

Identity Negotiation and Gendered Communication Practices among Single-Mother Micro-Entrepreneurs in West Java: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Lina Karlina*

Fakultas Komunikasi dan Ilmu Sosial, Universitas Telkom, Kabupaten Bandung, Jawa Barat, 40257 Indonesia
linakl@telkomuniversity.ac.id

Indra N.A Pamungkas

Fakultas Komunikasi dan Ilmu Sosial, Universitas Telkom, Kabupaten Bandung, Jawa Barat, 40257 Indonesia
indrapamungkas@telkomuniversity.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the negotiation of communication identity among single mothers who run micro-enterprises using the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) framework. The research seeks to understand how identity is constructed across personal, enacted, relational, and communal layers, and how these interactions shape their gender performativity and business practices. The study contributes theoretically by positioning survival as a conceptual outcome of identity negotiation, extending the application of CTI within the context of marginalized women entrepreneurs. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews, observation, documentation, and data analysis through NVivo software to identify coding patterns and word similarities. The findings reveal that identity is formed dynamically through interconnected character traits, generating emergent attributes such as proactive, adaptive, accountable, integrity-driven, strategic, empathetic, realistic, credible, pragmatic, and ultimately survival-oriented. Survival emerges as the core identity strategy, not merely as economic endurance but as a communicative and performative process that integrates authenticity and pragmatism. This study highlights that single mothers' empowerment lies in their ability to continuously negotiate identity across domestic and public spheres to sustain both family life and business continuity.

Keywords: *Identity Negotiation, Survival Strategy, Single Mother Entrepreneurs, Communication Identity*

1. Introduction

The increasing role of women in the micro-business sector in West Java is one of the most significant socio-economic changes in the 2013–2023 period (Da'watuna, 2023). If previously MSMEs were seen primarily as an economic buffer sector, now this sector has transformed into a strategic space for women, especially single mothers, to build economic independence (Mishra, 2025). In various cities and districts in West Java, women are increasingly actively running micro-scale businesses to maintain family survival, even though they have to deal with complex social dynamics. The strategic role of women in MSMEs has been shown to improve household welfare and contribute to regional economic development (Indriani et al., 2024). Rather than relying solely on macro-structural claims, this study situates these developments within lived communicative experiences to avoid overgeneralization and unsupported statistical extrapolation.

Of all groups of women MSME actors, single mothers represent both a significant and socio-economically vulnerable category (Yahya et al., 2025). They not only manage businesses as their primary source of income but also assume domestic responsibilities as breadwinners, caregivers, educators, and family decision-makers (Dhaliwal, 2022). The results of a pre-research interview with Mrs. Lisda, Coordinator of MSMEs in West Java, indicate that many single mothers enter the MSME sector primarily due to survival imperatives rather than opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. This finding underscores the structural and situational constraints shaping their economic participation, rather than framing their entry as purely agentic choice.

In the Indonesian social context, single mothers frequently encounter stigma, stereotypes, and gendered expectations (Primadona & Lenggogeni, 2024). Patriarchal norms often associate women with domestic and nurturing roles, while positioning men as primary breadwinners. When single mothers engage in micro-entrepreneurship, they must navigate economic responsibilities alongside socially constructed expectations (Kasuma, 2022). However, instead of treating stigma and patriarchy as monolithic forces, this study conceptualizes them as communicative mechanisms operating through daily interactions—such as labeling, trust attribution, and credibility testing—which may vary across socio-economic, cultural, and spatial contexts.

Previous studies have extensively examined the economic contributions of MSMEs and the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, including financial barriers, limited access to networks, and social stigma (Corona, 2021). Other research has explored the

psychological and social pressures experienced by single mothers (Zakaria et al., 2019). Studies on women's entrepreneurial identity also show that women negotiate identity within social expectations and gender norms in both offline and digital environments (Kelly & McAdam, 2023). In communication research, identity negotiation has been examined using the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), which highlights how individuals manage tensions across personal, enacted, relational, and communal identity layers in different social contexts (Trinh & Faulkner, 2023; Utari & Hermawati, 2020). Meanwhile, broader entrepreneurship literature, such as mumpreneurship studies, discusses the structural and socio-economic conditions influencing mothers' participation in business (Amorim et al., 2025). However, existing literature largely treats these challenges as socio-economic, psychological, or structural issues, leaving the communicative processes through which single mothers negotiate identity and legitimacy in entrepreneurial contexts insufficiently explored. In particular, limited attention has been given to how single mothers strategically construct and perform their identities when interacting with customers, communities, and family members within their business environments.

In everyday practice, stigma influences how single mothers communicate within their social and business environments (Lai, 2021). They actively construct self-presentations reflecting credibility, stability, and competence to secure customer trust (Abdul Razak et al., 2024). Yet these communicative efforts may encounter pre-existing public perceptions that position single mothers as weak or dependent (Dor, 2021). Social support and shifting public perceptions, therefore, become important enabling factors in their entrepreneurial trajectories (Abdul Razak et al., 2024).

To understand these dynamics, this study draws on Hecht's Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), which conceptualizes identity as emerging from the interaction of personal, enacted, relational, and communal identity layers. Rather than treating these layers as analytically separate components, CTI views identity as an emergent communicative process in which tensions may arise across different identity frames. Identity negotiation, therefore, occurs through ongoing communicative interactions across these interdependent layers. This theoretical perspective is complemented by Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which conceptualizes gender as constituted through repeated communicative and embodied acts (Butler, 1990). In the context of single-mother micro-entrepreneurs, performativity can be understood as a strategic negotiation between maternal and professional identities (Badan Pusat Statistik

Provinsi Jawa Barat, 2025). Instead of framing these roles as contradictory or mutually exclusive, this study interprets them as context-sensitive identity enactments shaped by audience expectations, institutional norms, and market interactions.

