



Strengthening Ecoprint Batik Branding through Motif Identity and Storytelling: A Community Service Program at Zulfa Ecobay

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ABSTRACT

The competitiveness of creative Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) is increasingly influenced by their ability to develop distinctive product identities that communicate cultural values. However, many ecoprint batik MSMEs still market their products without unique motif identities, philosophical meanings, or storytelling, limiting their branding potential and product differentiation. This community service program aimed to strengthen the product identity of Zulfa Ecobay, an ecoprint and natural dye batik MSMEs in Jarum Village, Klaten Regency, Indonesia, through the identification of unique ecoprint motifs and the development of motif names and storytelling. The program employed participatory training and mentoring methods involving observation of existing motifs, identification of visual characteristics based on the composition of natural leaves, participatory discussions, motif naming, and the development of philosophical narratives. The program successfully identified three distinctive motif identities, namely Wening Alas, Sekar Bumi, and Wana Sasmita, each representing different visual characteristics, local wisdom, and environmental values. The development of motif identities and storytelling enhanced the partner's ability to communicate the cultural meanings embedded in each product while strengthening product differentiation and brand authenticity. The findings demonstrate that integrating motif identification with storytelling is an effective branding strategy for creative MSMEs because it enhances product value, strengthens emotional connections with consumers, and reinforces competitiveness through cultural identity and local biodiversity. This approach can serve as a sustainable empowerment model for creative enterprises seeking to integrate local cultural heritage into product branding.

Keywords: branding, ecoprint batik, storytelling, community service, MSMEs.

1. Introduction

Creative industries rooted in cultural heritage play a vital role in fostering economic growth, generating employment opportunities, and preserving local cultural values. In Indonesia, batik is one of the most significant creative industry subsectors, possessing both substantial economic value and cultural significance. Its global importance was formally recognized when UNESCO designated Indonesian batik as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. As public awareness of environmental issues continues to increase, the batik industry has evolved through the adoption of natural dyes and ecoprint techniques, producing environmentally friendly textiles that support the principles of sustainability. This transformation indicates that innovation in the batik industry is no longer limited to production processes but increasingly emphasizes the creation of added value through product identity as a means of enhancing market competitiveness (Isa et al., 2023; Kusumawardani et al., 2024; Harsanto et al., 2026).

Previous studies have shown that the competitiveness of MSMEs depends not only on product quality but also on their ability to establish authentic product identities. Such identities can be developed through distinctive motifs, meaningful motif names, and storytelling that effectively communicates the cultural significance embedded in each product. Products with clear identities supported by compelling cultural narratives are more easily recognized by consumers, enhance perceptions of authenticity, and generate added value that contributes to sustainable competitive advantage. Within cultural creative industries, motifs are no longer regarded merely as decorative elements but as representations of identity, history, and cultural values that distinguish one product from another (Harsanto et al., 2026; Wibowo et al., 2026).

The concept of heritage branding suggests that contemporary consumers purchase not only physical products but also the stories, meanings, and cultural identities associated with them (Mavilinda et al., 2023). Consequently, motif naming and the development of philosophical narratives or storytelling have become essential components of branding strategies for cultural products. By communicating the origins of a motif, its symbolic meaning, and its relationship with the local environment and cultural traditions, batik products can establish stronger emotional connections with consumers while enhancing perceptions of product quality and authenticity. Such an approach has proven effective in strengthening brand differentiation and improving the competitiveness of products in increasingly dynamic creative markets (Wibowo et al., 2026; Harsanto et al., 2026; Kuswati et al., 2021; Chinki et al., 2025).

One MSMEs with considerable potential in environmentally friendly batik production is Zulfa Ecobay, a producer of natural-dye batik and ecoprint textiles located in Kebonagung, Jarum Village, Bayat District, Klaten Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The enterprise utilizes various locally available leaves, including eucalyptus, castor (*Ricinus communis*), kenikir (*Cosmos caudatus*), teak, lanang, and birch, to create distinctive ecoprint motifs. Variations in leaf shape, size, texture, and arrangement generate unique visual patterns, ensuring that no two pieces of fabric are exactly alike. This rich local biodiversity serves as the primary source of inspiration for motif creation while offering opportunities to develop product identities rooted in local wisdom.

