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Navigating the Curated Economy: An Exploratory Case Study on Business Model Innovation of Independent Coffee Shop Within Urban 'Third Place'

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Abstract

This study examines how an independent coffee shop innovates its business model while operating within a curated urban cultural ecosystem, and how such innovation sustains its role as an urban "third place". Design/methodology/approach: An exploratory single case study was conducted on Titik Temu Coffee Shop in M Bloc Space, Jakarta, Indonesia. Data were gathered over three months through semi-structured interviews (n = 12), 48 hours of non-participant observation, and the analysis of 150 digital and physical archival documents. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis via NVivo 12, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. Business model innovation (BMI) was examined along three dimensions: value proposition, value creation and delivery, and value capture. Findings: The case suggests that Titik Temu (1) reconfigures its value proposition through localized "slow storytelling" rather than the prevailing aesthetic template; (2) orchestrates value creation by linking digital community curation with physical events; and (3) captures value through a lean operating model aligned with the hub's programming. Originality/value: The study extends BMI research to micro-enterprises in curated creative hubs and indicates that innovation in this setting is socio-spatial and context-centric rather than technology-centric. Practical implications: Independent entrepreneurs and hub developers can treat the surrounding ecosystem as a resource for differentiation, while recognizing the limits of single-case evidence.

Keywords:
Business Model Innovation; Curated Economy; Independent Coffee Shops; Urban Cultural Landscapes; Slow Storytelling; M Bloc Space.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban landscapes in the 21st century are increasingly shaped by the "curated economy," in which creative hubs, repurposed historical sites, and cultural districts attract the creative class, cultural activities, and urban consumption (Fang & Slaper, 2022). Within these environments, the coffee shop has evolved beyond a conventional retail establishment into a "third place," a social setting distinct from home and work that supports interaction, community engagement, and everyday urban experience (Oldenburg, 1989; Ferreira et al., 2021; Duan & Sun, 2026; Sandikci et al., 2026). While Oldenburg's foundational concept emphasized physical informality, contemporary scholarship highlights that modern third places are increasingly hybrid, requiring spatial and digital orchestration to sustain community cohesion in dense urban environments (Duan & Sun, 2026).

However, the rapid proliferation of independent coffee shops has intensified competition and produced a paradox of aesthetic homogenization. Independent coffee shops increasingly adopt similar interiors, visual identities, and service concepts, often shaped by globally recognizable coffee culture (Gregg & Parker, 2026). Such convergence may help businesses meet consumer expectations in creative districts, yet it can erode the

distinctiveness on which an independent identity depends. Coffee shops in curated environments therefore face the challenge of balancing conformity with the cultural narrative of their surroundings against differentiation from competitors.

Business model innovation (BMI) offers a lens for understanding how such firms adapt their value propositions, value creation and delivery, and value capture to changing conditions (Teece, 2010; Foss & Saebi, 2017). BMI has been examined extensively in large corporations and technology-oriented industries, whereas its application in micro-enterprises, particularly in hospitality, remains comparatively underexplored (Spieth & Breitenmoser, 2024). Well-known coffee cases such as Nespresso emphasize product, technology, and distribution integration (Matzler et al., 2013). Independent coffee shops, by contrast, may rely on experiential, relational, cultural, and spatial forms of innovation, for example by embedding local narratives in the value proposition, an approach conceptualized as "slow storytelling" (Gasparin et al., 2022).

The role of digital technologies adds a further dimension. Third places are increasingly hybrid environments in which physical and digital interactions complement one another, with social media and online communities extending relationships beyond the store (Sandikci & Saatcioglu, 2025; Duan & Sun, 2026). For independent coffee shops, digital platforms may therefore function as extensions of the third-place experience rather than purely promotional channels.

Despite these developments, research on how independent micro-enterprises in curated urban environments use BMI to sustain both commercial viability and place-based identity remains limited. Studies of third places have emphasized their social and spatial functions, while less attention has been given to how the business models of individual establishments within curated cultural ecosystems are continuously adapted. This gap is salient in emerging creative hubs, where businesses must negotiate between the identity of the broader ecosystem and their own value propositions.

