

Ecological Identity and Social Representation of Green MSMEs: Ergo-Iconic Value, Performativity, and Representational Resistance in the Platform Economy

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Abstract

Amid growing market demands for sustainability, several green micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia have begun to construct ecological identities through digital media as a strategy for value differentiation. However, these representational practices go beyond mere commercial promotion. They reflect a complex interplay between local values, global consumer expectations, and the algorithmic logic embedded within digital platforms. This study investigates how green MSME actors construct, negotiate, and perform social representations of sustainability in digital spaces. Employing an interpretive qualitative approach, the study adopts a multi-sited case study design. It uses visual-narrative analysis to examine digital campaign content from MSMEs engaged in plastic recycling, ecoprint textile production, and natural honey harvesting. Data were collected through online observation, digital document analysis, and limited narrative interviews, and analyzed through the theoretical lenses of social representation, ecological identity, performativity, and platform economy. The findings reveal three dominant patterns: (1) the symbolization of ergo-iconic value, combining tangible ecological practices with aesthetic visualizations as symbolic capital; (2) performative and algorithm-driven sustainability, where content is crafted to attract visibility within a competitive platform ecosystem; and (3) representational resistance, where certain MSMEs choose to highlight complex ecological processes that may not be “Instagrammable” but are instead educational and contextually grounded. The study concludes that the ecological identities of green MSMEs in Indonesia are shaped through representational labor that is symbolic, relational, and conditioned by structural asymmetries within the digital economy. These findings contribute to the fields of environmental communication, digital moral economies, and sustainability strategies in the context of the Global South.

Keywords:

Platform Economy; Ecological Identity; Ergo-Iconic Value; Social Representation; Indonesian Green MSMEs

Introduction

Over the past two decades, sustainability has evolved into a normative principle that has fundamentally reshaped the direction of global economic policy and market behavior. The push toward a green economy is evident in various transnational frameworks, such as the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019), net-zero

emissions commitments made by G20 countries (Climate Transparency, 2022), and the mainstreaming of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within global supply chains (United Nations, 2015). In parallel, a new form of consumerism, ethical consumerism, has emerged, encouraging consumers to consider sustainability, ethical production, and social justice when making purchasing decisions (Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2014; Holt, 2022). Within this context, sustainability is no longer merely a matter of technical practice; it has become integral to symbolic construction and brand identity. Consumers today evaluate products not only based on functionality and price but also on how those products embody ecological values deemed morally significant.

In developing countries, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play not only an economically vital role but also hold ecological potential in the transition toward a green economy. MSMEs are typically community-based, rely on local resources, and operate within informal production systems, allowing for the implementation of contextual and adaptive sustainability practices. Several studies have shown that environmentally friendly practices such as agroecological farming, organic waste recycling, and direct-to-consumer distribution have long been present in many areas of the Global South, despite often being undocumented in formal systems (UNCTAD, 2019; Barki, Comini, & Cunliffe, 2020).

Nevertheless, these contributions are frequently overlooked in modern market systems due to limitations in certification, technological access, and digital representational capacity. In the current digital economy, MSMEs are not only expected to adopt sustainable practices but also to articulate and symbolically express ecological values through online media. Sustainability representation has become a key component of competitiveness, particularly on platforms that prioritize visibility, narrative coherence, and performative engagement. In this setting, green MSMEs in developing countries should be understood not merely as economic actors, but also as symbolic agents who construct sustainability as a cultural identity within the logic of the platform economy (Srnicek, 2017).

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped how micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) construct their image and reach consumers. In the past, the identity of small businesses was often cultivated through local social networks, community-based reputation, and direct forms of promotion. However, with the emergence of digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and value-oriented e-commerce, MSMEs increasingly rely on visual branding and digital storytelling to represent ecological values, local authenticity, and sustainable practices (Ndiaye, Razak, Nagayev, & Ng, 2018). Social media has evolved beyond a marketing tool; it now functions as a symbolic arena where entrepreneurs build credibility, produce meaning, and negotiate consumer expectations.

According to van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018), this shift marks the integration of public space into the logic of the platform society, where visibility dynamics, algorithmic operations, and data capitalization shape who is deemed credible and “authentic.” For green MSMEs, values once embedded in lived practices, such as

compost use, local producer-consumer relationships, or ecological justice, must now be reformulated into visually engaging and shareable digital formats. Scholars have noted that in digital platform environments, sustainability is increasingly framed not as a set of production practices but as a performative narrative aligned with platform logic and brand strategy (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019; Carah & Shaul, 2016).

Research on ecological representation in digital economies has highlighted that sustainability no longer functions solely as a product attribute but has also become a symbolic construction mediated through visual, narrative, and emotional forms (Carfagna et al., 2014; Holt, 2022). Within this framework, sustainability is part of a curated brand image tailored to appeal to increasingly moralized markets, markets that evaluate products based on their ethical and ecological performance.

