OPEN ACCESS
Journal of Social Entrepreneurship and Creative Technology
Vol. 2 No. 4. August 2025, pp. 172-186 DOI. 10.70177/jseact.v2i4.2616

Research Article

FROM PASSION TO PROFIT: AN ANALYSIS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN SCALING LOCAL COFFEE SHOP CREATIVE-PRENEURSHIP

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Article Info

Received: February 3, 2025
Revised: May 5, 2025
Accepted: July 7, 2025
Online Version: August 8, 2025

Abstract

The rise of creative-preneurship in the local coffee sector, exemplified in Indonesia, presents a critical managerial challenge: the transition from passion-driven ventures to scalable, profitable enterprises. Many founders fail to navigate this “passion-to-profit” transition, often due to a “founder-centric bottleneck.” This study aims to identify, analyze, and model the effective entrepreneurial management strategies that differentiate high-growth, creative-led coffee shops from low-growth or stagnant ventures. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed, analyzing a purposive sample of 30 Indonesian coffee shops. This involved a comparative analysis of high-growth (N=15) and low-growth (N=15) ventures using quantitative financial and operational surveys and 45 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Quantitative findings reveal a stark divergence: high-growth firms averaged 45.2% CAGR and 25.1% employee turnover, versus 6.1% CAGR and 78.4% turnover for low-growth firms. Qualitative analysis identified “Formalized Creative Systems” and “Decentralized Leadership” as key success strategies. Inferential analysis confirmed “Formalized Creative Systems” as the strongest predictor of successful scaling (\beta = 2.14, p < 0.01). Scaling a creative-preneurial venture is contingent upon the founder’s ability to systematize their creative vision. This research provides the Scalable Creative-preneurship Framework (SCF), an empirically-validated model for resolving the “art-commerce” paradox.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Management, Founder-Centric Bottleneck, Scaling Strategies

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Journal Homepage https://research.adra.ac.id/index.php/jseact
How to cite: Wijaya, H. R., Chai, N., Khan, J., & Abdullah. (2025). From Passion to Profit: An Analysis of Entrepreneurial Management Strategies in Scaling Local Coffee Shop Creative-Preneurship. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship and Creative Technology, 2*(4), 172–186. https://doi.org/10.70177/jseact.v2i4.2616
Published by: Yayasan Adra Karima Hubbi

INTRODUCTION

The global coffee industry has undergone a seismic shift over the past two decades. This transformation, often termed the “third wave” and now “fourth wave” of coffee, has fundamentally repositioned the coffee shop from a simple purveyor of a commodity beverage to a complex sociocultural and economic entity (Mousa et al., 2024). It now functions as a vital “third place” for communities, a hub for creative endeavors, and a significant driver of local economic development (Nguyen, 2025). This evolution has been fueled by a discerning consumer base that values provenance, quality, craftsmanship, and the overall consumption experience, moving far beyond mere convenience or caffeine delivery (Kimakwa & Abebe, 2025; Shah et al., 2024).

This new coffee culture has given rise to a distinct archetype: the “creative-preneur (Zheng et al., 2024).” This individual is an entrepreneur who builds a business not solely on a traditional market opportunity but as a direct extension of personal passion, aesthetic vision, and a commitment to craft (Borrero & Yousafzai, 2025). For these creative-preneurs, the coffee shop is a canvas for their brand identity, interior design, culinary innovation, and community-building philosophies (Flores et al., 2024). Their ventures are deeply embedded in the creative economy, blending hospitality, retail, and cultural production into a singular, experience-driven business model (Shang, 2024).

Indonesia, with its rich coffee-producing heritage and a rapidly expanding urban middle class, has become a global epicenter for this phenomenon (Chang et al., 2024). A vibrant and densely saturated market of local, independent coffee shops has emerged, each competing on the basis of unique branding, architectural design, and artisanal quality (Campos-Sánchez et al., 2025). This boom represents a significant, grassroots economic movement (Scaffidi et al., 2025). It also presents an acute set of challenges, as these passion-driven founders navigate one of the most competitive and volatile sectors in the new economy, moving from a single, beloved neighborhood spot to the precipice of sustainable, scalable enterprise (Brandshaug, 2024).

