

Curation, Value, and Cultural Identity of Independent Bookstores in Yogyakarta: A Bourdieusian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Research Objective. *This study examines how bookstore owners' tastes and values shape the cultural identities of independent bookstores in Yogyakarta. Using Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, and field, this study understands independent bookstores not merely as commercial spaces but as curatorial spaces where books, ideas, and cultural meanings are selected, displayed, and legitimized. This study aims to extend Bourdieu's theoretical framework to the everyday curatorial practices of independent bookstore owners in Yogyakarta, a context rarely examined through this lens, thereby illuminating how taste and value are actively enacted, not merely inherited, in the construction of cultural identity.* **Research Method.** *This study employed a qualitative approach with a constructivist perspective. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Informants were selected purposively from six independent bookstores in Yogyakarta and one mainstream bookstore as a point of comparison.* **Data Analysis.** *Data were analyzed using Miles et al.'s (2014) model, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis focused on collection curation, owners' tastes, bookstore values, reader relations, and cultural identity.* **Results.** *The findings show that owners' tastes determine the direction of collection, while values define the selection boundaries. Each bookstore constructs identity through different curatorial orientations, such as literature, advocacy, progressive values, access to reading, archives, small publishers, and community spaces.* **Conclusions.** *Independent bookstores in Yogyakarta serve as cultural actors, converting cultural and social capital into symbolic capital through curation, reputation, trust, and reader recognition.*

Keywords: Independent Bookstores; Curation; Cultural Identity; Bourdieu; Yogyakarta

A. INTRODUCTION

Independent bookstores should not be understood merely as commercial sites for selling books. Through curatorial practices, independent bookstores select, display, and recommend books based on particular tastes, values, and cultural orientations. These practices position independent bookstores not only as channels of distribution, but also as cultural actors that shape readers' tastes and cultural identities within the literary and bookselling ecosystem (Noël, 2018; Steiner, 2017). In various contexts, independent bookstores also serve as broader cultural spaces. A study of independent bookstores in Kuwait shows that bookstores can function as cultural centers that cultivate reading communities,

foster an educated middle-class readership, and combine art and commerce within intimate spaces (Kaposi & Al-Shammari, 2021). Thus, independent bookstores do not merely reflect particular cultural identities; they also help shape them through collection choices, spatial atmosphere, and social relations with readers.

The strength of independent bookstores often lies in curation. Curation does not simply refer to selecting books for sale, but also to determining which books are considered important, which publishers are given space, which authors are introduced, and what kinds of discourse are circulated to readers. Luyt & Heok (2015) show that independent bookstores can build specialization, create a sense of belonging, and develop closer relationships with readers. Laing (2020) also views independent bookstores as centers of activity, community safe spaces, sites that sustain literacy practices, and spaces that maintain emotional ties with reading communities.

Discussions of curation, taste, value, and the identity of independent bookstores can be strengthened by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Bourdieu (1977) explains that social practice is formed through the relationship between habitus, field, and capital. In the context of independent bookstores, the habitus of owners is reflected in how they select books, shape collections, arrange space, build conversations with readers, and formulate the store's position within the bookselling ecosystem. Therefore, curation cannot be understood as a neutral technical activity, but rather as a social practice shaped by owners' experiences, knowledge, and cultural positions.

Taste is an important element in this curatorial practice. Bourdieu (1986) explains that taste is not entirely individual or neutral, but is shaped by social experience, education, social position, and the accumulation of cultural capital. Therefore, the collection choices of independent bookstores can be read as the materialization of taste within the bookstore space. Books that are selected, displayed, recommended, or even excluded are part of how owners assert the bookstore's cultural position.

In addition to habitus and taste, the concept of capital is also important for understanding independent bookstores. Bourdieu (1986) explains that capital is not only economic, but also cultural, social, and symbolic. In the context of independent bookstores, limited economic capital can be offset by cultural capital in the form of literary knowledge, curatorial ability, familiarity with publishers, and an understanding of readers' needs. Social capital appears through networks with communities, independent publishers, writers, academics, students, and regular readers, while symbolic capital emerges through reputation as an alternative, intellectual, or trusted literary space.

The values held by owners also play a role in shaping the identity of independent bookstores. These values are visible in curatorial decisions: which books are selected, which books are not given space, which publishers are supported, and what ideas are circulated. In the field of cultural production, Bourdieu (1993) explains that cultural actors take positions through aesthetic, symbolic, and cultural choices. In the context of independent bookstores, the decision to sell literature, alternative books, small-press publications, history,

philosophy, feminism, ecology, or socio-political works can be understood as a form of position-taking within the field of bookselling.