Despite these insights, much of the literature remains focused on large-scale corporate branding practices, offering limited attention to how small-scale entrepreneurs, particularly MSMEs in the Global South, translate sustainability values into socially and visually acceptable formats in digital environments. Meanwhile, studies on digital branding in MSMEs have predominantly emphasized technological adoption and promotional efficiency (Ndiaye et al., 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2021), without thoroughly engaging with the symbolic, cultural, and representational dimensions of these practices. This oversight is particularly notable given that green MSMEs targeting ethical export markets must not only sell products but also establish ecological credibility, articulate local identities, and negotiate global expectations through platform-driven aesthetics and visibility economies (Duffy, 2017; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). The absence of research that integrates ecological representation with a sociocultural analysis of MSMEs' digital practices constitutes a significant gap in current academic discourse.

Much of the existing literature on digital branding and sustainability remains anchored in normative approaches that focus predominantly on communication effectiveness, purchase intention, or market performance (Bhardwaj et al., 2023; Qayyum et al., 2023). While such approaches are helpful for quantitatively measuring consumer responses, they tend to overlook the social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of ecological representation. Green branding is often treated as a set of rational strategies that can be measured in linear terms. At the same time, the deeper meanings embedded in visualizations, narratives, and digital expressions are marginalized. As a result, critical aspects such as the politics of representation, disparities in visibility access, and the negotiation of local identities within digital spaces are frequently left unexamined.

In the context of green MSMEs in developing countries, however, the process of constructing ecological authenticity cannot be separated from the social dynamics in which such narratives are embedded. Digital representations of sustainability are not merely about transmitting information; they are also about who gets to speak, how stories are framed, and which values are deemed worthy of public display in a globalized media environment (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Couldry & Mejias, 2019). This necessitates an alternative analytical lens, one that can interrogate the structures of

meaning and power within sustainability branding, viewing it not only as a matter of communication efficiency but as a socially situated practice shaped by interests, positionalities, and symbolic relations.

Although research on sustainability, digital branding, and MSMEs is expanding, studies that explicitly examine the social meanings of ecological representation by Indonesian MSMEs remain scarce. Most domestic research has focused on the impact of technology on business performance or marketing strategies via social media platforms (Purnawan, 2024; Sari, 2022), without interrogating how ecological values are constructed, negotiated, and publicly displayed in symbolic forms within digital environments. In practice, however, MSME actors, particularly in the sustainable agriculture sector, frequently embed local narratives, cultural expressions, and specific visual performances to mediate their identity in response to global market expectations for “green” products.

Against this backdrop, the present study positions itself to critically examine the representational dimensions of digital branding among Indonesia’s green MSMEs. Rather than treating sustainability as a mere business attribute, the study conceptualizes it as a social field where ecological identity is constructed through digital media. By employing an interpretive qualitative approach and visual-narrative analysis of digital campaigns conducted by export-oriented MSMEs, this research seeks to understand how ecological symbols, such as farmer portraits, composting processes, organic certifications, and product traceability, are deployed both as instruments of authentication and as forms of identity articulation within a digitally mediated economy shaped by value commodification.

Green micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia operate within a complex landscape as they navigate the intersections of digital economies and global sustainability demands. On one hand, small-scale producers in the sustainable agriculture sector must respond to the growing expectations of export markets, particularly in Europe and Japan, which increasingly emphasize traceability, organic certification, and ethical consumption narratives (Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), 2021; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) Japan). On the other hand, the digital infrastructure gap between urban and rural areas presents significant challenges in terms of access to technology, digital literacy, and the capacity to construct credible online identities. As a result, many MSMEs that engage in substantively green practices struggle to visualize and communicate these values in digital formats that align with market expectations.

In this context, social media and online platforms play a pivotal role. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and ethical marketplaces provide relatively open representational spaces, allowing entrepreneurs to showcase production processes, narrate farmers’ stories, and highlight sustainability symbols such as composting practices or local certifications. However, platform logics are far from neutral; they encourage selective representation and the aestheticization of values, often requiring complex ecological narratives to be condensed into visually appealing, shareable, and easily consumable formats. Within this architecture, the digital branding practices of

Indonesian green MSMEs can be understood as a form of symbolic struggle, where entrepreneurs must articulate ecological authenticity within algorithmic systems engineered for the commodification of attention.

Across various regions in Indonesia, community-based organic farming initiatives have embraced digital platforms to articulate their ecological identities and promote sustainable practices. For instance, Tani Organik Merapi (TOM) in Sleman, Yogyakarta, established in 2008, utilizes social media channels to disseminate information on organic farming techniques, composting methods, and the daily lives of farmers. This digital engagement aims not only to market their products but also to foster a deeper connection with consumers by sharing authentic narratives that intertwine sustainability with local agrarian traditions (Organic Without Boundaries, 2021).

