



# The Role of Women's Empowerment in Creative Songket Industry in Palembang City

Imey Pratama Putri<sup>1\*</sup>, Didik Susetyo<sup>2</sup>, Zakaria Wahab<sup>3</sup>

<sup>123</sup>Doctoral Program In Management Science, Sriwijaya University, Indonesia.  
01023682328019@student.unsri.ac.id

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of women's empowerment in the development of the creative songket industry in Palembang. The songket industry is a cultural heritage that has high economic value and involves many women in its production process. Through a qualitative approach with descriptive methods, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation of industry players, especially female songket craftsmen in several production centers in Palembang. The results of the study indicate that women's empowerment plays an important role in maintaining the sustainability of the creative songket industry, both in terms of production, motif innovation, and digital marketing. The empowerment carried out includes skills training, access to capital, and support from the government and local communities. In addition to increasing women's economic independence, this empowerment also strengthens the preservation of local culture. However, challenges are still found in the form of limited access to technology and minimal business assistance. This study recommends increasing cross-sector collaboration to strengthen the role of women in the creative songket industry in a sustainable manner.

**Keywords:** Women's Empowerment, Creative Industry, Songket, Cultural Preservation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The creative industry has increasingly been recognized as a strategic sector that not only drives economic growth but also fosters cultural identity and innovation (Kalfas et al., 2024). Among its diverse sub-sectors, the traditional textile industry particularly *songket* weaving in Palembang, South Sumatra holds a unique position as both a cultural artifact and an economic asset (Kasuma et al., 2020). *Songket*, a luxurious handwoven fabric interlaced with gold or silver threads, reflects centuries of heritage and craftsmanship (Andini & Susanti, 2024). The intricate production process, largely carried out by women, is typically passed down through generations, making it not just a form of labor but a legacy of identity and cultural continuity (Berwal, 2021). In this context, women's involvement in the *songket* industry is not merely an economic activity, but a multidimensional contribution encompassing cultural preservation, artistic expression, and family welfare. Yet, despite their central role, female artisans often remain marginalized due to structural constraints such as limited access to capital, lack of business and digital skills, and minimal representation in formal policy-making. These challenges highlight a gendered

© The Author(s) 2025

A. Kurniawan and Y. Dian Fitriansyah (eds.), *Proceedings of the Palembang Tourism Forum Volume 2 2025 (PTF-2025)*, Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research 359,

[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-912-4\\_5](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-912-4_5)

division of labor and opportunity, reinforcing the need for targeted empowerment strategies.

The concept of empowerment as articulated by Naila Kabeer (1999) which encompasses *resources*, *agency*, and *achievements* provides a useful analytical framework. *Resources* such as training and capital enable women to build capabilities; *agency* refers to their ability to make life choices and strategic decisions; and *achievements* reflect the tangible outcomes of these capabilities and choices. In the *songket* industry, skill development programs and cooperative-based microfinancing are examples of how *resources* are mobilized. Women artisans who gain control over production and marketing exhibit enhanced *agency*, while their improved income levels and social recognition are measurable *achievements*.

Moreover, the study draws on the *Creative Economy Theory* (Howkins, 2001), which emphasizes creativity, intellectual property, and cultural assets as central to economic value creation (Bullich, 2020). Women, as key custodians of creative labor in the *songket* sector, embody this principle through their innovations in design and technique, often blending traditional motifs with contemporary aesthetics to meet evolving market preferences (Mbatha, 2024). This creative adaptation not only sustains the cultural relevance of *songket*, but also opens new economic pathways in local and global markets (San & Guo, 2023).

The integration of *Social Capital Theory* (Putnam, 2000) is also pertinent, particularly in understanding how community networks, mutual trust, and collective norms support women's empowerment (Dodd et al., 2015). Institutional support from government agencies, NGOs, and cooperatives when effectively aligned can strengthen these social networks, allowing knowledge sharing, collaborative marketing, and collective bargaining among artisans (San & Guo, 2023). Furthermore, *Diffusion of Innovation Theory* helps explain how digital literacy and marketing practices spread among craftswomen, with early adopters often acting as influencers or agents of change within their artisan communities (Rogers et al., 2019).

