

Coworking Spaces as a Strategic Resource for Freelancers and SMEs: A Qualitative Study

Hero Gefthi Firnando¹, Cucu Setiawati²

¹STIE GICI Business School, Jakarta, Indonesia

²Universitas PTIQ, Jakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: Hero Gefthi Firnando

Corresponding email: hero.gefthi@stiegoci.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 02 November 2024

Revised 13 November 2024

Accepted 15 December 2024

Available Online 21 December 2024

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of coworking spaces as strategic resources for freelancers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in enhancing productivity, collaboration, and business sustainability. Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV), this research adopts a qualitative approach through in-depth semi-structured interviews with freelancers and SME actors who utilize a coworking space known as BMS as their primary or supporting work environment. The findings reveal that coworking spaces provide not only physical infrastructure but also intangible resources, including networking opportunities, knowledge sharing, and a collaborative atmosphere that fosters innovation and business growth. Furthermore, the presence of a flexible and professional work environment contributes to greater work efficiency and enhanced business credibility. However, several challenges are identified, such as cost considerations and dependency on shared facilities. Overall, the findings suggest that coworking spaces function as valuable strategic assets that support the competitiveness and sustainability of freelancers and SMEs. These findings contribute to the entrepreneurship and SME literature by highlighting the importance of shared work environments as part of the modern entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Keywords:

Coworking Space
Strategic Resources
Freelancers
SMEs

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by International Ecsis Association. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.



<https://doi.org/10.55980/esber.v3i3.425>

1. Introduction

The rapid transformation of the global economy toward digitalization and flexible work arrangements has significantly reshaped the nature of employment and business activities (Alfieri et al., 2025; Xia et al., 2024). Freelancers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are increasingly becoming central actors in this evolving economic landscape, particularly in emerging markets (Radic, 2020; Zhu, 2026). These groups often operate under resource constraints, limited access to formal infrastructure, and fluctuating market conditions. As a result, the need for adaptive, cost-efficient, and collaborative work environments has grown substantially. Coworking spaces have emerged as an alternative solution, offering shared work environments that combine physical infrastructure with opportunities for social and professional interaction (Akhavan et al., 2019; Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021). Empirical data indicate that the global coworking market was valued at approximately \$22.01 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach \$93.68 billion by 2035,

reflecting a strong growth trajectory (Teter, 2026). In addition, around 42,000 coworking spaces were operating globally by the end of 2024, indicating rapid expansion and increasing adoption across industries. This phenomenon reflects a transition from traditional office models toward more flexible and community-oriented work environments, highlighting the increasingly strategic role of coworking spaces in both academic and practical contexts (Yu et al., 2019).

The growth of coworking spaces is also evident in developing countries, including Indonesia, where the number of coworking spaces has increased significantly over the past decade (Sutriadi & Fachryza, 2021). More recent global reports highlight that flexible workspace demand is increasingly driven not only by freelancers but also by corporations (R. Bouncken et al., 2020; Echeverri et al., 2021). Furthermore, industry insights indicate that coworking continues to expand globally, supported by hybrid work trends, cost efficiency, and technological advancements (R. Bouncken et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2019). The coworking industry is also becoming more diverse, attracting freelancers, startups, remote workers, and corporate teams seeking flexibility and collaboration. However, despite this rapid growth, several challenges remain, particularly in understanding how coworking spaces contribute to productivity (Bueno et al., 2018), innovation (Clifton et al., 2022), and business sustainability. Many freelancers and SMEs still face limitations in accessing strategic resources that support long-term competitiveness. Therefore, it is essential to examine coworking spaces not only as physical work environments but also as strategic enablers of business development.

Several previous studies have examined coworking spaces from different perspectives, providing important foundations for this research. First, Cheah & Ho (2019) found that social interactions within coworking spaces significantly enhance business model innovation through opportunity recognition. Second, Wijngaarden et al. (2020) demonstrated that coworking environments support creativity and innovation through network formation. Third, Clifton et al. (2022) emphasized the role of coworking spaces in shaping entrepreneurial ecosystems by facilitating social and professional connections. Fourth, R. Bouncken et al. (2020) highlighted that Coworking spaces facilitate entrepreneurship and new digital business models by creating a sense of community, emotional activation, and digital linkages, thus shaping entrepreneurial ecosystems through social and professional connections. Fifth, Gao & Psenner (2024) argued that Coworking spaces act as brokers to link, hold, pass, and reproduce resources, enhancing local resource networks and transforming entrepreneurial ecosystems by facilitating social and professional connections. Although these studies provide valuable insights, most of them rely on quantitative approaches or focus on developed economies. Consequently, there is still limited qualitative understanding of how freelancers and SMEs experience and utilize coworking spaces in specific local contexts. This gap underscores the need for deeper exploration of coworking spaces as strategic resources.