Such campaigns often integrate documentary-style visuals, storytelling, and transparency practices, including product traceability features, farm introductions, and community certification disclosures, in response to global consumer demands for clarity regarding origin and production processes. Despite operating at a scale far removed from that of large industrial players, these MSME actors demonstrate a high degree of representational capacity in communicating green values through digital channels. Their practices suggest that ecological branding in the Indonesian MSME context is not solely a matter of marketing, but also a social and symbolic articulation of ecological identity amidst market pressures and platform-driven logics.

This study adopts a sociological approach that views digital branding not merely as a promotional activity but as a practice of social representation. Drawing on Moscovici's (1984) theory of social representations, representation is understood not as a mirror of reality, but as a collectively constructed meaning-making process that enables individuals and groups to make sense of and organize their social world. In the context of green MSMEs, the digital visualization of sustainability can be seen as an effort to construct social representations of ecology, bridging locally grounded experiences with the normative and aesthetic expectations of global markets.

The dimension of identity is also central to this study. Ecological identity is understood as a relational construct between individuals or communities and sustainability value systems, expressed through everyday practices, narratives, and symbols (Clayton, 2003). In digital spaces, this identity becomes part of a strategically crafted performance aimed at building moral authority and public trust. Here, the relevance of performativity theory, as developed by Butler (1990) and Goffman (1959), becomes apparent: ecological identity is not essential or fixed, but instead performed, negotiated, and sustained through public social interactions, particularly via social media and online platforms.

However, this stage for performance is far from neutral. The logic of today's digital economy is shaped by what Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) term the "platform society" and what Srnicek (2017) describes as "platform capitalism," wherein social representations and identity performances must conform to algorithmic protocols,

viral aesthetics, and the commodification of attention. Within this environment, MSME actors are required not only to produce goods but also to produce meanings in formats compatible with the architecture of the global digital economy.

To conceptualize these dynamics, this study introduces the term *ergo-iconic value*: a form of socio-ecological value represented through visual or performative digital content that serves a dual function. First, it acts as a marker of ecological authenticity (*ergo* referring to actual labor or practice), and second, it operates as a symbolic icon that is recognizable, shareable, and consumable within the logic of social media platforms (*iconic*). The concept of ergo-iconic value captures how sustainability is mediated into a visual symbol that is operative in global markets while remaining rooted in the ecological labor of local communities.

Building upon this conceptual framework, the study is guided by two primary research questions: (1) How do green MSME actors in Indonesia construct social representations of sustainability in digital spaces? Moreover, (2) What symbolic elements are mobilized, and how is ecological meaning constructed within the context of the platform economy? These questions emerge from a notable gap in the literature, particularly the lack of critical inquiry into the social and performative dimensions of branding practices among MSMEs, especially within developing societies facing the pressures of globalization and algorithmic logic.

Overall, this study seeks to investigate the social construction of ecological identity among Indonesian green MSMEs in the context of digital media ecosystems. It examines the symbolic representational practices used in online campaigns, with a focus on how small-scale entrepreneurs articulate sustainability values in visual and narrative formats, and how these values are negotiated within the visibility-driven logic of digital media.

At the academic level, this research contributes to three fronts. First, it offers a sociological understanding of how small economic actors in the Global South digitally construct ecological identities. Second, it proposes a novel conceptual category, *ergo-iconic value*, which captures the performative and representational nature of ecological values in digital media. Third, it develops a critical framework for analyzing how sustainability is visualized and commodified within the architecture of the global platform economy. As such, this study is relevant not only to the fields of communication studies and economic sociology but also to broader efforts to strengthen Global South epistemologies in the study of representation and sustainability.

Literature Review

Social Representation and Digital Media

Serge Moscovici introduced the concept of social representation (1984), which emphasizes that representation is a collective process through which social groups construct, share, and naturalize meanings related to new objects within social life.

Rather than mirroring reality, representation actively shapes shared understanding and guides social practices. In the context of sustainability, social representations play a crucial role in how communities interpret, evaluate, and assign meaning to ecological actions, including those undertaken by small-scale entrepreneurs.

With the advent of digital transformation, the landscape of social representation has shifted dramatically. Social media has become more than a communication channel; it functions as a space for the articulation of identity and meaning, governed by algorithmic logic and symbolic power relations (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Representation no longer unfolds in symmetrical, face-to-face interactions but is mediated by digital platforms that dictate what becomes visible, what goes viral, and what is deemed symbolically legitimate. Within this framework, questions of *what* is being represented cannot be disentangled from *who* has the authority to represent, and *how* such representations gain public legitimacy (Banet-Weiser, 2012).