However, preliminary observations revealed that these distinctive visual characteristics had not yet been optimally utilized as part of the products' identities. Most motifs were marketed solely according to fabric color or product type without possessing distinctive motif names, philosophical meanings, or documented storytelling. As a

result, the products' differentiation potential had not been fully exploited to support branding strategies. In fact, systematic motif identification combined with meaningful motif naming and cultural storytelling can significantly increase product value while strengthening the competitiveness of creative MSMEs. Furthermore, documenting motif identities contributes to product promotion and supports the preservation of local cultural heritage (Wibowo et al., 2026).

Based on these conditions, this community service program focused on assisting Zulfa Ecobay in identifying unique ecoprint motifs and developing motif names and storytelling as a strategy to strengthen product branding. The program involved exploring the visual characteristics of existing motifs, identifying leaf compositions, developing motif names based on local philosophical values, and creating narratives that reflect the relationship between the motifs, the natural environment, and local culture. As a complementary output, the identified motif identities were documented in a motif catalog to support promotional activities, future product development, and brand identity.

This program is expected to ensure that each ecoprint motif embodies not only aesthetic value but also a strong cultural identity expressed through distinctive motif names and meaningful storytelling that enhances consumers' perceptions of product authenticity. Ultimately, strengthening product identity is expected to improve the branding capacity of Zulfa Ecobay, increase the competitiveness of its products in both national and international markets, and contribute to the preservation of local wisdom through the development of sustainable, culture-based creative industries (Harsanto et al., 2026).

2. Method

This community service program was conducted at Zulfa Ecobay, a MSMEs located in Kebonagung, Jarum Village, Bayat District,

Klaten Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The partner specializes in producing natural-dye batik and ecoprint textiles by utilizing various locally available leaves to create distinctive motifs on fabric. The program aimed to strengthen product identity through the identification of unique ecoprint motifs and the development of motif names and storytelling as a culture-based branding strategy.

The program employed a participatory approach combining training and mentoring. This approach was selected because it enhances both participants' knowledge and practical skills through collaborative learning, hands on practice, and continuous evaluation, thereby facilitating the effective implementation of the program outcomes in product development (Kolb, 2015; Knowles et al., 2020).

The training phase focused on improving the partner's understanding of the importance of motif identity as a key component of heritage branding for ecoprint batik products. The training materials covered the concepts of cultural product identity, the visual characteristics of ecoprint motifs, principles of motif naming, and the development of philosophical narratives and storytelling to communicate cultural values to consumers. The training was delivered through interactive lectures, group discussions, and case studies, enabling participants to develop a conceptual understanding of the relationship between motif identity and product competitiveness (Knowles et al., 2020).

The **mentoring phase** was conducted collaboratively between the community service team and the partner to develop the identity of each ecoprint motif. The process began with observations of the existing motifs and an inventory of the types of leaves used in the ecoprinting process. Each motif was then analyzed based on its visual characteristics, including leaf shape, size, texture, pattern, and composition. The results of this analysis served as the basis for selecting the most representative motifs to be developed into distinctive product identities.

The selected motifs were subsequently refined through a participatory process of motif naming based on their visual characteristics, philosophical meanings, and their relationship with the local environment and cultural values of Jarum Village. Storytelling narratives were then developed to explain the symbolic meaning of each motif, enabling the products to convey not only aesthetic appeal but also cultural identity that enhances product

value and strengthens branding. The entire mentoring process was conducted through participatory discussions to ensure that the resulting motif identities accurately reflected both the characteristics of the products and the local values upheld by the partner (Brinkerhoff, 2002).

The implementation stages of the community service program are summarized in Figure 1.