From a theoretical perspective, coworking spaces can be examined through the lens of organizational and management theories (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte & Isaac, 2016). Prior literature suggests that coworking spaces offer both tangible resources, such as office facilities and technological infrastructure, and intangible resources, including social capital, trust, and collaborative culture (Fu et al., 2025; Gerdenitsch et al., 2016). These intangible elements are particularly critical for freelancers and SMEs, as they rely heavily on networks and knowledge exchange to enhance their capabilities. In addition, coworking spaces are increasingly recognized as part of broader entrepreneurial ecosystems that support innovation and business growth (Knox et al., 2024). However, the integration between RBV theory and the actual practices within coworking environments remains underexplored. Moreover, existing research has not fully captured the dynamic and relational nature of resources within coworking spaces. The state of the art of this research lies in its qualitative approach, which aims to uncover how users perceive and leverage both tangible and intangible resources in real-world settings. This approach provides a more nuanced understanding of coworking spaces beyond traditional resource-based analysis.

The novelty of this study is reflected in its focus on positioning coworking spaces as strategic resources through an in-depth qualitative lens that captures the lived experiences of freelancers and SMEs. Unlike prior studies that emphasize quantitative measurement, this research explores how coworking spaces generate value through interaction, collaboration, and shared experiences. It also integrates RBV theory with empirical findings to reveal how resources within coworking spaces are dynamically created and utilized. Furthermore, this study contributes by incorporating recent industry data to contextualize the rapid growth and transformation of coworking spaces

globally and locally. By examining both benefits and challenges, this research provides a balanced perspective on coworking space utilization. Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate how coworking spaces function as strategic resources for freelancers and SMEs. Specifically, it seeks to explore perceived benefits, challenges, and impacts on productivity, collaboration, and business sustainability. Ultimately, this research contributes to bridging the gap between theory and practice in understanding modern work environments and entrepreneurial ecosystems.

2. Methods

This study applies a qualitative research design using a case study approach to examine coworking spaces as strategic resources for freelancers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The qualitative approach enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the use of coworking spaces in supporting their business activities. The case study focuses on a single research site, namely the BMS Office coworking space, which serves as an active shared workspace for freelancers and SME actors. The unit of analysis consists of individual users who utilize coworking facilities for professional and business purposes. This design provides a contextual and comprehensive understanding of how coworking spaces function as strategic resources. The study is grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), which emphasizes the role of tangible and intangible resources in achieving competitive advantage. By integrating empirical insights with theoretical perspectives, the research produces a robust analytical framework. This approach ensures that the findings are both contextually rich and theoretically grounded.

The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling to ensure that selected informants meet specific and relevant criteria. The informants consist of freelancers and SME actors who have actively used coworking space facilities for a minimum period of three months. A total of 12 informants are involved in this study, ensuring data saturation where no new themes emerge from additional interviews. The selected informants represent diverse professional backgrounds, including digital freelancers, creative workers, startup founders, and small business owners. This diversity strengthens the depth and breadth of the data collected. The clear inclusion criteria ensure that all participants have sufficient experience to provide meaningful insights. Each informant is coded systematically to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. This sampling strategy ensures the relevance, richness, and credibility of the qualitative data. As a result, the study captures authentic perspectives from actual coworking space users.

Data collection is conducted through semi-structured interviews and supported by field observations. The interviews are carried out directly with each informant, with a duration ranging from 30 to 60 minutes per session. The interview protocol focuses on key themes, including perceived benefits of coworking spaces, challenges encountered, networking opportunities, productivity, collaboration, and business sustainability. All interviews are audio-recorded with the full consent of participants to ensure data accuracy and completeness. In addition to interviews, field notes are documented to capture contextual conditions, interaction patterns, and non-verbal expressions observed during the research process. The use of semi-structured interviews allows flexibility while maintaining consistency across participants. The data reflect both explicit responses and implicit meanings derived from participants' experiences. This comprehensive data collection process ensures depth, validity, and contextual richness.