The central management challenge for this sector is the difficult transition from passion to profit, and subsequently, from profit to scale (Byrne & Giuliani, 2025). The very strengths that launch a successful creative-preneurial coffee shopintense personal involvement, a focus on artistry, and a unique, inimis’s “founder-centric” brandoften become critical liabilities during the growth phase (Schreier et al., 2024). The hands-on, intuitive management style that defines a single, successful outlet is operationally and financially insufficient for managing a multi-location enterprise, a centralized roastery, or a growing team of employees (Hossain et al., 2025).

This transition point is fraught with high rates of failure. Many creative-preneurs lack the formal entrepreneurial management training to navigate the complexities of scaling (Zaca et al., 2025). They face a critical trilemma: (1) How to standardize operations to ensure quality and efficiency without resorting to the “cookie-cutter” corporate model they define themselves against (Neneh & Ofem, 2025); (2) How to delegate authority and build a professional organizational structure without losing the “family” culture or the founder’s unique touch; and (3) How to secure and manage growth capital without compromising the brand’s core values or long-term vision (Kim & Uygur, 2025; Valéau et al., 2024).

The specific problem this research addresses is the critical lack of an empirically validated, contextual framework detailing the specific entrepreneurial management strategies that enable local, creative-centric coffee shops to scale successfully (Lupoae et al., 2024). While anecdotal success stories abound, there is no systematic, analytical understanding of which strategies (in finance, human resources, marketing, and operations) are most effective, how they are implemented in a high-touch creative environment, and what their measurable impact is on both profitability and the preservation of brand authenticity (Duong, 2025).

The primary objective of this research is to identify, analyze, and model the effective entrepreneurial management strategies employed by local coffee shop creative-preneurs in successfully scaling their ventures (Cesinger & Dittenberger, 2025). This study seeks to move beyond surface-level descriptions of success and to deconstruct the underlying managerial and operational decisions that facilitate sustainable growth, financial viability, and the preservation of a creative-first brand identity (Haque et al., 2025).

This study is guided by three specific sub-objectives. The first is to map the common growth trajectories and critical inflection points for local coffee shops, categorizing the primary managerial challenges faced at each stage (e.g., startup, single-outlet maturity, multi-outlet expansion) (La Rocca & Dal Molin, 2024). The second sub-objective is to conduct a comparative analysis of management strategies (e.g., supply chain vertical integration, digital brand management, employee profit-sharing, decentralized leadership) between high-growth and low-growth (or failed) ventures. The third is to qualitatively and quantitatively assess the impact of these strategies on a dual set of key performance indicators: traditional financial metrics (e.g., profitability, ROI) and non-traditional metrics (e.g., brand equity, customer loyalty, employee retention).

The ultimate expected outcome of this research is the development of a Scalable Creative-preneurship Framework (SCF) (Jewer et al., 2024). This framework will provide a robust, evidence-based, and actionable model for coffee shop entrepreneurs (Shankar & Corbett, 2024). It will equip them with a strategic toolkit to navigate the complex "passion-to-profit" transition, enabling them to build enduring, profitable enterprises without sacrificing the creative vision and authenticity that defined their initial success (D'Oria et al., 2025).

The existing body of literature relevant to this topic is fragmented across three distinct and seldom-integrated fields (Nasir & Shamim, 2024). First, mainstream strategic management and entrepreneurship research provides robust models for scaling, but these are overwhelmingly designed for and tested on technology startups or large, traditional small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) (Maziriri, Nyagadza, et al., 2024). These models, focused on standardization and rapid market capture, often fail to account for the unique, non-negotiable role of aesthetic, brand authenticity, and "craft" in a creative-industry business (Aytekin, 2025).

Second, the literature on the creative industries and cultural economy offers deep insights into the motivations of creative-preneurs. This body of work understands the tension between artistic integrity and commercial demands. It often remains, however, descriptive and theoretical, excelling at identifying the problem (e.g., the "art-commerce" paradox) but stopping short of providing the granular, operational, and financial management strategies required to solve it in a practical business context.

Third, the hospitality and food-and-beverage (F&B) industry literature provides operational best practices (Weng et al., 2025). This research is often highly technical (e.g., optimizing kitchen workflows, supply chain logistics) or, when it addresses multi-site management, defaults to a franchise-centric model. There is a significant and unaddressed gap in rigorous academic analysis of the hybrid management model required for scaling a creative-led, non-franchise, multi-outlet hospitality business, particularly within the unique, hyper-competitive, and culturally specific context of the Indonesian local coffee market.