Framed within the notion of the platform society (Van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018), social representation must be understood within a technological ecosystem that shapes how values are processed, displayed, and evaluated in the public sphere. For instance, the sustainability efforts of green MSMEs are not evaluated solely based on ecological practices but also on how those practices are translated into visual and narrative forms that align with the aesthetic and performative expectations of platforms like Instagram and TikTok. This creates added pressure for small-scale producers to become not only makers of goods but also producers of symbols that are digitally recognizable and socially shareable.

Therefore, in the digital age, social representation constitutes a complex arena in which values, power, and technology intersect. It becomes a field where small economic actors such as MSMEs must navigate tensions between ecological authenticity and algorithmic aesthetics, between locally rooted narratives and globally shaped market expectations. This study places such issues at the center of its analysis, focusing on how the meanings of sustainability are socially constructed through symbolic representational practices in digital environments.

Ecological Identity and Sustainability Branding

Ecological identity refers to the emotional, cognitive, and moral connection between individuals or communities and the natural environment (Clayton, 2003). It is not a fixed attribute but rather a dynamic construct shaped through interaction with ecological landscapes, cultural values, and social practices that imbue human-environment relationships with meaning. In the context of green micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), ecological identity is reflected in choices related to production methods, the adoption of environmentally friendly technologies, and narratives that position sustainability as integral to the enterprise's self-conception.

In marketing practices, ecological identity is often commodified into branding elements, particularly in the form of green branding or eco-branding. These strategies are designed to signal alignment between business activities and environmental

commitments. Sustainability branding commonly employs visual cues such as organic labels, environmental certifications, and nature imagery to create positive perceptions of products and producers (Chen, 2010; Hartmann & Ibáñez, 2006). While such approaches may be practical in specific market contexts, they frequently emphasize normative and performative dimensions in superficial ways, often overlooking the deeper social and cultural complexities that shape ecological identity, particularly in the Global South.

The dominant literature on green marketing and brand sustainability remains primarily rooted in the experiences of the Global North and large corporations, which possess the resources to construct standardized and systematized sustainability narratives (Bhardwaj et al., 2023; Qayyum et al., 2023). This leaves a significant gap in understanding how small-scale entrepreneurs in developing countries, who face limited digital access, export market pressures, and locally embedded socio-ecological conditions, construct and digitally represent ecological identity. At the MSME level, ecological identity is often intimately tied to daily practices, community relationships, and local values that resist reduction to easily consumable labels or icons.

In this context, green branding must be understood not merely as a marketing strategy but as a form of identity articulation and social positioning. The digital representation of ecological identity should be read as an effort by MSME actors to navigate global structures through local narratives and to build legitimacy through recognizable sustainability symbols within the architecture of the platform economy. In other words, digital representation is not only about "selling environmentally friendly products" but also about shaping ecological meaning and asserting positionality within broader social relations, toward markets, local communities, and global digital infrastructures alike.

MSMEs, the Platform Economy, and Value Representation

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play a vital role in the transition toward a green economy, particularly in developing countries where they serve as the backbone of local economies and key actors in sustaining community-based ecological practices. In Indonesia, MSMEs significantly contribute to employment and local economic development. According to the 2023 Industrial Micro and Small Industry Profile, there were 4,181,128 micro and small industrial enterprises across the country, highlighting their substantial presence in the national economy (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). Despite this contribution, their role remains underrepresented in the global digital landscape, especially concerning the representation of sustainability values.

Digital transformation has compelled MSMEs to navigate the platform economy, an emerging economic ecosystem centered on digital infrastructures such as social media, online marketplaces, and web platforms governed by algorithmic logic, viral aesthetics, and the attention economy (Srnicek, 2017; Van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018). Within this context, ecological values cannot simply be enacted through real-life practices; they must also be repackaged into visual and narrative formats that conform to the logic of digital visibility. Representations of sustainability must be

“recognizable,” “shareable,” and “verifiable” within the symbolic framework preferred by both users and platforms, often materialized through imagery such as smiling farmers, composting processes, organic labels, or product traceability features.

This very act of simplification, however, introduces a representational dilemma. The visual elements featured in MSME digital campaigns often serve a dual symbolic function: affirming the ecological labor actually undertaken by producers while simultaneously presenting it in aesthetically appealing forms that meet the expectations of a digital audience. To conceptualize this tension, this study introduces the notion of *ergo-iconic value*, a form of socio-ecological value grounded in actual ecological practices (*ergo*) yet mediated and reconstructed into iconic visual formats (*iconic*) that satisfy the demands of the platform economy.

Ergo-iconic value is not merely communicative but also performative and political. It functions within a digital space that is far from neutral, where algorithmic structures dictate what appears on users’ feeds, and sustainability values are commodified into content that must generate engagement. In other words, ecological value in the platform era is not only about environmental truth but also about how much truth is packaged, represented, and negotiated to remain both competitive and digitally credible.

