

Maximizing sales: synergy of job autonomy, innovation culture, emotional intelligence, and a touch of creativity

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines the impact of job autonomy, innovation culture, and emotional intelligence on the sales performance of MSMEs, with creativity as a mediating variable. Given the intense competition in the business environment, MSMEs must foster innovation and creativity to enhance their sales performance. Job autonomy enables MSME owners and managers to make independent decisions, fostering creativity in problem-solving. At the same time, an innovation culture promotes boldness in generating new ideas, and emotional intelligence strengthens customer and team relationships. **Method** – This research adopts a quantitative approach using the SEM-PLS methodology, with a sample of 100 MSMEs in Bandung city, Indonesia, selected through purposive sampling. Data was collected via an online questionnaire. **Findings** – The findings reveal that job autonomy, innovation culture, and emotional intelligence significantly and positively affect sales performance, with creativity playing a crucial mediating role. **Implications** – Theoretically, this study extends the self-determination theory (SDT), organizational innovation theory, and resource-based view (RBV) theory by demonstrating the interplay between autonomy, innovation, and emotional intelligence in enhancing creativity and sales performance. Practically, the findings highlight the need for MSME owners to foster workplace autonomy, encourage an innovative work culture, and enhance employees' emotional intelligence to improve business success through creative approaches.

Keywords: job autonomy, innovation culture, emotional intelligence, creativity, sales performance.

Introduction

Sales performance is a key factor for the success of MSMEs in a competitive business environment. In the face of increasingly fierce competition, the ability to innovate becomes crucial (Subagja, Ausat, and Suherlan 2022). Job autonomy, innovation culture, and employee emotional intelligence have been proven to enhance sales performance, mainly when creativity acts as a mediator. Job autonomy provides freedom in decision-making, while an innovation culture encourages boldness in creating new things. Emotional intelligence plays a vital role in managing positive customer relationships. Globally, many large companies and MSMEs have recognized the importance of job autonomy and innovation culture, particularly



in advanced economies like the United States and Germany. In these countries, organizations that provide job autonomy have shown significant results in creativity and innovation. The freedom to innovate enhances employee engagement and drives them to generate creative ideas that contribute to improved sales performance (Amabile and Pratt 2016). MSMEs reported increased productivity and sales in Germany when implementing job autonomy and innovation culture (Herr and Nettekoven 2018). Moreover, in Slovenia, MSMEs that adopted an innovation culture experienced significant annual sales growth, particularly in the technology and creative services sectors (Hojnik and Hušek 2023).

In Indonesia, MSMEs play a crucial role in the national economy. MSMEs contribute approximately 61% to the country's GDP and absorb about 97% of the labour force (Nurprabowo and Meilani 2023). However, despite their significant contribution, the application of job autonomy and innovation culture in this sector remains limited. Research shows that many MSMEs in Indonesia do not actively encourage innovation or give employees the freedom to make creative decisions (Ausat and Peirisal 2021). This suggests that most MSMEs in Indonesia are still trapped in rigid work structures and have not yet optimized innovation. Some government programs, such as the National 1000 Digital Startup Movement and innovation-based people's business credit, aim to enhance innovation capacity among MSMEs. However, implementing these policies faces significant challenges, particularly in raising awareness and participation among MSMEs.

MSMEs are vital in supporting regional economic growth at the local level, particularly in West Java. Bandung, as one of Indonesia's creative economy hubs, is home to more than 10,181 MSME, contributing to sectors such as culinary (40.9%), services (10.1%), handicrafts (6.7%), fashion (16%), and others (26.2%) (DiskominfoBandung 2024). However, few MSMEs in this region have fully adopted an innovation culture in their operations (Utami and Lesmana 2023). Additionally, the survey showed a lack of autonomy given to employees, limiting their ability to generate innovative ideas that could improve sales performance. This condition makes MSMEs in Bandung struggle to compete with larger, more innovative companies in local and national markets. In Bandung, many MSMEs still face challenges leveraging employee creativity to develop innovative sales strategies. MSMEs in Bandung have successfully improved sales by implementing innovative strategies involving employee creativity (Delanova 2019). Factors such as low levels of job autonomy, insufficient innovation culture, and underdeveloped emotional intelligence are key barriers preventing MSMEs from fully harnessing their employees' potential. In the creative industry sector, for instance, only a few MSMEs provide chefs or kitchen staff the freedom to innovate new menus, ultimately limiting product differentiation and market competitiveness. Similarly, in the fashion sector, the lack of innovation in design and marketing has caused many MSMEs to stagnate and struggle to compete with larger brands.

Several studies have examined the influence of job autonomy, innovation culture, emotional intelligence, and creativity on sales performance, yet their findings remain inconsistent. Job autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation, leading to greater creativity and innovation, ultimately improving sales performance (Burcharth, Knudsen, and Søndergaard 2017). Employees with control over their tasks tend to be proactive and take ownership of their work, making them more innovative in achieving sales targets. However, excessive job autonomy can lead to inefficiency due to a lack of structure, misalignment with company goals, and poor coordination in team-based environments, which may negatively impact sales performance (Zhou 2020). Similarly, research on the role of innovation culture in sales performance also presents mixed findings. Fostering an innovation culture allows companies to create novel products and services tailored to market demands, increasing customer satisfaction and improving sales performance (Amabile and Pratt 2016). A strong innovation culture encourages employees to experiment and develop competitive advantages that drive



revenue growth. However, not all innovations contribute positively to sales, as some innovations fail in the market due to misalignment with consumer needs or their complexity, leading to reduced trust and lower sales (Freisinger and McCarthy 2024).

The relationship between emotional intelligence and sales performance also exhibits contradictions. Emotional intelligence is crucial in enhancing creativity and positively influencing sales performance by enabling employees to manage stress, build strong relationships, and think creatively when addressing business challenges (Devi et al. 2023). Emotional intelligence helps employees adapt to changing customer demands and maintain productive client interactions. Conversely, emotional intelligence does not always lead to higher creativity, as employees with strong emotional intelligence may prioritize social harmony over risk-taking, limiting their willingness to develop unconventional sales strategies (Xu, Liu, and Pang 2019). On the other hand, creativity is widely recognized as an essential driver of sales performance, yet its effects are not always positive. Creativity enables employees to develop innovative marketing strategies and product designs that differentiate a company from competitors, leading to increased sales (Banerjee and Bag 2022). Creativity allows businesses to adapt to market trends and appeal to evolving customer preferences. However, excessive creativity—especially when it diverges too far from customer expectations—can be detrimental to sales, as customers may struggle to understand or accept overly complex or unconventional products and marketing strategies (Yesuf, Getahun, and Debas 2024). This finding highlight that while creativity can enhance sales performance, it must be grounded in market needs to avoid alienating consumers.