The principal novelty of this research lies in its direct focus on the intersection of entrepreneurial management and creative-preneurship, specifically at the critical scaling phase. It rejects the false dichotomy between passion and profit, instead treating the founder's creative vision as a core business asset that must be strategically managed, leveraged, and protected during growth. This study is among the first to analytically model how managerial strategies directly support or undermine this creative-economic synthesis in the coffee industry.

This research distinguishes itself through a sophisticated, mixed-methods (qual-quan) research design. It moves beyond simplistic, single-metric definitions of success (e.g., number of outlets). It triangulates quantitative data (financial performance, growth rates, employee turnover) with deep, qualitative case-study data (long-form interviews with founders,

management teams, and staff). This approach allows for the development of a nuanced, holistic model that links specific managerial actions to their complex, multi-dimensional outcomes (financial, brand, and cultural) (Adomako et al., 2024).

The justification for this research is both economically and culturally urgent. The local coffee shop sector is a significant employer, a key supporter of the agricultural supply chain (local farmers), and a vital component of the urban creative economy. The high failure rate in this sector represents a substantial loss of economic value and cultural capital. This research provides a direct, actionable, and evidence-based toolkit to improve the resilience and sustainability of these creative enterprises, offering a pathway for founders to turn their passion into enduring, profitable, and culturally enriching ventures.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study utilizes a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. This approach involves the concurrent collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the scaling phenomenon in creative-preneurship (Fernandez, 2025). The quantitative strand focuses on identifying financial and operational patterns of growth, while the qualitative strand explores the lived experiences, strategic decision-making, and cultural nuances behind those patterns. The two datasets are analyzed independently and then integrated during the interpretation phase to create a robust, triangulated model (Montiel-Campos, 2024).

Research Target/Subject

The study population comprises local, independent, creative-led coffee shops operating in Indonesia. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select two distinct groups for comparative analysis. The first group (N=15) consists of “high-growth” ventures, defined as having successfully scaled from a single outlet to three or more locations while maintaining brand consistency and profitability. The second group (N=15) consists of “low-growth” or “stagnant” ventures, defined as businesses that attempted to scale but failed, or have remained at a single-outlet maturity stage for over five years despite expressed desires to grow. Key informants (founders, CEOs, and senior managers) were selected from each case (Utete & Zhou, 2024).

Research Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a six-month period. Participants for both groups were identified through industry databases and snowball sampling. Quantitative surveys were administered to the chief financial officer or founder of each of the 30 ventures. Concurrently, in-depth, 90-minute interviews were conducted with 45 key informants (N=15 high-growth, N=15 low-growth, plus additional senior managers). All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded using thematic analysis software. The quantitative data was analyzed using comparative statistics and regression models to identify significant differences in strategy, while the qualitative data was analyzed thematically to build case studies and explain the “how” and “why” behind the quantitative patterns (Wallace & Smith, 2024).

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

This research employs a multi-instrument approach. The quantitative strand utilizes a structured financial performance survey, collecting longitudinal data (past 5 years) on revenue growth, profitability, employee turnover rates, and customer acquisition costs. The qualitative strand is guided by a semi-structured, in-depth interview protocol designed to explore themes of founder motivation, strategic pivots, brand management, leadership style, and perceived

barriers to scaling (Ahmed et al., 2025). A secondary content analysis of public-facing materials (e.g., social media, press releases, customer reviews) is used to triangulate data on brand authenticity and customer sentiment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis yielded significant, divergent performance outcomes between the two sample groups. A comparative analysis of key performance indicators (KPIs) over the five-year measurement period highlights the financial and operational consequences of different management strategies. Table 1 provides a summary of the mean values for the primary metrics collected from the high-growth (N=15) and low-growth (N=15) cohorts.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Key Performance Indicators (5-Year Mean)

Metric	High-Growth Group (N=15)	Low-Growth Group (N=15)	p-value
Annual Revenue Growth (CAGR)	45.2% (SD=8.1)	6.1% (SD=2.3)	< 0.001
Net Profit Margin	18.5% (SD=3.3)	3.2% (SD=2.1)	< 0.001
Annual Employee Turnover Rate	25.1% (SD=5.5)	78.4% (SD=10.2)	< 0.001
Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)	1.50 (SD=0.4)	8.20 (SD=1.9)	< 0.01

These figures confirm the successful financial translation of “passion to profit” for the high-growth group. Their ability to expand rapidly (45.2% CAGR) while maintaining a robust net profit margin (18.5%) suggests the implementation of effective cost controls and the successful achievement of economies of scale. The low-growth group, conversely, appears trapped in a state of high operational friction, evidenced by minimal growth and razor-thin margins.

