



Collaborative Strategic Model of Creative Economy Actors and the Halal Industry in Accelerating International Market Penetration in Pekalongan

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Abstract

The global halal industry has shifted towards fashion, offering vast opportunities for Pekalongan's creative economy. However, despite its status as a UNESCO Creative City, the export of Pekalongan's creative products (crafts and batik) is hindered by MSMEs' low literacy regarding halal value chain standards and critical contamination risks during production. Previous studies have mostly treated the creative economy and halal industry separately, leaving a significant gap in integrative frameworks. Addressing this research gap, this study aims to construct a strategic collaboration model among stakeholders to overcome these export barriers. Using an exploratory qualitative case study method, primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with key Pentahelix elements—namely government, academia, business, community, and media. The results indicate that integrating comparative cultural advantages with competitive halal compliance through the Pentahelix model triggers value co-creation. This synergy empowers the government as a regulatory catalyst, academia in material innovation, businesses as export aggregators, communities as ethical supervisors, and media for digital branding. This collaboration fosters the "Halal and Ethical Modest Fashion" concept, effectively increasing global market competitiveness. Theoretically, this study contributes to the strategic management literature within the halal ecosystem. Practically, it contributes by recommending local governments to establish a dedicated task force integrating halal certification into the creative economy export roadmap.

[Industri halal global telah merambah sektor fesyen, menawarkan peluang besar bagi ekonomi kreatif Pekalongan. Namun, meskipun berstatus sebagai Kota Kreatif UNESCO, ekspor produk kreatif Pekalongan (kriya dan batik) terhambat oleh rendahnya literasi UMKM mengenai standar rantai nilai halal serta adanya risiko



kontaminasi kritis pada proses produksi. Penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya sebagian besar masih memisahkan kajian ekonomi kreatif dan industri halal, sehingga menyisakan celah penelitian (research gap) pada kurangnya kerangka kerja integratif. Berangkat dari kesenjangan tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkonstruksi model kolaborasi strategis antar pemangku kepentingan guna mengatasi hambatan ekspor tersebut. Menggunakan metode studi kasus kualitatif eksploratif, data primer dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan elemen kunci Pentahelix—yakni pemerintah, akademisi, bisnis, komunitas, dan media. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi keunggulan komparatif (budaya) dengan keunggulan kompetitif (kepatuhan halal) melalui model Pentahelix mampu memicu penciptaan nilai bersama (value co-creation). Sinergi ini memberdayakan pemerintah sebagai katalisator regulasi, akademisi dalam inovasi material, bisnis sebagai agregator ekspor, komunitas sebagai pengawas etika, dan media untuk branding digital. Kolaborasi ini mendorong lahirnya konsep "Halal and Ethical Modest Fashion" yang secara efektif meningkatkan daya saing pasar global. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur manajemen strategis dalam ekosistem halal. Secara praktis, penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan merekomendasikan pemerintah daerah untuk membentuk satuan tugas khusus guna mengintegrasikan sertifikasi halal ke dalam peta jalan ekspor ekonomi kreatif.]

Keywords: Creative Economy, Halal Industry, Market Penetration, MSMEs, Pentahelix Model.

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INTRODUCTION

The global halal industry has currently transformed from mere food sector compliance into a comprehensive lifestyle (*halal lifestyle*) that penetrates the fashion and craft sectors (Ulama'i, 2019). This shift opens strategic opportunities for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia's creative economy. In this context, Pekalongan City holds a prospective position. As a city designated by UNESCO as a *Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art*, the creative economy ecosystem in Pekalongan, which is dominated by the batik industry, has proven to be the main pillar of local community income (Rosyada & Tamamudin, 2020).

Although it has a comparative advantage in the form of a strong cultural heritage, empirical data shows that the export performance of Pekalongan's creative products has not maximally optimized the global halal niche market. Quoting indicative data from the Trade Office and regional export performance reports, although in aggregate the export value of Pekalongan City is stable in the range of tens of millions of US dollars per year, specific penetration for craft and modest fashion products to Muslim-majority countries (OIC members) tends to stagnate. Based on data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (2023), the export volume of creative products is often held back due to the inability of business actors to meet the supply chain traceability standards demanded by international buyers.

Realities on the ground indicate that the main problem triggering this stagnation is the lack of MSME literacy regarding halal value chain standardization. Creative economy actors and halal industry stakeholders in Pekalongan still tend to operate partially without structured synergy (Hakim, 2021; Asmawi & Lutfiadi, 2026). The failure to integrate halal quality assurance with global production ethics causes local cultural advantages to lose their competitive edge at the international level (Jamaluddin & Al Haq, 2026).

