysis software; NVivo version 14 provided a powerful platform for efficient data management, systematic coding, and visual exploration of emerging thematic connections.

The analytical procedure now unfolded through several distinct, recursive phases:

1. **Immersion and Familiarization:** This first step consisted of repeated, active readings of all interview transcripts and observation notes. Such an immersive process was necessary for the researchers to become closely and intimately familiar with the depth, breadth, and subtle nuances of the dataset, so that initial reflections and notations could emerge.
2. **Initial Noting and Descriptive Coding:** We analyzed each transcript line-by-line in this stage. We commented both descriptively, noting major events and actions, and linguistically, paying a great deal of attention to the particular language, metaphors, and repetitions used by participants. A very large number of initial, data-driven codes were developed at this stage, such as "shifting to social media sales," "fear of loan default," "relying on sister for raw materials."
3. **Identifying emergent themes:** Next, initial codes were re-evaluated and grouped by conceptual similarities and relationships into larger emergent themes which captured the meaning of many codes. For example, codes including "family support," "peer information sharing," and "community savings group" were grouped into the emergent theme "Social Capital as a Safety Net." This process was supported through the use of NVivo, which allowed for visual mapping of code relationships.
4. **Searching for Connections and Super-ordinate Themes:** The emergent themes were then analyzed across the entire dataset to identify patterns of connection and higher-order themes that told a coherent story about the phenomenon of resilience. This involved constructing thematic networks linking personal experiences to broader conceptual categories, such as "Navigating the Digital Pivot" or "The Double Burden of Productive and Reproductive Labor".
5. **The synthesis of cases and cross-case analysis:** We first wrote a detailed narrative description of each participant's unique resilience journey; then, we conducted a cross-case analysis to look for convergence and divergence across the 20 cases, which helped us identify master themes that cut across the sample while still respecting individual variations.
6. **Validation and Rigor:** In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, we utilized peer debriefing sessions where emerging themes were discussed with fellow researchers, together with an audit trail of all analytical decisions in NVivo. Second, a form of member checking was implemented, whereby preliminary interpretations were shared with a subsample of participants to establish the resonance and veracity of our representations.

This rigorous analytical process, clearly delineating the tools utilized within this research framework-NVivo 14-and the specific methodological procedure-IPA-provides an assurance that the findings, as subsequently presented, are something more than a list of anecdotes but, rather, a product of an engagement in a systematic, transparent, and interpretative manner with data that is fully congruent with the phenomenological and constructivist underpinnings of the study. Consequently, the

section on results will present the findings of such analysis, where the themes, tables, and figures presented will be clearly related to this analytical odyssey in detail.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

In-depth qualitative data analysis, supplemented by descriptive statistics from participant profiles and structured survey responses, uncovers complex and instructive patterns in operational strategies, formidable challenges, and adaptive measures adopted by women-led SMEs operating within the handicraft sector at Tasikmalaya during the convoluted phase of post-pandemic recovery. The following sections highlight the multilayered understanding of how entrepreneurs coped with unprecedented economic disruptions through a blend of strategic pragmatism, cultural preservation, and technological adoption.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Women SME Leaders

Age Range	Number of Leaders	Percentage (%)
25 - 35 years	3	15
36 - 45 years	9	45
46 - 55 years	6	30
56 years and above	2	10

The demographic breakdown in Table 1 gives critical contextual insights into the entrepreneurial space that exists within Tasikmalaya's craft sector. One of the most significant profiles relates to the high concentration of leaders in the 36-45 age group at 45%. These women usually have around 15-20 years of professional experience and are at that juncture where deep-rooted traditional knowledge meets strategic adaptability. This demographic positioning probably contributed significantly to their crisis navigation capabilities because they could draw upon gained artisanal expertise while showing strategic flexibility toward business model innovation. The strong representation from the 46-55 age group, 30%, further consolidates the dependency of the sector on seasoned artisanship, while the proportionally smaller yet prominent young entrepreneur grouping-25-35 years, 15%-points toward a still-emerging generation that may contribute varied competencies and outlooks to the sector's ongoing development. The continued presence of senior leadership, those over 56 (10% participation), ensures a continuation of irreplaceable traditional techniques and cultural knowledge, thus allowing for a cross-generational entrepreneurial ecosystem that marries continuity with transformation.