Complementing these theoretical perspectives, Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study. The framework illustrates how the social conditions experienced by single mothers—such as stigma, domestic responsibilities, and economic pressures—can generate identity tensions between personal self-understanding and socially constructed expectations. These tensions create identity gaps that are negotiated through communicative identity processes as conceptualized in the Communication Theory of Identity and through gender performativity practices in everyday interactions. Through this dynamic process, single mothers develop strategies of identity negotiation to manage the intersection between maternal responsibilities and entrepreneurial roles in micro-business activities.

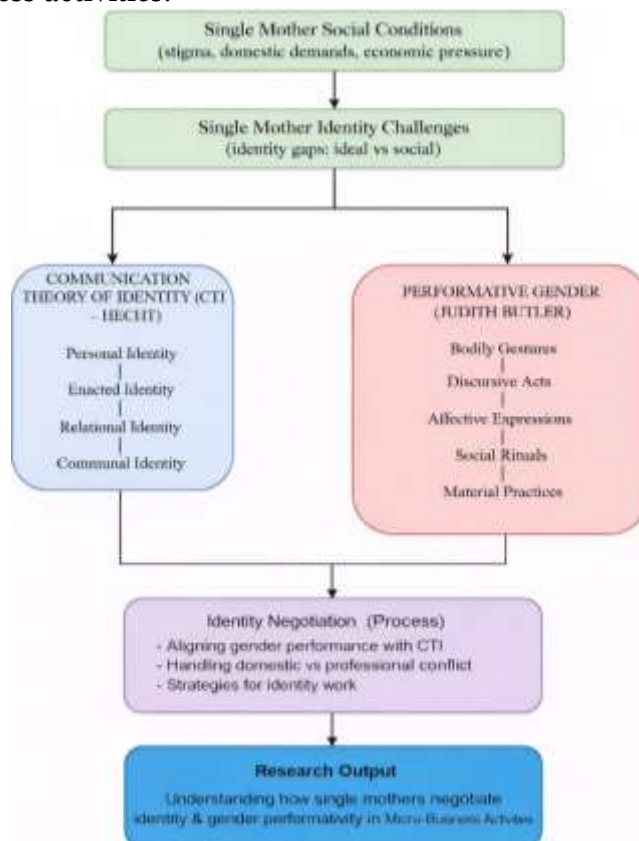


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Identity Negotiation among Single-Mother Micro-Entrepreneurs

Macro-level data further contextualize the phenomenon. West Java is reported as one of the provinces with the largest number of MSMEs in Indonesia. Data 2024 from PPID West Java (Afader et al., 2021) and the Central Statistics Agency (2025) records millions of MSME units across districts and cities, while nationally MSMEs constitute approximately 99% of business units (BPS, 2024), with over 65 million active enterprises recorded by the (Kementerian Koperasi dan UKM Republik Indonesia, 2024). These statistics are used as contextual background rather than as direct analytical variables, as the primary empirical focus of this study remains on interpretative accounts derived from qualitative inquiry.

Despite the significant economic contributions of MSMEs and the increasing participation of women entrepreneurs, single mothers continue to face complex social expectations, stigma, and multiple role responsibilities that shape their entrepreneurial experiences. While previous studies have examined the economic and structural challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs, limited attention has been given to the communicative processes through which single mothers construct and negotiate their identities within entrepreneurial contexts. Understanding these communicative dynamics is important because identity negotiation influences how single mothers establish credibility, build trust, and sustain their business relationships in everyday interactions. Therefore, this study examines how single-mother micro-entrepreneurs in West Java negotiate identity and perform gender roles through everyday communicative interactions within their business environments.

Using a qualitative approach grounded in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as emphasized by Creswell, this research explores the lived experiences, communicative strategies, identity negotiations, and gender performativity of single-mother MSME actors in West Java. By integrating the Communication Theory of Identity with gender performativity, this study contributes a communicative perspective to the study of women's entrepreneurship, particularly in understanding how maternal and entrepreneurial identities are negotiated within micro-business contexts. In addition to its academic contribution, this research also aligns with the broader objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2019), particularly Goal 5 concerning gender equality and Goal 8 regarding decent work and economic growth (Hind & Marcoes, 2022). Rather than claiming direct measurement of SDG indicators, the study provides interpretative insights into micro-level gendered communication dynamics that contribute to broader discussions on gender equality and inclusive economic participation. By doing so, this research seeks to refine the application of the Communication Theory of

Identity in gendered entrepreneurial contexts while offering grounded insights that may inform more socially responsive MSME empowerment initiatives.

