



Identity comfort as the primary driver of TikTok acceptance small business owners

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how Tiktok adoption functions as a process of self-concept among small-business owners. This research focused on communication identity as the elementary stage, suggesting that social media usage does not constitute a full digital transformation; rather, it is the integration of digital platforms into small-business owners' identities. This research constructed the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explain the subjective internalization of objective technological functions. This research applied a qualitative approach with NVivo 12 Pro analysis of 11 small-business owners in Bali. The study determined a new phrasing, "Socio-Technical Syncretizes," to show small-business owners who harmonize personal values with platform affordances. Findings revealed that "identity comfort" was a more significant driver of perceived usefulness than technical ease of use. By establishing identity alignment as a critical antecedent to technology acceptance, this research offered a novel theoretical synthesis that explained why some practitioners achieve digital sustainability while others resist. These results suggested that genuine digital inclusion required support systems that address the psychological and identity-based dimensions of technology, far from beyond simply technical training.

Keywords: *Communication Theory of Identity, Technology Acceptance Model, MSMEs, TikTok, Socio-Technical Syncretism, Identity Comfort.*

INTRODUCTION

TikTok TikTok has occurred as a leading platform, especially for digital promotional activities, creating opportunities for small-business owners to adapt. The self-negotiation among them, particularly for Digital Immigrants, is naturally adjusted to current conditions over time. Thus, small-business owners exhibit significant identity tension rather than merely a technical transition during the adoption process. On the other hand, recent literature tends to view social media integration through the lens of technical competence and functional ability (Jamshidi & Hussin, 2016; Ta & Lin, 2023), often ignoring the built-in psychological friction involved. Although studies have acknowledged the role of digital literacy (Wedi, 2025) and equitable access (Ter et al., 2025), there remains a gap in critical research, as existing models still need to be more

specifically developed to address emerging issues. The researchers argued that there is a mismatch between 'identity-technology' and the 'technology' itself, with the 'technology' itself serving as a missing link. While previous studies focus more on external factors of adoption (Zou et al., 2024), there is limited research on how the performative nature of TikTok conflicts with the established professional persona of digital immigrants. The researchers go beyond a functionalist perspective to investigate 'identity balance' as a key driver of digital sustainability by combining the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). This approach bridges the gap between early platform experimentation and long-term business integration through the lens of identity negotiation (Leatemala et al., 2023).

TikTok implementation as a means of supporting digital marketing development among small business owners is not only a technical transition but also heavily depends on individual self-concept and identity negotiation. Rogers (2003) explained that adoption is driven by perceived attributes such as relative advantage and compatibility, focusing on the innovation's characteristics rather than on adopters' internal identity tensions (Zulkifli, 2023). This study argues that for small business owners, compatibility is not only about functional fit but also about symbolic alignment with their professional persona (Ta & Lin, 2023). The research constructs the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), which investigates layers of self-concept that mediate technology acceptance (Y. Zhu et al., 2020). This theoretical framework highlights that identity gaps can enhance communication and integration among digital immigrant groups within the entrepreneurial context, ultimately improving their business success as they adapt to TikTok as a contemporary promotional tool (Wedi, 2025). Digital immigrant groups, often with migration backgrounds, face unique challenges when adjusting to a new digital environment different from their formative experiences (Ter et al., 2025). A lack of willingness to negotiate oneself can hinder an individual's ability to utilize platforms such as TikTok for business growth (Mannan et al., 2017; Zou et al., 2024).

Jung & Hecht (2004) stated that the gap constitutes the main theoretical framework, characterized by a mismatch in the construction of personal, relational, and community-based identities (Y. Zhu et al., 2020). In this study, the gap related to the realm of social media is examined, which significantly influences how small-business owners evaluate satisfaction and participate in entrepreneurial efforts (Jamshidi & Hussin, 2016). The researchers addressing the gap are crucial to understanding small-business owners' experiences, especially those in the digital immigrant generation. This investigation aims to navigate the complexities of the digital environment and achieve sustainable growth (Octasyva et al., 2022). Effective adaptation to platforms such as TikTok requires negotiating complex layers of identity to promote an inclusive digital economy (Leatemala et al., 2023). Furthermore, digital immigrant groups often experience high levels of technological stress due to the ever-changing demands of digitalization, thereby widening their communication identity gap (Verhoeven, 2024).