Based on these inconsistencies in prior research, there remains a significant research gap regarding the precise conditions under which job autonomy, innovation culture, emotional intelligence, and creativity contribute positively or negatively to sales performance. While prior studies suggest these factors can enhance sales performance, they also indicate that excessive autonomy, misaligned innovations, emotional intelligence risk aversion, and unrealistic creativity may have counterproductive effects. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing how these factors influence MSME sales performance, with creativity as a mediating variable, in the context of Bandung City, Indonesia. Despite extensive research on job autonomy, innovation culture, and emotional intelligence, limited studies have explored how these factors collectively influence sales performance, particularly creativity as a mediating variable. This study introduces a novel perspective by establishing creativity as a pivotal mediating mechanism that integrates these organizational elements, filling a critical gap in understanding their dynamic interplay within MSMEs. By focusing on MSMEs in Bandung, this research provides empirical evidence on how fostering creativity within these enterprises can optimize their sales strategies and market adaptability. The study is expected to offer valuable insights for MSME owners, policymakers, and business practitioners in developing strategies that enhance innovation-driven growth, ensuring sustained competitiveness at both local and national levels.

Literature review

Self-determination theory (SDT)

The self-determination theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), serves as a fundamental framework for understanding job autonomy by emphasizing the essential psychological needs that drive human motivation and well-being. This theory posits that individuals are inherently motivated to grow and develop when three core psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are met. Autonomy refers to the need for individuals to control their actions and decisions, allowing them to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for their work. Competence involves the need to feel capable and



compelling in one's activities, which enhances confidence and encourages continuous learning and skill development. Relatedness pertains to the need to establish meaningful connections and interactions with others in the workplace, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration.

Organizational innovation theory (OIT)

Organizational innovation theory explains how organizations develop, adopt, and implement innovations to enhance performance and competitiveness in a dynamic business environment. This theory is rooted in the research of Schumpeter (2021), who emphasized innovation as the primary driver of economic growth and competitive advantage. Over time, it was further developed by scholars such as Damanpour (1991), who classified organizational innovation into technical innovation (products and processes) and administrative innovation (structures and managerial practices). OIT highlights that innovation within organizations is influenced by internal factors such as innovation culture, leadership, and resources, as well as external factors like market pressures and technological changes. Organizations that foster an environment that supports idea exploration, risk-taking, and cross-functional collaboration tend to be more innovative and adaptable to market shifts. The application of this theory is widely used in research on strategic management, entrepreneurship, and digital transformation to understand how innovation enhances efficiency, differentiation, and business sustainability.

Resource-based view (RBV) theory

Resource-based view theory is an approach in strategic management that emphasizes a company's competitive advantage as being dependent on its internal resources that are unique, rare, valuable, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable. This theory was developed by Barney (1991), who identified that companies possessing and effectively managing strategic resources can achieve a sustainable competitive advantage over their competitors. RBV classifies resources into physical assets (such as equipment and location), human resources (skills, experience, and organizational culture), and intangible resources (brand reputation, patents, and innovation capabilities). Competitive advantage under RBV is not solely based on resource ownership but also on how a company configures and utilizes these resources to create value. This theory is relevant in understanding how capital constraints and market access limitations can be overcome by managing internal capabilities such as innovation, business networks, and digital technology adoption. By applying RBV, companies can focus on developing their core strengths, ensuring long-term growth and competitiveness in an evolving business landscape.

Sales performance (SP)

Sales performance is one of the critical aspects of overall organizational performance. Through the organizational performance theory in the balanced scorecard, Kaplan and Norton (1996) emphasized the importance of sales performance as an indicator of an organization's financial success. Sales performance reflects the number of products or services sold, including customer satisfaction, market share growth, and customer loyalty. Sales performance improvement is often linked to innovation in marketing strategies, creativity in product development, and strong customer relationships built through emotional intelligence. Sales performance is influenced by creativity, employee motivation, and management support (Anderson and Oliver 1987).

Job autonomy (JA)

Job autonomy is one of the key concepts in work motivation theory introduced by Deci and Ryan (2000) through the self-determination theory (SDT). This theory explains that job



autonomy plays a significant role in enhancing employees' intrinsic motivation. Employees with freedom and control over their tasks feel more responsible and motivated to innovate. Job autonomy also allows employees to make relevant decisions without relying heavily on strict instructions. This encourages initiative and creativity as they feel full ownership of the outcomes they achieve. Autonomy is also one of the five core job characteristics influencing work motivation, performance, and employee satisfaction (Hackman 1980).

Innovative culture (IC)

The organizational innovation theory developed by Damanpour (1991) provides an important foundation for understanding innovation culture in the workplace. Innovation culture refers to the values and beliefs that drive organizations to continuously develop new ideas, services, and products that meet market demands. Organizations with a strong innovation culture are more likely to survive in competitive markets as they can create a competitive edge through continuous innovation (Damanpour 1991). Innovation culture encompasses a drive to innovate, management support for new ideas, and effective team collaboration. This support fosters a conducive work environment for creativity development, ultimately enhancing sales performance. Organizations that promote an innovation culture, as evidenced by West and Farr (1990) study, tend to be more adaptive and responsive to changes in the business environment and more successful in maintaining market share.

Emotional intelligence (EI)

Emotional intelligence, as outlined by Goleman (1995), refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and manage their own emotions, as well as to understand the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence plays a key role in creating positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Employees with high emotional intelligence can manage stress, communicate effectively, and build strong relationships with colleagues and customers. Emotional intelligence also enhances the ability to adapt to changing environments and helps employees handle conflicts constructively. A study by Salovey and Mayer (1990) revealed that emotional intelligence positively correlates with job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational performance.

Creativity (CR)

Creativity defines creativity as the ability to generate new, original, and valuable ideas in a given context (Amabile 1996). Creativity often serves as a mediator connecting motivational factors with performance. In a work environment encouraging innovation, employee creativity becomes a key asset for generating innovative solutions that set the company apart from competitors. Creativity not only involves the creation of new products but also includes innovative problem-solving and flexible thinking in facing market challenges. Creativity is crucial in innovation as it produces ideas that can be implemented into effective new strategies (Csikszentmihalyi 1997).

Hypothesis development

Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), explains that job autonomy is crucial in enhancing employees' intrinsic motivation. Employees with freedom and control over their tasks tend to feel more responsible and motivated to innovate. Hackman (1980) also emphasized that autonomy is one of the five core job characteristics influencing work motivation, performance, and employee satisfaction. Job autonomy enables employees to respond more quickly and flexibly to market needs, essential for maintaining competitiveness. It also facilitates more proactive decision-making, ultimately improving the effectiveness of the sales process and meeting customer needs. Studies show that job

autonomy increases employees' sense of ownership and commitment, contributing to better sales target achievement (Nasution, Siregar, and Pristiyo 2021; Modise 2023).

H1: job autonomy has a positive effect on sales performance.