Yogyakarta's long-standing identity as Indonesia's 'Student City' (Kota Pelajar) offers a plausible explanation for the density and vitality of its independent bookstore scene. The concentration of public and private universities in the city has historically attracted students from across the archipelago, positioning Yogyakarta as both an educational and cultural hub (Pharmacytha & Nayati, 2024). This sizeable population of young, educated readers has provided fertile ground for community-driven, low-capital bookstores that often originate from owners' personal book-collecting habits rather than commercial ambition. In recent years, this local ecosystem has further been shaped by a trend in which bookstores increasingly combine literary curation with café-style, aesthetically designed spaces, transforming from sites of mere book distribution into broader literacy spaces frequented by students and the wider public (Syahwalani, 2026). This distinct local trajectory, rooted in student culture, community initiative, and social media visibility, further underscores the relevance of examining how Yogyakarta's independent bookstore owners construct cultural identity through their curatorial practices. Social relations further strengthen the formation of this identity. Mahdi (2026) states that shared personal values can foster an environment for the dissemination of information through social interaction. Thus, independent bookstores not only shape collections but also create spaces for conversation, recommendation, and reading communities. Initial observations of independent bookstores in Yogyakarta show that each bookstore has a different curatorial character. Some emphasize literature and alternative reading materials, while others give more space to social issues, history, philosophy, gender, agrarian issues, archives, music, or books from small publishers.

While independent bookstores have received growing scholarly attention internationally, particularly regarding reader communities, curatorial specialization, and cultural mediation (Kaposi & Al-Shammari, 2021; Luyt & Heok, 2015), research on independent bookstores in the Indonesian context remains very limited. To the researcher's knowledge, no prior study has examined independent bookstores in Indonesia, let alone through Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus, capital, and field, to understand how owners' taste and values shape bookstore identity. Most existing discussions of independent bookstores in Indonesia, including those in Yogyakarta, tend to be journalistic or descriptive rather than peer-reviewed academic research grounded in cultural theory. This study, therefore, fills that gap by offering an empirically grounded, theoretically informed account of how curatorial practice constructs cultural identity within Indonesia's independent bookstore ecosystem, particularly in Yogyakarta.

Based on this background, this study asks: How do bookstore owners' tastes and values shape the cultural identities of independent bookstores in Yogyakarta? This study contributes to interdisciplinary research at the intersection of library and information science, cultural studies, and book industry studies, particularly by understanding independent bookstores as curatorial spaces that shape taste, value, and cultural identity. Given that taste, values, and identity in this study are constructed through the subjective meanings embedded in owners' everyday

curatorial practices, a qualitative approach grounded in a constructivist perspective offers the most robust lens for capturing how these meanings are interpreted and enacted by the actors themselves. This study, therefore, adopts this approach to explore the lived experiences and interpretive processes by which bookstore owners construct their stores' cultural identity, allowing the context-bound realities of curatorial practice to emerge from the informants' own perspectives.

B. METHODS

(1) Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative approach with a constructivist perspective to understand how independent bookstores in Yogyakarta construct their cultural identities through curatorial practices, values, and everyday cultural activities. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on the subjective meanings, experiences, and practices of bookstore owners in selecting books, organizing collections, building recommendations, and shaping the character of their bookstores (Connaway & Powell, 2010; della Porta 2014) In this study, curation is not treated merely as a technical activity of selecting books, but as a cultural practice shaped by owners' tastes, values, knowledge, and positions within the bookselling ecosystem. Therefore, the research examines how owners interpret their curatorial choices, define bookstore values, and represent those values through collections, spatial arrangements, events, and interactions with readers.

(2) Data Collection

The data in this study were collected between December 2025 and February 2026 through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the experiences, interpretations, and values of bookstore managers, particularly regarding curatorial choices, value boundaries, and the formation of bookstore identity. This interview format allows the researcher to follow prepared themes while remaining open to new information that emerges during the fieldwork (Rachmawati, 2007; Walidin et al., 2020).

Informants were purposively selected because the study required participants with direct knowledge of curatorial practices and bookstore identity formation. The informants were owners, founders, or owners involved in selecting collections, arranging spaces, developing programs, and building relationships with readers or communities (Patton, 2015). This study involved seven bookstores in Yogyakarta: Jual Buku Sastra (JBS), Buku Akik, Akal Buku, Bawa Buku, Ruang Melamun, Warung Sastra, and Solusi Buku. Solusi Buku was included as a comparative case because, although it is part of a larger business unit and cannot be fully categorized as an independent bookstore, it illustrates how spatial aesthetics, bookstore experience, and reader engagement are reproduced in a more commercial format.