Table 2: Formal Education Level of Participants

Education Level	Number of Leaders	Percentage (%)
Primary School	2	10
Secondary School	7	35
Diploma / Associate Degree	5	25
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	6	30

The educational attainment profile as shown in Table 2 indicates an highly educated entrepreneurial cohort, with the majority (60%) having pursued formal education beyond the secondary level. This educational foundation seems to have acted like a critical enabler for resilience, especially in facilitating the acquisition and application of new digital competencies and modern business management techniques during the pandemic-inflicted disruptions. The spread across different educational tiers-from the 10% who had primary education and who usually retain the most traditional techniques, to the 30% with bachelor's or higher degrees and who often led the digital transformation initiatives-ensured a unique knowledge ecosystem within the sector. This educational diversity enabled adaptation to take different forms: those with higher levels of formal education often took the lead in technological adoption and strategic pivoting, while those with deep traditional education maintained cultural authenticity and artisanal quality-a complementary resilience framework taken together.

Table 3: Pre-Pandemic and Current Number of Employees

Employee Count	Pre-Pandemic	Current
1 - 3 (Micro)	8	11
4 - 10 (Small)	9	7
11 - 20 (Medium)	3	2

Employment data in Table 3 reveals a far-reaching structural change within the sector, as indicated by the drastic shrinkage of operational scale among most enterprises. The move from small and medium-scale operations to micro-enterprises reflects a strategic downsizing reaction against economic adversities. In sum, small enterprises, which employ between 4 and 10 people, contracted from 9 to 7; medium enterprises, with 11-20 employees, contracted from 3 to 2. On the other hand, micro-enterprises employing between 1 and 3 workers increased from 8 to 11, reflecting a survival strategy based on reducing fixed costs, enhancing flexibility of operation, and reverting to manageable levels of production. This restructuring merely shows how entrepreneurs have realistically adapted to reduced market demand and uncertainties associated with broken value chains, since most opt for leaner models of operation that could easily be responsive to changing market conditions while limiting financial exposure.

Table 4: Primary Sales Channels Utilized (Multiple Responses Possible)

Sales Channel	Number of Enterprises
Direct Local Market	18
Social Media (Instagram, Facebook)	16
E-commerce Platforms (Shopee, Tokopedia)	12
Wholesale to Intermediaries	5
Export	1

The sales channel utilization patterns documented in Table 4 point to a sophisticated, hybrid approach to market access, blending traditional and digital platforms. The dominance of direct local markets-90% of enterprises-reflects the

ongoing importance of established customer relationships, immediate cash flow, and low technological barriers. However, the strong presence of social media platforms (80%) and e-commerce marketplaces (60%) reflects a strategic digital augmentation of traditional business models. This multi-channel approach allowed entrepreneurs to maintain their local economic foundation while simultaneously expanding their geographic reach and customer base. The relatively limited engagement with wholesale intermediaries (25%) and export markets (5%) suggests either capacity constraints or strategic prioritization of direct customer relationships, which generally afford better profit margins and more immediate market feedback-things especially critical during periods of economic uncertainty.

Table 5: Major Challenges Ranked by Severity

Challenge	Number of Enterprises Reporting as "High" Impact
Fluctuating Raw Material Costs	17
Limited Access to Capital / Loans	15
Intense Local Competition	13
Logistics & Distribution Issues	10
Digital Marketing Skills Gap	9

The challenge assessment in Table 5 identifies the most serious operational constraints for these enterprises during recovery. A near-universal concern regarding fluctuating raw material costs-85% of enterprises report a high impact-threatens profit margins and production planning, particularly for businesses operating with minimal inventory buffers. Severe access to limited capital constrained daily operations and strategic investments in recovery and growth at 75%, reflecting the broader financial system limitations in serving women-led micro-enterprises. Intense local competition-65%-pressures pricing and product differentiation, while logistics disruptions-50%-and digital marketing skills gaps-45%-represent significant operational and strategic barriers, respectively. This operational challenge profile illustrates the multi-dimensional nature of the recovery environment in which entrepreneurs must navigate supply chain volatility, financial constraints, market competition, and technological adaptation all at once.