A review of previous literature found a significant research gap. The majority of previous studies only examined the development of the creative economy and the halal industry as two separate disciplines. While international literature has extensively discussed the halal supply chain and modest fashion in a broader global context (Tieman, 2011; Suhartanto et al., 2021), local studies focused exclusively on preserving batik in Pekalongan (Listiyaningrum, 2020), or merely highlighted the role of halal regulations for MSMEs in general (Maulana et al., 2026). Therefore, no prior study integrates halal value chain with creative economy governance using Pentahelix approach.

Departing from this urgency and novelty, this study aims to construct a collaborative strategy model between creative economy and halal industry actors in Pekalongan City. This research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to strategic management literature and present practical recommendations in the form of an export acceleration roadmap that is adaptive to global ethical fashion trends.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the research objective, which seeks to uncover, understand, and construct a complex and dynamic strategic collaboration model among stakeholders. The research locus is set in Pekalongan City, Central Java, considering its status as a representation of a world creative city based on crafts and the high urgency of integrating local MSMEs into the global halal supply chain. To maintain methodological transparency and ensure data depth, this study was conducted over a period of 2 weeks.

Data sources in this study are divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews using a purposive sampling technique with key informants representing the *Pentahelix* elements. Each in-depth interview was conducted with a duration ranging from 45 to 60 minutes to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the issues. These informants include: (1) Export-oriented MSME actors in the creative economy and batik fashion; (2) Representatives of the local government (Office of Trade, Cooperatives, and SMEs of Pekalongan City); (3) Local halal mentoring institutions/authorities (such as the Halal Study Center or regional Halal Task Force); and (4) Local business associations or communities. The detailed profile of the 4 (four) key informants involved in this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of Key Informants

Informant Code	Background / Role	Pentahelix Element
Mr. A	Export Batik MSME Actor	Business, Media
Mrs. B	Halal Center Auditor	Academia, Government

Informant Code	Background / Role	Pentahelix Element
Mr. C	Official of the Pekalongan City Trade Office	Government
Mr. D	Fashion Export Practitioner & Aggregator	Business, Community

Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through documentation studies of government regulations, regional export performance reports - the Halal Product Guarantee Law, and reports from relevant agencies, as well as relevant academic literature.

Data validity was tested using source triangulation and data collection technique triangulation, where information from interviews was cross-checked with policy documents and field observations. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model (Miles et al., 2014) consisting of three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During the data condensation stage, the researchers applied open coding to identify and break down interview transcripts into initial categories, followed by axial coding to establish structured connections between these categories regarding halal critical points and collaborative strategies. The results of this analysis were then synthesized to formulate an applicable collaborative strategy model to accelerate international market penetration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mapping the Condition of Halal Literacy in the Pekalongan Creative Economy Ecosystem

Pekalongan City has a creative economy ecosystem deeply rooted in tradition and history, legitimized through its status as a *UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art*. Overall, the craft and batik fashion industry is the backbone of the local economy. However, when this ecosystem is projected to penetrate the international market, especially member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that apply strict standards regarding the halal lifestyle, there is a structural lag in understanding and implementing the *Halal Value Chain* (HVC).

Based on field data analysis, a "cognitive bias" was found among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) actors in the Pekalongan creative economy. The majority of business actors still hold a narrow paradigm that halal assurance is exclusively attached only to the food, beverage, and cosmetics sectors. In fact, based on Law No. 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Guarantee (UU JPH), the scope of halal certification also covers "consumer goods" worn or utilized by consumers, including clothing or fashion products (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2014).

Ignorance of global regulations and market trends is confirmed by an interview with an export-oriented Batik MSME owner:

"So far, our understanding in the association is that halal certification is the domain of people selling food. Batik is made of cloth and wax, how can there be any haram elements? But when we tried to penetrate buyers from the Middle East last month, they actually asked for traceability documents for halal assurance regarding the synthetic dyes and brushes we use. At that point, we were completely blind and lost a potential contract." (Interview with Mr. A, Export Batik MSME Actor).

The statement above indicates that weak literacy regarding *halal traceability* has become a critical barrier to entry. In today's global fashion industry, Muslim consumers do not only evaluate products from their visual aesthetics but also from spiritual aspects and production ethics, which are often conceptualized as *halal and ethical fashion* (Suhartanto et al., 2021).