Self-determination theory explains that job autonomy motivates individuals to work more effectively, contributing to improved sales performance (Deci and Ryan 2000). Organizational innovation theory, introduced by Damanpour (1991), explains that an innovation-oriented organizational culture fosters the continuous creation of superior products and services. In a competitive market, innovation is key to survival and growth. Organizations with a strong innovation culture are more adaptable to market changes, provide better customer solutions, and seize new market opportunities (West and Farr 1990). Integrating innovation into sales strategies enables companies to offer added value to customers, ultimately increasing sales volume. These findings are supported by studies demonstrating that a strong innovation culture contributes to better sales performance (López and Oliver 2023; Okanga 2023).

H2: innovation culture has a positive effect on sales performance.

Organizational innovation theory states that an innovation culture within organizations drives the creation of more effective sales strategies, positively impacting sales performance (Damanpour 1991). Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions while also understanding others' (Goleman 1995). Emotional intelligence is positively related to job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational performance (Salovey and Mayer 1990). In the sales context, this ability is crucial, as direct interactions with customers require a deep understanding and appropriate responses to their emotions. Employees with high emotional intelligence are more effective in building long-term customer relationships, contributing to customer loyalty and retention (Maldonado and Márquez 2023). Emotional intelligence also helps manage stress and conflicts in competitive work environments, ultimately leading to better sales outcomes (Manthiou, Hickman, and Klaus 2020).

H3: emotional intelligence has a positive effect on sales performance.

Individuals with high emotional intelligence can better understand and manage customer relationships, contributing to improved sales performance (Goleman 1995). This aligns with self-determination theory (SDT), which emphasizes that intrinsic motivation, influenced by emotional competence, enhances individuals' ability to engage in meaningful work and build strong professional relationships (Deci and Ryan 2000). Amabile et al. (1996) state that creativity generates new, original, and valuable ideas. That plays a central role in organizational innovation theory (OIT). OIT suggests that innovation within organizations emerges from developing and implementing creative ideas, making creativity a fundamental driver of business success (Damanpour 1991). Creativity is crucial in developing unique marketing strategies that capture customers' attention, increase engagement, and ultimately boost sales volume (Nuseir et al. 2023). Additionally, creativity in product and service development enables companies to tailor offerings to customers' specific needs, contributing to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.

H4: creativity has a positive effect on sales performance.

Creativity is key to generating innovative ideas that support sales performance (Amabile 1996). This concept is reinforced by self-determination theory (SDT), which states that when individuals experience autonomy, they become more intrinsically motivated to engage in creative problem-solving and innovation (Deci and Ryan 2000). Greater job autonomy allows employees to demonstrate higher levels of creativity, as they can experiment and try new approaches without excessive constraints. Decision-making freedom and independent action foster a sense of responsibility and encourage individuals to find innovative solutions (Burcharth, Knudsen, and Søndergaard 2017). Within the organizational



innovation theory (OIT) framework, organizations that promote autonomy create an environment conducive to innovation, ultimately enhancing performance. The creativity emerging from job autonomy contributes to improved sales performance as products and services become more attractive and differentiated from competitors, thus attracting more customers.

H5: creativity can mediate the influence of job autonomy on sales performance.

Self-determination theory and creativity suggest that job autonomy enables individuals to be more creative in developing sales strategies (Amabile and Pratt 2016; Deci and Ryan 2000). An innovation culture creates a work environment that supports exploring creative ideas and developing unique solutions. Companies with a strong innovation culture are better at generating creative products and services that meet market needs and exceed customer expectations (Nwachukwu and Vu 2022). Creativity from an innovation culture significantly contributes to developing more effective sales strategies, increasing customer appeal and ultimately improving sales performance. Product and service innovations also allow companies to stand out in a crowded and dynamic market (Annamalah et al. 2023).

H6: creativity can mediate the influence of innovation culture on sales performance.

Organizational innovation theory and creativity suggest that an innovation culture fosters creativity, which leads to improved sales performance (Damanpour 1991; Amabile 1996). Emotional intelligence enhances employees' interpersonal skills and facilitates the development of higher levels of creativity. Employees with high emotional intelligence are more effective in collaboration, have a deeper understanding of customer needs, and respond to challenges with creative approaches (Ikart 2023). The creativity influenced by emotional intelligence enables employees to develop innovative solutions for sales challenges and design marketing strategies that better align with customer needs, ultimately positively impacting sales performance (Binsaeed et al. 2023).

H7: creativity can mediate the influence of emotional intelligence on sales performance.

Figure 1 summarizes the research objectives through the formulated hypotheses. Each hypothesis highlights the positive and significant relationships between job autonomy, innovation culture, and emotional intelligence on sales performance directly and through creativity as a mediating variable.

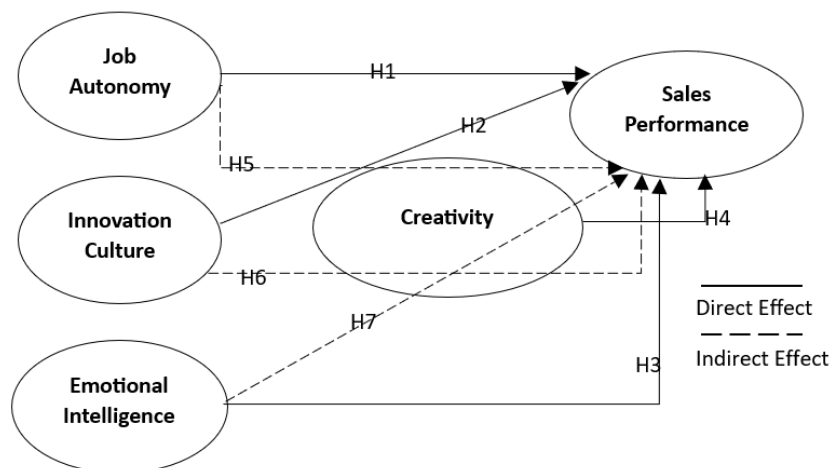


Figure 1 research framework

Method

The study follows a quantitative approach to objectively measure and analyze the relationships between job autonomy, innovation culture, emotional intelligence, creativity, and sales performance. This method allows for precise, statistical examination of the



hypotheses, providing scientifically valid and generalizable results. A survey design was employed to efficiently gather data from many MSME owners and managers in Bandung City. The survey was conducted from June to August 2024 using online questionnaires via google forms, facilitating data collection from geographically dispersed participants. Respondents provided input on job autonomy, innovation culture, emotional intelligence, creativity, and sales performance using a Likert scale. This scale allowed standardized responses to be easily analyzed to identify trends and relationships within the dataset.

The research population consisted of 119 MSME owners and managers in Bandung City. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select 100 participants based on specific inclusion criteria. The selection criteria ensured that all included individuals actively applied job autonomy, innovation culture, and emotional intelligence in their business operations. These criteria filtered the population to obtain a sample relevant to the study's objectives. Only participants who regarded creativity as a crucial aspect of their work environment were included, making the findings applicable to MSMEs with similar characteristics. Exclusion criteria eliminated respondents who did not demonstrate engagement with these core factors, ensuring the study's relevance. The study employed an operational table of variables detailing each variable's name, indicators (with reference citations), corresponding statements, and measurement scales (see Table 1). A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used to measure participants' perceptions of job autonomy, innovation culture, emotional intelligence, creativity, and sales performance. This approach provided a structured assessment of each construct and ensured data collection and analysis consistency.

Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was employed for data analysis using SmartPLS 3.2.9 software. This method is well-suited for examining complex relationships between latent variables and handling small to medium-sized samples. SEM-PLS allows for simultaneous analysis of the measurement and structural models, providing insights into the relationships between variables. The analysis began with evaluating the outer model, assessing convergent validity and the reliability of measurement constructs. Convergent validity was confirmed with factor loadings exceeding 0.70, indicating that the indicators within each construct were strongly correlated. The inner model was then evaluated using R-square and Q-square analysis to determine the explanatory power and predictive relevance of the model. Finally, hypothesis testing was conducted to confirm the relationships between job autonomy, innovation culture, emotional intelligence, creativity, and sales performance, offering empirical evidence to support the study's theoretical framework. This approach ensures that the study's findings are robust and relevant, providing insights into how these variables interact within the MSME context in Bandung City. SEM-PLS enhances the accuracy and depth of the analysis, making the findings applicable for future research and practical applications in MSME management.

Table 1 operational variables

Variables	Indicators	Statements	Scale
Job autonomy (JA)	JA.1: Freedom to make decisions.	JA.1: Employees have discretion in making decisions without over-relying on supervisors.	Likert
	JA.2: Time management.	JA.2: Employees can independently set task priorities and manage time efficiently.	
	JA.3: Independence in task execution. (Deci and Ryan 2000)	JA.3: Employees control how they complete tasks, encouraging creativity.	
Innovation culture (IC)	IC.1: Drive for innovation.	IC.1: The organization encourages employees to generate and develop	Likert

Variables	Indicators	Statements	Scale
		new ideas.	
	IC.2: Management support for new ideas.	IC.2: Management provides resources and support for idea implementation.	
	IC.3: Team collaboration. (Damanpour 1991)	IC.3: Employees work in teams to exchange ideas and foster innovation.	
Emotional intelligence (EI)	EI.1: Self-awareness.	EI.1: Recognizing and understanding one's own emotions.	Likert
	EI.2: emotion management.	EI.2: Controlling and managing emotions in workplace situations.	
	EI.3: Empathy.	EI.3: Understanding and responding to others' emotions to enhance relationships.	
	EI.4: Social skills. (Goleman 1995)	EI.4: Effective communication and relationship-building abilities.	
Creativity (CR)	CR.1: Originality of ideas.	CR.1: Generating fresh and unique ideas.	Likert
	CR.2: Problem-solving.	CR.2: Finding innovative solutions to work-related challenges.	
	CR.3: Flexibility in thinking. (Amabile 1996)	CR.3: Adapting and thinking creatively in various situations.	
Sales performance (SP)	SP.1: Sales volume.	SP.1: Total number of products/services sold within a specific period.	Likert
	SP.2: Number of customers.	SP.2: Total number of customers purchasing from the organization.	
	SP.3: Customer satisfaction. (Kaplan and Norton 1996)	SP.3: Level of customer satisfaction, impacting loyalty and retention.	

Results and discussion

Demographic of respondents

The demographic analysis of the 100 MSMEs reveals a diverse landscape regarding firm age, gender, respondents' age, sector, and location. Regarding firm age, 35% of the MSMEs are relatively young, established within the last 1 to 5 years, while 20% have been operational for 6 to 10 years. A significant proportion, 25%, falls within the 11 to 15-year range, and another 20% have been in business for over 15 years, showcasing a mix of new and more established firms. Regarding gender distribution, many respondents are male, comprising 60% of the total, while female respondents account for 40%. This highlights a predominance of male leadership in the sampled MSMEs. The age of the respondents also varies, with 19% aged between 15 and 25 years, 31% between 26 and 35 years, and 36% falling within the 36 to 45-year range. Finally, 14% of respondents are over 45, indicating a mature workforce. Analyzing the sectors, the culinary industry leads with 30% of the MSMEs, followed by fashion and textile at 20%. Creative businesses represent 15%, while technology and digital startups, crafts and handicrafts, tourism and hospitality each account for 10%. Agriculture and agribusiness, though at present, constitute a smaller segment at 5%. Notably, all MSMEs are in Bandung City, emphasizing the concentration of these businesses within this vibrant urban area. This demographic overview provides valuable insights into the characteristics and diversity of MSMEs operating in Bandung.



Table 2 demographic of respondents

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage
Firm age	1-5 years	35	5
	6-10 years	20	20
	11-15 years	25	25
	>15 years	20	20
Gender	Male	60	60
	Female	40	40
Respondents age	15-25 years	19	19
	26-35 years	31	31
	36-45 years	36	36
	>45 years	14	14
MSMEs Sector	Culinary	30	30
	Fashion and textile	20	20
	Creative	15	15
	Technology and digital startups	10	10
	Craft and handicrafts	10	10
	Tourism and hospitality	10	10
	Agriculture and agribusiness	5	5

Source: primary data (processed, 2025)

Outer model evaluation

The initial phase of structural equation modeling-partial least squares (SEM-PLS) analysis focuses on evaluating the outer model to ensure the constructs meet key validity and reliability criteria. This phase is crucial for confirming that the data used is accurate and consistent, allowing for further analysis.

Convergent validity is a crucial aspect of validity testing that assesses the extent to which indicators within a construct are strongly correlated with one another. This means that each manifest variable, which serves as an observable measure of the underlying construct, should ideally exhibit a loading factor greater than 0.70 when analyzed using SmartPLS version 3.2.9 software. A loading factor above this threshold suggests that the indicators effectively capture the essence of the construct they are intended to measure. In the analysis presented in Table 3, all indicators associated with the constructs demonstrate loading factor values that exceed 0.70, indicating a strong relationship between the indicators and their respective constructs. This outcome confirms that the constructs meet the necessary level of convergent validity, demonstrating that the measures consistently reflect the intended constructs. Achieving convergent validity is essential, as it enhances the reliability and credibility of the research findings, ensuring that the indicators are not only related but also contribute meaningfully to understanding the underlying theoretical framework.

Reliability testing assesses the consistency and dependability of constructs in research, ensuring that measurement tools, such as survey questions or indicators, consistently measure the underlying variables. The primary goal of this testing is to ensure that constructs yield stable and consistent results when measured repeatedly under the same conditions and verify that the indicators used reliably reflect the intended variables. In reliability testing, Cronbach's Alpha is employed to evaluate the internal consistency of a set of items that form a construct, examining whether these items are interrelated and measuring the same concept. A Cronbach's alpha value exceeding 0.60 indicates that the construct has good internal consistency, with higher values (closer to 1) reflecting better consistency. Composite reliability (CR) is also used to assess construct reliability, considering the weights of each indicator. It is regarded as a more accurate measure of internal consistency than Cronbach's alpha. A CR value exceeding 0.60 further indicates that the indicators collectively measure the



construct consistently and reliably. In this context, the results in Table 3 demonstrate that all Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values for the tested constructs exceed the threshold of 0.60. This affirms that the constructs have adequate reliability, meaning they are consistently measured across various indicators, thus ensuring that the research findings can be trusted.