Current literature on green marketing and the platform economy has paid limited attention to the social and symbolic dimensions of value representation, particularly from the perspective of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in developing contexts. Much of the existing research emphasizes digital capability, marketing models, or technological adoption (Kraus et al., 2021), while neglecting how sustainability values are constructed, negotiated, and publicly displayed in symbolic forms within digital environments. This study, therefore, positions the concept of ergo-iconic value as a theoretical contribution that expands our understanding of how small-scale economic actors respond to representational pressures within global digital systems.

Research Methodology

Approach and Research Design

This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach to examine the social construction of sustainability representation by green micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia within the context of the digital economy. This approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of symbolic, narrative, and performative meanings embedded in visual practices and online communication. A multi-sited case study design was adopted to capture the diversity of representational strategies across distinct geographical and cultural settings.

Research Sites, Subjects, and Selection Criteria

The study focuses on four purposefully selected green MSMEs: Kizie Craft (Tangerang), Imago Raw Honey (Bogor), Yumana.Id (Cirebon), and Robries (Surabaya). Selection was based on the following criteria:

1. Engagement in sustainability-oriented and recycling-based production practices,
2. Consistent use of social media (Instagram/TikTok) to convey ecological narratives,
3. Presence of visual content explicitly containing sustainability symbols,
4. Accessibility of content within public digital spaces.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using the following methods:

- Online observation (virtual ethnography) of the MSMEs' official Instagram accounts during the observation period,
- Visual content analysis including images, videos (reels), captions, and public interactions on social media platforms,
- Visual documentation (e.g., screenshots and metadata of posts), systematically categorized based on representational themes.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using an interpretive visual-narrative approach in two stages:

1. Visual-narrative analysis (Banks, 2007; Rose, 2016) to interpret visual symbols, narrative structures, and performative strategies across content,
2. Deductive theoretical analysis based on four conceptual lenses: social representation (Moscovici), ecological identity (Clayton), performativity (Butler & Goffman), and the logic of the platform economy (Van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018; Srnicek, 2017).

Validity, Rigor, and Research Ethics

Interpretive validity was ensured through cross-checking visual data across posts and maintaining thematic consistency among selected MSMEs. All data were sourced from publicly accessible digital platforms and ethically analyzed in accordance with guidelines for internet-based research (Townsend & Wallace, 2016), with due respect for user privacy and content copyright.

Results and Discussion

This study identifies three primary patterns in the social representation of sustainability by Indonesian green MSMEs in digital spaces: (1) the symbolization of

ergo-iconic value; (2) the performativity of sustainability within algorithmic logic; and (3) representational strategies as adaptive responses to market expectations and structural limitations.

Symbolization of Ergo-Iconic Value

All MSMEs observed in this study exhibit a strong tendency to use visual elements and public narratives as primary tools for constructing an image of sustainability. Representation is not merely used to inform audiences about production processes; rather, it is strategically and symbolically crafted through aesthetic, communicative, and culturally resonant content.

A prominent example is Kizie Craft, a small enterprise based in Cibodas District, Tangerang City, founded by Wati Prihatinia Dewi. This business transforms household plastic waste into decorative flowers. In one Instagram reel, the process of ironing plastic using protective layers (e.g., parchment paper) and shaping it into colorful petals is shown. The visual aesthetic, natural lighting, a green background, and close-up shots of the artisan's hands create the impression that recycling is not only an ecological act but also an artisanal craft.

This narrative is reinforced by a post from the official @tangerangtv account (December 30, 2024), featuring Dewi with her floral creations under the headline, "Kizie Craft, MSME That Turns Plastic Waste Into Beautiful Flowers." The caption explains that the initiative was motivated by concern over Indonesia's plastic waste crisis, noting that the country is ranked as the second-largest producer of plastic waste globally, according to the World Economic Forum (see Figure 1). By leveraging community-based practices and local wisdom, Kizie Craft reframes waste as a source of ecological, cultural, and economic value.

In contrast, Imago Raw Honey, a honey producer based in Bogor, presents a different representational strategy. In a collaborative promotional post between @imagorawhoney and @kemenkop (August 10, 2024), the "Imago Detox Honey" product is showcased in premium glass packaging, surrounded by illustrations of herbal ingredients such as ginger, cinnamon, and lemon. The video includes a clip of the founder discussing export strategies and the importance of demonstrating that local products can compete with imported honey (see Figure 2).

Imago's visual strategy employs a modern and dynamic branding approach. Unlike Kizie Craft, the content does not show harvesting or manual packaging. Instead, it highlights the finished product's aesthetics, national pride, and global positioning. This reflects how sustainability and local values are repackaged into a visual language compatible with the promotional logic of digital markets and state-sponsored branding platforms.

Both cases, whether grounded in everyday ecological labor or export-oriented product aesthetics, illustrate how *ergo-iconic* value is constructed. It merges actual ecological

work (*ergo*) with representational symbols (*iconic*) to achieve digital visibility and market legitimacy.