2. Method

The method used is a qualitative approach grounded explicitly in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), positioned as an idiographic, small-sample design that prioritizes depth of lived experience over breadth or statistical representation. Ontologically, science views human experience as subjective and inseparable from the social context (Gómez Tapia, 2025). In line with IPA's epistemological commitment, the study involved a limited number of participants (small-N), each selected because they met clearly defined criteria: single mothers actively managing micro-enterprises in West Java for a minimum specified period. The emphasis was placed on intensive, case-by-case analysis rather than cross-case generalization. The analysis is carried out through double hermeneutics, where researchers interpret how informants interpret their experiences while interpreting the meanings contained in the narrative. This double hermeneutic process was implemented through iterative reading, detailed exploratory commenting (descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual), and the development of emergent themes within each individual case before cautiously identifying convergences across cases.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the primary method to access lived experience, complemented by limited participant observation to contextualize communicative practices (Bowie, 2019; Crosina et al., 2025; Noor, 2021). Interview transcripts were analyzed idiographically: each case was examined independently to preserve experiential nuance, and no frequency counts or percentage-based thematic aggregation were employed in order to remain consistent with IPA's rejection of quantification. Rather than applying thematic analysis in the Braun and Clarke sense, thematic development was conducted within the IPA framework, focusing on experiential meaning-making in individual narratives before cautiously exploring patterns of resonance. NVivo software was used as a data management tool to organize transcripts, coding notes, and analytic memos; however, interpretative analysis remained grounded in manual, reflexive hermeneutic engagement by the researcher, as software does not substitute for analytic interpretation. The analysis process followed a recursive and reflective logic rather than a linear reduction-display-conclusion model. (Miles & Huberman, 1994), ensuring alignment with phenomenological inquiry.

The unit of analysis of this research refers to the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993b) and Performativity of Gender (Butler, 1990) which are used integratively to understand the negotiation of communication identity at the level of lived, narrated experience. Informants were selected through purposive sampling techniques by considering the suitability of the phenomenon being studied (Iskandar, 2009; Moleong, 2018). Sampling criteria, number of participants, and rationale for analytic sufficiency were explicitly defined, with recruitment continuing until experiential depth and interpretative richness were achieved rather than statistical saturation.

The validity of the data was ensured according to the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was reinforced through prolonged engagement with participants, iterative questioning, and meticulous analytic documentation. Member checking was conducted using interpretative summaries rather than raw transcripts, allowing participants to reflect on the researcher's interpretations and provide dialogical clarification, in line with IPA's epistemological stance, while acknowledging ongoing debates about its scope and limitations. Additionally, source and technique triangulation (Sugiyono, 2019) were applied complementarily rather than positivistically, enriching contextual understanding without implying objective verification. Reflexive journaling and a detailed audit trail were maintained to ensure dependability and confirmability of interpretative decisions. Collectively, these measures ensured that the research was conducted systematically, reflectively, and in a manner that was academically rigorous and ethically responsible, fully consistent with the interpretative phenomenological framework.

To provide a clearer overview of the research procedures described above, the stages of the study are summarized in the research flow diagram presented in Figure 2. The diagram presents the sequential stages of the research process, beginning with research design and participant recruitment, followed by data collection, idiographic analysis, cross-case interpretation, and procedures to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

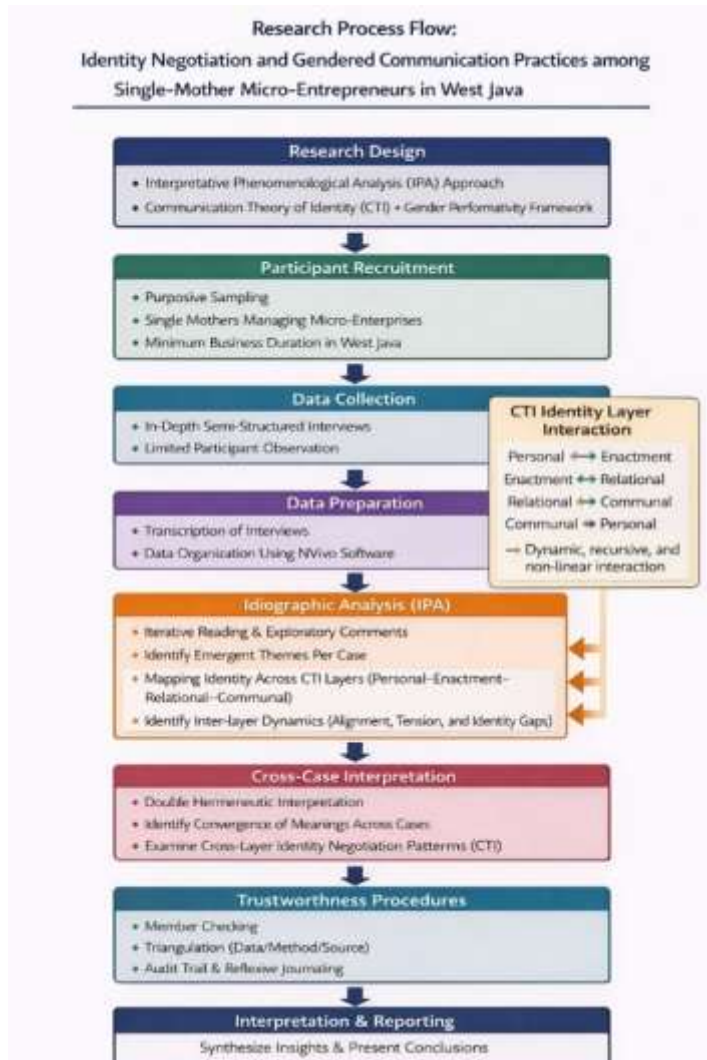


Figure 2. Research Process Flow

3. Results

The unit of analysis in this study uses the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), which views identity as a multilayered and dynamic construction that continues to be negotiated through communication practices. Identity is understood as a process that is formed and transformed through everyday social interactions. Interview data were analyzed based on four main layers (Personal Identity, Enactment Identity, Relational Identity, and Communal Identity) to capture the complexity of the experiences of single mothers as micro-entrepreneurs across various life contexts. This analytical approach allows for a more context-sensitive

application of CTI, particularly in understanding identity construction within gendered entrepreneurial settings.