This study aims to explore the intersection of these theoretical dimensions by examining how women's empowerment initiatives shape the development and sustainability of the creative songket industry in Palembang. Specifically, it investigates the forms of empowerment received by female artisans, the institutional and technological challenges they face, and how these factors influence their roles in production, innovation, and entrepreneurship. In doing so, the research contributes to broader discussions on Gender and Development Theory, which distinguishes between *practical gender needs* (such as skill training and income generation) and *strategic gender needs* (such as structural transformation and equal participation in decision-making). Addressing both aspects is crucial for achieving long-term, transformative empowerment.

By contextualizing women's empowerment within these interrelated theoretical frameworks, this study not only enhances our understanding of gender dynamics in the creative economy, but also offers insights into how

empowering women can simultaneously serve as a vehicle for economic resilience and cultural sustainability. The preservation of *songket* tradition, therefore, is not solely an act of heritage conservation, but also a testament to the agency and innovation of women who carry it forward.

The *songket* industry itself remains a vital part of South Sumatra's creative economy and cultural identity. Based on recent data, the number and distribution of *songket* artisans and industries are widespread throughout the region. This can be seen in the following table:

**Table 1. Number and Distribution of Songket Industries/ Craftsmen in South Sumatra Province**

| No | Region                                  | Number of Artisans/Industries | Description   | Source                |
|----|---|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1  | South Sumatra Province                  | ±5,687 artisans               | Spread across 17 regencies/cities. Part of a national heritage preservation effort. | Bappeda Sumsel (2024) |
| 2  | Palembang City                          | ±150 business units           | Actively producing <i>songket</i> using both traditional and modern methods.        | Kompas (2011)         |
| 3  | Ogan Ilir Regency (Limang Jaya Village) | ±150 artisans                 | Capable of producing up to 300 sheets of <i>songket</i> per month.                  | Bisnis.com (2015)     |
| 4  | East OKU Regency                        | Not specifically stated       | Recognized as one of the <i>songket</i> artisan centers in eastern South Sumatra.   | Antaraneews (2022)    |
| 5  | Ogan Komering Ilir (OKI) Regency        | Not specifically stated       | Identified to have household-based <i>songket</i> craft groups.                     | Antaraneews (2022)    |
| 6  | Musi Rawas Regency                      | Not specifically stated       | Small artisan groups supported by the local government.                             | Antaraneews (2022)    |
| 7  | Lahat Regency                           | Not specifically stated       | Known for its distinctive <i>songket</i> motifs that differ from Palembang styles.  | Antaraneews (2022)    |

This data illustrates that *songket* production is not only concentrated in urban centers like Palembang but also thrives in various rural areas across the province, including Ogan Ilir, OKU Timur, OKI, Musi Rawas, and Lahat. This wide distribution highlights the importance of developing comprehensive and inclusive empowerment strategies that account for geographical diversity, traditional knowledge, and digital transformation efforts.

This research presents an original contribution by examining the role of women in the Palembang *songket* industry interdisciplinarily, combining the frameworks of empowerment, creative economy, social capital, and diffusion of innovation in one integrated analysis. Unlike previous studies that have focused more on economic or cultural aspects separately, this study examines the interconnectedness between gender empowerment, creative innovation, and cultural sustainability in the context of local heritage-based industries. The

specific focus on women's empowerment strategies through digital approaches, cooperatives, and social transformation is a new aspect that has not been widely discussed in previous literature, especially in the local context of Palembang. In addition, this research also identifies systemic structural challenges and formulates policy recommendations based on strategic gender needs, which are often missed in purely pragmatic approaches.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of women in the songket industry. Data were collected through the following techniques:

### a. In-depth Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 20 female songket artisans, local business owners, and stakeholders such as representatives from the Department of Industry and Trade in Palembang. The questions focused on their involvement in the production process, empowerment experiences, challenges faced, and perceptions of cultural heritage.

### b. Observation

Direct observations were carried out in several songket production centers in Palembang, including Kampung Songket Tangga Buntung and Seberang Ulu. These visits allowed the researcher to observe production techniques, working environments, and interactions within the artisan communities.