Figure 1

Visual representation of Kizie Craft in a post by @tangerangtv (December 30, 2024). Wati Prihatinia Dewi is shown with her flower creations made from recycled plastic, accompanied by a headline emphasizing the transformation of waste into valuable craft. The narrative illustrates how community work is linked to environmental concerns while simultaneously generating economic value from local creativity.

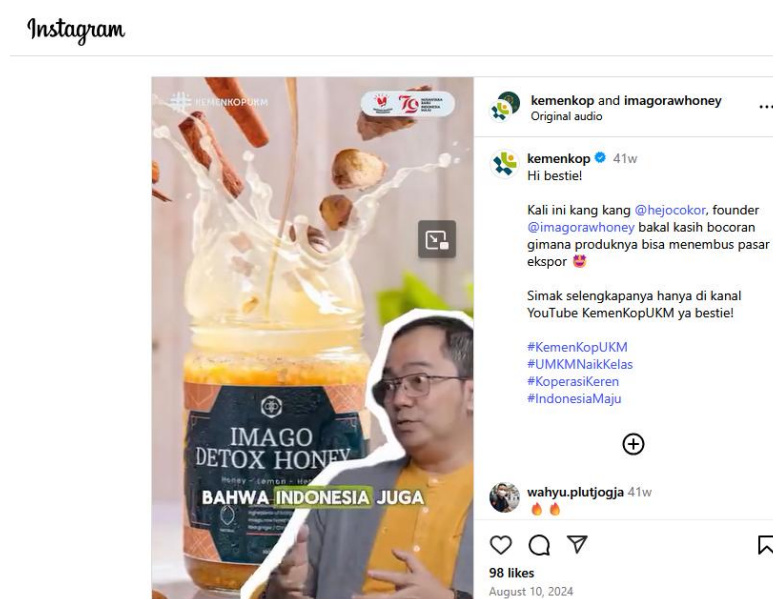


Figure 2

This is a visual representation of Imago Raw Honey in a collaborative post by @kemenkop and @imagorawhoney (August 10, 2024). The “Imago Detox Honey” product is presented in a modern promotional style that emphasizes natural ingredients and export quality. A video clip features the founder emphasizing the importance of bringing local products to international markets. This representation builds both ecological credibility and product nationalism through a symbolic visual strategy.

The representational practices of Kizie Craft and Imago Raw Honey exemplify the symbolic process of constructing *ergo-iconic* value, a form of sustainability representation grounded in real ecological labor but delivered through visual and narrative forms that operate effectively within the digital ecosystem.

Within the framework of the platform economy (Van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018), sustainability is not only enacted but also required to be *performed* in ways that make it visible and recognizable to both audiences and algorithms. Social media thus becomes both a space for articulation and a filter for meaning, where symbols such as flowers made from recycled plastic or detox honey labels signify the social values being advocated.

Drawing on social representation theory (Moscovici, 1984), these symbols contribute to the formation of collective meanings that are recognizable, shareable, and socially capitalized. From the perspective of performativity (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990), MSME actors appear not merely as producers of goods but as performers on a digital public stage who strategically construct ecological identity.

In this light, the symbolization of *ergo-iconic* value functions not only as a branding tool but as a socio-political act of representation, a means of articulating local sustainability values within a global economic landscape increasingly driven by narrative, aesthetics, and visibility.

Performative and Algorithmic: The Logic of Digital Representation

In the context of the digital economy, sustainability representation by MSMEs is not solely informative; it is also performative and algorithmic. This is exemplified by the practices of Yumana.Id, a Cirebon-based enterprise specializing in *wastra* (traditional fabric) production using *ecoprint* techniques and natural dyes. Through its official Instagram account (@yumana.id), Yumana consistently shares visual content showcasing the ecoprint process, from selecting leaves and flowers to arranging motifs and presenting the final textile products with natural aesthetic patterns.

One Instagram reel in particular features a step-by-step depiction of the ecoprint production process, including material selection, motif composition, and the final leaf-patterned fabric. The visual narrative is carefully composed, employing natural lighting, outdoor settings, and macro shots that emphasize the texture of the cloth and the vibrancy of plant-based pigments. This visual strategy demonstrates that sustainability practices are not only carried out but are also rendered visually compelling to engage audiences in the digital landscape. The content is explicitly designed to be visible and interactive, optimized for platform engagement metrics such as views, likes, and comments. This reflects how MSME actors integrate sustainability with digital performance, curating content for visibility and resonance within algorithm-driven media spaces.

Such strategies reveal that in the digital era, sustainability has evolved into a representational practice that must conform to the visibility logic of social media.

Green entrepreneurs like Yumana.Id function as performative actors who actively construct their ecological identities for global audiences within non-neutral digital infrastructures.