3.1 The First Layer of Personal Identity

The results of coding 90 references indicate that the personal identity of single mothers as micro-entrepreneurs is predominantly characterized by resilience (44%, 40 references), followed by pessimism (29%, 26 references), and optimism. These categories were identified based on recurring expressions in informants' narratives related to their daily roles as single mothers and micro-entrepreneurs.

3.1.1 Resilient Coding Results

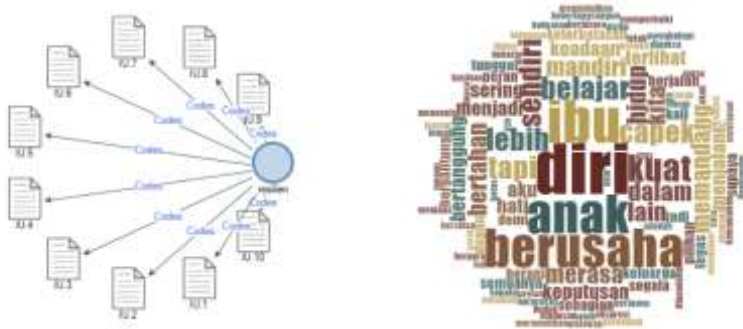


Figure 1. Network view and word cloud resilient code

Figure 1 presents the network view and word cloud of the resilience category. Frequently occurring words include mother, child, self, striving, strong, tired, independent, and learning. These words appear in narratives describing daily activities related to childcare and income-generating responsibilities. References to mother and child occur consistently, while words such as strong, striving, and independent co-occur with descriptions of routine challenges. The word learning appears in relation to ongoing experiences in carrying out these roles.

This pattern is reflected in the following statements from several informants:

"There is no other choice but to accept this situation and strive to carry out these roles as best as possible for the survival and future of my children."

"Being a single mother has made me more decisive in making decisions and more aware of my life priorities."

"I feel tired, but I also have to persevere because I realize my child is completely dependent on me."

3.1.2 Pessimistic Coding Results

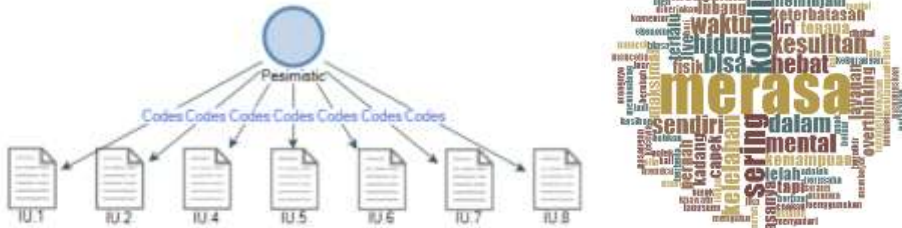


Figure 2. Network view and word cloud Pessimistic Code

Figure 2 presents the network view and word cloud of the pessimism category. Frequently occurring words include feel, alone, tiredness, difficulty, mental, and time. These words appear in narratives describing fatigue, limited time, and emotional strain in daily activities. Informants refer to managing multiple responsibilities with limited resources and working independently. Words such as can and do appear in statements describing continued efforts despite these constraints.

This pattern is reflected in the following statements from several informants:

"I once tried to use digital services such as GrabFood and Gojek, but in practice, I found it difficult to manage orders, time, and energy because I had to handle everything on my own."

"I am now someone who is struggling with all my limitations."

"I realize that my abilities are not always optimal and there are many things I cannot do perfectly."

3.1.3 Optimistic Coding Results

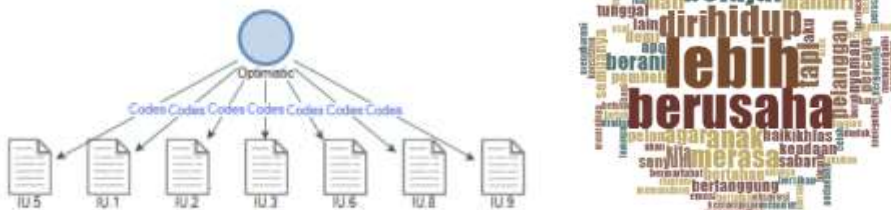


Figure 3. Network view and word cloud Optimistic Code

Figure 3 presents the network view and word cloud of the optimism category. Frequently occurring words include more, try, live, self, learn, independent, and endure. These words appear in narratives describing continued efforts in carrying out daily responsibilities. Expressions such as try, learn, and endure are associated with ongoing activities, while independent and self appear in statements referring to managing responsibilities without external support. References to children also appear in several narratives related to daily routines.

This pattern is reflected in the following statements from several informants:

"I learned to accept the situation without complaining too much."

"I take on all these roles as part of my survival and self-actualization efforts, especially after living as a single mother."

"Being a single mother and an entrepreneur has made me bolder in making decisions and more independent."