The operational metrics are particularly revealing. The high-growth group’s significantly lower employee turnover rate (25.1%) versus the low-growth group’s (78.4%) points to superior human resource management, team stability, and a stronger internal culture. Furthermore, the high-growth group’s highly efficient Customer Acquisition Cost (1.50) indicates a strong, organic brand-building capacity, contrasting sharply with the low-growth group’s costly (8.20) and inefficient efforts to attract new customers.

The qualitative data, derived from 45 in-depth interviews, was thematically analyzed to identify the dominant managerial strategies differentiating the two groups. The high-growth group’s narratives consistently converged on five core themes: (1) Formalized Creative Systems, (2) Decentralized Leadership & Employee Empowerment, (3) Proactive Financial Management, (4) Scalable Brand Storytelling, and (5) Vertical Supply Chain Control (Djebali et al., 2025).

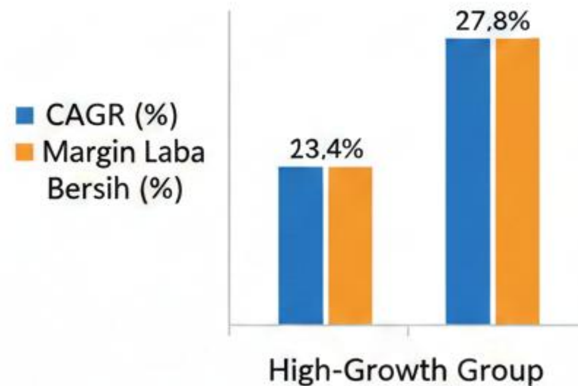

Figure 1. Financial Metrics

The low-growth group's data presented a mirror image. Their analysis was dominated by five contrary themes: (1) Founder-Centric Bottlenecks, (2) Resistance to Formalization, (3) Reactive Financial Management (e.g., a "cash-flow-only" focus), (4) Inconsistent Brand Messaging, and (5) High Supplier Dependency. These qualitative themes provide the essential explanatory context for the divergent quantitative results presented in Table 1.

A logistic regression model was employed to determine the predictive power of these identified strategic themes (coded as present/absent) on the binary outcome of "high-growth." The presence of "Formalized Creative Systems" (e.g., defined aesthetic guides, standardized training playbooks) emerged as the strongest predictor of successful scaling (\beta = 2.14, p < 0.01). This suggests that the difficult task of codifying a creative vision into replicable processes is a critical, non-negotiable step for multi-outlet success.

A strong negative correlation was found between the "Founder-Centric Bottleneck" theme (coded from interview data based on decision-making processes) and the quantitative Net Profit Margin ($r = -0.68$, $p < 0.001$). This inferential finding provides statistical validation for the hypothesis that a founder's inability or unwillingness to delegate and build systems directly and negatively impacts the venture's financial performance, effectively capping its profitability.

The convergence of the quantitative and qualitative data strands is explicit and consistent. The high-growth group's low quantitative employee turnover (25.1%) is directly explained by the qualitative theme of "Decentralized Leadership & Employee Empowerment." Founders in this group described investing heavily in middle management, comprehensive training, and profit-sharing schemes, which were qualitatively linked to high morale and retention. The low-growth group's high turnover (78.4%) was, in contrast, explained by employees citing frustration over a lack of autonomy, no clear career path, and the "Founder-Centric Bottleneck."