Table 1. Informants and Bookstore Profiles

No.	Bookstore	Informant	Position	Relevance to the Study
1	Jual Buku Sastra (JBS)	IK	Owner	Shows how literary specialization shapes the store's curation, values, and cultural identity.
2	Buku Akik	TW	Owner	Explains the relationship between personal collections, reading spaces, access to knowledge, and the formation of the bookstore's character.
3	Akal Buku	AM	Owner	Shows how the owner's reputation, progressive values, and readers' trust shape the bookstore's identity.
4	Bawa Buku	A	Owner	Demonstrates how values become the basis for collection selection and the formation of the bookstore's cultural identity.
5	Ruang Melamun	BSW	Owner	Explains how personal taste, archives, and old books shape the bookstore's curatorial character.
6	Warung Sastra	ALS	Owner	Shows the relationship between literature, small publishers, community, and the bookstore's identity as an alternative space.
7	Solusi Buku	AD	Store Manager	Used as a comparative case to examine how curation and bookstore experience are reproduced in a more commercial format.

This study adhered to standard ethical principles in qualitative research. Prior to data collection, informants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of their participation, and informed consent was obtained from all informants before the interviews. Informants were also given the option to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. To protect confidentiality, informants are referred to using initials rather than full names throughout this study, as shown in Table 1. All data collected was used solely for academic purposes.

(3) Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted concurrently with data collection, in line with the emergent nature of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The analysis began during interviews, observations, and documentation to identify early patterns related to curation, value, and the cultural identity of independent bookstores. The analytical process followed Miles et al. (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data were selected, summarized, coded, and organized into key themes, including collection curation, owners' tastes, bookstore values, relationships with readers, and cultural identity. These themes were then compared across bookstores to identify similarities, differences, and relationships among practices. Conclusions were continuously drawn and verified by integrating interview, observation, and documentation data.

To establish the trustworthiness of the data, this study employed methodological triangulation by combining semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation, allowing findings from one method to be cross-checked against another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Morgan, 2024). In addition,

member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries and preliminary interpretations to informants to confirm the accuracy of their statements and to allow clarification or correction where needed (Birt et al., 2016). These strategies were intended to ensure that the interpretations of taste, values, and cultural identity presented in this study genuinely reflect the perspectives of the bookstore owners and managers themselves, rather than the researcher's assumptions.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The main question of this article is how bookstore owners' tastes and values shape the cultural identities of independent bookstores in Yogyakarta. Based on interviews, observations, and documentation, this study finds that the cultural identity of independent bookstores is not formed suddenly, but through continuous curatorial processes. Owners' tastes determine the direction of the collection; owners' values define the boundaries of selection, while social relations with readers and communities strengthen recognition of the bookstore's identity. Thus, independent bookstores should be understood not only as places for selling books but also as curatorial spaces that produce taste, value, and cultural meaning.

This finding is in line with Bourdieu's (1986), who explains that taste is not neutral, but is shaped by habitus, social experience, education, and the accumulation of cultural capital. In the context of independent bookstores, owners' tastes do not remain merely personal preferences, but are institutionalized through collection choices, reading recommendations, spatial arrangement, and literary activities. Bourdieu (1986) also emphasizes that capital exists not only in economic form but also in cultural, social, and symbolic forms. This can be seen in independent bookstores that may have limited economic capital, but possess cultural capital in the form of literary knowledge, curatorial ability, publisher networks, closeness to communities, and a reputation as alternative reading spaces. Within Maguire & Matthews (2012) framework, bookstore owners can also be understood as cultural intermediaries because they work between cultural production and consumption by selecting, interpreting, recommending, and legitimizing particular books, publishers, authors, and ideas.

Diagram 1. Conceptual Model of Cultural Identity Formation in Independent Bookstores



The diagram above shows that the cultural identity of independent bookstores is shaped by the relationships among bookstore owners' habitus, taste, values, curatorial practices, reading character, social relations, and symbolic recognition. The owners' habitus becomes the starting point because it is from this habitus that taste and values are formed. Owners' taste then determines the kinds

of reading materials selected, while their values define the ethical and cultural boundaries of those choices.