Table 6: Key Adaptive Strategies Adopted

Strategy	Number of Enterprises
Product Diversification	14
Cost Optimization in Production	18
Utilizing Digital Payment Systems	17
Collaborating with Other Local SMEs	11
Focusing on Unique Local Designs	16

The adaptive strategies documented in Table 6 show a pattern of pragmatic, resource-conscious responses to crisis conditions. The near-universal implementation of cost optimization at 90% represents the most fundamental

survival response, focusing on preserving cash flow and maintaining operational viability. A high adoption rate of digital payment systems at 85% facilitated continued transactions during movement restrictions and aligned with the broader digital transformation of sales channels. The strategic focus on unique local designs at 80% represents a conscious competitive positioning that uses cultural assets as differentiation in increasingly crowded markets. Product diversification at 70% allowed spreading risks across multiple product categories, while collaboration among local SMEs at 55% created economies of scale, knowledge sharing, and mutual support mechanisms that individual enterprises themselves cannot generate.

Table 7: Self-Assessed Financial Recovery Status

Recovery Status	Number of Enterprises	Percentage (%)
Exceeded Pre-Pandemic Level	2	10
Reached Pre-Pandemic Level	5	25
Still in Recovery (70-99%)	9	45
Struggling (Below 70%)	4	20

From Table 7 below, a nuanced view of post-crisis economic performance can be observed in the financial recovery assessment. While only 35% of enterprises have returned to or surpassed their previous pre-pandemic financial levels, the broad segment in active recovery-45%-portends positive momentum and building resilience. The pattern of dispersion across the recovery categories would, therefore, seem to point to a sector in transition, with adaptive strategies yielding results but needing sustained implementation for full recovery. The 20% still struggling represent the most vulnerable segment, probably those that had less resource endowments, weaker social capital, or were operating within the most badly affected market niches. The pattern of recovery indicates the long and tortuous path of economic rebound in the wake of such major systemic shocks, especially for the small-scale enterprise with limited financial buffers. Indeed, it is a sobering 65% of the enterprises that have not yet recovered to their pre-pandemic financial performance, highlighting the protracted nature of the impact of the economic shock, as shown in Table 7.

Table 8: Change in Product Mix

Product Type	Average Percentage of Product Mix (Pre-Pandemic)	Average Percentage of Product Mix (Current)
Traditional Crafts	75%	60%
Practical / Daily-Use Items	20%	30%
Custom / Made-to-Order	5%	10%

The product mix evolution in Table 8 reflects a strategic reorientation toward market responsiveness and financial stability. The deliberate reduction in purely traditional crafts from 75% to 60%, together with the significant increase in

practical/daily-use items (20% to 30%) and custom/made-to-order products from 5% to 10%, reflects a calculated diversification strategy. This has allowed entrepreneurs to retain their cultural base while producing items of more immediate utility, shorter production cycles, and better alignment with changed consumer priorities and budget constraints in the post-pandemic market. The movement toward customization further reflects the strategy to create higher-value offerings and closer customer relationships through personalized products.