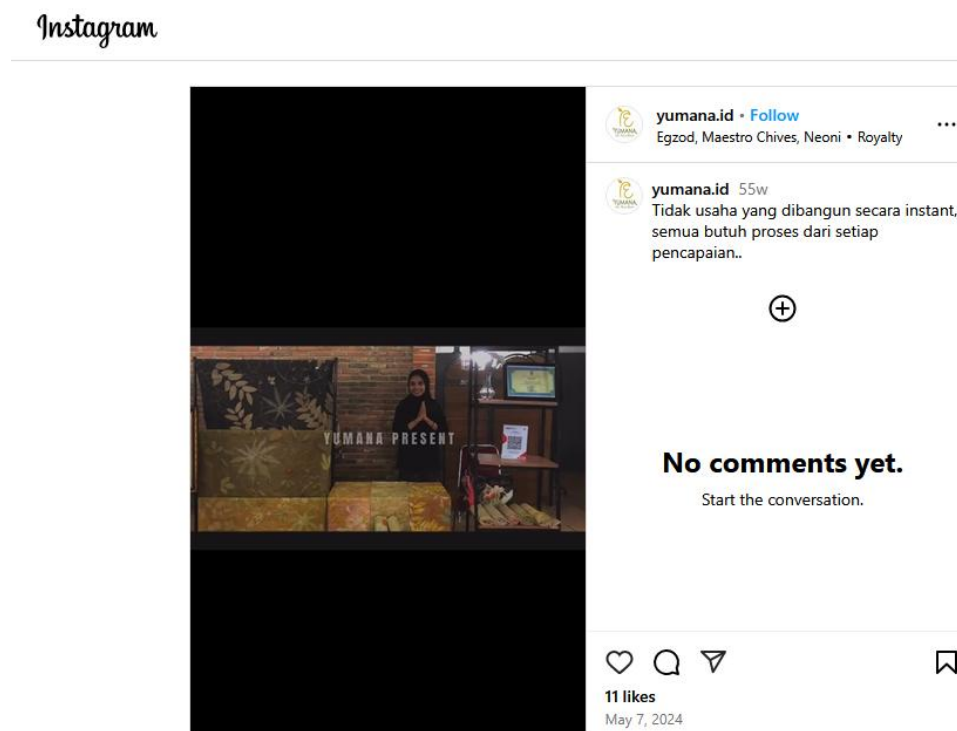


Figure 3

This is a visual representation of the eco print process by Yumana.Id, posted on Instagram (@yumana.id). The imagery presents the steps of creating fabric motifs using leaves and natural dyes, with an aesthetic that highlights harmony between production and the natural environment. The accompanying caption emphasizes the philosophy of sustainability and interconnectedness with nature embodied in each product.

The digital representation practices of Yumana.Id illustrate that within the platform economy, sustainability is not only enacted but also staged. Drawing on social representation theory (Moscovici, 1984), visual symbols such as leaf motifs on ecoprinted fabric are not mere illustrations, but articulations of shared values that online communities can collectively recognize. Furthermore, within a performativity framework (Goffman, 1959), green entrepreneurs appear as actors who construct ecological identity on a digital stage, crafting self-narratives that position them as agents of change rather than mere producers.

Thus, the case of Yumana.Id exemplifies a shift from sustainability as a production practice to sustainability as a representational performance shaped by algorithmic logic and platform aesthetics. In this context, sustainability becomes a curated act, one that is calibrated to meet both audience expectations and the mechanisms of digital media systems.

Adaptation, Resistance, and Representational Inequality

Within a digital landscape shaped by homogenized visual aesthetics and social media algorithms that prioritize virality, several MSMEs have adopted alternative approaches to sustainability representation. Robries, a Surabaya-based enterprise engaged in plastic recycling, exemplifies a practice that emphasizes educational and transformative processes over visually polished imagery.

Through its official Instagram account (@robries.id), Robries regularly shares content depicting the transformation of HDPE plastic bottle caps into furniture, solid boards, and waste bins. Their posts detail each stage of the recycling process, including collection, sorting, melting, and molding, using simple machinery. Unlike viral content that often relies on vibrant color palettes and emotionally charged narratives, Robries foregrounds material transformation as a form of ecological commitment and public education. Several posts include quantitative data, such as the kilograms of plastic used, alongside calls for public participation in recycling efforts.

One particular post features a blue-and-black recycled waste bin, accompanied by a caption explaining that approximately 22 kilograms of plastic waste were used to produce a single unit (see Figure 4). Rather than employing “Instagrammable” visuals, Robries emphasizes transparency of process, concrete metrics, and the material presence of recycled products as communicative tools for sustainability.