Both converge in curatorial practices, which are manifested in collection choices, reading recommendations, discussion programs, spatial arrangement, and the bookstore's atmosphere. These curatorial practices produce the bookstore's reading character and build social relations with readers. When readers and communities recognize this character and these relations, the bookstore gains symbolic capital in the form of reputation, trust, and legitimacy. This process is circular because the symbolic capital acquired by the bookstore, in turn, reinforces its cultural identity.

Owners' Taste as the Basis of Curation

The findings show that owners' tastes serve as the initial basis for shaping the cultural identity of independent bookstores in Yogyakarta. Within Bourdieu's framework, taste cannot be understood as a neutral individual preference, but as the result of habitus, namely dispositions formed through social experience, education, cultural environment, and the accumulation of cultural capital (1986). In the context of independent bookstores, owners' tastes indicate not only what kinds of books they like. It also reveals how they evaluate reading materials, determine the cultural value of a book, and establish boundaries between books considered important and those that are not. Thus, curation in independent bookstores can be understood as a cultural practice that emerges from the habitus of their owners.

Owners' habitus is materialized through collection choices, reading recommendations, spatial arrangements, literacy activities, and the ways bookstores present themselves to readers. Personal taste, initially attached to the owner, becomes institutionalized as the bookstore's character. At this point, Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital becomes important. Cultural capital refers not only to formal education but also to literary knowledge, reading experience, the ability to recognize publishers, sensitivity to discourse, and legitimacy in determining which books are considered valuable. Independent bookstore owners, therefore, act as cultural actors who transform their cultural capital into curatorial practices. Literature on independent bookstores also shows that owners often act as readers, writers, curators, and tastemakers who balance art and commerce (Kaposi & Al-Shammari, 2021). Their decisions in selecting books and shaping the bookstore's atmosphere reflect their understanding of cultural and literary values and help define the bookstore's identity (Liddle, 2019).

At *Jual Buku Sastra (JBS)*, literary taste becomes a concrete expression of the owner's habitus. IK explains that, from the beginning, JBS had a vision to offer alternative books, with the tagline "...not all literary books are available in bookstores." JBS's focus on literature cannot be separated from IK's background as a literary writer and his involvement in Yogyakarta's literary community. Read through Bourdieu, IK's literary taste is not merely a personal preference, but part of a literary habitus formed through writing, community participation, discussion, and involvement in the literary ecosystem. This habitus is then manifested in JBS's

consistent curation of literature, indie books, literary theory, and alternative reading materials.

JBS's taste also functions as a mechanism of distinction within the bookselling field. Bourdieu (1993) explains that the field of cultural production is occupied by actors who take positions through aesthetic, symbolic, and cultural choices. In this context, JBS positions itself as a literary bookstore and an alternative space, rather than as a general bookstore that provides all genres. IK states that JBS does not sell best-selling books readily available in large bookstores. Readers looking for popular books can find them in mainstream bookstores; however, those seeking literature across generations, literary theory, or books unavailable in large bookstores may find JBS more relevant. In this sense, JBS's literary specialization is a form of position-taking. It constructs its identity by choosing a literary niche and rejecting the logic of comprehensiveness commonly associated with large bookstores. This finding is consistent with studies showing that independent bookstores often build their identity through niche markets, a sense of mission, and community engagement when competing with online bookstores and large bookstore chains (Baidis et al., 2019; Luyt & Heok, 2015).

Bawa Buku presents another form of curatorial taste. A explains that Bawa Buku developed from a book-rental service, a personal shopping service, and an online bookstore before eventually becoming a physical bookstore. From the beginning, Bawa Buku's reading choices were curatorial, especially around themes of gender, sexuality, agrarian issues, and the social sciences and humanities. Within Bourdieu's framework, this choice can be read as the institutionalization of taste shaped by social experience, cultural position, and the values carried by the owner. When Bawa Buku established a physical store, its limited space strengthened the function of curation because not all books could be included. However, this limitation was not merely technical. It became a selection mechanism that affirmed the store's character. A states that people come to Bawa Buku to see the "taste" of the store. This statement shows that readers are not only looking for books as commodities but also for the owner's curatorial legitimacy.

The findings from Bawa Buku reinforce Bourdieu's idea that taste is a social construction. Taste does not stand as an individual choice detached from context, but is shaped by historical experience, social position, and broader cultural values (Bourdieu, 1984). Bawa Buku's preference for issues of gender, sexuality, agrarian concerns, and the social sciences and humanities is not random. It relates to the horizon of values the store seeks to present. In this sense, Bawa Buku's taste functions as cultural capital that shapes the store's character and as symbolic capital when readers recognize Bawa Buku as a bookstore with a particular stance. Kaposi & Al-Shammari (2021) emphasize that independent bookstores often reflect the socio-cultural dynamics of their communities, as owners adjust their collections and offerings to align with the values and needs of local readers. In this study, such alignment is read through Bourdieu as a process of symbolic recognition toward the bookstore's cultural capital.