3.1.4 Summary of Personal Identity

Overall, the results indicate that personal identity is reflected through three recurring categories: resilience, pessimism, and optimism, which appear across informants' narratives. These categories are represented through patterns of language used to describe daily roles, challenges, and ongoing efforts. The co-occurrence of these categories within the same narratives shows that personal identity is expressed through multiple and overlapping conditions rather than a single, fixed form. In relation to the research question on how personal identity is constructed, these findings indicate that personal identity is reflected through the simultaneous presence of enduring efforts, experienced constraints, and continued attempts to manage daily responsibilities as single mothers and micro-entrepreneurs.

3.2 The First Layer of Enactment Identity

The results of coding show that enactment identity is reflected in three main categories: emotional expression (44%, 20 references), passion (40%, 18 references), and authenticity (16%, 7 references). These categories were identified based on recurring expressions in informants' narratives related to their communication practices in daily interactions.

Figure 5 presents the network view and word cloud of the passion category. Frequently occurring words include effort, life, decisions, customers, and children. These words appear in narratives describing ongoing involvement in business activities and daily responsibilities. Informants refer to making decisions, serving customers, and continuing their routines. Words such as effort and responsibility appear in relation to these activities.

This pattern is reflected in the following statements from several informants:

"Even when I feel tired, I still have to continue because this is my responsibility for my children and my business."

"Being a single mother has made me more assertive in making decisions and more aware of my life priorities."

"I strive to be neat, orderly, and consistent. I want customers to believe that even though my business is small, I'm serious about it."

3.2.3 Authentic Result Coding

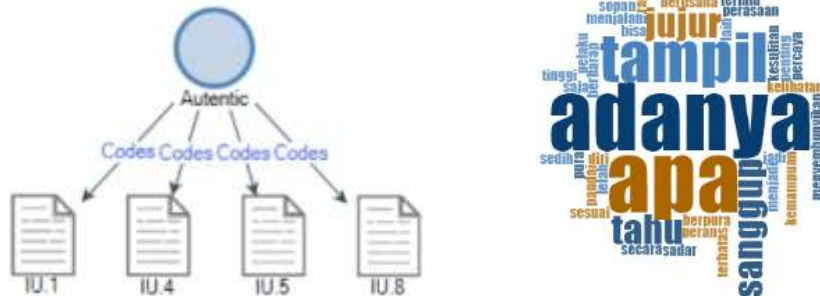


Figure 6. Network view and word cloud authentic code

Figure 6 presents the network view and word cloud of the authenticity category. Frequently occurring words relate to honesty, openness, and self-description. These words appear in narratives describing how informants communicate in everyday interactions. Informants refer to presenting themselves in a direct and open manner in both social and business contexts.

This pattern is reflected in the following statements from several informants:

"I present myself as I am. If I'm tired, I'm tired; if I can't, I can't."

"I try to live my role as a single mother and entrepreneur honestly and honestly."

"I present myself as I am. The important thing is to be honest, neat, and polite."

3.2.4 Summary of Enactment Identity

Overall, the results indicate that enactment identity is reflected through three recurring categories: emotional expression, passion, and authenticity, which appear across informants' narratives. These categories are represented through patterns of communication in daily interactions. The co-occurrence of these categories shows that enactment identity is expressed through multiple forms of communication, including the expression of emotional experiences, the continuation of responsibilities, and the presentation of self in social and business contexts. In relation to the research question on how identity is enacted, these findings indicate that enacted identity is reflected through the ways informants communicate their experiences, manage responsibilities, and present themselves in everyday interactions as single mothers and micro-entrepreneurs.

3.3 The First Layer Relational Identity

The results of coding indicate that the relational identity of single mothers as micro-entrepreneurs is reflected in three main categories: prudence (48%, 11 references), openness (30%, 7 references), and sensitivity (22%, 5 references). These categories are derived from recurring expressions in informants' narratives related to their interactions and communication with others in both personal and business contexts.

3.3.1 Prudent Coding Results



Figure 7. Network view and word cloud prudent code

Figure 7 presents the network view and word cloud of the prudence category. Frequently occurring words include but, alone, angry, tired, decisive, and trying. These words appear in narratives describing situations that involve emotional tension and the need to maintain self-control in

“I like to talk casually with people, so the interaction feels more familiar and not too formal.”

“Being open and friendly makes it easier for me to build relationships with customers.”

3.3.3 Sensitive Coding Results

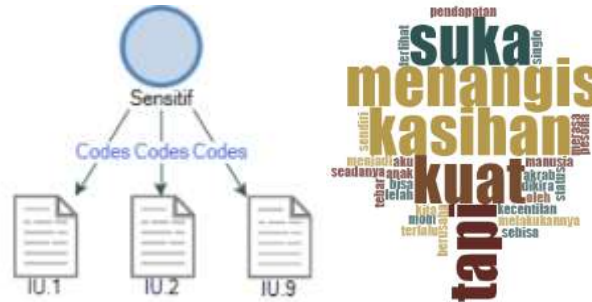


Figure 9. Network View and Word Cloud Sensitive Identity code

Figure 9 presents the network view and word cloud of the sensitivity category. Frequently occurring words include cry, pity, strong, like, and but. These words appear in narratives describing emotional responses in interactions with others. Informants refer to recognizing the feelings of others while at the same time managing their own emotional responses. The presence of the word but appears in statements that combine emotional reactions with efforts to remain strong and continue fulfilling responsibilities.

This pattern is reflected in the following statements from several informants:

“I feel sad when I see others going through difficult situations, but I try to stay strong so I can continue my responsibilities.”

“Sometimes I feel emotional when dealing with certain situations, but I try not to show it too much in front of others.”