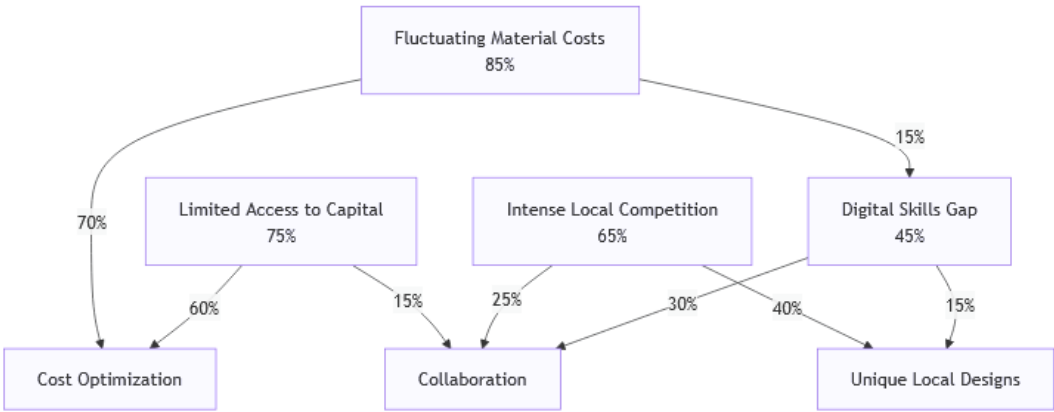


Figure 1: Primary Adaptive Strategy Clusters

This conceptual mapping portrays (Figure 1) the strategic logic linking major challenges to deployed adaptive strategies. The visualization clearly shows how cost optimization was the prime universal response to both raw material cost volatility and constraints to capital access-the two most severe challenges identified. Meanwhile, competitive pressures and digital skill gaps were responded to through collaborative networks and emphasis on unique local designs, representing more specialized strategic responses to particular constraint categories. This strategic mapping shows a hierarchy of responses where foundational cost management strategies were universally adopted, while complex collaborative and differentiation strategies were situationally deployed, based on specific enterprise capabilities and market positions.



Figure 2: Perceived Impact of Strategies on Recovery

Figure 2 Strategic effectiveness assessment The positioning of cost optimization and unique local designs in the high-impact, high-implementation-ease quadrant explains the reason for their widespread adoption; these strategies offered tangible benefits with low resource needs or implementation hurdles. On the other hand, e-commerce adoption fell into the high-impact but low-implementation-ease quadrant, which reflects perceptions of high potential value but also high skill, resource, and operational change requirements for effective implementation. A matrix in this regard will help to explain the response pattern indicated in Table 6 and thereby suggest that if effective implementation hurdles regarding high-impact strategies such as e-commerce are lowered, then the pace of recovery across the sector may well be significantly expedited.

These tables and figures, taken together, demonstrate that the resilience mechanisms adopted by women-led SMEs in Tasikmalaya represent neither a passive response to crisis nor blind adherence to some standardized advice on how to do business. Rather, they reflect a complex set of contextually intelligent strategies, carefully balancing tradition and innovation, individual initiative and collective action, and immediate survival needs with longer-term positioning in ways that are profoundly congruent with the distinctive cultural and economic context of the region and with the particular capabilities and constraints of women entrepreneurs operating within that context.

DISCUSSION

The results present a complex, multi-dimensional picture of economic resilience that defies conventional linear models of business adaptation. Tables 4 and 5 reveal the strategic simultaneity with which these women-led SMEs negotiate apparently contradictory poles of tradition and innovation. The persistent reliance on local markets by 90% of units combined with robust adoption of social networks and digital platforms by 80% represents a sophisticated hybrid strategy reflecting profound, contextually embedded knowledge of their competitive landscape. They secure their economic base through trusted, low-transaction-cost traditional relationships while expanding reach and brand visibility through strategic digital tools. This finding echoes [Gergely et al., \(2024\)](#), who documented similar "high-tech, high-touch" strategies in women-owned SMEs in Eastern Europe, where digital tools amplified rather than replaced core relational business practices. For these entrepreneurs, resilience involves not choosing between old and new but intelligently knitting them together in a more robust, multi-stranded business model.

Figure 2 reveals a clear preference for adaptive strategies characterized by high implementation feasibility and rapid tangible impact. The near-universal adoption of "Cost Optimization" by 90% of units epitomizes this pragmatic, resource-conscious approach not merely cost-cutting but deliberate, creative re-engineering of production processes, material sourcing, and operational workflows that eliminated waste without compromising quality or cultural authenticity. This focus on internally manageable, low-risk strategies aligns with "effectuation" in entrepreneurship literature, where entrepreneurs under uncertainty focus on controllable activities. This echoes [Jayanto et al., \(2025\)](#), who found internal resource optimization to be a primary resilience tactic among SMEs with constrained external capital access.

Table 7 tells a nuanced recovery story beyond simple success-versus-failure binaries. While only 35% of enterprises have fully returned to pre-pandemic income levels, 45% are firmly on a path of "sustainable improvement," suggesting resilience has evolved from temporary crisis response to embedded structural capability. This movement from reactive survival to proactive adaptation marks long-term resilience. This aligns with [Verreynne et al., \(2023\)](#), who argue true organizational resilience is evidenced not just by recovery but by institutionalization of learning and adaptive capacities enabling sustained performance in volatile environments. The journey of these 45% indicates they are building precisely this capacity, transforming pandemic lessons into durable competitive advantage.