There are significant hindrances to small-business owners' success, including Interactions between identity gaps and technostress (Al-Dhaen et al., 2023). In this

study, technostress is conceptualized as a barrier to small-business owners' modern adaptation in managing digital technology, manifesting as anxiety, mental fatigue, and decreased self-efficacy when individuals perceive a mismatch between technological demands and their internal resources (Çakıroğlu et al., 2022). Both psychological and physiological pressure, often exacerbated by constant connectivity and the rapid digital evolution, require the implementation of tailored support systems to mitigate these stressors and foster adaptive resilience (Kurmanova et al., 2022; Putritamara et al., 2023). The conflict between users' personal identities and their digital personas can lead to reduced satisfaction with communication and psychological pressure when presenting themselves on platforms such as TikTok (Brites et al., 2024). Previous literature has widely employed various validation scales to assess psychological and social outcomes related to technology adoption across different contexts (Ohme & Ohme, 2019). However, there is a lack of continuing data on the long-term psychological effects of identity gaps among digital immigrant entrepreneurs (José et al., 2023). Current research has yet to sufficiently integrate communication identity theory with specific digital media use to drive business performance.

This study attempts to define the existing literature regarding the intersection between communication identity gaps and TikTok acceptance among small entrepreneurs who are digital immigrants. Moreover, addressing the unique challenges faced by digital immigrants may facilitate more effective use of TikTok, thereby promoting a more inclusive entrepreneurial environment. The rapid progression of digital transformation necessitates prompt scholarly attention to avert the exacerbation of the digital divide among marginalized groups (Chumo et al., 2023). Additionally, disruptions to conventional commerce caused by TikTok Shop compel SMEs to adapt their communication strategies swiftly to uphold brand trust (Joevin et al., 2025). This research dissects how technology acceptance is not merely a rational decision-making process based on utility, but rather an identity-negotiation process among small business owners in the digital era. In small enterprises, the decision to use TikTok is strongly influenced by internal perceptions of the platform. Moreover, Researchers see the opportunity for novelty as the State of the Art in this investigation, namely the acceptance of TikTok among small business owners, which is now understood through the integration of cognitive, affective, and identity management factors, where identity comfort is recognized as the main driver (Al-Khasawneh et al., 2022; Shin & Hecht, 2017).

One theoretical perspective to view is the communication theory of identity (CTI) by comprises four layers (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Littlejohn et al., 2017; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008; Seroka, 2019): personal, legal, relational, and communal. [1] The personal frame is an individual's self-concept or self-image. [2] Legal is an individual's performed or expressed identity. Relational. [3] Relational identity is that which is mutually negotiated between individuals. Relational frames emerge in four levels, showing the mutual construction of identity. Ascribed relational describes how individual identity is shaped by internalizing how others view you. Second are relationships formed with others, such as identifying as co-workers or roommates. Third, multiple relationships

exist simultaneously and in relation to each other. Fourth, relationships form units of identity. Finally, [4] The final of the four CTI frames is the communal frame, and this highlights identities held in common by groups with a shared collective history, such as religious, collegiate, or ethnic affiliations, or even belonging to a fandom.

This research dissects how technology acceptance is not merely a rational decision-making process based on utility within the context of small enterprises. However, it is shaped by internal perceptions of the platform. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding behavioral intentions through two primary constructs (Davis, 1989; Park & Kim, 2023): [1] Perceived Usefulness, defined as the individual users' subjective possibility that the use of a new information system or technology will improve their job performance within the organizational settings. The degree to which MSME owners believe that TikTok can enhance business performance and market reach. [2] Perceived Ease of Use is defined as the individual user's belief that using a particular information technology system will be effort-free. Referring to the technical simplicity of producing short-form video content, which serves as a critical determinant for the sustained use of the application (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017).