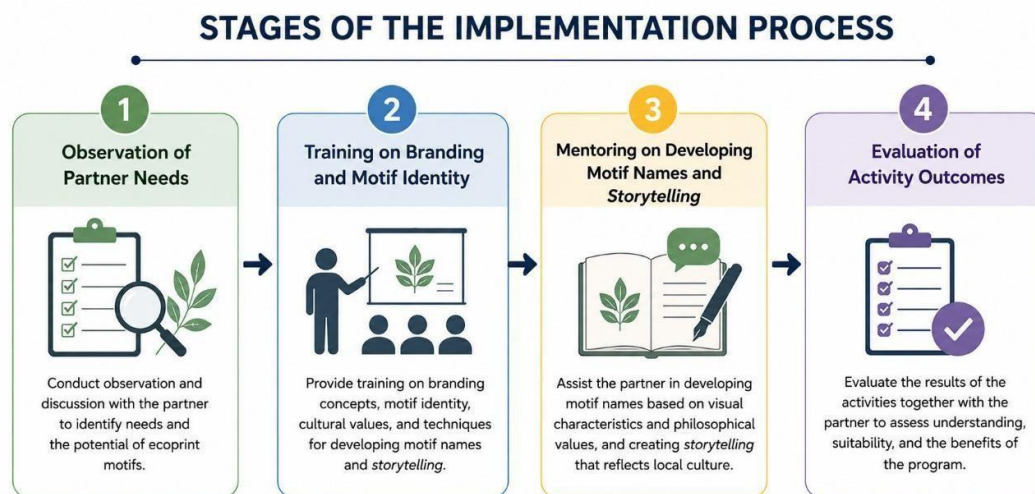


Figure 1. Community Service Program

The training and mentoring approach implemented in this community service program is expected to generate sustainable outcomes by enhancing the participants' knowledge and developing intellectual assets in the form of distinctive motif identities and storytelling. These outputs are intended to serve as strategic branding resources that strengthen the competitiveness and cultural identity of Zulfa Ecobay.

3. Results and Discussion

Identification of Unique Ecoprint Motifs

The The program began with an observation of the various ecoprint batik motifs produced by Zulfa Ecobay. The identification process revealed that all motifs were created using the leaf printing technique, in which natural leaves, including eucalyptus,

castor (*Ricinus communis*), kenikir (*Cosmos caudatus*), teak, lanang, and birch, were directly transferred onto fabric. Although each piece of fabric exhibited a unique pattern, most motifs had not been systematically documented, making it difficult to distinguish one product from another.

At this stage, the community service team worked collaboratively with the partner to inventory the leaf species used in the production process, identify the visual characteristics of each leaf, and examine motif compositions with the most distinctive features. This identification process generated several alternative motif compositions, from which the most representative designs were selected for further development as new product identities. This stage served as the foundation for product differentiation, as each motif possessed unique visual

characteristics determined by the shape, size, texture, arrangement, and composition of the natural leaves used. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that the rich local biodiversity of Jarum Village constitutes the primary source of inspiration for ecoprint motif creation and can therefore serve as a distinctive regional identity.

These findings are consistent with those of Kusumawardani et al. (2024), who argued that innovation in environmentally friendly batik production is determined not only by the use of natural materials but also by the ability to develop distinctive product characteristics that create sustainable competitive advantages.



Figure 2. Identification of unique ecoprint motifs

Development of Motif Names and Storytelling

The next stage of the community service program focused on developing motif identities through motif naming and storytelling. Prior to the implementation of the program, all ecoprint products produced by Zulfa Ecobay were marketed solely based on fabric type or color, without possessing distinctive identities that differentiated one product from another. Consequently, the unique characteristics of each motif were not effectively communicated to consumers, and the cultural values embedded in the motifs had not yet been incorporated into the product's branding strategy (Taha & Abdelfattah, 2023).

Through a participatory discussion process involving the community service team and the partner, each motif was analyzed based on its visual characteristics, the composition of the leaves used to create it, and the local cultural values to be represented. Based on this collaborative process, three new motif identities were developed: Wening Alas, Sekar Bumi, and Wana Sasmita. These names were carefully selected to reflect the distinctive visual characteristics of each motif while conveying philosophical meanings that foster emotional connections between the products and consumers (Mandung, 2024).