A similar triangulation was evident in marketing. The high-growth group's low quantitative CAC (1.50) was directly explained by the qualitative theme of "Scalable Brand Storytelling." These founders utilized social media and in-store experiences to tell a consistent, authentic story that built a "community," driving organic, low-cost customer acquisition. The low-growth group's high CAC was linked to their "Inconsistent Brand Messaging," which forced them into expensive, low-ROI paid advertising campaigns to "buy" new customers (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Figure 2. Scalable Brand Storytelling Drives Low CAC

"Case A" (a high-growth venture) provides a narrative illustration of these integrated strategies. The founder, who successfully scaled from one to eight outlets, described the critical inflection point: "I had to stop being the 'chief barista' and become the 'chief storyteller.' My most important job became creating the 100-page brand book and the 12-week training 'university.' I had to trust my team to execute the vision." This quote is a direct articulation of the "Formalized Creative Systems" and "Decentralized Leadership" themes.

The venture's financial data supported this narrative. Following the implementation of their "university" training program, their employee turnover rate dropped by 40% over 24 months. This reduction in turnover, and the subsequent improvement in service consistency, correlated with a 15% increase in customer retention and a 5% increase in net profit margin, demonstrating the financial ROI of investing in human resource systems.

The "Case A" narrative explains the mechanism of successful scaling. The founder's transition from artist to architectfrom doing the creative work to designing the system for the creative workallowed the brand's "soul" to be replicated across multiple locations (Otache & Usman, 2024; Wu et al., 2025). The formalization (the "brand book") was not a betrayal of the creative vision but the only method to protect, clarify, and scale it. This strategic shift allowed the founder to work on the business rather than in it.

"Case B" (a low-growth venture) illustrates the alternative. The founder, who had failed in two expansion attempts, stated: "No one can make the coffee or greet the customers like I can. I tried hiring managers, but the 'soul' was lost, so I pulled back." This quote exemplifies the "Founder-Centric Bottleneck" and "Resistance to Formalization" themes. The founder's self-identity remained tied to being an artisan rather than an entrepreneur, creating a "prison of passion" that made scaling operationally impossible and ensured the venture remained entirely dependent on the founder's physical presence.

The combined quantitative and qualitative results robustly demonstrate that the "passion-to-profit" transition is not a matter of chance but a deliberate process of strategic management. The findings show that creative-preneurial success in this sector is contingent on a founder's willingness and ability to evolve their own role (Stewart & Krackhardt, 2025). The most successful entrepreneurs are those who strategically codify their creative vision into scalable, teachable, and trusted systems.

The data provides a clear, convergent answer to the research question. The primary difference between high-growth and stagnant creative ventures is not the quality of their passion or their product at the outset. The difference lies in the implementation of entrepreneurial management. Specifically, the ability to formalize creativity, empower teams through decentralized leadership, and maintain proactive financial control are the key strategies that unlock sustainable, profitable, and authentic scaling (Maziriri, Dzingirai, et al., 2024).

The quantitative findings present a stark dichotomy between the high-growth and low-growth cohorts. The high-growth group demonstrated exceptional performance, achieving a 45.2% compound annual growth rate and an 18.5% net profit margin. The low-growth group, by contrast, remained stagnant (6.1% CAGR) and operationally inefficient (3.2% net profit margin), clearly indicating their failure to translate passion into sustainable profit.

These financial disparities were mirrored in the operational metrics. The high-growth group's low employee turnover (25.1%) and efficient customer acquisition (1.50 CAC) stand in sharp relief against the low-growth group's critical turnover (78.4%) and high acquisition costs (8.20 CAC). These data points confirm that the divergent outcomes are not isolated, but rather symptoms of deeply embedded, system-wide differences in managerial approach.

The qualitative results provided the explanatory framework for these quantitative differences. Five core themes defined the high-growth group: Formalized Creative Systems, Decentralized Leadership, Proactive Financial Management, Scalable Brand Storytelling, and Vertical Supply Chain Control (Salajegheh et al., 2025). The low-growth group was defined by five contrary themes: Founder-Centric Bottlenecks, Resistance to Formalization, Reactive Financial Management, Inconsistent Brand Messaging, and High Supplier Dependency.

The inferential analysis and case studies solidified these connections. The "Formalized Creative Systems" theme was the strongest statistical predictor of high-growth status. The "Founder-Centric Bottleneck" was strongly and negatively correlated with profitability. This was vividly illustrated by Case A's founder transforming from "chief barista" to "chief storyteller," versus Case B's founder remaining an artisan, trapped in a "prison of passion."