The researchers obtained data on the Level of MSME adoption across regions in Indonesia, with Bali ranking second after Java, as shown in Figure 1. In this dataset, the island of Java ranks highest with 49 points, while Bali and Nusa Tenggara rank second with 22 points each (Annur, 2022; Hidayat & Herian, 2025). The uniqueness of business actors in Bali with an entrepreneurial mindset is categorized into three parts: learning, spirituality, and development, which together form *Tri Hita Kirana*, a life philosophy (Suprpti et al., 2016). These business owners often establish partnerships and collaborations with the community. Msmes themselves are present to empower the community (Syaleha & Yasin, 2024). Previous explanations suggest that innovation acceptance in collective cultures is likely because social, cultural, and religious factors contribute to technology adoption (Hidayat & Herian, 2025).

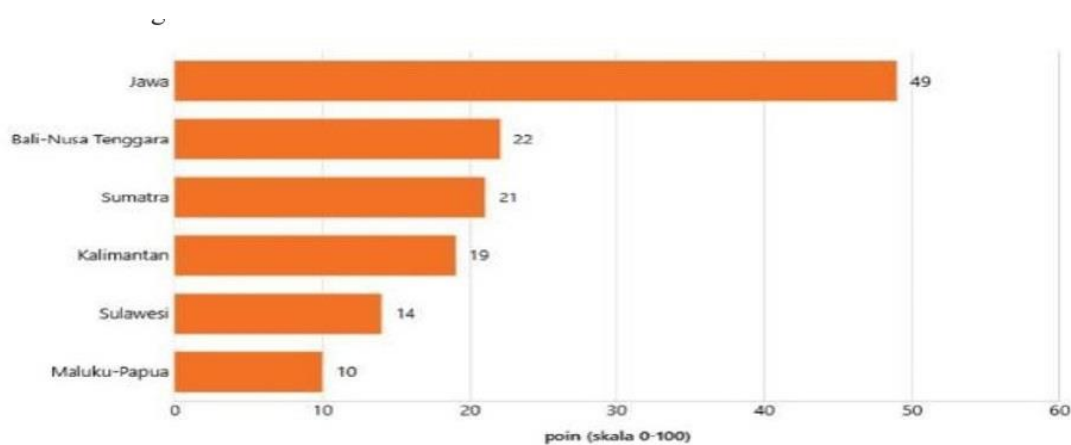


Figure 1. Level of digital adoption of MSMEs in Indonesia based on region(Hidayat & Herian, 2025)



METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to provide an in-depth exploration of the 'identity comfort' phenomenon, which is inherently subjective and process-oriented. This approach allows for the capture of nuanced psychological frictions and 'identity gaps' that standardized scales might overlook. To achieve a thorough understanding of these processes, a descriptive qualitative method was employed to examine the relationship between communication identity and technology acceptance. The main data collection involved Zoom video recordings and audio interviews, which were transcribed for detailed analysis. Additionally, the study involved interviews with 11 small business owners and TikTok users from Bali, specifically from the digital immigrant group (Generation X), who served as key informants, as shown in Table 1. In this context, an informant refers to Prensky (2001), who describes the digital immigrant generation, born between 1967 and 1980, also known as Generation X (Widiyanti & Pamungkas, 2025). Definitions of small businesses in this research align with Law No. 20 of 2008 on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises and Government Regulation No. 7 of 2021 on the Facilitation, Protection, and Empowerment of Cooperatives and MSMEs. According to these regulations, a small business is a productive economic entity that operates independently, owned or controlled by individuals, and is not part of a medium or large business. It has a business capital ranging from IDR 1 billion to IDR 5 billion (excluding land and building values) and annual sales of IDR 2 billion to IDR 15 billion.