### c. Documentation

Supporting data were collected from official reports, community organization archives, digital marketing content (e.g., social media accounts), and previous research on women in the creative industry.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing patterns related to women's empowerment, innovation, marketing strategies, and cultural sustainability to emerge. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of data sources and member checking.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Women's empowerment in the Palembang songket industry manifests in three primary forms: skills training, access to capital, and community or institutional support. Skill development is primarily facilitated by NGOs, cultural organizations, and local government agencies, focusing on weaving techniques, motif innovation, and product development. According to (Kabeer, 1999) empowerment framework, such training represents a critical resource that enhances women's agency, enabling them to make empowered decisions within both domestic and economic spheres. Women with advanced weaving skills tend to hold stronger bargaining power within the local creative industry ecosystem.

Access to capital is provided mainly through women's cooperatives and micro-banking initiatives. These financial resources are crucial in

supporting women to become self-sufficient entrepreneurs. However, limited financial literacy remains a major barrier, leading to suboptimal use of credit schemes. Within the framework of economic empowerment theory, financial access without accompanying business management capabilities can lead to dependency rather than sustainable independence. Institutional and community support comes from agencies such as the Department of Industry and Trade, which provide promotional platforms, digital training, and formal recognition of women's cultural contributions. This aligns with Putnam's (2000) Social Capital Theory, emphasizing the role of trust, networks, and collective norms in fostering individual and community welfare (Dodd et al., 2015). These networks act as social infrastructure that elevates women's economic participation and cultural visibility.

Empowered women have contributed significantly to the creative development of the songket industry in Palembang (Bagas Tantawi et al., 2023). Their involvement has led to design innovation, market expansion, and increased economic self-reliance. Creative motifs influenced by modern aesthetics such as abstract shapes, flora and fauna, and local pop culture symbols are emerging alongside traditional designs. This evolution reflects the essence of the Creative Economy Theory (Howkins, 2001), which highlights creativity as a key economic driver. By infusing personal and cultural narratives into product designs, women artisans increase the competitiveness and uniqueness of songket in both domestic and international markets.

Digital marketing has also expanded market reach. Tech-savvy women utilize social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, as well as e-commerce sites such as Shopee and Tokopedia, to promote and sell their products. This pattern of adoption is consistent with Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which explains how new technologies spread through communities and influence behavioral changes (Call & Herber, 2022). Such digital engagement has opened previously inaccessible markets, helping women broaden their income streams. Economic independence is a particularly significant outcome of empowerment. Many women artisans now serve as primary income earners or key financial contributors within their families. This shift promotes gender equity in economic decision-making both at home and within community structures. Their growing autonomy reflects a broader socio-economic transformation facilitated through localized empowerment initiatives.

Beyond economic impacts, women's empowerment plays a crucial role in cultural preservation. Women who feel valued and supported are more likely to pass down weaving skills to their daughters, participate in local cultural events, and creatively reinterpret traditional values in modern songket designs. According to Throsby's (2001) Cultural Sustainability theory, cultural heritage is best sustained through active community participation, rather than through formal institutional interventions alone. In Palembang, many women sustain the songket tradition as a familial legacy, passed down from generation to generation. Their role is thus both cultural and intergenerational.

Despite these achievements, several challenges persist. Older artisans often struggle with digital literacy and the use of technology for marketing and production. Additionally, many training programs focus solely on technical skills, neglecting essential business knowledge such as branding, financial planning, and strategic marketing. Unequal distribution of support also hampers inclusivity, with some artisan groups receiving repeated aid while others remain marginalized. From the perspective of Gender and Development Theory, these issues suggest that empowerment efforts must go beyond addressing practical gender needs (e.g., income generation) to also tackle strategic gender needs such as equitable access, control over resources, and structural transformation of social roles.

To overcome these challenges and amplify the positive impacts of women's empowerment, cross-sector collaboration is essential. The government should expand inclusive training programs, particularly in technology and entrepreneurship, and ensure that financing schemes are accessible to small-scale artisans. The private sector, through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, can provide mentorship in product branding, packaging, and digital marketing. Universities and researchers also have a vital role to play in delivering applied research and involving students in community service programs that support artisan development. This collaborative model is in line with the Quadruple Helix Innovation Model (Carayannis & Campbell, 2009), which promotes synergy among government, industry, academia, and civil society to foster sustainable innovation .

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Women's empowerment plays a vital role in the sustainability of the creative songket industry in Palembang. Through skill development, financial access, and institutional support, women artisans contribute to both economic growth and cultural preservation. However, empowerment efforts still face obstacles such as technological illiteracy, limited business knowledge, and unequal access to resources.