Data analysis is conducted using a systematic thematic analysis approach. The process begins with a verbatim transcription of all interview recordings to ensure accuracy and completeness of data. The first stage of analysis is open coding, where key concepts and initial categories are identified directly from the data. The second stage is axial coding, which organizes and connects categories into broader themes based on relationships and patterns. The final stage is selective coding, which integrates and refines themes into a coherent explanation of coworking spaces as strategic resources. The analysis is supported by qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo to enhance coding accuracy and data organization. Each step of the analysis follows a structured and transparent process to ensure consistency. The resulting themes reflect both tangible and intangible resource dimensions identified in the data. This analytical approach produces valid, reliable, and theory-driven findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, this study applies four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is achieved through triangulation by comparing data across multiple informants and validating interpretations. Member checking is conducted by confirming key findings with selected participants to ensure accuracy. Transferability is ensured by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participant characteristics. Dependability is maintained through a clear and auditable research process, including documentation of all procedures and decisions. Confirmability is ensured by grounding all findings in empirical data and minimizing researcher bias. Ethical considerations are strictly applied, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and maintaining participant anonymity. All participants are informed about the research objectives and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage. These procedures ensure that the study meets high ethical and methodological standards.

3. Results

Exploring Coworking Space through the RBV Perspective

The thematic analysis reveals that coworking spaces, particularly BMS Office, function as strategic resources encompassing both tangible (physical) and intangible (non-physical) assets. Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV), these findings indicate that coworking spaces extend beyond the role of providing work facilities, acting instead as platforms for value creation through social interaction, collaboration, and the enhancement of individual as well as organizational capabilities. Physical resources such as comfortable workspaces, reliable internet access, and supporting facilities establish an operational foundation that improves work efficiency. In contrast, intangible resources—including professional networks, knowledge exchange, and a collaborative atmosphere—serve as critical elements in fostering competitive advantage for freelancers and SMEs.

To clarify the relationships among concepts within the RBV framework, the research model is illustrated in the following figure.

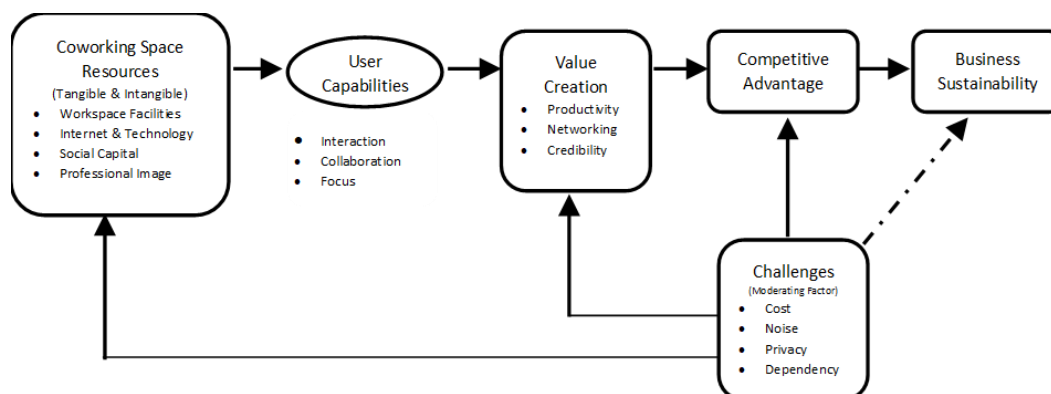


Figure 1. RBV Framework of Coworking Space

Furthermore, the results of interviews with 12 informants reveal that the utilization of coworking spaces as strategic resources is reflected in five interrelated themes. These themes demonstrate that the integration of physical and social resources contributes to improved productivity, stronger business credibility, and expanded collaboration opportunities. From an RBV perspective, this condition reflects the characteristics of resources that are valuable and difficult to imitate, particularly in relation to social networks and the organically developed collaborative culture within coworking environments.

As illustrated in Figure 2, coworking spaces can be understood as resource integrators that connect tangible and intangible resources in the process of value creation. Physical resources primarily support operational activities, while intangible resources drive innovation and differentiation. The interaction between these two types of resources generates several strategic outcomes, including increased productivity, enhanced business credibility, and business sustainability. However, certain constraints are also identified, such as cost considerations and

dependency on shared facilities, which may influence the extent to which these benefits can be optimized. This framework emphasizes that competitive advantage in the context of coworking spaces is shaped not only by the availability of resources, but also by the ability of users to manage, combine, and leverage these resources effectively within a collaborative and dynamic work environment.

Physical Resources: Tangible Assets Supporting Work Efficiency

Coworking spaces provide physical resources that serve as a fundamental foundation in supporting the work activities of freelancers and SMEs. Facilities such as comfortable workspaces, high-speed internet connectivity, and access to technological infrastructure play a crucial role in enhancing work efficiency. These tangible resources enable users to perform their tasks more effectively without the need to invest heavily in establishing and maintaining private office spaces.