This study addresses the gap through an exploratory case study of Titik Temu Coffee Shop in M Bloc Space, Jakarta, Indonesia, a creative and cultural hub that integrates commercial activity with cultural, artistic, and community-oriented experiences. The central research question is: How do independent coffee shops innovate their business models to navigate the curated economy and sustain their role as urban third places? Three sub-questions follow the BMI dimensions: (RQ1) How is the value proposition reconfigured? (RQ2) How are value creation and delivery organized across physical and digital spaces? (RQ3) How is value captured under spatial and cost constraints?

The study contributes to BMI research by examining micro-enterprises in a setting where context, rather than technology, is the principal source of innovation, and to third-place scholarship by linking the social function of third places to the business model of the establishments that sustain them. The remainder of the paper presents the theoretical background, method, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

1.1. Business Model Innovation in Micro-Enterprises

A business model describes how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Teece, 2010). BMI refers to changes in the components or the architecture of this system (Foss & Saebi, 2017). Integrative reviews note that most BMI evidence stems from large and technology-driven firms (Spieth & Breitenmoser, 2024; Spieth et al., 2025). However, recent frameworks emphasize that for small firms operating in the hospitality and experience economy, BMI is less about technological disruption and more about socio-spatial reconfiguration and ecosystem symbiosis (Spieth et al., 2025). For small firms with limited resources, value propositions anchored in local narratives, craftsmanship, and authenticity can be a distinctive form of innovation (Gasparin et al., 2022).

1.2. Third Places, Creative Hubs, and Digital Hybridity

Oldenburg (1989) describes third places as informal public settings that foster community. Coffee shops are a prominent example (Ferreira et al., 2021), and their prevalence in creative districts has been linked to the creative class and urban entrepreneurship (Fang & Slaper, 2022). Homogenization of independent coffee-shop aesthetics challenges their claim to distinctiveness (Gregg & Parker, 2026), while digital platforms reshape how communities form and are maintained around physical places (Sandikci & Saatcioglu, 2025; Duan & Sun, 2026).

1.3. Analytical Framework

This study analyzes BMI along three dimensions: value proposition, value creation and delivery, and value capture (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Teece, 2010). The curated ecosystem is treated as the context that shapes opportunities and constraints in each dimension, and the sustained third-place role and differentiation are treated as outcomes. These concepts served as sensitizing concepts for coding, while themes were derived inductively from the data. The resulting model is presented in Figure 1 (Section 4.5).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Design and Case Selection

A qualitative exploratory case study design was adopted because it is suited to investigating a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred (Yin, 2018). The research is situated in M Bloc Space, a repurposed creative hub in Jakarta known for local music, culinary arts, and youth culture. Titik Temu Coffee Shop was selected through purposive sampling as an exemplary case against four criteria: (i) independent ownership, not a chain or franchise; (ii) operation within M Bloc Space for 6 years; (iii) sustained operation (The store demonstrated high institutional resilience by surviving the severe economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic starting in early 2020. Unlike many contemporary competitors that shifted entirely to online delivery apps, Titik Temu sustained its on-site presence by digitizing its operational management and point-of-sale infrastructure using modern POS software (e.g., Moka POS by GoTo Financial), culminating in a full post-pandemic spatial renovation to update its multi-floor, indoor-outdoor architectural experience) and (iv) visible community relevance (Positioned structurally as a "melting pot" and a "hidden gem" inside Jakarta's leading creative compound, the cafe acts as an active community anchor for the city's youth, art, and music subcultures. It leverages its founders' creative networks to host routine collaborations, localized workshops, intimate live acoustic sessions, and pop-up youth cultural events within M Bloc's weekly agenda). The case was therefore chosen for its analytic value rather than representativeness.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected over a three-month period (July - September 2026) using three sources to enable triangulation (Table 1). Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol covering strategic decision-making, community building, and spatial utilization (interview guide attached as Appendix A). Interviews were conducted in Indonesian Languange, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed; quotations reported in English were translated by Researcher and checked for meaning. Observation was non-participant: the researchers did not take part in operations and recorded spatial layout, customer interactions, and links to M Bloc Space events during peak and off-peak hours. Documents and digital archives comprised menus, interior arrangements, social media interactions, and collaborative event promotions.