Figure 1 highlights the central role of "Collaboration" and "Networking," with 55% of units actively participating in local cooperative networks. These informal, trust-based arrangements from shared raw material purchases to joint marketing and childcare support facilitated crucial resource sharing, information exchange, and transaction cost reduction. Social capital operated not as a substitute for financial capital but as a vital complementary asset enhancing its utility and accessibility. This critical role is supported by [Odoch et al., \(2025\)](#), who found social capital was a primary antecedent to financial resilience for women-owned SMEs in Uganda, buffering against formal financial exclusion. Similarly, [Kuran & Khabbaz, \(2025\)](#) emphasize that women entrepreneurs mobilize relational resources to develop "network-based resilience," a pattern clearly present in Tasikmalaya's craft sector collaborative ecosystems.

The strategic evolution is further demonstrated by the significant product mix shift in Table 8. The deliberate reduction in purely traditional items with corresponding increases in functional and customized goods reflects keen, dynamic understanding of shifting market demands. This represents creative adaptation a process of "dynamic tradition" where core artisanal skills are harnessed for new product forms meeting modern consumers' needs for utility and personalization. This strategic flexibility characterizes resilient enterprises; [Huang & Ichikohji, \(2024\)](#) found product diversification and business model innovation mediated between dynamic capabilities and crisis survival for Chinese SMEs. Tasikmalaya entrepreneurs' ability to read markets and pivot product offerings positions them as active innovators within their cultural domain rather than passive custodians of tradition.

These findings demonstrate persuasively that resilience exhibited by these women-led SMEs emanates from a powerful synergy of collective wisdom, pragmatic innovation, and agile capacity to reshape threats into opportunities. While emergent and bottom-up, this model's effectiveness lies precisely in its contextual adaptability a form of "bricolage" wherein entrepreneurs creatively recombine available socio-cultural and material resources to solve novel problems. This grounded model provides a vital template for macro-policy in regional economic development, suggesting policymakers should foster enabling ecosystems that strengthen indigenous resilience mechanisms rather than impose standardized, top-down support schemes. This means facilitating digital literacy within traditional business contexts; bringing formalization and scaling to informal collaborative networks; and providing financial products accessible to and designed for hybrid business models valuing both social and economic returns. The Tasikmalaya women entrepreneurs'

experiences ultimately show that investment in local actors' capacity to adapt in contextually and culturally intelligent ways is not only a recovery strategy but a blueprint for building more inclusive, robust, and sustainable local economies.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that economic resilience among women entrepreneurs in Tasikmalaya's handicraft sector emerges from indigenous wisdom, practical innovation, and social capital rather than extensive institutional support. Key empirical findings reveal that 90% of enterprises maintained local market connections while 80% adopted digital platforms, 90% implemented cost optimization strategies, 70% diversified products, and 55% actively participated in local collaboration networks illustrating a sophisticated hybrid model balancing tradition and innovation. However, only 35% have fully recovered to pre-pandemic income levels, with 45% on sustainable recovery paths, indicating ongoing structural challenges including limited formal financial access, fluctuating raw material prices, and digital skills gaps. The product mix shifted from 75% to 60% purely traditional items, reflecting strategic adaptation of cultural heritage to modern market demands. These findings establish that informal networks and social capital functioned as critical resilience mechanisms when formal resources were limited, highlighting women's capacity for participatory management prioritizing long-term sustainability. The Tasikmalaya model offers transferable lessons for other regions: intelligent integration of creative industries with digital economy, maintenance of cultural authenticity alongside innovation, and strengthening of local cooperation networks. Realizing full potential requires policymakers to design support packages suited to these enterprises' characteristics, provide accessible financial resources, and develop targeted training programs. Ultimately, these women entrepreneurs demonstrate that investment in contextually intelligent, locally-embedded adaptive capacity represents not merely a recovery strategy but a blueprint for building more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable economies at local and national levels.

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