Most informants emphasized that the availability of such facilities significantly reduces their operational burden compared to renting independent offices. As expressed by one participant, *“The workspace here is already fully equipped, so I don’t need to think about office setup costs anymore”* (Informant 3, Interview, 2025). Another informant highlighted the importance of reliable internet access, stating, *“Fast internet is absolutely crucial for my work, especially for meetings and uploading projects”* (Informant 6, Interview, 2025). These responses indicate that physical infrastructure is not merely supportive, but essential for enabling efficient day-to-day work activities.

In addition, flexibility in the use of space and time emerges as a significant advantage. Informants reported that they are able to choose working hours and workspace types according to their specific needs, reflecting the adaptive nature of coworking space resources. This flexibility allows freelancers and SME actors to align their working environment with task demands, ultimately improving efficiency and productivity.

Table 1. Physical Resources (Coding Results)

Main Theme	Subtheme	Representative Quote
Physical Resources	Workspace Facilities	“The workspace here is comfortable and well-equipped.”
	Internet & Technology	“Fast internet really helps my work.”
	Cost Efficiency	“It is more affordable than renting a private office.”
	Flexibility	“I can choose the time and space based on my needs.”

These findings indicate that coworking spaces exhibit characteristics aligned with key RBV criteria, particularly as valuable and cost-efficient resources that contribute to improving users’ operational efficiency.

Social Capital: Intangible Resources for Collaboration and Innovation

Beyond physical resources, coworking spaces also generate social capital, which represents a key advantage compared to conventional workspaces. Interactions among users create opportunities for networking, collaboration, and knowledge exchange, all of which contribute to the development of intangible resources. These social dynamics enable individuals and businesses to expand their professional connections while simultaneously enhancing their capabilities through shared experiences.

Several informants highlighted that coworking spaces have directly contributed to new business opportunities. One participant stated, *“I gained several new clients from people I met here”* (Informant 7, Interview, 2025). Another informant emphasized the importance of idea exchange, noting, *“We often share ideas here, so we can learn from each other’s experiences”* (Informant 5, Interview, 2025). These insights indicate that coworking environments facilitate continuous learning and foster innovation through informal and formal interactions.

The collaborative atmosphere strengthens the role of intangible resources within the Resource-Based View (RBV), particularly in terms of knowledge sharing and relational capital. In several cases, informants reported that collaborations initiated within the coworking space evolved into real

business projects, demonstrating how social interaction can translate into tangible economic outcomes. Additionally, the presence of a supportive community fosters trust and a sense of belonging, which further enhances cooperation among users.

Table 2. Social Capital (NVivo Coding Results)

Main Theme	Subtheme	Representative Quote
Social Capital	Networking	“I gained clients from the coworking space.”
	Knowledge Sharing	“We often exchange ideas with other users.”
	Collaboration	“Some projects originated from here.”
	Community Support	“There is a strong sense of community.”

These findings indicate that coworking spaces provide resources that are rare and difficult to imitate, as social interactions, trust, and organically developed collaborative cultures cannot be easily replicated in other work environments.

Productivity Enhancement: Improving Work Performance

Coworking spaces have been shown to enhance users’ work productivity. A professional work environment with minimal distractions enables freelancers and SMEs to maintain focus and improve work discipline. Compared to working from home or other informal settings, coworking spaces provide a structured atmosphere that supports more consistent and efficient work patterns.

Several informants highlighted that working in a coworking space significantly improves their ability to concentrate. One participant stated, *“I am more focused working here compared to at home”* (Informant 2, Interview, 2025). Another informant emphasized the motivational aspect of the environment, noting, *“Seeing other people working also makes me more motivated”* (Informant 9, Interview, 2025). These responses suggest that the presence of a productive work culture positively influences individual performance.

In addition, some informants reported that coworking spaces help them establish more structured work routines. The separation between personal and professional environments encourages better time management and consistency, which ultimately leads to higher work output. Reduced distractions, combined with a disciplined work setting, further reinforce productivity gains among users.

Table 3. Productivity Enhancement (NVivo Coding Results)

Main Theme	Subtheme	Representative Quote
Productivity	Work Focus	“More focused compared to working at home.”
	Work Discipline	“More disciplined with my work schedule.”
	Reduced Distraction	“There are fewer distractions.”
	Motivation	“The work environment increases my motivation.”

These findings indicate that coworking spaces contribute to the enhancement of human capital productivity, which plays a crucial role in strengthening competitive advantage for freelancers and SMEs.