Ruang Melamun shows how personal taste can shape bookstore identity through aesthetic experience and the materiality of books. BSW explains that Ruang Melamun emerged from his interest in books on music, history, old books,

and archives. This choice was rooted in his experience as a music student who felt dissatisfied with the dominance of Western references in music education. As BSW recalls, “Why should we learn music from people far away when we have our own [tradition]? ... the reference we were always made to use was Western music.” He later discovered that many writings on Indonesian music, especially from the pre-independence period, were rarely discussed in formal education. Read through Bourdieu, this experience shaped BSW’s curatorial habitus at Ruang Melamun. He does not choose books merely because of their rarity, but because they contain knowledge marginalized within the formal field of music education.

In the case of Ruang Melamun, cultural capital is present not only in the content of the books but also in the owner’s ability to recognize the historical and material value of old books and archives. Old books, archives, music, history, and research materials curated by Ruang Melamun create an atmosphere that differs from mainstream bookstores. Additional literature on the aesthetic and immersive experience of independent bookstores helps clarify that bookstores do not only present books as reading objects, but also build relationships among books, readers, space, and cultural experience (Dongdong & Jiani, 2024). The material aspects of books, such as age, cover design, physical condition, rarity, and display, also contribute to the cultural status of the collection (Enns & Metz, 2022). Within Bourdieu’s framework, however, this materiality becomes meaningful because the owner possesses the cultural capital to recognize and legitimize the symbolic value of old books and archives.

Taken together, the cases of JBS, Bawa Buku, and Ruang Melamun show that owners’ taste operates as a form of habitus that is materialized through curation and converted into cultural capital: JBS’s literary taste, Bawa Buku’s issue-based orientation, and Ruang Melamun’s archival and musical interests each produce a distinct curatorial character. When readers recognize and trust these choices, cultural capital is converted into symbolic capital in the form of reputation and legitimacy, the quality that distinguishes independent bookstores from marketplaces governed by algorithms, stock, and price. This distinctiveness is therefore not merely an experiential strategy (Dongdong & Jiani, 2024; Enns & Metz, 2022) but the outcome of converting owners’ habitus and cultural capital into the bookstore’s symbolic identity.

Value as a Principle of Selection and a Boundary of Identity

In addition to taste, the owners’ values are an important element in shaping the cultural identity of independent bookstores. If taste determines the direction of the collection, values define the boundaries of selection. Values answer questions about which books are considered aligned with the bookstore, which books are not given space, which publishers are supported, which issues are prioritized, and what ideas are circulated to readers. Within Bourdieu’s framework, values can be understood as part of the owners’ habitus, namely dispositions formed through social experience, cultural position, knowledge, and particular beliefs. This habitus then operates within the bookselling field through curatorial practices: selecting, rejecting, recommending, and legitimizing certain

books. Thus, the curation of independent bookstores is not only related to the availability of stock, but also to the ethical and cultural positions of their owners.

In this context, owners' values function as a limiting principle. Bourdieu (1986) explains that cultural capital refers not only to knowledge but also to the ability to assess and legitimize what is considered valuable. In independent bookstores, this cultural capital manifests in the owners' ability to determine which books are important, which publishers deserve shelf space, and which ideas need strengthening. This process is in line with the literature on independent bookstores, which shows that owners often balance their roles as small-business owners, cultural activists, and creative workers. This combination of identities requires owners to navigate the tension between commercial sustainability and cultural significance. The values they hold, in turn, influence book selection, reading recommendations, and the organization of events, thereby shaping the bookstore's cultural identity and its connection to broader social movements or cultural ecosystems (Noël, 2018).

Bawa Buku is a strong example of values as a boundary of identity. In A's own words, "we wanted to pass on our spirit, our principles, the things we believe in, about values, about equality, about taking a side, about how we account for the vulnerable in society." This principle influences how the bookstore selects books, authors, publishers, events, and working relationships. Bawa Buku gives attention to women's works, issues of gender, sexuality, agrarian struggles, the social sciences and humanities, and zines. Within Bourdieu's framework, these choices can be read as curatorial practices that emerge from the owner's habitus and operate as cultural capital. A does not select books merely based on market potential, but based on their alignment with the values she believes in. Therefore, Bawa Buku's values are not merely a slogan, but a selection mechanism that determines what is given space and what is limited.