Figure 3. *Wening Alas Ecoprint Batik*

The name Wening Alas is derived from the Javanese words *wening*, meaning *serenity* or *inner peace*, and *alas*, meaning *forest*. This motif is created from a combination of eucalyptus and castor (*Ricinus communis*) leaves, producing a visual composition that evokes the tranquil and harmonious atmosphere of a forest. The eucalyptus leaf symbolizes tranquility, healing, and the ability to recover from adversity, while the castor leaf represents protection, strength, and resilience. Together, these two types of leaves convey the philosophy that true strength originates from inner peace and the ability to maintain harmony with nature. The motif encourages individuals to remain resilient in the face of change without losing their sense of calm and hope.

From a marketing perspective, Wening Alas offers strong emotional value. Consumers do not merely purchase a textile featuring botanical patterns; they also embrace a story of serenity, resilience, and harmonious living. This storytelling enhances the perceived authenticity of the product because the motif is inspired by the natural characteristics of locally sourced leaves rather than by purely decorative design elements. The cultural significance and sustainability values embedded in the motif serve as key differentiating factors, distinguishing it from conventional batik products that emphasize only visual aesthetics.



Figure 4. *Sekar Bumi Ecoprint Batik*

The Sekar Bumi motif is created from a combination of kenikir (*Cosmos caudatus*) and castor (*Ricinus communis*) leaves. The name Sekar Bumi, which literally means *the flower of the earth*, symbolizes the beauty of life that flourishes from nature and reflects the balance between gentleness and strength.

Kenikir leaves represent simplicity, sincerity, and inner peace. Their delicate shape conveys a sense of lightness and natural elegance. In contrast, castor leaves possess a bold and distinctive form, symbolizing courage, protection, and resilience in the face of change. The combination of these two botanical elements conveys the philosophy that true strength can coexist with gentleness and a deep sense of care for the surrounding environment.

From a branding perspective, the storytelling of Sekar Bumi positions the product as an ecoprint batik that embodies the values of harmony with nature and balanced living. This philosophical narrative appeals to consumers who appreciate sustainable products while seeking items with personal and cultural significance. Consequently, the motif functions not merely as a visual design element but also as a medium for communicating cultural values, thereby enhancing brand value, strengthening perceived authenticity, and fostering stronger emotional connections with consumers.



Figure 5. *Wana Sasmita Ecoprint Batik*

The name *Wana Sasmita* is derived from the Javanese words *wana*, meaning *forest*, and *sasmita*, meaning *sign* or *wisdom*. This motif is created from a combination of eucalyptus and kenikir (*Cosmos caudatus*) leaves, symbolizing the harmony of the forest ecosystem as a source of life. Eucalyptus leaves represent resilience, renewal, and the continuous spirit of growth, while kenikir leaves symbolize simplicity, sincerity, and balance in life. The combination of these botanical elements conveys the philosophy that humans are an inseparable part of nature and that sustainable living can only be achieved through a harmonious relationship between people and the environment (Otto et al., 2021; Barr et al., 2022).

From a branding perspective, *Wana Sasmita* embodies the concept of eco-cultural branding, integrating environmental sustainability with local cultural identity. Consumers not only acquire a fashion product made using natural dyes but also engage with a narrative that promotes environmental conservation and appreciation of local biodiversity. These values create a distinctive competitive advantage by appealing to modern consumers who increasingly consider sustainability, product authenticity, and social responsibility in their purchasing decisions (Mancher et al., 2023; Afzali & Kim, 2021).

Impact of the Community Service Program

Overall, the community service program made a significant contribution to strengthening the product identity of Zulfa Ecobay. Prior to the implementation of the program, the enterprise marketed its ecoprint batik products solely based on fabric type or color, without distinctive motif identities that could differentiate one product from another. Consequently, the uniqueness of the motifs derived from the composition of locally sourced leaves had not been fully utilized as a source of added value.