Business Credibility: Enhancing Professional Image

Coworking spaces also play a significant role in enhancing business credibility. A professional work environment creates a positive impression on clients and business partners, which is particularly important for freelancers and SMEs seeking to establish trust and legitimacy. Compared to informal or home-based work settings, coworking spaces provide a more formal and structured environment that strengthens the perceived professionalism of a business.

Several informants emphasized that conducting meetings in a coworking space improves how their business is perceived. One participant stated, *“Meeting clients here makes my business look more professional”* (Informant 4, Interview, 2025). Another informant highlighted the importance of

having a business address, noting, “*Having an office address in a coworking space increases client trust*” (Informant 8, Interview, 2025). These responses indicate that the physical and symbolic presence of a coworking space contributes to building a stronger professional image.

Furthermore, the use of a coworking space as a business address enhances the legitimacy of SMEs, particularly for those that do not yet have their own dedicated office. This legitimacy not only improves client confidence but also supports business growth by attracting new customers and opportunities. In this context, coworking spaces function not only as operational environments but also as strategic tools for reputation building.

Table 4. Business Credibility (NVivo Coding Results)

Main Theme	Subtheme	Representative Quote
Business Credibility	Professional Image	“It looks more professional.”
	Client Trust	“Clients trust me more.”
	Business Legitimacy	“An office address increases credibility.”
	Business Growth	“I gained more clients since working here.”

From an RBV perspective, these findings indicate that coworking spaces function as reputational resources that support business growth and strengthen competitive positioning.

Challenges: Limitations in Utilizing Coworking Spaces

Despite offering numerous benefits, coworking spaces also present several challenges for their users. The main issues identified include cost considerations, limited privacy, and dependency on shared facilities. These constraints indicate that while coworking spaces provide valuable resources, their utilization is not without trade-offs.

Several informants expressed concerns regarding the cost of membership, particularly for freelancers with fluctuating income. One participant noted, “*The membership fee sometimes feels expensive for freelancers*” (Informant 10, Interview, 2025). In addition, environmental factors such as noise were highlighted as potential distractions. As stated by another informant, “*It can get quite noisy when it’s crowded*” (Informant 1, Interview, 2025). These findings suggest that the shared nature of coworking spaces may occasionally reduce comfort and concentration.

Furthermore, some informants pointed out limitations related to privacy, especially for tasks that require confidentiality. The open and collaborative design of coworking environments may not always be suitable for sensitive work. In such cases, users may need to seek alternative arrangements or adapt their working patterns. Dependency on shared facilities also emerged as a concern, as users rely heavily on the availability and quality of resources provided by the coworking space.

Table 5. Challenges (NVivo Coding Results)

Main Theme	Subtheme	Representative Quote
Challenges	Cost	“The cost is quite expensive.”
	Noise	“Sometimes it is noisy.”
	Privacy	“Difficult for confidential work.”
	Dependency	“Dependent on coworking facilities.”

These findings indicate that although coworking spaces offer significant advantages, users must consider certain trade-offs in order to optimize their overall experience and benefits.

Word Cloud Analysis

As a complementary analysis, a word cloud visualization is employed to illustrate the frequency and prominence of keywords that emerge from the interview data. This visual representation provides an additional layer of insight by highlighting the most commonly used terms across informants, thereby reflecting the dominant themes and patterns within their experiences. By synthesizing large

volumes of qualitative data into a single visual format, the word cloud helps to reinforce and validate the findings obtained through thematic analysis.



Figure 3.1 Word Cloud of Coworking Space Experience

The visualization reveals that several key terms—such as “workspace,” “networking,” “productivity,” “business,” and “collaboration”—appear with high frequency throughout the interviews. Among these, “workspace” and “networking” stand out as the most dominant, indicating that informants primarily perceive coworking spaces as a hybrid environment that integrates both physical and social dimensions. The prominence of “workspace” reflects the importance of tangible resources in supporting daily work activities, while the frequent appearance of “networking” underscores the significance of social interaction and relationship-building within the coworking ecosystem.

In addition, terms like “productivity” and “collaboration” suggest that users strongly associate coworking spaces with improved work performance and opportunities for joint activities. The presence of the word “business” further indicates that these environments are not only used for individual work purposes but also play a role in broader business development and growth. Collectively, the distribution of these keywords demonstrates how coworking spaces function as dynamic environments where operational efficiency, social engagement, and business opportunities intersect.

This visualization strengthens the results of the thematic analysis by confirming that coworking spaces operate as both tangible and intangible strategic resources. The convergence of frequently mentioned terms reflects a consistent pattern in user perceptions, where physical infrastructure and social capital are interconnected in creating value. As such, the word cloud serves as empirical support for the argument that coworking spaces embody a dual role within the Resource-Based View framework, contributing simultaneously to operational effectiveness and competitive advantage.