Table 1 Informants' data

Informants	Initial	Borned	Bussiness	Informants	Initial	Borned	Bussiness
1 st	KWY	1975	Silver	7 th	UES	1972	Villa
2 nd	GKI	1977	Villa	8 th	FRY	1969	Exportir
3 rd	PYG	1980	Galery	9 th	ADS	1967	Spa
4 th	STP	1967	Spa	10 th	WKD	1967	Villa
5 th	PIN	1976	Spa	11 th	HKI	1975	Spa
6 th	KBL	1974	Galery				

Data analysis was executed using NVivo 12 Pro, a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) that facilitates rigorous data management and thematic exploration. The analytical process followed several structured stages (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013): [1] Data Management, the researchers begin by organizing data from interviews in order to access and process it in the software; [2] Idea Management; doing the process of coding to classify similar informants' answers into the same coding with the purpose of aligning Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), as the conceptual framework of the research; [3] Querying Data, the researchers used query feature to analyse and identify patterns efficiently; [4] Visualizing Data, the researchers use coding reference table to analyse the similar answer and coding in percentage. Moreover, the use of a word cloud to show the dominance of informants' answers classified through coding to support the result phase of this study. Cluster analysis, which shows relationships among codes, is used to support discussion analysis; lastly, [5] Reporting: the researcher integrates



the data by excerpting evidence and insights with study references to strengthen the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Coding Reference to All Unit Analysis

The researchers present data from two analysis units in the form of coding results generated using NVivo 12 Pro, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Coding Reference for All Unit Analysis

Codes	Number of coding references	Percentage
Layer 1. Personal Identity		
Nodes\\A1. Personal Identity\Growing Mindset	22	43%
Nodes\\A1. Personal Identity\Principled Realist	20	39%
Nodes\\A1. Personal Identity\High- Adaptability	9	18%
Total	51	100%
Layer 2. Enactment Identity		
Nodes\\A2. Enactment Identity\Value-Driven Actor	12	39%
Nodes\\A2. Enactment Identity\Standard Bearer	11	35%
Nodes\\A2. Enactment Identity\Collaborative	8	26%
Total	31	100%
Layer 3. Relational Identity		
Nodes\\A3. Relational Identity\Trust-Based Foundation	10	53%
Nodes\\A3. Relational Identity\Supportive	5	26%
Nodes\\A3. Relational Identity\The Trusted Advisor	4	21%
Total	19	100%
Layer 4. Communal Identity		
Nodes\\A4. Communal Identity\Socially Flexible	6	55%
Nodes\\A4. Communal Identity\Co-Opetition	4	36%
Nodes\\A4. Communal Identity\Low Communal Attachment	1	9%
Total	11	100%
Technology Acceptance Model		
Nodes\\B. Technology Acceptance Model\Perceived Usefulness	7	78%
Nodes\\B. Technology Acceptance Model\Perceived Ease of Use	2	22%
Total	9	100%

personal identity helps close “identity gaps” during technological shifts, where feeling like a “digital immigrant” might clash with the need to act as a “digital native.” Recent research emphasizes that such psychological resilience is crucial for entrepreneurs in the fast-changing digital environment, helping them maintain a stable professional image while rapidly upgrading their skills.

Findings indicate that the success of small business owners in using TikTok heavily depends on an internalized growth mindset within their communication identity, reflected in attitudes of consistency, optimism, and relationship-building. Participants view digital challenges not as obstacles but as opportunities to demonstrate professionalism and support, which are key to gaining trust on the TikTok platform (Pal et al., 2022). Optimism acts as a psychological driver, reducing resistance to complex new algorithms and helping entrepreneurs endure the steep learning curve (Zayadin et al., 2023). Additionally, efforts to connect with other entrepreneurs digitally strengthen their sense of community, ultimately increasing motivation to continue using the platform (Chumo et al., 2023). Therefore, a growth mindset is more than just a personal trait; it is a communication skill that affirms the self-efficacy of small-business owners in an ever-evolving digital world (Campbell et al., 2021).

Value-Driven Actor as in Enactment Identity Layer

In the second layer of CTI, enacted identity refers to how individuals express their identity through social interactions (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Seroka, 2019; Widiyanti & Pamungkas, 2025). Table 2 shows that most data fall into the Value-Driven Actors category, accounting for 39% of the total coding. It suggests that small business owners generally use TikTok to communicate their core values and ethics rather than just technical details (Putra et al., 2026). Small-Business owner has an opportunity to embrace technology to align digital content with their moral identity (Hannah et al., 2020). Value-driven Actors from among small-business owners create messages that emphasise transparency and authenticity, which in turn enhances consumer trust on social media (Wang et al., 2024). Consequently, small-business owners succeed on TikTok by acting as value-driven actors, fostering stronger relationships with their audiences (Daffah et al., 2024). Findings regarding role identity layers show that small business owners act as Value-Based Actors by actively demonstrating their internal principles (Thangavel & Chandra, 2024) through tangible actions on TikTok. The researchers analysed, in accordance with the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), the role layer, which emphasises that identity is not only something a person possesses but also something enacted or displayed through consistent communication with one’s core values.