“I understand how others feel because I have experienced similar things, but I still have to control my emotions.”

3.3.4 Summary of Relational Identity

Overall, the results indicate that relational identity is reflected through three recurring categories: prudence, openness, and sensitivity, which appear across informants’ narratives in describing their interactions with others. These categories are represented through patterns of

communication and emotional responses in both personal and business contexts.

The co-occurrence of these categories within the same narratives shows that relational identity is expressed through multiple and overlapping interactional tendencies rather than a single, fixed pattern. In relation to the research question on how identity is constructed, these findings indicate that relational identity is reflected through the ways informants manage emotions, maintain interactions, and adapt their communication in engaging with others in their daily lives as single mothers and micro-entrepreneurs.

3.4 The First Layer Communal Identity

Based on the coding results, the communal identity of single mothers as micro-entrepreneurs is reflected in three main categories: professionalism (46%, 26 references), responsibility (32%, 18 references), and friendliness (22%, 12 references). These categories are derived from recurring expressions in informants' narratives related to shared expectations, social roles, and interactions within broader social and business environments.

3.4.1 Professional Coding Results

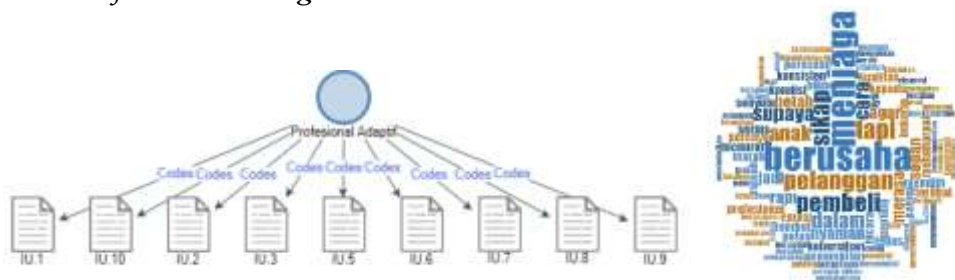


Figure 9. Network view and word cloud: Professional code

Figure 9 presents the network view and word cloud of the professionalism category. Frequently occurring words include trying, customer, buyer, keep, trust, quality, and comfortable. These words appear in narratives describing efforts to maintain service quality and build customer trust. Informants refer to maintaining consistency in their work, ensuring product quality, and creating comfortable interactions with customers. Words such as but and emotion appear in statements that describe situations requiring the management of personal feelings while continuing to provide services.

This pattern is reflected in the following statements from several informants:

reflected through the ways informants align their actions, responsibilities, and interactions with shared norms and expectations in their daily lives as single mothers and micro-entrepreneurs.

Taken together, the findings across the four identity layers (personal, enactment, relational, and communal) indicate that identity construction among single mother micro-entrepreneurs is a dynamic and multilayered process. This process is shaped by continuous negotiation between internal meanings, everyday communication practices, interpersonal relationships, and broader social expectations. In this regard, the results refine the application of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) by demonstrating how identity is constructed within gendered entrepreneurial contexts. At the same time, these findings provide empirically grounded insights that may inform more socially responsive MSME empowerment strategies.

4. Discussion

The findings reinforce the central premise of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) that identity is constructed through communication processes and operates across multiple interrelated layers (Hecht, 1993b, 1993a; Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). In line with the social constructionist perspective, identity is not fixed but continuously shaped through interaction, experience, and interpretation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In relation to the research question, the findings demonstrate that identity among single mother micro-entrepreneurs is constructed through the dynamic interaction of personal, enactment, relational, and communal layers, as reflected in Sections 3.1–3.4. Building on these foundations, this study refines the application of CTI by demonstrating that identity construction in gendered entrepreneurial contexts is not only multilayered but also shaped by the continuous negotiation between caregiving responsibilities and economic roles. This indicates that identity layers do not merely coexist but interact dynamically and simultaneously in context-specific ways.

At the personal identity layer (3.1), identity is constructed through the coexistence of resilience, pessimism, and optimism, which appear simultaneously across informants' narratives. As shown in the results, these categories frequently co-occur within the same accounts, indicating that they are not separate psychological states but overlapping conditions reflected in recurring expressions such as striving, tiredness, limitation, and continued effort. While previous studies tend to emphasize resilience as the dominant narrative among single mothers (Dor, 2021; Lai, 2021), this study demonstrates that pessimism also plays a significant role in how

individuals interpret constraints such as limited time, energy, and capability. Importantly, optimism emerges not as abstract hope but as a form of ongoing effort (e.g., trying, learning, enduring) embedded in daily practices. This pattern suggests that personal identity is formed through the simultaneous negotiation of endurance, constraint, and effort, rather than a single dominant trait. This finding refines CTI by showing that internal contradiction is not incidental but constitutive of identity construction.

At the enactment layer (3.2), identity is expressed through three interrelated communication patterns: emotional expression, passion, and authenticity. The findings show that emotional expressions (such as tiredness, sadness, and worry) frequently co-occur with continued activity, often marked by contrasting expressions (e.g., feeling exhausted but continuing to work). This indicates that emotional experience is not separate from action but embedded within it. Supporting the performativity perspective (Butler, 1990) Identity is enacted through everyday practices in which individuals simultaneously express emotions, carry out responsibilities, and present themselves authentically. While prior studies often separate emotional and professional domains (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Caza et al., 2018) This study demonstrates that in micro-enterprise contexts, particularly among single mothers, emotional expression, responsibility, and self-presentation are inseparable. This finding refines CTI by positioning enactment identity as inherently affective, processual, and grounded in daily communication practices.