To uncover the root cause of this lack of MSME understanding, this study conducted participatory observations of the batik production supply chain in several production houses in the Wiradesa and Kauman areas. The observation results were then cross-checked with expert analysis from the local University's Halal Study Center. The results revealed that the production process of batik and crafts actually has a relatively high risk of non-halal (najis) contamination. The findings regarding "Halal Critical Points" in Pekalongan's creative economy products are mapped in Table 1 below:

Table 2. *Mapping Halal Critical Points in the Pekalongan Batik Production Chain*

Production Component	Elements Used	Halal Critical Points	Potential Contamination / Sharia Violation
Main Raw Material	Fabric (Cotton, Silk, Rayon)	Type of fabric fiber and sizing process	The use of pure silk is considered haram if the fashion is intended/sold for men. In addition, starch on fabric sometimes uses animal gelatin.
Auxiliary Materials	Batik Wax	Composition of the wax mixture (paraffin, microwax, beeswax, pine resin).	Prone to being mixed with animal fat (such as tallow/fat from pigs or cows not slaughtered according to sharia) to reduce production costs and soften the wax.
	Dyes (Synthetic & Natural)	Additives, emulsifiers, and softeners.	Chemical color binders and textile softeners often contain animal fatty acid derivatives (glycerin/stearic acid) that are not halal certified.
Production Tools	Painting Brush / Canting	Brush bristles for coloring (<i>colet</i>) or applying wax.	Vulnerable to using brushes made of boar bristle because the bristles are durable, cheap, and able to hold liquid well. (<i>Source: Field Observations and Primary Data Analysis</i>).

Referring to Table 1, the complexity of producing creative craft products strongly requires intensive mentoring. As emphasized by an expert informant from the Halal Study Center:

"Education regarding critical points such as the use of bristle brushes or animal fats in textile dyes has not reached the grassroots artisans. As a result, their production processes do not meet the Halal Product Assurance System (SJPH) standards." (Interview with Mrs. B, Halal Center Auditor).

Failure to mitigate these critical points directly disrupts the value proposition creation process in the international market (Purwaningsih & Lawal, 2026; Nahar et al., 2022). Furthermore, the lack of MSME literacy is also an implication of the lack of structural support at the regional policy level. The halal industry and creative economy ecosystem in Pekalongan still operate in a fragmented manner (standing alone). Based on interviews with

representatives from the Pekalongan City Trade and Cooperatives Office, it was revealed that government intervention has been disproportionate so far:

"We admit that the budget allocation and free halal certification facilitation program (SEHATI) from the central and regional governments have so far been almost 95% absorbed in taking care of MSMEs in the food and beverage (culinary) sector. For the craft and batik fashion sectors, which are actually icons of Pekalongan exports, there is no roadmap or special Task Force bridging their halal assurance integration." (Interview with Mr. C, Official of the Pekalongan City Trade Office).

The qualitative facts and data above convincingly show that the challenge of accelerating Pekalongan's creative economy exports is no longer solely a matter of design, production quantity, or capital. The most fundamental challenge today is the absence of strategic actors in adopting global halal value chain standards. If this literacy gap and institutional fragmentation are not immediately bridged through an inclusive collaborative strategy, Pekalongan's creative economy products will continue to stagnate and risk being eliminated from the increasingly competitive international market that prioritizes the principle of *halal traceability*.

Pentahelix-Based Collaborative Strategy Model

Responding to findings regarding the high halal critical points in craft production and the fragmented business ecosystem in Pekalongan, this study formulates the urgency of a structural intervention. A partial approach where MSMEs struggle alone to penetrate the export market has proven ineffective. Therefore, this study constructs an integrated collaborative strategy model using the *Pentahelix* approach. This model requires the synergy and merging of sectoral egos from five main actors—Government, Academia, Business, Community, and Media—into a single, unified Halal Value Chain (Muharrami et al., 2023).