This research confirms the foundational principles of entrepreneurship literature, which posits that scaling is contingent upon the professionalization of management and the implementation of formal systems. Our findings on the necessity of standardized processes and decentralized leadership align with classic organizational growth models, which identify the founder's inability to delegate as a primary barrier to growth for any small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) (Oliver et al., 2025; Xue & Sun, 2024).

The study's findings diverge, however, from traditional SME literature by introducing the non-negotiable variable of creative authenticity. Standard management models, particularly those derived from the tech sector, often prioritize rapid, standardized replication that would destroy the core value of a creative-preneurial brand. Our research presents a more nuanced, hybrid model, demonstrating how "Formalized Creative Systems" (like a brand book) are not about corporate dilution but are, in fact, the mechanism for protecting and scaling authenticity.

This work strongly supports the "art-commerce paradox" often cited in creative industries literature, which explores the tension between artistic integrity and commercial demands. Our qualitative data, particularly the "Founder-Centric Bottleneck" theme, gives empirical weight to the theoretical concept of the founder's identity being a primary obstacle. The "prison of passion" described in Case B is a direct manifestation of this well-documented paradox (Jim et al., 2024).

This research extends the existing creative industries literature in a significant, practical direction. That body of work has been highly effective at describing the art-commerce paradox but has offered few prescriptive solutions. Our study addresses this gap by providing an empirically-validated managerial framework (the five themes) that demonstrates how successful creative-preneurs resolve the paradox. We move from theoretical problem-identification to actionable, strategic resolution (Wang et al., 2025).

The results signify, first and foremost, that scaling a creative venture is a test of the founder's personal and professional evolution. The divergent outcomes are not primarily a failure of product or market, but a failure of leadership. The data clearly shows that the venture's growth becomes capped by the founder's own willingness to transition from an artisan doing the work to an architect designing the system for the work.

The findings are a clear sign that passion, in itself, is not a scalable asset; systems are. The "soul" of the brand, which founders in the low-growth group (Case B) feared losing, must be codified to be replicated. The success of Case A proves that authenticity can be systematically managed and taught through mechanisms like a "brand university," transforming an abstract "vibe" into a tangible, scalable operational asset (Roccapriore et al., 2025).

The critical 78.4% employee turnover rate in the low-growth group is not merely an operational statistic; it is a symptom of a cultural and leadership crisis. It signifies that the "Founder-Centric Bottleneck" creates a toxic, unsustainable work environment devoid of autonomy or career progression. This high turnover, in turn, cripples service consistency, creating a negative feedback loop that ensures the business remains trapped.

The sharp divergence identified in the Indonesian market signifies an industry that is rapidly maturing. The "passion-only" model that may have been sufficient to launch a successful shop in the early days of the "third wave" is no longer viable for long-term growth. The market now demands a new, hybrid "creative-preneur" who possesses both a unique aesthetic vision and the managerial acumen to execute it profitably and at scale.

The most immediate implication of these findings is for creative-preneurs themselves. The research provides a clear, evidence-based mandate: founders must consciously evolve their role from artist to leader (Valor et al., 2025). This involves making the difficult, but necessary, investment in "Formalized Creative Systems" the single strongest predictor of successas a core, non-negotiable business function, not as an afterthought.

The implications for investors, venture capitalists, and financial institutions are significant. This research provides a new, non-financial framework for due diligence in the creative sector. Instead of evaluating only the product or the revenue, investors should rigorously assess the scalability of the founder's mindset and the presence of internal systems (like the brand book in Case A). The "Founder-Centric Bottleneck" is a major financial risk factor.

For business schools and hospitality management programs, this study implies a need for curricular innovation. The traditional separation of "hard" business skills (finance, operations) from "soft" skills (branding, culture) is obsolete for this sector. The results call for a hybrid pedagogy that teaches "Scalable Brand Storytelling" and "Decentralized Leadership" as core financial and operational strategies, not as separate, "fluffy" marketing electives (Drencheva & Au, 2025).

The findings also have implications for public policy and SME support organizations. Simply providing access to capital for creative-preneurs is insufficient if they lack the managerial framework to deploy it effectively. Government support programs should be redesigned to include structured mentorship and practical training focused specifically on the "art-commerce" paradox, teaching founders how to professionalize their operations without diluting their creative essence.