The principle of "equality and advocacy" also shows that curation always involves processes of selection and exclusion. Bawa Buku does not seek to become a bookstore that offers all kinds of reading materials, but instead constructs its identity through specific boundaries of value. This relates to literature, which states that the process of book selection is closely connected to the values and professional identities of those who make decisions. Librarians and booksellers often prioritize books that align with their understanding of literary value, social role, and function as cultural mediators. This process involves promoting certain genres, authors, or themes while excluding others. Thus, selection and exclusion strengthen the cultural identity of the (Rabot, 2011; Kaposi & Al-Shammari, 2021). In the case of Bawa Buku, its advocacy for women's works, gender issues, sexuality, and agrarian struggles serves to construct the bookstore's identity as a reading space that is not neutral but explicitly takes a position.

Akal Buku shows another pattern of values as a principle of curation. AM explains that Akal Buku initially sold books written by himself and his wife, then later expanded to include books they liked, books from publishers close to their networks, and books that did not contradict their values. Because his wife is active in issues of sexual violence and feminism, Akal Buku provides many books on gender and ecofeminism. In religious issues, they choose books on moderate Islam

or wasatiah Islam. In the field of social knowledge, AM mentions a tendency toward democratic socialism and leftist books. This means that Akal Buku's collection is a manifestation of the owners' personal values, intellectual positions, and political-cultural orientations.

Read through Bourdieu, Akal Buku demonstrates how the owners' habitus operates within the bookselling field. AM and his wife bring experiences as writers, readers, creative workers, and actors who are close to publisher networks and literacy communities. These experiences become cultural capital that determines the direction of curation. However, as the collection grows, curation is no longer carried out entirely by the owners themselves. AM explains that they began to rely on book summaries, assessments from close friends, and recommendations from people considered to have strong disciplinary knowledge. He describes this process as trust-based curation: "curation is now based on trust ... in the end, it is not just us anymore, but we entrust our curatorial values to friends we consider to have good disciplinary knowledge."

This practice at Akal Buku shows that values can be extended through social capital. Bourdieu (1986) explains that social capital is related to networks, relationships, and trust that can be used to maintain or expand one's position within a particular field. At Akal Buku, networks of trust help maintain the consistency of curatorial values when the number of books no longer allows all items to be read directly by the owners. Thus, values are not only attached to AM and his wife as individuals, but are also transmitted to networks of people considered to have similar knowledge and values. This process confirms that independent bookstores are not merely spaces for buying and selling books, but spaces of cultural mediation where owners and their networks help determine which reading materials are considered important.

Buku Akik offers a different value: access to reading materials. TW explains that the initial intention behind Buku Akik was not to establish a bookstore, but a library. Book sales were conducted to buy new books and distribute reading materials. Until now, the library space at Buku Akik remains larger than the sales area. TW even states, "the original aspiration was a library, and that is something that must never disappear from Buku Akik. If it has to disappear, I would rather close the store." Within Bourdieu's framework, this choice shows that owners' values can shape the store's spatial structure and operational practices. Buku Akik's cultural capital is evident not only in its collection choices but also in its commitment to providing readers with access to knowledge.

The case of Buku Akik shows that independent bookstores can function as cultural spaces, not merely as commercial entities. Although from a business perspective, the library space could be converted into a more profitable sales area, Buku Akik maintains it because access to reading materials is its main value. This is in line with the literature indicating that independent bookstores are increasingly understood as cultural spaces where browsing books and aesthetic experience are central. Owners curate collections and design spaces to build a distinctive cultural atmosphere, emphasizing creativity, immersive experience, and alignment with the bookstore's identity (Kaposi & Al-Shammari, 2021; Dongdong & Jiani, 2024). At Buku Akik, the value of access to reading materials is materially manifested through

the library space, reading area, and collections that can be enjoyed without always having to be purchased.

Warung Sastra also demonstrates values as the basis of identity. ALS explains that Warung Sastra aims to provide a safe space for all groups who want to discuss, read, or build community. In ALS's words: "We wanted to provide a safe space for everyone who wants to discuss, read, or build community here. A safe space that can be interpreted in many ways, safe from sexual violence, for instance, and your privacy is also protected here.

Its collection is dominated by literature, socio-political works, history, philosophy, and mostly books from independent publishers. Warung Sastra's curation is based on the bookstore's character, namely, environmental issues, socio-political concerns, literary books, and reading materials not widely available in mainstream bookstores. Warung Sastra also prefers to call itself a small bookstore or an alternative space because the term "indie" is increasingly being capitalized by larger actors. Thus, Warung Sastra's values shape both the boundaries of its collection and the boundaries of its identity.