Figure 4 shows that the concept of “anyone” within the relational identity context represents a universal ethical commitment that establishes a Trust-Based Foundation. In this framework, the self is characterized by unwavering integrity across all social interactions. According to the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), especially at the relational level, identity is jointly created and expressed through the “other-defined” perspective (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Seroka, 2019; Widiyanti & Pamungkas, 2025). The informant’s refusal to “change character for anyone” underscores a steadfast consistency between personal and relational identities answered:

4th Informant answered: “I demonstrate genuine hospitality toward others, and as a business owner, my honesty ensures that I never seek to disadvantage anyone.”

10th Informant answered: “I am just who I am; I don’t change my character for anyone.”

The researchers found that consistent honesty and openness act as behavioral anchors, reducing identity gaps and helping the authentic self-emerge across different social hierarchies among small-business owners. Studies on community communication indicate that such genuine authenticity is vital for maintaining social capital, as relational identity often provides credibility that surpasses individual achievements. In the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this trust-based relational identity is a key factor influencing Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU), especially in collectivist settings where perceived integrity influences technology adoption (Mensah et al., 2023). When one of the small-business owners consistently shows integrity toward everyone, they lower psychological barriers (González et al., 2021) and perceived risks (Gerlich, 2023) associated with new systems, as their social reliability serves as a safety heuristic for others. The researchers analyzed Balinese small-business owners’ digital transformation. Trust built by a genuinely honest business owner encourages community acceptance: if the owner is seen as trustworthy and firm, their endorsement of a platform or technology becomes more credible. Therefore, the term “anyone” symbolizes democratized trust that supports social influence within expanded TAM models, emphasizing that relational consistency is essential for sustained technological diffusion.

Socially Flexible in Communal Layer

In the fourth layer of CTI, communal identity illustrates how a group defines itself collectively through shared norms and cultural customs (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Seroka, 2019; Widiyanti & Pamungkas, 2025). Table 2 shows that the highest coding on this layer is “socially Flexible” that reveal 55 % from the total coding. This coding shows that small-business owners view themselves as part of a flexible community. Social flexibility enables small-business owners to adjust their business identities to evolving community trends while maintaining core values (Muchsin & Siswandari, 2020). The researchers analysed that this adaptability enables small-business owners to use language and content that mirror TikTok culture, thereby accelerating technological integration (Dolan et al., 2019). Ultimately, social agility diminishes cultural barriers

among small-business owners to the adoption of new technologies (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). The prominence of Socially Flexible coding at the community level highlights the importance of openness within the digital ecosystem. Figure 6 indicates that small business owners' adoption of TikTok, as indicated by the most dominant word, is "open." It is driven by a spirit of collaboration and transparency within its business community.



Figure 5. Word Cloud of Trust-Based Foundation

The emergence of the keyword "open" within the communal identity frame underscores a state of Socially Flexible enactment, in which identity is defined by collective permeability and shared evolutionary trajectories. According to the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), the communal frame represents how groups or networks define their collective self-concept (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Seroka, 2019; Widiyanti & Pamungkas, 2025). In this study, the informants' emphasis on being "open to everyone" and "sharing for mutual learning" was their answer:

5th Informant answered: "We are always open with our business partners regarding developments and future steps."

11th Informant answered: "I am very open to everyone, and we can share so we can all learn together."