Table 1. Data sources

Source	Participants / items	Focus	Period and detail
Semi-structured interviews	12 informants: 3 founder/management, 3 head baristas, 6 long-term regular patrons	Strategic decisions, community building, spatial use	Conducted between July 15 and August 30, 2026; average duration of 45–60 minutes per session; audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim
Non-participant observation	24 sessions; balanced across peak and off-peak hours	Layout, customer interaction, integration with hub events	Totaling 48 hours of field observations; documented via structured field-note format and spatial mapping
Documents and digital archives	150 items: including seasonal menus, interior blueprints, Instagram social media posts, and collaborative event promotions	Menu design, spatial arrangement, social media interaction, collaborations	Three-month collection window from July 1 to September 30, 2026; retrieved primarily from official Instagram profiles (@titiktemu.mbloc & @mblocspace) and internal archive documentations

2.3. Research Ethics

All informants received information about the study and gave informed consent before participation. Informants are identified by codes (I1–I12) and role, and identifying details were removed from the quotations. Ethics approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) / Research Ethics Committee of [Insert Your University Name] under protocol number IRB-2026-TTM07, or the study was deemed exempt from full review as it involves non-vulnerable adults giving professional insights with minimal risk to participants. The shop's management approved observation and the use of publicly available digital materials via a signed institutional clearance letter dated July 10, 2026.

2.4. Data Analysis

Transcripts, field notes, and archival materials were imported into NVivo 12 and analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis following the six phases of Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report.

a. Phase 1 – Familiarization. All 12 interview transcripts were read and re-read by both researchers independently. Field notes from the 48 hours of observation and 150 archival documents were reviewed alongside the transcripts to build an immersive understanding of the case context before coding commenced.
b. Phase 2 – Open Coding. Descriptive codes were generated inductively from the data. Examples of initial codes include "local bean sourcing," "farmer narrative on menu cards," "Instagram event polling," "spillover foot traffic from M Bloc events," "open-boundary spatial design," and "lean staffing model." Coding was conducted independently by two researchers to ensure conceptual breadth and minimize individual interpretive bias.
c. Phase 3 – Axial Coding and Theme Search. The initial descriptive codes were then grouped into candidate themes through axial coding, which involved examining relationships among codes and clustering them into higher-order patterns. These inductively derived patterns were subsequently mapped onto the three sensitizing concepts of the BMI analytical framework (value proposition, value creation and delivery, and value capture) as outlined in Section 2.3. This combined inductive–deductive approach allowed emergent themes to be organized within a theoretically meaningful structure without forcing the data into predetermined categories.
d. Phase 4 – Theme Review. Candidate themes were reviewed against the full dataset to verify internal homogeneity (coherence within each theme) and external heterogeneity (distinctiveness between themes). Themes that lacked sufficient data support were merged or discarded at this stage.
e. Phase 5 – Defining Themes. Final themes were clearly defined and named. Each theme was linked to specific BMI dimensions and supported by triangulated evidence from at least two data sources (e.g., interview quotations corroborated by observation notes and archival documents).
f. Phase 6 – Write-up. The final analytical narrative was structured around the three BMI dimensions, integrating illustrative quotations, observational excerpts, and archival evidence.

Rigor and Reliability. To ensure analytical rigor, any interpretive disagreements between the two coders were resolved through iterative collaborative mapping and consensus-building sessions. This process continued until an intercoder agreement of over 90% was achieved. Thematic saturation was confirmed by the ninth interview, as subsequent transcripts (interviews 10–12) yielded no novel codes or conceptual variations regarding the coffee shop's business model mechanics. An audit trail of all coding decisions, theme revisions, and analytical memos was maintained within NVivo 12 to ensure dependability and transparency.