The findings of this study indicate that coworking spaces align closely with the core principles of the Resource-Based View (RBV), particularly in terms of their ability to create value for users. The presence of well-equipped workspaces, reliable internet access, and supporting facilities contributes significantly to improving operational efficiency. These tangible resources reduce the need for large initial investments, allowing freelancers and SMEs to allocate resources more strategically. In addition, the structured and professional work environment enhances focus and work discipline, leading to increased productivity. Informants consistently emphasized that coworking spaces enable them to work more effectively compared to informal settings such as home-based environments. The integration of physical infrastructure with a conducive work atmosphere further strengthens performance outcomes. This demonstrates that coworking spaces function as valuable resources that directly support business activities. As a result, their contribution to efficiency and productivity becomes a critical factor in strengthening user performance.

In addition to being valuable, coworking spaces also exhibit characteristics of rarity, particularly through the social environments they create. The presence of diverse individuals from various professional backgrounds fosters unique networking opportunities that are not easily found in traditional office settings. Informants reported that interactions within coworking spaces often lead to new business connections, partnerships, and client acquisition. This network diversity enhances access to information and opportunities, creating a distinct advantage for users. The organic development of relationships within a shared workspace contributes to a dynamic and evolving social structure. Such conditions make coworking spaces not only places to work but also hubs of professional interaction. The uniqueness of these social networks strengthens their classification as rare resources. Consequently, coworking spaces provide access to opportunities that are not readily available in isolated work environments.

The inimitability of coworking spaces is reflected in the complexity of social interactions and the collaborative culture that develops over time. Unlike physical facilities, which can be replicated relatively easily, the relationships, trust, and informal knowledge exchange within coworking spaces are deeply embedded in user experiences. Informants highlighted that the sense of community and mutual support plays a crucial role in fostering collaboration and innovation. These social dynamics are shaped by continuous interaction, making them difficult to reproduce in other contexts. The spontaneous exchange of ideas and experiences further enhances creativity and problem-solving capabilities. Such relational and cultural elements cannot be easily imitated by competitors or alternative work environments. This reinforces the argument that coworking spaces possess inimitable characteristics within the RBV framework. The embedded nature of these interactions contributes significantly to sustained competitive advantage.

Another important dimension identified in this study is the non-substitutability of coworking spaces as strategic resources. The combination of tangible infrastructure and intangible social capital creates a unique value proposition that cannot be easily replaced by other alternatives. While traditional offices may provide physical facilities, they often lack the collaborative and community-driven aspects found in coworking environments. Similarly, working from home may offer flexibility but does not provide structured networking opportunities or professional legitimacy. Informants emphasized that the integration of these elements is what makes coworking spaces particularly effective. The synergy between workspace facilities and social interaction generates benefits that are difficult to replicate in isolation. This integrated resource configuration strengthens the strategic position of coworking spaces. As a result, coworking spaces fulfill the non-substitutable criterion within the RBV perspective.

The synthesis of these findings positions coworking spaces as strategic assets that extend beyond their functional role as work environments. Their ability to combine valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources highlights their importance in supporting business competitiveness. Freelancers and SMEs benefit not only from improved efficiency but also from enhanced credibility, expanded networks, and increased opportunities for growth. The interaction between physical and social resources creates a dynamic ecosystem that supports continuous development. Informants' experiences demonstrate that coworking spaces contribute to both short-term performance and long-term sustainability. These characteristics reinforce the role of coworking spaces within modern entrepreneurial ecosystems. The strategic utilization of such environments enables users to adapt to changing market conditions more effectively. Consequently, coworking spaces emerge as key enablers of competitiveness and business sustainability for freelancers and SMEs.

4. Discussion

Coworking spaces are increasingly understood as strategic environments that integrate multiple types of resources for freelancers and SMEs within the contemporary digital economy. The findings indicate that coworking spaces function not merely as shared offices but as ecosystems that combine physical and social resources in the process of value creation. This perspective aligns with the Resource-Based View (RBV), which emphasizes the importance of resource configuration and utilization in achieving competitive advantage (El Nemar et al., 2025; Rantanen et al., 2021). The combination of infrastructure, interaction, and knowledge exchange reflects a shift toward network-

based approaches in modern work settings. Such environments enable individuals to access capabilities that would otherwise be difficult to obtain independently. This transformation suggests that competitiveness is no longer solely determined by resource ownership but by the ability to access and manage resources effectively. In this regard, coworking spaces emerge as adaptive platforms that respond to evolving economic dynamics.