The researcher analysed the fourth layer of CTI presence, "open," as a dominant word representing a social lubricant that reduces friction between business partners and fosters resilience adaptable to market shifts. Social identity research highlights that such flexibility characterizes "learning organizations," where collective identity is negotiated through dialogue and knowledge sharing (Paige et al., 2019). By co-developing future steps, small business owners shift from individualism (Oumlil & Balloun, 2017) to a unified, socially flexible (Awad & Martín-rojas, 2024) entity prioritizing collective progress over proprietary gains. Incorporating this into the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), an "open" outlook boosts Perceived Usefulness (PU) via "Social Influence" as a bandwagon effect (García & Pino, 2022). In such networks, adopting new technologies is a communal effort driven by shared learning (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024), reducing perceived complexity as mastery is distributed across the network. This open character of small-business owners accelerates the

diffusion of innovation among Indonesian MSMEs, where trust and shared experience often outweigh scepticism (Indiani et al., 2025).

A socially flexible identity acts as a catalyst for 'Behavioural Intention,' transforming technology into a shared utility vital for long-term sustainability. At the communal level, social flexibility influences success in TikTok use, as reflected in openness to partners and the community. According to CTI, group norms and collective memory shape identities, fostering social connection (Mutoni, 2025). Small-business owners' openness to sharing knowledge suggests they view digital exchange as adaptive rather than closed (Nambisan, 2016). This flexibility creates collective learning spaces that lower psychological barriers to adopting new tech (Wilson et al., 2023), while efforts to build digital inclusivity strengthen resilience amid competitive platforms (Awad & Martín-rojas, 2024).

Technology Acceptance Model

Table 2 explained that the intention of small business operators to utilize technology is driven by a Perceived Usefulness score of 78% comes from total coding, which reflects the extent to which they perceive that using a specific system will enhance their job performance (Davis, 1989; Ullah et al., 2021). In the current era of digitalization, this perception remains the most influential factor in the decision to continue using an application (Joshi et al., 2021). Researchers note that findings regarding entrepreneurs as the primary drivers of TikTok adoption substantiate the construct of Perceived Usefulness. When stakeholders describe this technology as "perfectly aligned" with their needs, it exemplifies a functional integration between professional identity and technological efficacy. The research findings demonstrate that TikTok adoption among small business owners as "entrepreneurs" is predominantly influenced by Perceived Usefulness, with entrepreneurs viewing the platform as a vital instrument for fulfilling their entrepreneurial roles, as depicted in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Word Cloud of Perceived Usefulness

Figure 6 illustrates that integrating social media into entrepreneurial workflows reflects a profound alignment between technological utility and the CTI, specifically within the enactment and communal layers. Informants conceptualize "Perceived Usefulness" not merely as a functional advantage but as a core component of their professional persona, where the adoption of digital tools serves as a communicative performance of being a "modern entrepreneur" (He & Harris, 2020), as shown in the informant's answer:

5th Informant answered: "The use of social media is perfectly aligned with the needs of an entrepreneur, as it plays a vital role in business growth."

9th Informant answered: "The use of social media is perfectly aligned with my needs as an entrepreneur, providing a significant impact on my business operations."

11th Informant answered: "What social media provides is sufficient to adapt to the current situation as an entrepreneur."

This alignment suggests that the utility of social media is validated when it resonates with the entrepreneur's internal self-concept and the external demands of the business environment, thereby bridging the gap between individual identity and collective digital expectations (Rahardja et al., 2022). Consequently, the technology is accepted not just for its operational efficiency but also for empowering the entrepreneur to navigate the "current situation" with legitimate professional standing in a digitized market. Furthermore, the informants' emphasis on "business growth" and "adaptation" underscores the evolution of TAM in the context of digital entrepreneurship, where the need for identity-driven resilience heightens perceived Usefulness. From a CTI perspective, the entrepreneur's identity is relational, so social media provides the communal frame needed to sustain business operations and growth through continuous interaction (Sha & Basri, 2026). When Informant 11 notes that social media is "sufficient to adapt," it indicates that the technology has been successfully internalized into the entrepreneur's identity layer, reducing the cognitive barrier to adoption. This synergy between perceived utility and identity enactment suggests that for MSMEs, the decision to use social media is a strategic affirmation of their entrepreneurial role within the broader digital ecosystem, ensuring both competitive relevance and communicative consistency

Relationship Between CTI and TAM

In this section, the researchers review the relationships between the largest coding in this study, as shown in Figure 8.