Within Bourdieu's (1993) framework, Warung Sastra's position can be read as a form of position-taking within the bookselling field. The bookstore not only selects certain types of books, but also determines how it wants to be recognized: not as a bookstore that follows the increasingly commercialized aesthetics of "indie," but as a small bookstore and alternative space. As ALS explains, "we now prefer to call ourselves a small bookstore, because the term 'indie bookstore' has already been capitalized on by bigger players than us ... we started from the ground up, so we call ourselves an alternative space or a small bookstore in Jogja." The values of safe space, community, and closeness to small publishers become symbolic capital that distinguishes Warung Sastra from mainstream bookstores and commercial spaces that adopt an indie image. This is in line with the literature, which states that independent bookstores often function as community spaces that encourage highbrow reading and build intimate spaces for cultural exchange. Owners' values play an important role in determining the bookstore's engagement with social issues, the types of events it organizes, and the ideas it circulates within the community (Osborne, 2015).

Together, Bawa Buku, Akal Buku, Buku Akik, and Warung Sastra show that owners' values function as a principle of cultural selection that extends beyond collection choices to shape spatial organization, networks, events, and community relations: Bawa Buku through equality and advocacy, Akal Buku through progressive and trust-based curatorial networks, Buku Akik through its library and commitment to access, and Warung Sastra through its safe-space and small-publisher orientation. Within Bourdieu's framework, these values operate as habitus that guides curation. When the resulting choices are recognized and trusted by readers, they are converted into symbolic capital in the form of reputation and legitimacy. This alignment between values and everyday practice is what keeps independent bookstores distinctive cultural entities amid commercial pressures.

Cultural Identity as the Result of Curation and Readers' Recognition

Taste and owners' values ultimately shape the cultural identity of independent bookstores. Within Bourdieu's framework, identity cannot be understood merely as a matter of name, logo, spatial aesthetics, or promotional strategy. Rather, it is produced through continuous social practices involving habitus, capital, and the bookstore's position within the bookselling field. Owners' habitus shapes their taste and values; cultural capital enables them to select, assess, and legitimize particular reading materials; social capital operates through networks of communities, publishers, writers, and readers; while symbolic capital emerges when the bookstore's curatorial choices receive public recognition. Thus, the cultural identity of independent bookstores is formed when the owners' curation is recognized, trusted, and lived by readers and communities.

Jual Buku Sastra (JBS) shows how cultural identity is formed through the consistency of a literary habitus. IK describes JBS as a "home", as he puts it "JBS is a home for me, because when I arrived in Jogja, JBS was born from a community pattern, and with the presence of JBS I almost have no private space left." because it was born from a community pattern and became a place where people gather, look for books, and discuss literature with readers and writers. He also states that interaction with buyers makes literature "present." Read through Bourdieu, JBS demonstrates how the owner's literary habitus as a writer, reader, and member of the literary community is materialized through curatorial practices and the social space of the bookstore. Literature is not only present as a collection, but also as cultural capital institutionalized through book selection, conversation, recommendation, and community relations. When the public recognizes JBS as a literary bookstore and an alternative space, this cultural capital is transformed into symbolic capital in the form of reputation and legitimacy. Warung Sastra shows a similar pattern, but with a stronger emphasis on community and safe space. Its identity is shaped not only by its collection of literature, socio-political works, history, philosophy, and books from independent publishers, but also by activities such as discussions, Malam Buku, a community space, and relations with small publishers. ALS explains that Warung Sastra needs a community in order to grow together. In Bourdieu's terms, this community can be read as social capital that strengthens Warung Sastra's position within the Yogyakarta bookselling field. Through networks with small publishers, literacy communities, and readers, Warung Sastra not only circulates books but also circulates values, ideas, and recognition. Its identity as a small bookstore, alternative space, and safe space is therefore the result of converting social and cultural capital into symbolic capital.

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circulates values, ideas, and recognition. Its identity as a small bookstore, alternative space, and safe space is therefore the result of converting social and cultural capital into symbolic capital.

Akal Buku demonstrates that cultural identity can also be formed through the owner's figure as a source of legitimacy. AM explains that many people come to Akal Buku to meet him and his wife, to ask for signatures, to talk, or to discuss books. As AM explains "Up to now, it is still the personal side that sets us apart. Many people come here because they want to meet us in person, ask for signatures, talk, discuss, and so on ... but as a form of branding, it works well, because people come to believe that the books at Akal Buku are books that Kalis and I have already approved."