To ensure this model is applicable in Pekalongan City, each *Pentahelix* element must have a specific role oriented toward value co-creation and export acceleration. An in-depth mapping of the roles and forms of intervention from each actor is synthesized in Table 2 below:

Table 3. *Matrix of Pentahelix Collaborative Strategy Model for Accelerating Creative MSME Exports*

Actor (Pentahelix)	Strategic Role	Form of Collaboration and Specific Interventions (Intervention Plan)
Government	Regulator & Catalyst	Establishing a cross-departmental "Halal Fashion Export Task Force." Providing subsidy schemes for financing the Halal Product Assurance System (SJPH) certification specifically for non-food products. Facilitating Government-to-Government (G2G) diplomacy at international exhibitions in OIC countries.
Academia	R&D & Mentoring	Conducting research to create halal-certified batik brushes and natural dyes free of <i>najis</i> . The campus Halal Center deploys Halal Product Process Assistants (PPH) directly to batik production centers.
Business	Aggregator & Financing	Islamic Financial Institutions provide export-oriented working capital. Export aggregators (SOEs/Private) select products and connect MSMEs with buyer networks (B2B matchmaking) in the Middle East and Europe.
Community	Curator & Standardization	Artisan Associations/Communities (e.g., Kampung Batik Kauman/Pesindon) conduct peer-monitoring to ensure their

Actor (Pentahelix)	Strategic Role	Form of Collaboration and Specific Interventions (Intervention Plan)
		members strictly adhere to <i>halal traceability</i> ethics in their supply chain.
Media	Branding Accelerator	Eliminating conventional campaigns, shifting to global digital campaigns and storytelling about authentic Pekalongan Halal & Ethical Modest Fashion to build international brand awareness.

Based on Table 2, this collaboration operates like a mutually reinforcing closed ecosystem. The Pekalongan City Government, through the Office of Trade, Cooperatives, and SMEs, no longer merely organizes local exhibitions but acts as a regulatory umbrella. This is confirmed by a statement of readiness from local authorities:

"Moving forward, we realize the need for a special Task Force bridging the Trade Office with BPJPH and the Halal Center. We will design a roadmap so that there is a dedicated quota for halal certification facilitation specifically for export craft and fashion products." (Interview with Mr. C, Official of the Pekalongan City Trade Office).

On the other hand, the role of academia is at the forefront of solving technical problems (halal critical points) found in the field. Innovation from higher education institutions is crucial for creating substitutions for raw materials whose halal status is questionable, such as the creation of eco-friendly synthetic brushes to replace bristle brushes, and the standardization of color fixation materials (Widiastuti et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, from the Business and Community perspectives, this collaboration forces MSMEs to level up. Artisan associations or communities play a central role in maintaining collective quality (curation). A fashion export aggregator in Pekalongan noted:

"Buyers from Dubai or Malaysia don't want to buy retail; they ask for large volumes with strict halal and ethical fashion standards. A single MSME won't be able to handle it. That's why associations must unite, production is carried out collectively (makloon) but with the same Halal Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), supervised together, and then we export through a single gateway via an aggregator." (Interview with Mr. D, Fashion Export Practitioner & Aggregator).

This statement represents the principle of *value co-creation*, where added value is created collectively. With capital support from Islamic banking and the escalation of storytelling promotions featuring the narrative of "Halal, Ethical, and Cultured Pekalongan Batik" by the media, global market penetration barriers can be comprehensively reduced. The full implementation of this *Pentahelix* model ultimately changes the posture of Pekalongan's creative economy; from merely being producers of cultural heritage to becoming key players in the global halal fashion supply chain with absolute competitive advantage (Faza et al., 2021).

Accelerating International Market Penetration through Value Co-Creation

The implementation of the *Pentahelix* collaboration model is fundamentally not just a division of administrative tasks, but a process of *value co-creation* that is essential for winning competition in the international market. In the context of Pekalongan's creative economy, *value co-creation* occurs when comparative advantages in the form of cultural

heritage and crafts are precisely integrated with competitive advantages in the form of quality assurance and sharia compliance (*halal compliance*).

Before collaborative interventions, Pekalongan batik products were often only positioned as ethnic wear. However, when targeting global niche markets—especially in Muslim-majority countries (Middle East) as well as Western countries that emphasize ethical fashion trends—the "ethnic" label alone does not have strong leverage without supply chain transparency (Rachmawati et al., 2022; Maulana et al., 2026).

Through cross-actor synergy, MSMEs no longer struggle alone to create this value. Higher education institutions provide added value in the form of "halal innovation", the government contributes the value of "trust and diplomacy", while associations maintain the value of "cultural authenticity". Data triangulation results show that this shift in value proposition tangibly accelerates product acceptance in foreign markets. This was expressed by a fashion export practitioner who has tried to implement strict protocols in his supply chain:

"In the past, when we exhibited in Dubai, buyers only saw that our batik was unique, but hesitated to sign long-term contracts because there was no certification ensuring the process was free from environmental exploitation or non-halal materials. Now, with the 'Halal and Ethical Modest Fashion' narrative, where we can prove the dyes are natural and the supply chain is clean, buyers are willing to pay premium pricing. The value of our products has multiplied." (Interview with Mr. D, Fashion Export Practitioner).