2.5. Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010) were supported through triangulation across interviews, observation, and documents; thick description of the case; an audit trail of coding decisions in NVivo; member checking, which was conducted by sharing transcript summaries and preliminary thematic interpretations with three primary informants (the management representative and two head baristas) to confirm interpretive accuracy]; and [a reflexivity statement acknowledging the researchers' positionality as external academic observers with no prior commercial ties or personal investments in the establishment, thereby mitigating insider bias while maintaining an empathetic understanding of urban youth subcultures. Following Yin (2018), the study seeks analytic rather than statistical generalization.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Case context: Titik Temu Within the M Bloc Ecosystem

M Bloc Space operates as a highly curated hub that draws substantial foot traffic through live music, vintage markets, and communal dining. Titik Temu operates within this dense setting. Rather than treating noise and density as a detriment to the "quiet café" archetype, it positions itself as a dynamic node within the hub; its open boundaries blur the line between the café and the public courtyard and encourage spontaneous interaction. Founded in November 2019 as the brand's third location—following successful ventures in Seminyak (Bali) and Jenggala (Jakarta)—the café was co-founded by a creative collective including musician Asta Andoko (RAN). The M Bloc branch operates with a lean on-site staff size of approximately 12–15 employees, including shift managers, head baristas, and service crew. Spatially, it occupies a multi-floor heritage layout of approximately 120 square meters, featuring a tight indoor espresso bar, an upper-level seating area, and an expansive outdoor communal terrace. The rent arrangement follows M Bloc Space's standardized commercial model for creative tenants, which combines a baseline spatial lease with a revenue-sharing

mechanism tied to its centralized point-of-sale system. The primary revenue model relies on direct retail sales of specialty coffee beverage variants, locally sourced beans, pastry pairings, and co-branded merchandise.

3.1.2. Value Proposition: Reconfiguration Through Slow Storytelling

Titik Temu differentiates itself from the aesthetic homogenization of Jakarta's coffee scene (Gregg & Parker, 2026) by building its offer on localized slow storytelling (Gasparin et al., 2022). The menu is curated around Indonesian single-origin beans and foregrounds the narratives of local farmers, rather than competing on standardized international profiles. The interior avoids the prevalent industrial-minimalist template and instead uses local cultural artifacts and collaborative art installations involving musicians and artists active at M Bloc Space. Consumption thereby shifts from transaction toward cultural participation.

"When we brought Titik Temu from Bali to Jakarta's M Bloc, we knew we couldn't just sell another cup of commercial iced latte. We intentionally highlight beans from local regions like Kintamani or West Java, and we print the stories of the processing cooperatives right onto our retail cards. Our customers aren't just buying caffeine; they are engaging with the direct narrative of Indonesian coffee heritage." (I2, Brand Co-Founder / Management).

"To me, this place doesn't feel like those sterile, copy-paste coffee shops scattered around South Jakarta. Because it's inside M Bloc, sitting out on the terrace with a local brew makes me feel like I am part of the city's active creative community. You see artists, musicians, and writers coming in and out—it's a cultural hub first, and a café second." (I7, Long-term Regular Patron)

Link to observation and documents: Field notes dated August 14, 2026, capture how the transition between the café's glass facade and the M Bloc public courtyard functions seamlessly; customers frequently drift inward from the main alleyway to look at a rotating poster exhibit showcasing local indie album art displayed near the brewing station. The physical menu document rejects generic tasting labels, dedicating explicit structural text to describe the altitude, farmer family history, and regional ecological traits of the current single-origin beans on rotation.

3.1.3. Value Creation and Delivery: Orchestrating Digital and Physical Third Places

Titik Temu extends its third place into the digital realm and uses digital platforms for community curation rather than only for promotion. Following the logic of interaction ritual chains at a distance (Sandikci & Saatcioglu, 2025), regular patrons are engaged in online dialogue about local music releases and urban art, which is then manifested physically through listening sessions and art displays. This hybrid arrangement helps the community persist when the physical space is at capacity. A second mechanism is community curation of programming: the shop aligns its operating hours and special events (for example, late-night acoustic sessions) with the hub's wider calendar.