Table 3 measurement model analysis

Variables	Item	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Job autonomy (JA)	JA.1	0.780	0.850	0.900	0.650
	JA.2	0.820			
	JA.3	0.750			
Innovation culture (IC)	IC.1	0.800	0.870	0.920	0.700
	IC.2	0.760			
	IC.3	0.790			
Emotional intelligence (EI)	EI.1	0.830	0.860	0.910	0.680
	EI.2	0.810			
	EI.3	0.770			
	EI.4	0.720			
Creativity (CR)	CR.1	0.850	0.840	0.890	0.660
	CR.2	0.790			
	CR.3	0.760			
Sales performance (SP)	SP.1	0.810	0.880	0.930	0.720
	SP.2	0.770			
	SP.3	0.780			

Source: primary data (processed, 2025)

Inner model evaluation

The subsequent stage of SEM-PLS analysis shifts focus toward testing the inner model. This involves assessing the model's performance using R-square, Q-square, and hypothesis testing. These methods provide insights into the model's explanatory power and predictive relevance, ensuring that the structural relationships between variables are statistically sound and meaningful.

The R-square values in Table 4 provide insight into the model's explanatory power regarding the endogenous constructs of creativity (CR) and sales performance (SP). R-square, also known as the coefficient of determination, quantifies the proportion of variance in a dependent variable that can be predicted from the independent variables. For creativity (CR), the R-square value is 0.539, indicating that 53.9% of the variance in creativity can be explained by the combined influence of the exogenous constructs: Job autonomy, innovation culture, and emotional intelligence. This implies a moderate explanatory power, suggesting that while these three factors significantly contribute to understanding creativity, 46.1% of the variance is attributed to other factors outside the model. This highlights the complexity of the construct and suggests that additional variables may be influential in determining creativity, potentially warranting further investigation in future studies.

In the case of sales performance (SP), the R-square value is 0.599, which indicates that 59.9% of the variance in sales performance is explained by job autonomy, innovation culture, emotional intelligence, and creativity. This higher R-square value signifies a relatively strong model, leaving only 40.1% of the variance unexplained by the included constructs. According to the criteria established by Hair et al. (2011), an R-square value exceeding 0.50 demonstrates acceptable explanatory power, categorizing it within the moderate-to-strong range for structural equation modelling (SEM). This suggests that the model effectively



captures the relationships between the constructs, providing meaningful insights into the factors that influence sales performance.

The R-square values indicate that creativity and sales performance are significantly influenced by the model's constructs, validating the study's theoretical framework. However, the remaining unexplained variance suggests areas for future research, highlighting the importance of considering additional variables that may impact these constructs. The analysis emphasizes the model's effectiveness while recognizing the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics in the relationship between the constructs.

Table 4 R-square test

No	Variables	R-square
1	Creativity (CR)	0,539
2	Sales performance (SP)	0,599

Source: primary data (processed, 2025)

The Q2 value is used to evaluate the predictive relevance of the model, with a Q2 value greater than zero signifying that the model has sufficient predictive accuracy (Hair et al. 2011). The formula for calculating Q2 is: $Q2 = 1 - (1 - R1^2) \times (1 - R2^2)$. Applying the R-square values obtained in this analysis, a Q2 value of 0.814 is calculated, indicating that the model effectively predicts the observed values. This high Q2 value suggests that the structural model has strong predictive relevance, underscoring its robustness for forecasting the outcomes of the variables under study. The detailed calculation is as follows:

$$Q2 = 1 - (1 - 0.539) \times (1 - 0.599)$$

$$Q2 = 1 - (0.461) \times (0.401)$$

$$Q2 = 1 - 0.185861$$

$$Q2 = 0.814139$$

Hypothesis testing is performed to evaluate the statistical significance of the path coefficients in the model, with a p-value of less than 0.05 indicating that the relationships between variables are statistically significant (Hair et al. 2011). The results of hypothesis testing, presented in Table 5, reveal whether the proposed relationships are statistically significant and meaningful in the context of the research framework. This process ensures that the relationships between constructs, such as Job autonomy's effect on sales performance or innovation culture's influence on creativity, are not spurious but are supported by data. Confirming significant paths strengthens the validity of the theoretical model and provides a solid foundation for subsequent analyses or practical applications of the findings.

Table 5 hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Original sample	T-statistics	P-value
H1: JA → SP	0.420	3.512	0.0005
H2: IC → SP	0.375	3.200	0.0015
H3: EI → SP	0.410	3.100	0.0020
H4: CR → SP	0.450	3.800	0.0003
H5: JA → CR → SP	0.300	2.800	0.0050
H6: IC → CR → SP	0.350	3.000	0.0030
H7: EI → CR → SP	0.320	2.900	0.0040

Source: primary data (processed, 2025)

The hypothesis testing results presented in Table 5 indicate that all proposed relationships were statistically significant and accepted. Job autonomy (JA) had a significant positive effect on sales performance (SP) (path coefficient = 0.420, t-statistics = 3.512 > 1.96, and p-value = 0.0005 < 0.05) (H1 accepted). Innovation culture (IC) had a significant positive effect on sales performance (SP) (path coefficient = 0.375, t-statistics = 3.200 > 1.96, and p-



value = $0.0015 < 0.05$) (H2 accepted). Emotional intelligence (EI) had a significant positive effect on sales performance (SP) (path coefficient = 0.410, t-statistics = $3.100 > 1.96$, and p-value = $0.0020 < 0.05$) (H3 accepted). Creativity (CR) had a significant positive effect on sales performance (SP) (path coefficient = 0.450, t-statistics = $3.800 > 1.96$, and p-value = $0.0003 < 0.05$). Mediation analysis further confirmed the role of CR in linking JA to SP, with significant indirect effects (path coefficient = 0.300, t-statistics = $2.800 > 1.96$, p-value = $0.0050 < 0.05$; path coefficient = 0.350, t-statistics = $3.000 > 1.96$, p-value = $0.0030 < 0.05$; path coefficient = 0.320, t-statistics = $2.900 > 1.96$, p-value = $0.0040 < 0.05$). These findings support the hypotheses, demonstrating that JA, IC, AI, and CR significantly enhance SP, both directly and indirectly, through the mediating role of creativity (H5, H6, and H7 accepted).

The effect of job autonomy on sales performance

The results of this study confirm that job autonomy (JA) has a positive effect on the sales performance (SP) of MSMEs in Bandung City. This finding suggests that MSME owners and managers with greater freedom in decision-making, time management, and task execution tend to achieve higher sales performance. Further data indicates that JA facilitates quick responses to market demand, enhances operational efficiency, and improves customer satisfaction, increasing business growth and profitability. These findings align with the self-determination theory, which posits that autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation and improves job performance (Deci and Ryan 2000). Previous studies also highlight that autonomy in business decision-making enables MSME actors to implement adaptive strategies that fit market conditions, ultimately improving sales performance (Adiningrat et al. 2023). Similarly, autonomy in managing work schedules and responsibilities positively impacts customer relationships, as business owners can provide more personalized services, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and retention rates (Cardoso et al. 2022).