The phenomenon described by the informant confirms strategic management theories that *value co-creation* in the halal industry ecosystem can reduce the psychological barriers of global consumers (Suhartanto et al., 2021). International consumers, especially *Muslim millennials*, have a high tendency for loyalty towards brands that can synergize religious values (halal) with contemporary issues such as environmental sustainability and local community empowerment.

Furthermore, the established *Pentahelix* ecosystem creates a network effect that benefits micro-scale MSMEs. Through export aggregators and digital campaigns spearheaded by business and media elements, halal-certified products from Pekalongan can be globally indexed on various Business-to-Business (B2B) e-commerce platforms. At this point, the collaboration that began as an effort to mitigate halal critical points has transformed into a robust export accelerator engine. Market penetration is no longer sporadic or incidental but runs on an industrial roadmap that is structured, inclusive, and globally competitive (Hakim, 2021).

Strategic Synthesis: Comparative Analysis, Contributions, and Policy Implications

This study's findings on the *Pentahelix* collaborative model offer a significant advancement in understanding how localized creative industries can penetrate the global halal market. Compared to previous studies by Widiastuti et al. (2022) which broadly identified general challenges in Indonesia's halal value chain, this research provides a more granular and operational framework specifically for the craft and batik sectors. Furthermore, while Tieman (2011) primarily focused on the logistical efficiency of halal supply chains, this study expands the discourse by integrating "Ethical Modest Fashion" as a core value

proposition that combines religious compliance with cultural heritage. This alignment with the concept of value co-creation—as suggested by Battisti et al. (2022) in the context of innovation networks—proves that synergy between Pentahelix elements is the key to overcoming MSMEs' literacy barriers.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the strategic management literature by bridging the gap between creative economy governance and the halal industry, which are often treated as separate entities. It offers a novel integrative model that views halal certification not merely as a regulatory burden, but as a global quality standard that enhances competitiveness. Methodologically, this study demonstrates how qualitative exploratory designs can effectively map complex stakeholder interests in a specific regional ecosystem.

Practically, the results of this study have direct policy implications for the Pekalongan City Government. First, there is an urgent need to establish a "Halal Export Task Force" that functions as a bridge between Halal Mentoring Institutions (Academia) and Export Aggregators (Business). Second, the government should formulate a regional roadmap that subsidizes halal certification costs for batik artisans, ensuring that the "Halal and Ethical" label becomes a mandatory competitive edge in Pekalongan's international trade promotion.

CONCLUSION

Accelerating the export of creative economy products from Pekalongan City requires a strategic transformation from traditional cultural reliance to a competitive advantage rooted in the halal value chain integration. This study finds that the low literacy of MSME actors regarding halal critical points remains a primary barrier. However, the implementation of a Pentahelix-based collaborative model—synergizing Government, Academia, Business, Community, and Media—serves as a robust instrument to achieve value co-creation. This synergy fosters the "Halal and Ethical Modest Fashion" narrative, which significantly enhances product competitiveness in the international market.

Theoretically, this research contributes to strategic management literature by bridging the gap between creative economy governance and the halal industry ecosystem. Practically, it offers a strategic roadmap for local governments to establish a "Halal Fashion Export Task Force" and underscores the importance of R&D funding for halal-certified material substitutes.

Despite these insights, this research has limitations regarding its locus scope, which only focuses on Pekalongan City, potentially limiting the generalizability of the model to regions with different cultural characteristics. Additionally, the qualitative approach provides deep understanding but lacks quantitative measurements regarding the exact magnitude of each actor's impact on export volume. Therefore, future research should consider conducting quantitative longitudinal studies or comparative analyses across different UNESCO Creative Cities to validate the model's broader applicability. In conclusion, the integration of halal standards through cross-sectoral synergy is no longer optional but a necessity for Indonesian creative MSMEs to thrive in the global ethical market.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by SN. The first draft of the manuscript was written by SN, and KI, along with MA, provided critical revisions and academic supervision. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

AI USAGE STATEMENT

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools or AI-assisted technologies were used to generate the core intellectual content, data analysis, or primary arguments of this manuscript. AI tools were solely utilized for basic language editing and translation assistance to improve readability, with the authors taking full responsibility for the final content

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest financially, personally, or institutionally with any party that could unduly influence the objectivity of the research execution, data analysis, authorship, or the publication process of this article.

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