To address these issues, cross-sector collaboration is essential. Strengthening partnerships among government agencies, private sectors, and academic institutions can create a more holistic and inclusive empowerment ecosystem. Such efforts will not only improve women's welfare but also safeguard Palembang's rich songket heritage for future generations.

#### 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praises be to Allah SWT, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, for granting me strength, health, and perseverance throughout the process of completing this research titled **“The Role of Women's Empowerment in Creative Songket Industry in Palembang City”** This study would not have been possible without the support and contribution of many parties. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my academic advisors and lecturers in the

Doctoral Program in Management Science, Sriwijaya University, for their invaluable guidance, constructive criticism, and encouragement throughout the research process.

Special thanks are dedicated to the women artisans of Palembang who willingly shared their experiences, knowledge, and insights. Their stories and contributions are the heart of this study and have provided a deep understanding of empowerment within the context of cultural industry and creative economy. I also wish to express my appreciation to local government agencies, especially the Department of Industry and Trade of Palembang, cultural institutions, and non-governmental organizations that have been active in promoting women's empowerment and preserving the heritage of songket. Your collaboration and data support have been essential for the completion of this research. To my beloved family, thank you for your unwavering support, patience, and understanding. Your love and encouragement have been my greatest motivation.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the scholars whose theories and research works particularly those of Kabeer, Putnam, Howkins, Rogers, Throsby, and Carayannis & Campbell have served as important academic references in shaping the analytical framework of this study.

May this research serve as a meaningful contribution to the ongoing efforts of empowering women and sustaining the cultural legacy of the Palembang songket industry.

## REFERENCES

- Andini, S. S., & Susanti, L. R. (2024). Function and Meaning of Palembang Songket Fabric Decorative Varieties. *HISTORIA: Jurnal Program Studi Pendidikan Sejarah*, 12(2), 711. <https://doi.org/10.24127/hj.v12i2.9778>
- Bagas Tantawi, E., Suteja, I. W., Hulfa, I., Tri Darma Putra, I. N., & Martayadi, U. (2023). Empowerment of Songket Woven Craftsmen. *Advances in Tourism Studies*, 1(1), 29–36. <https://doi.org/10.47492/ats.v1i1.9>
- Berwal, R. (2021). Women's Contribution In The Textiles Industry: A Historical And Contemporary Analysis. In *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts* (Vol. 9, Issue 1). [www.ijcrt.org](http://www.ijcrt.org)
- Bullich, V. (2020). *Intellectual Property Rights and the Production of Value in a "Creative Economy"* (pp. 175–188). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53164-5\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53164-5_12)
- Call, D. R., & Herber, D. R. (2022). Applicability of the diffusion of innovation theory to accelerate model-based systems engineering adoption. *Systems Engineering*, 25(6), 574–583. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sys.21638>
- Dodd, M. D., Brummette, J., & Hazleton, V. (2015). A social capital approach: An examination of Putnam's civic engagement and public relations roles. *Public Relations Review*, 41(4), 472–479. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.05.001>

- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435–464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125>
- Kalfas, D., Kalogiannidis, S., Ambas, V., & Chatzitheodoridis, F. (2024). Contribution of the Cultural and Creative Industries to Regional Development and Revitalization: A European Perspective. *Urban Science*, 8(2), 39. <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci8020039>
- Kasuma, G., Andini, R., & M Anwari, I. (2020). Cultural Traditions And Economics Dinamycs Of The Songket Weaving Craftmen In Palembang. *Proceedings of the Proceedings of the Third International Seminar on Recent Language, Literature, and Local Culture Studies, BASA, 20-21 September 2019, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia*. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.20-9-2019.2296679>
- Mbatha, B. (2024). *Diffusion of Innovations: How Adoption of New Technology Spreads in Society* (pp. 1–18). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60267-2\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60267-2_1)
- Rogers, E. M., Singhal, A., & Quinlan, M. M. (2019). Diffusion of innovations. In *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research, Third Edition* (pp. 415–433). Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203710753-35>
- San, C. K., & Guo, H. (2023). Institutional support, social support, and academic performance: mediating role of academic adaptation. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 38(4), 1659–1675. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-022-00657-2>

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