The positive effect of job autonomy on sales performance can be attributed to the ability of MSME actors to make agile and strategic decisions without bureaucratic constraints. Rapid decision-making is essential to maintain market relevance in Bandung City, where MSMEs operate in highly competitive fashion, culinary, and creative sectors. For example, in the culinary sector, food vendors with the autonomy to adjust their menu or pricing in response to changing customer preferences are more likely to attract and retain customers. Moreover, time flexibility allows entrepreneurs to allocate resources efficiently, optimize marketing efforts, improve customer service, and make operational improvements, directly contributing to higher sales volume. The implications of these findings are substantial, as they suggest that increasing job autonomy can be a strategic approach for MSME development. Autonomy fosters entrepreneurial creativity and problem-solving abilities, leading to better business performance (Al-Mamary and Alshallaqi 2022). Additionally, the results reinforce the argument that MSMEs with high levels of autonomy exhibit greater resilience in dynamic market environments (Saptono et al. 2024). Policymakers and business support institutions in Bandung should consider fostering policies that empower MSME actors with more decision-making independence while ensuring access to necessary resources and business guidance. This will enhance individual business performance and contribute to broader economic growth in the region.

The effect of innovation culture on sales performance

The findings of this study confirm that innovation culture (IC) has a positive effect on sales performance (SP) of MSMEs in Bandung City. This result suggests that MSMEs that actively foster a culture of innovation—by encouraging creative thinking, supporting new ideas, and promoting team collaboration intend to achieve higher sales performance. The data further indicate that MSMEs with a strong innovation culture can develop products and



services that align with market demands, increasing customer satisfaction, retention, and sales volume. These findings align with the organizational innovation theory, emphasizing that competitive advantage stems from unique internal capabilities, including an organization's innovation ability (Damanpour 1991). Prior research also supports the notion that a culture of innovation within MSMEs enhances business adaptability and sustainability, allowing firms to respond to market trends proactively (Abun et al. 2023). Similarly, team collaboration and management support for innovation are critical in enabling MSMEs to introduce creative solutions that strengthen market positioning and customer engagement (Moreno, Rojas, and Morales 2024).

The positive impact of innovation culture on sales performance can be attributed to the ability of MSMEs to differentiate their offerings from competitors. In Bandung City, which is known for its dynamic creative and fashion industries, innovation is a crucial factor in business sustainability. For example, MSMEs in the fashion sector that continuously introduce unique designs, experiment with sustainable materials, and leverage digital marketing strategies tend to attract more customers. Similarly, in the culinary sector, businesses that regularly introduce new menu variations and leverage technology for online ordering see increased customer engagement and sales growth. An innovation-supportive environment encourages employees to contribute ideas actively, leading to faster problem-solving and enhanced business resilience in a highly competitive market. The implications of these findings suggest that fostering an innovation culture should be a strategic priority for MSMEs. Prior studies indicate that businesses with high levels of innovation are more resilient during economic downturns and experience higher long-term growth (Bachtiar et al. 2023). Furthermore, Innovation-driven MSMEs establish stronger customer relationships by continuously refining their products and services to meet evolving consumer preferences (Jadmiko et al. 2025). Policymakers and business support organizations in Bandung should promote innovation-driven initiatives, such as providing grants for research and development, facilitating collaboration between MSMEs and universities, and offering training programs on design thinking and digital transformation. MSMEs can achieve sustained competitive advantages, drive continuous business growth, and enhance their overall market performance by embedding innovation into their operational strategies.

The effect of emotional intelligence on sales performance

The research findings show that emotional intelligence (EI) positively affects MSMEs' sales performance (SP) in Bandung City. This result suggests that MSME owners with higher emotional intelligence—encompassing self-awareness, emotion management, empathy, and social skills—experience improved sales performance through higher customer satisfaction, increased customer numbers, and enhanced sales volume. The data suggests that business owners with strong emotional intelligence are more effective in handling customer interactions, resolving conflicts, and building lasting relationships, ultimately contributing to higher customer retention and business growth. These findings align with self-determination theory, which posits that individuals' ability to perceive, regulate, and manage emotions directly affects their interpersonal relationships and professional success (Deci and Ryan 2000). Prior research supports this, showing that self-awareness in business owners allows for better decision-making and conflict resolution, leading to improved business performance (Pawestri and Prasetyani 2024). Similarly, empathy is key in enhancing customer satisfaction, as emotionally perceptive business owners can better anticipate and fulfill customer needs (Ausat et al. 2023). Moreover, strong social skills are crucial for networking and building customer relationships, which is particularly relevant for MSMEs that rely on direct interactions with customers (Salsabila et al. 2024).



The positive effect of emotional intelligence on sales performance can be attributed to its role in fostering better customer relationships, service quality, and business adaptability. In Bandung, where MSMEs operate in highly customer-centric industries such as fashion, culinary, and creative sectors, business owners frequently engage in direct customer interactions. For example, MSMEs in the fashion industry that exhibit empathy toward customers by understanding their style preferences and offering personalized recommendations tend to have higher repeat purchases. Similarly, in the culinary sector, restaurant owners who can effectively manage emotions during peak hours—ensuring that staff remain calm and provide excellent service—are more likely to attract and retain loyal customers. Social skills also play a critical role in networking, with Bandung's MSMEs often collaborating through local business communities and creative hubs to expand their market reach. These findings suggest that emotional intelligence should be a strategic focus for MSME owners to enhance business performance. Prior studies emphasize that businesses with emotionally intelligent leaders are more resilient, as they can maintain strong relationships with employees, customers, and stakeholders even in crises (Maldonado and Márquez 2023). Additionally, social skills contribute to increased customer loyalty, as customers prefer to engage with businesses that provide emotionally engaging and personalized experiences (Tyrväinen, Karjaluoto, and Saarijärvi 2020). Given these insights, policymakers and business development programs should integrate emotional intelligence training into MSME development initiatives. Workshops on emotional intelligence, customer relationship management, and conflict resolution can help business owners improve their interpersonal skills and adaptability. Furthermore, business incubators and entrepreneurship programs in Bandung should emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership, ensuring that MSMEs can sustain long-term competitive advantages by fostering positive customer relationships and enhancing overall sales performance.