In Bourdieu's framework, owners' reputation functions as symbolic capital that legitimizes the bookstore's curation. Readers do not only buy books as objects; they also trust the cultural judgment attached to the authors' figures. Therefore, Akal Buku's identity is formed through the intersection of cultural capital in the form of knowledge and reading taste, social capital in the form of publisher and reader networks, and symbolic capital in the form of the owners' reputation as writers and public figures.

Buku Akik builds its cultural identity through the value of access to reading materials and the practice of maintaining a library. TWV states, "I still believe that reading interest is high. It is just access that is lacking." For this reason, Buku Akik maintains its library as the central part of its space, even though, from a business perspective, the library area could be converted into a more profitable sales space. Within Bourdieu's framework, this decision shows that Buku Akik's cultural identity is not determined solely by economic capital but by an orientation toward cultural capital that prioritizes access to knowledge. The library, reading space, collection, and reading experience become material expressions of the owner's habitus, which believes that books should be accessed, not only purchased. When visitors recognize Buku Akik as both a bookstore and a reading space, this value of access gains symbolic recognition and shapes the bookstore's cultural identity.

Ruang Melamun builds its identity through archives, old books, music, history, and the depth of personal taste. BSW does not define Ruang Melamun as an indie bookstore, but as a workspace and a place to share what he enjoys with others. However, from this personal position, a distinctive identity emerges. Through Bourdieu, BSW's taste for archives, music, history, and old books can be read as a habitus shaped by music education and anxiety over the dominance of Western references. This habitus is then materialized in a specific curatorial practice. Readers who come to Ruang Melamun usually have particular needs, such as research, archive searching, or specific intellectual concerns. Thus, Ruang Melamun's identity is formed through highly specific cultural capital recognized by readers who need such knowledge.

Solusi Buku is used as a comparative case to clarify the boundary between the cultural identity of independent bookstores and the commercial reproduction of bookstore aesthetics. AD states that Solusi Buku does not declare itself an indie bookstore because it has investors and operates within a corporate structure. As AD puts it, "we do not agree with being called independent, because we ourselves

have investors behind Solusi Buku we do not want to declare ourselves indie; we only want to offer readers a new kind of bookstore experience.” However, Solusi Buku remains important because it shows that spatial experience, aesthetics, coffee corners, literary activities, and closeness to readers can also be reproduced by bookstores with stronger economic capital. In Bourdieu’s terms, Solusi Buku shows that spatial aesthetics and visitor experience alone are insufficient to define independence. The cultural identity of independent bookstores must be understood through the relation between curatorial autonomy, ownership structure, owners’ values, cultural capital, and readers’ recognition.

Overall, the findings show that the cultural identity of independent bookstores is formed through the conversion of capital. First, owners’ habitus produces particular tastes and values. Second, these tastes and values are materialized through curation, collection selection, recommendations, spatial arrangement, and literary activities. Third, these practices build relations with readers, communities, publishers, and writers as forms of social capital. Fourth, when the bookstore’s curation and values are recognized and trusted by the public, they generate symbolic capital in the form of reputation, trust, and legitimacy. Therefore, the cultural identity of independent bookstores does not emerge solely from what they sell but also from how they use cultural and social capital to build a symbolic position within the bookselling field

E. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the cultural identities of independent bookstores in Yogyakarta are shaped through the tastes and values of bookstore owners. Owners’ tastes determine the direction of collections, while their values define the boundaries of selection, including which books, publishers, issues, and communities are given space. Therefore, curation is not merely a technical activity of selecting books, but a cultural practice that reflects owners’ habitus, cultural capital, and position within the bookselling field.

Using Bourdieu’s framework, this study shows that independent bookstores convert cultural and social capital into symbolic capital through curatorial practices. Jual Buku Sastra constructs its identity through literary specialization; Bawa Buku through advocacy and issue-based curation; Akal Buku through progressive values and trust-based networks; Buku Akik through access to reading materials; Ruang Melamun through archives and old books; and Warung Sastra through literature, small publishers, and community. Solusi Buku, as a comparative case, shows that spatial aesthetics can be reproduced commercially, but that does not automatically constitute an independent curatorial identity.

Thus, independent bookstores are not only economic actors in the book trade, but also cultural actors that shape taste, values, and symbolic recognition. This study contributes to library and information science, cultural studies, and book industry studies by positioning independent bookstores as curatorial spaces where knowledge, cultural identity, and community relations are produced.

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