Within this context, physical resources remain a fundamental foundation for supporting operational efficiency in coworking environments. Facilities such as high-speed internet, comfortable workspaces, and technological support directly contribute to work effectiveness. These findings are consistent with recent studies showing that shared infrastructure reduces operational costs and enhances efficiency for SMEs (Ingaldi & Ulewicz, 2025). In addition, the flexibility offered by coworking spaces allows users to adjust their usage based on changing needs. This adaptability distinguishes coworking spaces from traditional office models that tend to be rigid. Such characteristics reinforce the classification of these resources as valuable within the RBV framework. Therefore, physical resources not only support daily operations but also generate strategic efficiency for users.

Beyond tangible assets, the advantages of coworking spaces are strongly linked to the development of social capital through user interactions. Open environments encourage networking, collaboration, and continuous idea exchange. This is supported by prior research emphasizing that coworking spaces facilitate the formation of relational capital and collective innovation (R. Bouncken et al., 2020). These interactions occur organically, making them difficult to replicate in conventional work environments. Such characteristics reflect the “rare” and “inimitable” dimensions within RBV. Moreover, the networks formed often lead to new business opportunities for users. As a result, coworking spaces serve not only as workspaces but also as valuable social resources that enhance business development.

The relationship between social capital and knowledge-sharing processes further strengthens the role of coworking spaces as learning ecosystems. Collaborative environments enable individuals to exchange experiences and expertise across different fields. This finding is supported by recent studies that describe coworking spaces as knowledge ecosystems that foster innovation and capability development (Sutriadi & Fachryza, 2021). Access to diverse knowledge sources enhances users’ ability to adapt to changing market conditions. Informal learning processes, often driven by trust and direct interaction, tend to be more effective. These conditions create an environment that supports continuous skill development. Consequently, coworking spaces function as catalysts for innovation and competence enhancement.

The integration of these resources is clearly reflected in the improvement of user productivity. A professional and structured work environment enables individuals to maintain focus and discipline. These findings align with studies indicating that workspace design significantly influences productivity levels (Xia et al., 2024). In addition, the presence of a working community generates motivational effects through social influence. This suggests that productivity is shaped not only by individual factors but also by environmental context. The ability to establish structured work routines further supports long-term performance improvement. Thus, coworking spaces contribute to enhancing human capital as part of competitive advantage.

Improvements in productivity are closely associated with enhanced business credibility among coworking space users. A professional work environment creates a positive impression for clients and business partners. This is supported by research showing that coworking spaces function as signals of legitimacy and trust in the market (R. B. Bouncken & Tiberius, 2023). The use of business addresses and professional meeting facilities strengthens corporate image. This aspect is particularly important for SMEs that lack permanent office infrastructure. Increased credibility also opens opportunities for business expansion. Within the RBV framework, this represents a form of reputational resource that supports competitiveness.

5. Conclusion

This research concludes that coworking spaces function as strategic resources that integrate both tangible and intangible elements in supporting freelancers and SMEs within dynamic business environments. The findings address the research problem by demonstrating that coworking spaces are not limited to providing physical infrastructure, but also play a crucial role in facilitating social interaction, knowledge exchange, and collaborative value creation. In line with the research objectives, the study reveals that coworking spaces enhance productivity, strengthen business credibility, and expand networking opportunities, while also presenting certain challenges such as

cost, privacy limitations, and dependence on shared facilities. These results confirm that the value of coworking spaces lies in the effective combination and utilization of resources, consistent with the Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective. The study contributes theoretically by extending RBV into a more relational and ecosystem-based context, emphasizing the importance of social capital and collaborative environments in achieving competitive advantage. Practically, the findings provide insights for freelancers, SMEs, and coworking space providers in optimizing the use of shared work environments to improve performance and sustainability. Overall, coworking spaces emerge as adaptive and multifaceted platforms that support business development and competitiveness in the evolving digital economy.