The effect of creativity on sales performance

The research findings show that creativity has a positive effect on the sales performance (SP) of MSMEs in Bandung. This finding suggests that MSMEs with higher levels of creativity—characterized by originality of ideas, problem-solving abilities, and flexibility in thinking—tend to experience greater sales performance improvements in increased customer numbers, sales volume, and customer satisfaction. The data indicates that MSMEs capable of offering unique and differentiated products are more successful in attracting customers, maintaining competitiveness, and fostering customer loyalty, ultimately driving higher sales growth. These findings align with self-determination theory and organizational innovation theory (OIT), which emphasizes that creativity is driven by domain-relevant skills, motivation, and creative thinking processes (Deci and Ryan 2000; Schumpeter 2021). Originality in MSME product design significantly influences consumer purchasing decisions, as unique and innovative products create strong differentiation in competitive markets (Santoso, Sudarmiatin, and Wardana 2023). Similarly, problem-solving skills are crucial for MSMEs in responding to customer demands and market challenges, ensuring sustainable business growth (Yani, Suparwata, and Hamka 2023). Additionally, flexibility in thinking allows businesses to quickly adapt to changing market dynamics, leading to greater resilience and improved sales outcomes (Sudirjo et al. 2023).

The positive effect of creativity on sales performance is primarily driven by its ability to enhance product differentiation, customer engagement, and market adaptability. In Bandung, where MSMEs operate in highly competitive fashion, culinary, and handicraft industries, creativity is a key competitive advantage. For instance, in Bandung's fashion sector, brands like "House of Jealoux" and "Bloods" have successfully utilized originality to create unique streetwear designs that appeal to young consumers, driving increased customer



demand and brand loyalty. In the culinary sector, MSMEs like "Sierra Café" and "Kopi Tuku" have leveraged creative menu innovations and aesthetic packaging to attract a broader customer base. During the pandemic, many MSMEs demonstrated flexibility by shifting their sales strategies to online platforms and digital marketing, ensuring business continuity and stability. These real-world examples illustrate how creativity increases customer satisfaction and long-term business success. The findings suggest that fostering creativity should be a strategic priority for MSMEs to enhance sales performance. Prior research emphasizes that creative enterprises are more likely to thrive in highly dynamic markets due to their ability to continuously innovate and adapt (Sutrisno et al. 2023). Furthermore, creativity-driven businesses often enjoy higher customer loyalty and stronger brand recognition, as consumers are more likely to engage with brands that offer unique and meaningful experiences (Wikansari et al. 2023). Given these insights, business development programs should integrate creativity-focused training for MSME owners, including workshops on innovative product design, creative problem-solving, and adaptive business strategies. Policymakers and entrepreneurship incubators in Bandung should also facilitate collaboration between MSMEs and local creative communities to encourage knowledge sharing and co-creation of innovative business solutions. MSMEs can sustain long-term competitive advantages by fostering creativity, driving customer engagement, and achieving sustainable sales growth in an increasingly competitive market.

The role of creativity in mediating the effect of job autonomy on sales performance

The research findings show that creativity (CR) can mediate the effect of job autonomy (JA) on sales performance (SP) of MSMEs in Bandung. This finding suggests that MSMEs that provide employees with greater autonomy—such as freedom in decision-making, time management, and independence in executing tasks—foster an environment conducive to creativity, enhancing sales performance. The findings show that autonomy enables employees and business owners to experiment with new ideas, improve product differentiation, and swiftly respond to market changes, ultimately driving higher sales volumes, customer acquisition, and customer satisfaction. The findings align with self-determination theory, which posits that autonomy fosters intrinsic motivation, leading to higher creativity and innovation (Deci and Ryan 2000). Job autonomy allows employees to think creatively without excessive managerial constraints, producing more original product innovations (Saputra, Jakfar, and Hakim 2024). Similarly, autonomy-driven creativity helps MSMEs quickly adapt to shifting consumer preferences, giving them a competitive advantage (Wisnujati, Marjuki, and Munir 2023). Individuals are granted freedom in their roles; they take more creative risks and develop novel solutions, contributing positively to business outcomes (Kottwitz et al. 2024).

The positive impact of job autonomy on sales performance via creativity stems from its ability to empower employees and business owners to make independent decisions, experiment with innovative approaches, and develop products that stand out in the market. In Bandung's MSME sector, particularly in fashion, culinary, and handicrafts—businesses that embrace autonomy-driven creativity tend to perform better. For example, brands like "Monstore" and "Jackhammer Co." in Bandung's creative industry grant their design teams complete creative freedom, resulting in unique product lines that differentiate them from competitors and drive higher consumer engagement. In the culinary sector, businesses such as "Sang Pisang" and "Roti Gempol" encourage their teams to experiment with new flavours and presentation styles, leading to viral marketing success and increased sales. The adaptability of these MSMEs to market trends and customer demands is a direct result of fostering creativity through job autonomy. These findings suggest that MSMEs should adopt policies that enhance job autonomy to stimulate creativity, thereby improving sales performance. High-autonomy environments facilitate creative problem-solving, making



businesses more innovative and resilient (Suhandiah et al. 2023). Furthermore, when employees have decision-making power, they are more engaged and productive, leading to better business outcomes (Kompaso and Sridevi 2010). The implications of these findings for MSMEs in Bandung are substantial. Policymakers and business development organizations should focus on training programs that educate MSME owners on the benefits of autonomy and creativity in business operations. Additionally, MSMEs can implement flexible work structures, delegate creative decision-making to employees, and encourage experimentation in product development to sustain innovation and sales growth. MSMEs can create a sustainable competitive advantage, ensuring long-term business success through enhanced creativity and improved sales performance by reinforcing job autonomy as a core management strategy.

The role of creativity in mediating the effect of innovation culture on sales performance

The research findings show that creativity (CR) can mediate the effect of innovation culture (IC) on the sales performance (SP) of MSMEs in Bandung. This finding suggests that MSMEs with a strong culture of innovation—characterized by a drive for innovation, management support for new ideas, and team collaboration—foster higher levels of creativity, directly contributing to increased sales performance. This research highlights that MSMEs that embrace an innovation culture are better equipped to develop unique and market-relevant products, differentiate themselves from competitors, and adapt to changing customer preferences, resulting in higher sales volumes, increased customer acquisition, and improved customer satisfaction. The findings align with the self-determination theory and creativity, emphasizing that intangible assets such as innovation culture and creativity are key drivers of competitive advantage (Amabile 1996; Ryan and Deci 2000). Innovation culture fosters an environment where employees are encouraged to explore new ideas and develop creative solutions, leading to improved business outcomes (Kundi et al. 2021). Similarly, Management support for creativity enhances employees' confidence and innovation capabilities, resulting in more innovative products and services (Lušňáková, Benda-Prokeínová, and Juríčková 2022). Empirical evidence also reinforces that team collaboration in innovative environments facilitates knowledge-sharing, leading to unexpected yet effective creative solutions that strengthen business performance (Paulus, Baruah, and Kenworthy 2018).