At the relational layer (3.3), identity is constructed through patterns of prudence, openness, and sensitivity in managing interactions with others. The findings indicate that informants continuously navigate emotional tension in their relationships, often balancing personal feelings with the need to maintain social and business interactions. Patterns such as expressing negative emotions while maintaining composure (e.g., feeling angry or tired but choosing careful communication) reflect the importance of emotional regulation in relational contexts. While previous studies highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships in sustaining micro-enterprises ((Abdul Razak et al., 2024; Dhaliwal, 2022) This study extends these insights by showing how relational sensitivity, which manifested through prudence, openness, and empathy, is actively used to sustain trust and manage interactions. In contexts where single mothers may face social stigma (Lai, 2021; Primadona & Lenggogeni, 2024) Communication practices function as adaptive strategies for maintaining legitimacy and social acceptance. This refines CTI by emphasizing that relational identity is continuously negotiated through context-sensitive and emotionally regulated communication.

At the communal layer (3.4), identity is shaped through alignment with broader social expectations reflected in professionalism, responsibility, and wise behavior. The findings show that informants actively construct their identities by maintaining service quality, fulfilling dual responsibilities, and adapting their behavior to social norms such as politeness and respect. Professionalism is not only expressed through technical competence but also through the ability to manage emotions while interacting with customers. Responsibility reflects the integration of caregiving and economic roles, while wise behavior indicates awareness of how actions influence social responses. While previous studies often emphasize structural participation (Indriani et al., 2024; Jamali, 2009) This study shows that communal identity is enacted through everyday behavioral alignment with shared expectations. This finding refines CTI by demonstrating that communal identity operates at the level of practical, situational decision-making that supports both social acceptance and business sustainability. A key contribution of this study lies in reconceptualizing “survival” as a multidimensional and processual outcome. The findings across all four layers indicate that survival is not solely an economic indicator (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024), but emerges from the dynamic interaction between emotional resilience, identity negotiation, relational competence, and alignment with social norms. This shifts the understanding of survival from a static outcome to an ongoing communicative process, supporting qualitative perspectives that emphasize lived experience and contextual meaning (Creswell, 1994; Gómez Tapia, 2025).

Taken together, the findings across all four identity layers indicate that identity construction among single mother micro-entrepreneurs is a dynamic and overlapping process shaped by continuous negotiation between emotional experience, responsibility, interaction, and social expectations. A key analytical contribution of this study lies in identifying recurring patterns of co-occurrence (such as resilience alongside pessimism, or emotional strain alongside continued action) as central mechanisms of identity construction. This suggests that identity is not formed through stability or consistency alone, but through the ongoing balancing of competing demands in everyday life.

In terms of research contribution and distinction, this study offers several important advancements. First, it provides an integrative application of CTI by empirically demonstrating how all four identity layers operate simultaneously within a specific socio-economic context. Second, it introduces the concept of overlapping and co-occurring identity conditions as a key mechanism of identity construction, which has been

underexplored in previous studies. Third, it situates identity construction within the lived realities of single mother micro-entrepreneurs, where caregiving responsibilities and economic activities are inseparable. Therefore, this study contributes not only descriptively but also analytically by refining CTI to better capture the affective, relational, and contextual dimensions of identity in gendered entrepreneurial settings.

The findings offer practical implications for MSME empowerment. First, programs should go beyond financial support by incorporating emotional support components, such as stress management and peer-sharing sessions, to address the emotional strain identified in the personal and enactment layers. Second, given the importance of relational identity, training should focus on applied communication skills, including managing customer interactions, building trust, and regulating emotions in everyday situations. Third, empowerment strategies should adopt community-based approaches, such as local support groups or mentoring networks that reinforce professionalism, responsibility, and social acceptance. Finally, interventions should be adapted to the constraints faced by single mother entrepreneurs, for instance, through flexible training formats and simplified digital support.

This study has several limitations. First, the findings are based on a specific socio-cultural context, namely single mother micro-entrepreneurs in West Java, which may limit their transferability to other settings. Second, the qualitative approach emphasizes depth of understanding but does not capture broader population patterns. Third, the reliance on self-reported narratives introduces the possibility of subjective bias in how participants interpret and present their experiences. Future research may address these limitations by employing mixed-method approaches and exploring identity construction in different contexts, including other types of entrepreneurs or family structures, to further extend the applicability of CTI.

5. Conclusion

The major findings of this study show that survival is at the core of the negotiation of identity, communication, and gender performativity among single mothers of micro business actors. Rather than positioning survival as a novel theoretical construct, this study frames it as an empirically grounded theme that reflects participants' narratives within conditions of social and economic precarity. Survival is not understood solely as economic endurance, but as a communicative strategy articulated in response to stigma, gendered expectations, and market demands. What was previously described as the "encounter between authenticity and

pragmatism” is more precisely interpreted as participants’ efforts to maintain a coherent self-presentation while adapting strategically to contextual pressures.

In the framework of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), survival is understood not as the additive result of four identity layers, but as something constituted in the tension and negotiation between personal, enacted, relational, and communal frames. Participants’ accounts show that alignment and contradiction, such as private doubt alongside public optimism, are integral to this process.