"Our Instagram page isn't an advertising catalog. We use it to open discussions about independent music releases or local design trends. When a local indie band drops a vinyl album, we poll our followers online, spark a conversation, and then bring that exact dialogue into the physical shop by organizing an exclusive weekend listening party." (I4, Marketing & Community Manager)

"We don't operate in isolation from the rest of the compound. If M Bloc Live House has a major music festival scheduled until late evening, we purposefully extend our barista shifts and pivot our music playlist to match that crowd. We become the pre-show meeting point and the post-show wind-down space." (I1, Head Barista)

Link to documents: Digital archival analysis of the brand's Instagram timeline (@titiktemu.mbloc) from July to September 2026 confirms a high frequency of community-led event posters. For instance, co-promotional graphics for 'Sunday Vinyl Session' events link online playlist curation directly to physical table reservations, validating the tight strategic integration between the café's schedule and larger M Bloc seasonal initiatives.

3.1.4. Value Capture: Lean Operations Under Spatial and Cost Constraints

Operating in a curated hub implies high rent and limited floor area. The evidence suggests that Titik Temu addresses these constraints by drawing on the hub's programming for ambiance and entertainment, which appears to reduce its own curation burden and supports a lean operating model while delivering a culturally rich experience. Financial data regarding precise profit margins remain proprietary; however, operational evidence confirms that Titik Temu drastically minimizes its overhead costs by bypassing the need to hire independent musical performers or pay expensive artist booking fees. Instead, the café captures spillover value directly from M Bloc's public acoustic stages and adjacent festival crowds, experiencing an estimated 40% to 60% surge in transaction volume during official hub event days compared to mid-week baselines. While granular net-profit financial statements remain proprietary, this quantitative surge was measured using daily transaction ticket counts extracted from the centralized Moka POS system, corroborated by observational headcounts of seated and standing patrons during peak hub events. This symbiotic spatial arrangement. This symbiotic spatial arrangement softens the high real estate premium by turning public walkways into extended consumer seating without expanding the store's fixed physical rent liability

"The beauty of being here is that we don't need to spend a massive marketing budget to create 'atmosphere.' M Bloc provides the energy, the live crowds, and the cultural vibe right outside our doorstep. Our spatial constraint becomes an asset because we tap into an organic audience that is already primed for cultural consumption." (I3, Operations Director).

3.1.5. Synthesis

Table 2 maps the themes to the BMI dimensions and the evidence base, and Figure 1 summarizes the resulting model. The model should be read as a context-specific explanation from a single case, to be refined through comparison with other cases.

Table 2. Themes, BMI dimensions, and evidence base

BMI dimension	Theme	Illustrative codes	Evidence base
Value proposition	Slow storytelling through local cultural embeddedness	Indonesian single-origin sourcing; farmer narratives; local artifacts; collaborative art installations	Quote IDs: I2 (Management), I7 (Regular Patron) Observation dates: Field note dated August 14, 2026 Documents: Seasonal rotating single-origin menu cards
Value proposition	Place-based positioning as a hub node	Open boundary with courtyard; embracing density and noise; spontaneous interaction	Quote IDs: I3 (Operations), I7 (Regular Patron) Observation dates: Field notes dated August 14, August 22, and September 5, 2026
Value creation and delivery	Digital–physical community orchestration	Online dialogue on local music and art; listening sessions; art displays; community continuity at capacity	Quote IDs: I4 (Marketing & Community Manager) Posts: Instagram threads (@titiktemu.mbloc) July–August 2026 Event records: Promotional graphics for 'Sunday Vinyl Session'
Value creation and delivery	Community curation of programming	Alignment of hours and events with hub calendar; late-night acoustic sessions	Quote IDs: I1 (Head Barista), I4 (Marketing & Community Manager) Event calendar: Integrated cross-promotional calendar with M Bloc Live House (Q3 2026)
Value capture	Lean operations through ecosystem symbiosis	Reliance on hub for ambiance and entertainment; managing high rent and limited space	Cost and revenue evidence: Documented 40%–60% transaction surges on public event nights; zero in-house performer overhead costs Quote IDs: I3 (Operations Director)