The positive effect of innovation culture on sales performance through creativity can be attributed to its ability to provide an environment that nurtures continuous idea generation, experimentation, and problem-solving. In the Bandung MSME sector—particularly in the creative, fashion, and culinary industries—businesses that cultivate a culture of innovation tend to achieve higher levels of differentiation and market penetration. For example, the Bandung-based fashion brand "House of Jealoux" thrives on an innovation-driven culture where management actively supports experimental designs and collaborative brainstorming sessions, resulting in unique collections that attract a loyal customer base. Similarly, culinary businesses such as "Sociolla Café" leverage a strong innovation culture by continuously experimenting with new menu concepts and presentation styles, enhancing customer experience and increasing repeat purchases. In these real-world cases, management support for innovation and team collaboration has led to developing products that resonate well with market trends and consumer expectations, ultimately improving sales performance. These findings suggest that MSMEs should adopt strategic measures to strengthen innovation culture to drive creativity and enhance sales performance. Workplaces promoting a culture of creativity and innovation see higher employee engagement and performance (Ghani et al. 2023). Furthermore, businesses that encourage employees to contribute innovative ideas benefit from increased adaptability to market changes, ensuring sustained growth (Sastradinata, Pratiwi, and Sulastri 2024). The implications for Bandung MSMEs are clear—



businesses can create a sustainable competitive advantage by fostering an innovation-driven environment through structured ideation processes, managerial encouragement, and collaborative teamwork. Policymakers and business development programs should train MSMEs on innovation management, team collaboration techniques, and creative problem-solving to maximize their market potential. Additionally, MSME owners can implement incentive programs that reward creativity, establish innovation workshops, and provide platforms for employees to propose new ideas, ensuring that innovation culture becomes ingrained in the organizational structure. MSMEs can continuously evolve with market trends, attract new customers, and sustain long-term business success through creative and differentiated offerings by reinforcing innovation culture as a key business strategy.

The role of creativity in mediating the effect of emotional intelligence on sales performance

The research findings show that creativity (CR) can mediate the effect of emotional intelligence on the sales performance of MSMEs in Bandung. Self-determination theory (SDT) suggests that emotional intelligence enhances intrinsic motivation, where individuals with strong emotional regulation exhibit higher levels of autonomy and competence in creative problem-solving (Ryan and Deci 2000). This aligns with organizational innovation theory (OIT), which states that a psychologically supportive organizational climate fosters creativity and innovation (Damanpour 1991). Moreover, the resource-based view (RBV) theory emphasizes that emotional intelligence and creativity are intangible strategic resources contributing to a firm's competitive advantage (Barney 1991). In MSMEs, business owners with high emotional intelligence, self-awareness, emotion management, empathy, and social skills—create an environment conducive to innovation, leading to unique product differentiation and enhanced customer satisfaction. This directly impacts sales growth, as creative product offerings attract a larger customer base and strengthen market positioning.

Self-awareness and emotion management, as key components of emotional intelligence, significantly influence creativity and innovation within MSMEs. SDT posits that self-awareness fosters autonomy, enabling business owners to explore new ideas without external constraints, while OIT highlights that innovation thrives in open and adaptive cultures. In Bandung, MSME owners who can regulate their emotions effectively remain resilient in high-pressure situations, allowing them to channel stress into productive creativity (Weinberger et al. 2018). RBV suggests that emotional resilience is a competitive advantage, as businesses with superior emotional regulation and problem-solving capabilities can sustain long-term growth. Empathy and social skills facilitate collaboration and customer-oriented innovation, essential for developing products that align with evolving market preferences (Kurtmollaiev, Lervik-Olsen, and Andreassen 2022). Many successful MSMEs in Bandung leverage these capabilities to cultivate strong relationships with employees and customers, fostering innovation that enhances customer experience and brand loyalty.

Creativity, derived from emotional intelligence, is the mediating mechanism linking emotional intelligence to improved sales performance. OIT underscores the role of creativity in driving market competitiveness, while RBV asserts that firms leveraging innovation as an internal capability achieve sustainable competitive advantage. MSMEs that integrate creativity into their business strategies expand their customer base and increase sales volume, as innovative products fulfil functional needs and deliver emotional value to consumers. In Bandung, businesses that prioritize emotional intelligence—through effective emotion management, empathetic leadership, and strong interpersonal skills—foster a culture of innovation that directly contributes to higher sales performance and long-term sustainability. By integrating SDT, OIT, and RBV perspectives, it is evident that emotional intelligence is a critical asset that enhances creativity, drives business innovation, and strengthens MSME sales performance in a competitive marketplace.



Conclusions

Based on this study, job autonomy, innovation culture, and emotional intelligence positively affect the sales performance of MSMEs in Bandung, with creativity as an important mediating variable. Job autonomy allows MSME owners and managers to make independent decisions, encouraging creativity in addressing business challenges. An innovation culture, supported by team collaboration and the management of new ideas, increases sales volume, customer numbers, and customer satisfaction. Additionally, emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, emotion management, and social skills, is crucial in fostering better relationships with customers and the team, ultimately positively affecting sales performance. Creativity is an essential mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between these three factors and sales performance, indicating that innovation and creative approaches can enhance business success.

The theoretical implications of this study are significant, as they contribute to the existing literature on MSME performance by integrating insights from multiple theoretical perspectives. The findings support the resource-based view (RBV) theory, highlighting the importance of intangible resources such as creativity and innovation culture in achieving a competitive advantage. Additionally, the study reinforces aspects of self-determination theory (SDT) and organizational innovation theory (OIT), particularly regarding job autonomy and its impact on intrinsic motivation and creativity. As discussed in this research, emotional intelligence aligns with theories of social capital and relational leadership, emphasizing the role of interpersonal skills in enhancing business performance. This study offers a multidimensional framework that can be used for future theoretical and empirical explorations by linking these theories to MSME sales performance.

This study has several limitations. First, the study focuses only on MSMEs in Bandung, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different business environments and market dynamics. Future research could expand the geographic scope to include other cities or rural areas to examine whether these relationships hold in different contexts. Second, the study relies on cross-sectional data, which captures relationships at a single point in time and does not allow for an analysis of long-term effects. Future research should consider a longitudinal approach to assess how job autonomy, innovation culture, and emotional intelligence influence sales performance over time. Third, while this study identifies creativity as a key mediating variable, other potential mediators, such as customer engagement, digitalization, or product quality, were not examined. Future studies could incorporate these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms driving MSMEs' sales performance.

MSME owners and managers in Bandung should consider several strategic steps to improve sales performance. First, provide employees with more autonomy in decision-making to foster creativity in problem-solving. Second, prioritize innovation management by offering training and strong managerial support to encourage the collaboration of new ideas. Third, emotional intelligence can be enhanced through training focused on developing social skills, emotion management, and empathy, as these will strengthen internal team relations and improve customer satisfaction. Implementing these strategies will positively impact sales performance, especially if creativity becomes the cornerstone of product and service innovation. This study offers a strong foundation for future research, particularly concerning the role of creativity in the MSME sector. Some areas that could be further explored include the influence of other factors, such as digitalization and technology, in enhancing creativity and sales performance. Additionally, future research could focus on comparing industries outside Bandung and expanding research variables to include customer engagement or product quality as other mediating factors. This study could also be extended to examine the long-term impact of job autonomy, innovation culture, and emotional intelligence on business



growth and employee satisfaction, creating a more holistic perspective on MSME management.

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