Thus, survival explains how identity is negotiated communicatively and performatively, without conflating survival with identity or gender performativity itself. At the same time, the study acknowledges that survival carries emotional and material costs and may both resist and reproduce structural inequalities. Therefore, the contribution of this research lies in offering a contextually grounded interpretation of identity negotiation among single mothers of micro business actors in West Java, while inviting further critical and practical engagement.

Reference

- Abdul Razak, N., Wan Rashid, W. E., Syed Marzuki, S. Z., & Panatik, S. A. (2024). Entrepreneurial competency of single-mother entrepreneurs. *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.70082/esiculture.vi.793>
- Afader, M., Rahman, P. H., & Sunjaya, D. K. (2021). Patients’ Satisfaction in Public and Private Primary Health Care: A Study in Karawang Regency, West Java, Indonesia. *Althea Medical Journal*, 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.15850/amj.v8n4.2340>
- Amorim, V., Moreira, A. C., de Sousa Lopes, B., & Rua, O. (2025). Mumpreneurship: What is known, how it is known, and future agenda. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, 19(5), 1072–1102.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Schinoff, B. S. (2016). Identity under construction: How individuals come to define themselves in organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3, 111–137.
- Badan Pusat Statistik. (2024). *Data UMKM Indonesia 2024*. <https://www.bps.go.id>

- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Anchor Books.
- Bolino, M. C., Long, D. M., & Turnley, W. H. (2016). Impression management in organizations: Critical questions, answers, and areas for future research. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3, 377–406. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062337>
- Bowie, F. (2019). *Anthropology of Religion: The Basics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Caza, B. B., Vough, H., & Puranik, H. (2018). Identity work in organizations and occupations: Definitions, theories, and pathways forward. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 39(7), 889–910.
- Corona, J. (2021). Succession in the family business: The great challenge for the family. *European Journal of Family Business*. <https://doi.org/10.24310/EJFBEJFB.V11I1.12770>
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Crosina, E., Pratt, M. G., & Wood, J. D. (2025). Narrative and identity in qualitative research. *Organization Studies*.
- Da'watuna. (2023). *Perempuan dan UMKM di Jawa Barat*.
- DeVito, J. A. (2016). *The Interpersonal Communication Book* (14th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Dhaliwal, A. (2022). The mompreneurship phenomenon. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJSSMET.290334>
- Dor, A. (2021). Single motherhood by choice: Difficulties and advantages. *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.5539/JEDP.V11N1P18>
- Gómez Tapia, J. (2025). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis in social research*.
- Hecht, M. L. (1993a). 2002—A research odyssey: Toward the development of a communication theory of identity. *Communications Monographs*, 60(1), 76–82.

- Hecht, M. L. (1993b). Toward the development of a communication theory of identity. *Communication Monographs*, 60(1), 76–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759309376297>
- Hind, J., & Marcoes, L. (2022). *Gender equality and social inclusion strategy*. Knowledge Sector Initiative.
- Indriani, A., Sinaga, D. B. F., Ingtyas, F. T., & Ginting, L. (2024). Meta-analysis of the role of women in MSMEs. *Journal Corner of Education, Linguistics, and Literature*. <https://doi.org/10.54012/jcell.v4i001.360>
- Iskandar. (2009). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Gaung Persada Press.
- Jamali, D. (2009). Constraints and opportunities facing women entrepreneurs in developing countries. *Gender in Management*, 24(4), 232–251. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17542410910961532>
- Jung, E., & Hecht, M. L. (2004). Elaborating the communication theory of identity: Identity gaps and communication outcomes. *Communication Quarterly*, 52(3), 265–283.
- Kasuma, J. (2022). *Gender expectations and women entrepreneurs*.
- Kelly, G., & McAdam, M. (2023). Women entrepreneurs negotiating identities in liminal digital spaces. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 47(5), 1942–1970.
- Kementerian Koperasi dan UKM Republik Indonesia. (2024). *Data UMKM nasional 2024*. <https://www.kemenkopukm.go.id>
- Lai, H.-J. (2021). Social stigma and management strategies of unmarried single mothers in Taiwan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185385.2021.1934098>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2011). *Theories of Human Communication* (10th ed.). Waveland Press.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mishra, A. (2025). Empowering women entrepreneurship in MSMEs. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*. <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i05.55348>

- Moleong, L. J. (2018). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Noor, J. (2021). *Metodologi Penelitian*. Kencana.
- Primadona & Lenggogeni. (2024). *Stigma sosial terhadap ibu tunggal di Indonesia*.
- Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Trinh, V. D., & Faulkner, S. L. (2023). Using the communication theory of identity to examine identity negotiation among LGBTQ+ college students with multiple conflicting salient identities. *Communication Quarterly*, 71(2), 154–174.
- United Nations. (2019). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*. United Nations. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf>
- Utari, P., & Hermawati, T. (2020). *Not easy and challenging: How students maintain a relational and communal communication identity in doing business online*. 169–175.
- Yahya, W., Sitawati, A., Fitri, R., Andajani, R. D., & Siswanto, A. N. (2025). Kajian Daya Serap Ruang Terbuka Hijau Koridor Jalan Tol Jagorawi dalam Menurunkan Emisi CO2 dari Kendaraan. *Desa-Kota: Jurnal Perencanaan Wilayah, Kota, Dan Permukiman*, 7(1), 1–13.
- Zakaria, S. M., Lazim, N. H. M., & Hoesni, S. M. (2019). Life challenges and mental health issues of single mothers: A systematic examination. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE)*, 8, 48–52.