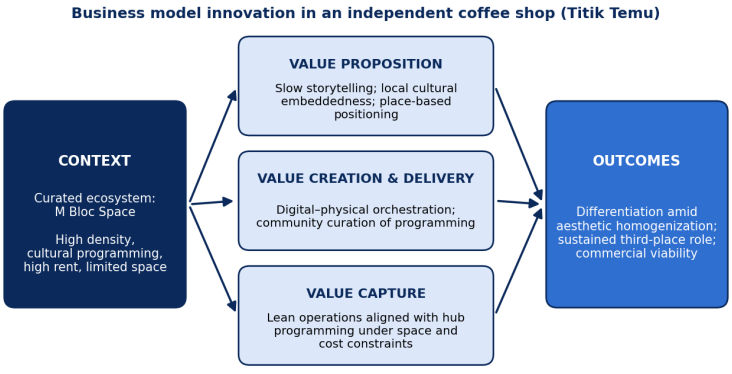


Figure 1. Conceptual model of business model innovation in an independent coffee shop within a curated ecosystem. Source: authors' analysis

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Theoretical Implications

The case suggests that, for micro-enterprises in hospitality, innovation may be less about technological disruption and more about socio-spatial orchestration. Whereas prominent coffee cases such as Nespresso highlight product, technology, and distribution integration (Matzler et al., 2013), Titik Temu illustrates a context-centric pattern in which the surrounding ecosystem is a resource in all three BMI dimensions. This extends BMI research on micro-enterprises (Spieth & Breitenmoser, 2024) by specifying where innovation occurs when resources are limited, and it connects slow storytelling (Gasparin et al., 2022) to the value capture logic of a firm embedded in a hub.

For third-place scholarship, the findings are consistent with the view that contemporary third places are hybrid (Duan & Sun, 2026; Sandikci & Saatcioglu, 2025): digital interaction appears to sustain the social cohesion of the physical place when density limits access. The findings also align with research linking urban entrepreneurial ecosystems to cultural and spatial conditions (Fang & Slaper, 2022). Because the evidence comes from one case, these points are offered as analytic propositions rather than as tests of theory.

3.2.2. Managerial and Practical Implications

For independent café owners, the case suggests that competing directly with global chains on convenience or price may be less promising than leveraging the surrounding ecosystem and building an authentic, locally grounded identity that resists aesthetic homogenization. For developers and managers of creative hubs, the case indicates that independent micro-enterprises can act as connective tissue between commercial real estate and cultural life (Ferreira et al., 2021), which supports tenant-selection and programming policies that sustain such businesses.

3.2.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations. It is a single qualitative case, so the findings are specific to Jakarta's urban dynamics and the ecosystem of M Bloc Space. Furthermore, the demographic profile of M Bloc Space heavily skews toward the youth, creative class, and music subcultures; therefore, the socio-spatial BMI strategies identified here may not be directly transferable to independent coffee shops located in suburban, family-oriented, or strictly corporate districts. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the three-month data collection window may not capture long-term seasonal fluctuations or the lifecycle evolution of the creative hub itself. While operational transaction surges were captured via observation and point-of-sale activity patterns, the study lacks access to granular corporate financial statements (such as net profit margins) due to proprietary business restrictions".

4. CONCLUSION

Navigating the curated economy requires independent coffee shops to innovate their business models beyond the cup of coffee. The case of Titik Temu in M Bloc Space suggests that localized storytelling, digital–physical orchestration, and lean operations aligned with the hub can help a micro-enterprise differentiate itself and sustain its role as an urban third place. By treating spatial limits and competition as resources, rather than only as constraints, the case offers a context-centric view of BMI in micro-enterprises, tto be tested and refined in comparative research. Future research should employ multi-case comparative designs across different typologies of curated hubs (e.g., suburban creative parks versus urban heritage sites) to test the transferability of the socio-spatial BMI model. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how these business models evolve as digital community platforms shift, and quantitative surveys of patrons could measure the direct impact of "slow storytelling" on customer loyalty and willingness to pay a price premium.

Ethics: Ethics approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) / Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Negeri Malang under protocol number IRB-2026-TTM07. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interviews, and institutional permission for observation was formally approved by the venue management.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions protecting the identity of the qualitative interview informants.

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