6. References

- Akhavan, M., Mariotti, I., Astolfi, L., & Canevari, A. (2019). Coworking Spaces and New Social Relations: A Focus on the Social Streets in Italy. *Urban Science*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci3010002>
- Alfieri, L., Mariotti, I., & Rossi, F. (2025). The twin transition and flexible work arrangements: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 395(November), 127988. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2025.127988>
- Berbegal-Mirabent, J. (2021). What do we know about co-working spaces? Trends and challenges ahead. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(3), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13031416>
- Bouncken, R. B., Kraus, S., & Martínez-Pérez, J. F. (2020). Entrepreneurship of an institutional field: the emergence of coworking spaces for digital business models. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 16(4), 1465–1481. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-020-00689-4>
- Bouncken, R. B., & Tiberius, V. (2023). Legitimacy Processes and Trajectories of Co-Prosumption Services: Insights from Coworking Spaces. *Journal of Service Research*, 26(1), 64–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10946705211050208>
- Bouncken, R., Ratzmann, M., Barwinski, R., & Kraus, S. (2020). Coworking spaces: Empowerment for entrepreneurship and innovation in the digital and sharing economy. *Journal of Business Research*, 114(February), 102–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.033>
- Bueno, S., Rodríguez-Baltanás, G., & Gallego, M. D. (2018). Coworking spaces: a new way of achieving productivity. *Journal of Facilities Management*, 16(4), 452–466. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFM-01-2018-0006>
- Cheah, S., & Ho, Y. P. (2019). Coworking and sustainable business model innovation in young firms. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11(10), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11102959>
- Clifton, N., Füzi, A., & Loudon, G. (2022). Coworking in the digital economy: Context, motivations, and outcomes. *Futures*, 135(May 2019), 102439. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2019.102439>
- Echeverri, N., Jylhä, T., & Koppels, P. (2021). Searching for flexibility in corporate real estate portfolio: Six co-working strategies for user corporations. *Buildings*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings11030115>
- El Nemar, S., El-Chaarani, H., Dandachi, I., & Castellano, S. (2025). Resource-based view and sustainable advantage: a framework for SMEs. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 33(6), 798–821. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2022.2160486>
- Fu, Y., Li, Y., & Li, X. (2025). Coexisting or coworking? The reconfigured office spaces in two emerging global cities. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 47(5), 1691–1708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2023.2242531>
- Gao, C., & Psenner, E. (2024). Transforming the Creative and Social Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: The Broker Roles of Rural Collaborative Workspaces. *Societies*, 14(6), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc14060081>

- Gerdenitsch, C., Scheel, T. E., Andorfer, J., & Korunka, C. (2016). Coworking Spaces: A Source of Social Support for Independent Professionals. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00581>
- Ingaldi, M., & Ulewicz, R. (2025). Sustainable Development and Technological Advancements in Industry 4.0: Overcoming Barriers in Sme Sector Integration. *Management Systems in Production Engineering*, 33(2), 144–162. <https://doi.org/10.2478/mspe-2025-0015>
- Knox, S., Farooqi, S., & Oziri, V. (2024). More than just co-working? How co-working spaces frame their role and impact in entrepreneurial ecosystems. *Local Economy*, 39(5–6), 253–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02690942251334593>
- Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, A., & Isaac, H. (2016). The new office: how coworking changes the work concept. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 37(6), 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-10-2015-0105>
- Radic, D. (2020). Small matters! *Journal of the International Council for Small Business*, 1(1), 24–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26437015.2020.1714357>
- Rantanen, T., Eronen, J., Kauppinen, M., Kokko, K., Sanaslahti, S., Kajan, N., & Portegijs, E. (2021). Life-Space Mobility and Active Aging as Factors Underlying Quality of Life among Older People before and during COVID-19 Lockdown in Finland - A Longitudinal Study. *Journals of Gerontology - Series A Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences*, 76(3), E60–E67. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gerona/glaa274>
- Sutriadi, R., & Fachryza, D. M. (2021). A phenomenon in urban disruption: the emergence of Coworking Spaces in Bandung. *Heliyon*, 7(7), e07663. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07663>
- Wijngaarden, Y., Hitters, E., & Bhansing, P. V. (2020). Cultivating fertile learning grounds: Collegiality, tacit knowledge and innovation in creative co-working spaces. *Geoforum*, 109(June 2019), 86–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.01.005>
- Xia, L., Baghaie, S., & Mohammad Sajadi, S. (2024). The digital economy: Challenges and opportunities in the new era of technology and electronic communications. *Ain Shams Engineering Journal*, 15(2), 102411. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asej.2023.102411>
- Yang, E., Bisson, C., & Sanborn, B. E. (2019). Coworking space as a third-fourth place: changing models of a hybrid space in corporate real estate. *Journal of Corporate Real Estate*, 21(4), 324–345. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCRE-12-2018-0051>
- Yu, R., Burke, M., & Raad, N. (2019). Exploring impact of future flexible working model evolution on urban environment, economy and planning. *Journal of Urban Management*, 8(3), 447–457. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jjum.2019.05.002>
- Zhu, S. (2026). How Does Cross-Border E-Commerce Change As Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Expand Into Emerging Markets? *Journal of Governance and Regulation*, 15(1), 160–173. <https://doi.org/10.22495/jgrv15i1art15>