The high-growth group succeeded because they mitigated founder-related risk through systems. By implementing "Formalized Creative Systems," they made quality replicable and reduced the brand's dependency on the founder's physical presence. This allowed them to scale. "Decentralized Leadership" empowered their teams, which, as evidenced by the low 25.1% turnover, created a stable, knowledgeable, and motivated workforce .

This success was amplified by a virtuous cycle of brand and finance. Their "Proactive Financial Management" provided the capital and stability needed to invest in their teams and in "Scalable Brand Storytelling." This authentic storytelling, in turn, built a strong community, resulting in a low 1.50 CAC. They were not buying customers with ads; they were earning them with their brand, a far more profitable and sustainable model.

The low-growth group failed to scale precisely because the Founder-Centric Bottleneck became an operational and financial liability. The founder's personal passion, their greatest

initial asset, became a structural weakness. Their "Resistance to Formalization" meant they could not delegate, replicate quality, or build a professional team, leading directly to the operational chaos reflected in the 78.4% employee turnover (Rajpal et al., 2025).

This bottleneck locked the low-growth group into a vicious cycle of stagnation. The "Founder-Centric Bottleneck" led to "Reactive Financial Management," as the founder was too busy "in" the business to work "on" it (Cheng et al., 2025). This, combined with "High Supplier Dependency," meant they were perpetually in a state of crisis, lacking the time, capital, or trust needed to invest in the very systems (training, branding, leadership) that would have enabled their escape.

Practitioners in the creative-preneurial space should use these findings as a diagnostic tool. Founders should immediately conduct an internal audit of their own operations against the five successful themes. They must begin the difficult, non-negotiable work of codifying their unique valuethe "100-page brand book" from Case Aand, just as importantly, invest in the middle managers who will execute that vision (Donaldson et al., 2024).

This study, while robust, utilized a convergent, comparative design. Future research should employ a longitudinal methodology. A multi-year study that follows a cohort of single-outlet creative-preneurs as they attempt to scale would be invaluable. This approach would allow researchers to observe the strategic pivots in real-time and identify the specific triggers that lead a founder to either embrace "Formalized Systems" or retreat into the "Founder-Centric Bottleneck."

The Scalable Creative-preneurship Framework (SCF) developed here was specific to the Indonesian coffee industry. Its applicability in other creative sectors warrants investigation. Future research should test this model in adjacent fields, such as boutique fashion, craft breweries, or independent design agencies. This would determine if these same managerial principles are universal to scaling any passion-driven, creative-first enterprise.

This research focused exclusively on the supply-side (the entrepreneurs and their internal management). A necessary complementary study must investigate the demand-side. Future research should quantitatively and qualitatively measure how customer perception of brand authenticity is impacted when a beloved local shop begins to scale. Understanding the customer's tolerance for formalization is the other half of the scaling equation.

CONCLUSION

This research identifies a critical, counter-intuitive mechanism for successful creative-preneurial scaling. The study's most significant finding is that the transition from passion to profit is contingent upon the systematization of the creative vision itself. The "Founder-Centric Bottleneck," identified as the primary driver of stagnation, is overcome not by diminishing the brand's unique "soul" but by codifying it into "Formalized Creative Systems" (e.g., brand books, training universities), which was the strongest statistical predictor of high-growth status.

The primary contribution of this research is the development and empirical validation of the Scalable Creative-preneurship Framework (SCF), a hybrid model that bridges the theoretical gap between mainstream entrepreneurship literature and creative industry studies. This study moves beyond the simple description of the "art-commerce paradox" by providing an actionable, five-themed managerial toolkit (e.g., Formalized Creative Systems, Scalable Brand Storytelling) that demonstrates how authenticity and profitability are concurrently achieved. Methodologically, its convergent mixed-methods design provides a novel template for linking "soft" cultural-creative assets directly to "hard" quantitative KPIs like employee turnover and customer acquisition costs.

This study's findings, while robust, possess limitations that frame the agenda for future research. The model was developed exclusively within the context of the Indonesian coffee industry; its generalizability to other creative sectors (e.g., boutique fashion, craft breweries,

design agencies) and different cultural-economic contexts warrants further investigation. The comparative, cross-sectional design, furthermore, provides a powerful snapshot but lacks the causal granularity of a longitudinal study. Future research should track a cohort of single-outlet ventures over time to map the precise triggers and decision-making processes of the "passion-to-profit" transition as it occurs.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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