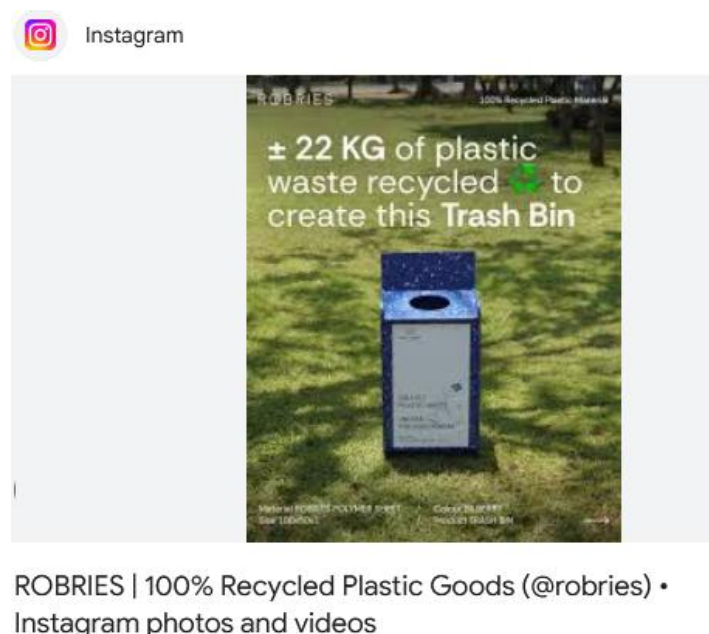


Figure 4

Visual representation of a recycled waste bin produced by Robries, as posted on @robries.id. The caption states that approximately 22 kilograms of HDPE plastic waste were used to manufacture one unit. The aesthetic is modest, set against a natural grass background, with emphasis on the quantitative impact of the recycling activity. The content highlights an

ecological practice rooted in material transformation, process visibility, and public education rather than polished visuals.

Robries' representational strategy reflects a form of symbolic resistance to the dominance of algorithmic visual logic. On social media, visibility is often constructed through a standardized aesthetic, which is clean, bright, and visually appealing. Robries, however, intentionally foregrounds ecological labor that is not necessarily "beautiful" but carries social and material significance.

Drawing on social representation theory (Moscovici, 1984), symbols such as plastic weight figures, melting machines, and fragmented bottle caps are not merely technical illustrations. They function as articulations of sustainability values that are recognizable within both online and offline communities. These visualizations emphasize sustainability as a verifiable collective process rather than a superficial brand image.

From the perspective of performativity (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990), Robries maintains its role as a public actor but deliberately avoids dramatized aesthetics in constructing its ecological identity. Rather than positioning itself as an "environmental hero" within an algorithmically filtered framework of ethical consumption, Robries adopts the stance of a material educator, foregrounding real processes, collective labor, and tangible outcomes as a form of legitimacy.

This approach aligns with critical perspectives on platform logic (Van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018; Couldry & Mejias, 2019), which highlight that digital representation often conforms to value systems dictated by visibility, engagement, and algorithmic legibility. In this context, Robries demonstrates that sustainability need not conform to a homogenized aesthetic. Instead, by presenting content that is rough, processual, and grounded in real ecological labor, Robries reclaims a space for authentic representation rooted in collective production values.

Conclusion

This study reveals that green micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia are not only economic actors but also agents of social representation, shaping narratives of sustainability within digital spaces. Three key patterns emerged in how these enterprises visualize ecological values: (1) the symbolization of *ergo-iconic* value, where material practices are transformed into visual and narrative symbols to build ecological credibility; (2) digital performativity, which illustrates how sustainability representation is conditioned by algorithmic logic and the aesthetics of social media visibility; and (3) resistance to dominant visual norms, as demonstrated by some MSMEs that foreground sustainability work which may not be visually appealing but instead emphasize its educational, collective, and material dimensions.

These findings support the argument that sustainability in the platform economy is not only a matter of production but also a representational practice that is curated,

negotiated, and contested within digital visual arenas. Enterprises such as Kizie Craft and Robries reframe ecological labor into artistic or educational narratives, while Yumana.Id and Imago Raw Honey adopt visibility strategies that are more aligned with the market-driven and algorithmic demands of digital platforms.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the scope of data is restricted to publicly available content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, potentially overlooking offline dynamics and communication strategies not captured in digital media. Second, the absence of direct interviews with MSME owners limits deeper insights into the motivations behind their representational choices.

Future research should consider methodological expansion by combining digital visual analysis with digital ethnography and in-depth interviews. Comparative studies across regions or sectors could also enrich the understanding of how ecological identity is constructed, negotiated, and received in different social, cultural, and economic contexts. Related inquiries could also investigate the role of state institutions, digital platforms, and support organizations in shaping, or even intervening in, the social representations of sustainability constructed by micro and small entrepreneurs.

In sum, this study contributes not only to the theoretical understanding of ecological symbolization within the digital economy but also to broader reflections on representational inequality, the transformative potential of localized green narratives, and the politics of visibility embedded in contemporary algorithmic infrastructures.

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