Through a series of training and mentoring activities, the partner successfully identified the visual characteristics of each ecoprint motif, developed motif names that reflected local philosophical values, and created storytelling narratives linking the motifs with cultural heritage and environmental sustainability. As a result, three distinctive motif identities; *Wening Alas*, *Sekar Bumi*, and *Wana Sasmita*, were developed, each possessing unique visual characteristics, philosophical meanings, and cultural narratives. These newly established identities not only strengthened product differentiation but also enhanced the partner's ability to communicate the cultural significance of its products to consumers.

From a marketing perspective, the development of motif names and storytelling generated substantial added value for Zulfa Ecobay's ecoprint products. Rather than being perceived merely as textiles featuring botanical patterns, the products are now positioned as cultural artifacts with distinctive stories, meanings, and identities (Umoren et al., 2022). This approach enhances brand authenticity, increases perceived value, and creates emotional connections with consumers, thereby improving the products' competitive position in an increasingly dynamic market (Suryana, 2024). These findings support the concept of heritage branding, which emphasizes cultural identity and product narratives as key sources of differentiation and competitive advantage within the creative industries (Harsanto et al., 2026).

Table 1. Changes in Partner Conditions Before and After the Community Service Program

Aspect	Before the Program	After the Program
Motif Identity	Products did not have distinctive motif names.	Three distinctive motif identities representing unique visual characteristics and local philosophical values were developed.
Storytelling	Not available.	Each motif was supported by documented philosophical meanings and cultural narratives.
Product Branding	Based primarily on the visual appearance of the products.	Based on motif identity, philosophical values, and storytelling.
Product Differentiation	Difficult to distinguish from similar products.	Products possess distinctive identities that are easily recognized by consumers.
Marketing Value	Emphasized the aesthetic appearance of the products.	Emphasizes cultural values, environmental sustainability, and emotional experiences for consumers.

4. Conclusion

This community service program successfully strengthened the product identity of Zulfa Ecobay, a creative MSMEs, through a training and mentoring approach focused on identifying unique ecoprint motifs and developing motif names and storytelling. The program demonstrated that each ecoprint motif possesses distinctive visual characteristics determined by the composition of natural leaves used in the production process, providing considerable potential for developing unique product identities.

Through a participatory process of motif identification and collaborative discussions, three distinctive motif identities; Wening Alas, Sekar Bumi, and Wana Sasmita, were successfully developed. Each motif is supported by its own philosophical meaning and cultural narrative, reflecting the relationship between local biodiversity, cultural values, and environmental sustainability. The development of motif names and storytelling added value to the products by not only strengthening their visual identities but also fostering emotional connections with consumers and enhancing perceptions of product authenticity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that motif identification and storytelling development constitute an effective strategy for strengthening the branding of creative MSMEs (Chinki et al., 2025). This approach

enhances product differentiation through the reinforcement of cultural identity, enabling ecoprint products to be perceived not merely as textile products but as cultural products with distinctive meanings, stories, and identities. Furthermore, this mentoring model offers a practical approach for empowering creative MSMEs to utilize local biodiversity as a source of product innovation while improving their competitive advantage.

As a follow-up, continuous mentoring is recommended to ensure that the developed motif identities and storytelling are effectively integrated into digital marketing strategies and promotional activities to support the growth and competitiveness of creative MSMEs (Praswati et al., 2024; Behzadi & Bakhtiary, 2023). Such efforts will enable the cultural values embedded in each motif to reach a broader audience while further strengthening Zulfa Ecobay's position as a producer of ecoprint batik rooted in local wisdom.

5. Allowance

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AI Disclosure Statement

The authors acknowledge the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, specifically ChatGPT, to assist with language refinement, paraphrasing, and improving manuscript clarity. The use of AI was limited to editorial

support and did not involve the generation of core research ideas, data analysis, original findings. All content has been carefully reviewed, revised, and validated by the authors to ensure its accuracy, originality, and academic integrity.

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