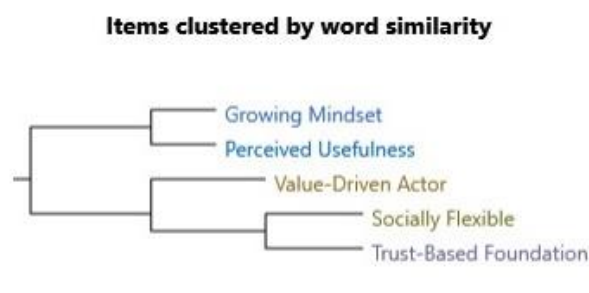


Figure 2. Cluster Analysis of the Relation among the Highest Coding

From the perspectives of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the relationship between growth mindset and perceived usefulness is a highly critical factor in the adoption of educational and professional technologies. A growth mindset, internalised as a personal identity within the CTI framework, reflects an individual's belief that their abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work, thereby directly shaping their cognitive

lens for evaluating an innovation (Joshi et al., 2021). The collaboration between the growing mindset, as part of personal identity in CTI, and perceived usefulness in TAM gives rise to the character of the Adaptive Tech-Optimizer, i.e., individuals who actively seek strategic value in technology to facilitate the development of self-capacity. This character represents a non-static self-identity, in which individuals view the utility of technology not merely as a work aid but as a catalyst for surpassing competence limitations. In the process of internalizing this identity, the belief that intelligence can be developed encourages users to explore features more deeply, thereby increasing their perception of the system's usefulness (Al-Dhaen et al., 2023).

This impact fosters proactive innovation, viewing technical barriers as learning opportunities to improve long-term technology use. It aligns self-perception with pragmatic tech assessment, thereby speeding adoption in professional settings (Lund et al., 2020). The interplay between Trust-Based Foundation and Socially Flexible identities cultivates Collaborative Agility, enabling deep trust and adaptability across social groups. This trait balances relationship stability with flexibility in the face of evolving norms. When linked to a Value-Driven Actor identity, it leads to actions aligned with moral principles, even under stress (Chan & Zhou, 2023).

This enactment process ensures that flexible behaviour and trust are not merely social conformity, but rather a communicative strategy guided by strong internal values to achieve organisational or community goals. The integration of these three layers ultimately results in an authentic yet functional communication pattern within a multicultural, complex environment. Value-driven actor meets collaborative agility to rise as a purpose adaptor. Researchers see an opportunity for novelty in a character by examining the synergy between the Adaptive Tech-Optimizer and purpose-adaptor characters, which will give rise to a novel character, namely the Social-Technical Syncretist, a hybrid identity capable of simultaneously harmonising technical feature optimisation with social navigation flexibility, as seen in Figure 9. This character is a manifestation of individuals who not only view the TikTok algorithm as a pragmatic content distribution tool but also as a space for identity contestation that demands highly fluid relational adaptation skills.

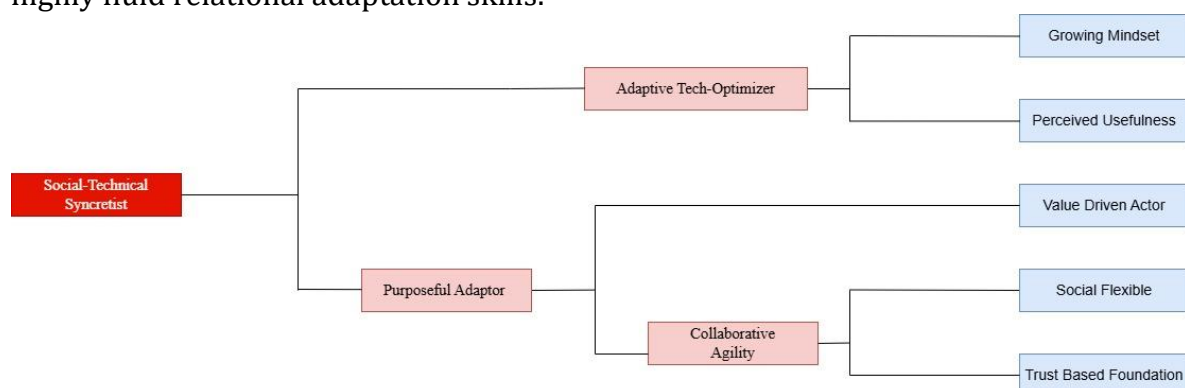


Figure 3. Research Finding

This integration supports technology acceptance because Social-Technical Syncretists have a low resistance threshold to changes in social media features, as

digital immigrant entrepreneurs who view system updates as opportunities to expand their social capital through creative collaboration. On TikTok, this character is reflected in users' ability to exploit video transition trends to build trust within ephemeral digital communities. Therefore, Social-Technical Syncretists are strong predictors of technology usage intensity because they can transform technical utility into sustainable social acceptance. Moreover, TikTok has rapidly emerged as a popular social media platform, offering an innovative portal for information discovery. In Indonesia, its popularity has grown significantly, making it widely recognised among users (Situmeang & Purwatiningsih, 2025).

The emergence of the "Social-Technical Syncretist" profile confirms that technology acceptance among small-business owners in the digital immigrant group is not merely a matter of technical ease but is deeply rooted in the alignment of innovativeness and personal performance (Octasyilva et al., 2022). The researchers reinforce the notion that when small-business owners possess a growth mindset, they are more likely to perceive digital transformation as a manageable evolution rather than a disruptive threat (Campbell et al., 2021). Figure 9 indicates that the connection between the highest percentage coding in cluster analysis and small-business owners' internal identity negotiation is inextricably linked, suggesting that identity comfort acts as a psychological anchor for sustained digital activity (Horst et al., 2020). Our cluster analysis (see Figure 9) indicates that consistency in content creation is inextricably These findings provide empirical support for the expansion of traditional acceptance models by including "identity layers" as critical precursors to perceived usefulness (Park & Kim, 2023).

Furthermore, small-business owners' adaptation to TikTok is driven by their capacity for "syncretism"—the blending of traditional business values with modern performative demands in society (Brites et al., 2024). The researchers point out that it aligns with previous research stating digital transformation models that transformation models must account for the cultural and social nuances of the adopter's environment and it aligns with previous research stating that digital transformation models must account for the cultural and social nuances of the adopter's environment (Nambisan, 2016). These small-business owners transform TikTok from a mere promotional tool into a space for authentic relational expression by successfully navigating identity gaps (Ding, 2024). Ultimately, this investigation confirms that digital sustainability is achieved when technology is viewed not only as an external entity but also as a seamless extension of the entrepreneur's professional persona.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that social media use among MSME entrepreneurs goes beyond mere functionality and becomes a complex process of identity negotiation, which we call "Socio-Technical Syncretism." The results integrate the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), showing that Perceived Usefulness (PU) primarily depends on the extent to which an entrepreneur's self-



image aligns with the platform's technical features. By introducing the term "Social-Technical Syncretists," this research offers a new perspective in which technological acceptance is seen as a way of expressing professional identity, rather than merely a rational choice. The findings suggest that for digital immigrants in the MSME sector, successful digital transformation relies more on "identity comfort" within the platform's environment than on ease of use, making identity alignment a key, often overlooked, factor in the technology adoption process.

Despite these contributions, this research possesses certain limitations that present opportunities for future scholarly exploration. The qualitative approach of this study, while providing comprehensive idiographic insights into 11 MSME owners, restricts the statistical generalizability of the Socio-Technical Syncretists typology to broader demographic populations. Future research should adopt longitudinal or quantitative methodologies to substantiate the "identity comfort" concept and investigate its capacity to forecast long-term resilience in digital business. Furthermore, subsequent studies could analyze how varying cultural contexts—particularly the tension between individualistic and collectivist identity layers—affect the process of syncretization on other emerging short-video platforms. Building on these findings, scholars are encouraged to explore the influence of "innovation influencers" within community networks to deepen understanding of how entrepreneurial identity evolves in the increasingly volatile digital economy.

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