

The Meaning of Professional Branding Among Millennial Farmers: A Phenomenological Study in Tegal Regency, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how millennial farmers construct the meaning of professional agricultural branding through their everyday communication experiences. Grounded in Alfred Schutz's phenomenological perspective, the study involved nine purposively selected millennial farmers aged 30–38 in Tegal Regency, Central Java. Interview, observation, and documentary data collected in May 2026 were analysed through epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. The findings indicate that decisions to pursue farming are shaped by the interplay between because-motives and in-order-to motives. Farming is understood through economic, ideational, affective, and self-actualising dimensions, while occupational stigma is addressed through five communicative branding strategies. Unlike previous studies focusing on digital self-presentation or outsiders' perceptions, this study reconstructs occupational branding from farmers' lived experiences. The findings demonstrate that individual branding can serve as an instrument for repositioning farming as a valuable collective profession. The resulting stigma-to-strategy model offers implications for farmer regeneration policies, agricultural extension, and the strengthening of both digital and face-to-face communication.

ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana petani milenial membangun makna branding profesional pertanian melalui pengalaman komunikasi sehari-hari. Berlandaskan fenomenologi Alfred Schutz, penelitian ini melibatkan sembilan petani milenial berusia 30–38 tahun yang dipilih secara purposive di Kabupaten Tegal, Jawa Tengah. Data wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi yang dikumpulkan pada Mei 2026 dianalisis melalui epoché, reduksi fenomenologis, dan variasi imajinatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keputusan menekuni pertanian dipengaruhi oleh keterkaitan motif karena dan motif untuk. Pertanian dimaknai melalui aspek ekonomi, ideologis, afektif, dan aktualisasi diri, sementara stigma terhadap profesi petani dihadapi melalui lima strategi branding komunikatif. Berbeda dari penelitian yang berfokus pada presentasi diri digital atau persepsi pihak luar, penelitian ini merekonstruksi branding profesi berdasarkan pengalaman hidup petani. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa branding individu dapat menjadi instrumen untuk membangun kembali citra pertanian sebagai profesi kolektif yang bernilai. Model stigma-to-strategy memberikan implikasi bagi kebijakan regenerasi petani, penyuluhan, dan penguatan komunikasi digital maupun tatap muka.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains a strategic engine of global economic growth. Beyond securing the livelihoods of billions, the sector holds substantial potential for eradicating extreme poverty (Calafat-Marzal et al., 2026) and, in the developing world, small-scale farming continues to be the single largest source of employment (White, 2012). Indonesia illustrates this strategic position vividly. Data released by Statistics Indonesia (BPS) show that the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sector contributed 14.35% of national Gross Domestic Product in the third quarter of 2025, up from 13.83% in the preceding quarter, positioning agriculture as the second-largest contributor to the national economy (BPS, 2025b). The sector's strategic role is equally visible in employment: the February 2025 National Labour Force Survey (Sakernas) recorded agriculture, forestry, and

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fisheries as the largest absorber of the national workforce, at 28.54% (BPS, 2025a). Beyond its economic weight, the sector also underpins social sustainability, serving simultaneously as the backbone of national food security and the mainstay of rural livelihoods (Selvia et al., 2025).

Behind these strategic contributions, however, Indonesian agriculture is confronting a fundamental challenge: a crisis of farmer regeneration. The main actors of the agricultural workforce are concentrated in older age groups, while the participation of the younger generation remains very limited (Selvia et al., 2025; Susilowati, 2016). This condition carries serious consequences for the sustainability of agricultural development (particularly for productivity, market competitiveness, and the economic capacity of rural areas) and, in the longer run, threatens national food security (Susilowati, 2016). The considerable potential for developing a sustainable agricultural sector therefore accentuates the need for capable young farmers as part of the regeneration process, given that farming is still dominated by elderly practitioners (Aziza et al., 2022). The 2023 Agricultural Census (Phase I) records that the number of individual farmers in Indonesia declined by 7.45% over the last decade, from 31.71 million in 2013 to 29.34 million in 2023, and that the demographic structure remains dominated by older cohorts: 42.39% of farmers belong to Generation X (aged 43-58), while the shares of farmers aged 59-64 and above 65 rose by 3.29% and 3.4%, respectively, over the same period. In stark contrast, the proportion of millennial-aged farmers has followed a downward trend: farmers aged 25-34 declined by 1.73 percentage points to 10.24%, and those aged 35-43 fell by 4.34 points to 22.0% (BPS, 2023).

The combination of an ageing farming population and waning youth interest is not unique to Indonesia; comparable patterns have been documented in European countries and Canada (Susilowati, 2016), and cross-national reviews confirm a global shortage of young people willing to pursue agricultural careers (Consentino et al., 2023; White, 2012). Importantly, this crisis is not merely a demographic phenomenon but a product of intertwined economic, cultural, and social dynamics (Selvia et al., 2025). Economically, regeneration is hampered by low farm incomes, employment instability, and minimal social protection in the agricultural labour market (Calafat-Marzal et al., 2026). Culturally, it is shaped by parental preferences that steer children away from farming (Selvia et al., 2025), by the erosion of local farming traditions and of young people's attachment to agricultural activity, and by family characteristics such as the number of children, age, and household size (Saleh et al., 2021). A further cultural driver lies in the shifting way of life of young people in the postmodern era and the influence of subcultures flourishing in today's digital-technology environment (Susilowati, 2016), which together render farming an unpopular career path among youth (Widiyanti et al., 2020).

The social dimension of the crisis is fundamentally symbolic, and therefore communicative. Young people widely stigmatise the farming profession as synonymous with poverty, low prestige, and the absence of opportunities for success (Widiyanti et al., 2020), and youth involvement in farming or agribusiness is often read as an act of compulsion rather than choice (Haryanto et al., 2021). This stigma is reinforced by symbolic representations that constitute the profession's image, or *branding*: farming is portrayed as physically exhausting and dirty work that darkens the skin through long hours in the field, and as suitable only for those from farming backgrounds. Young people, by contrast, prefer occupations with high mobility and promising prospects, are reluctant to work outdoors (Widiyanti et al., 2020), and gravitate toward office, service, economic, and business sectors (Nawawi et al., 2022). Seen through this lens, the regeneration crisis is, at its core, a problem of a "spoiled" occupational brand, one produced, circulated, and potentially transformed through communication.

Against this backdrop of persistent negative stigma, the emergence of millennial farmers has begun to change the "face" of Indonesian agriculture into one that is more modern, professional, and adaptive to technological change. Millennial farmers refer to farmers within the millennial age range, the generation born between 1982 and 2000 according to Howe and Strauss (as cited in Putra, 2016). This cohort is characteristically adaptive to digital technology and experiences relatively little difficulty in identifying and verifying technological innovations, a capability recognised in Indonesia's agricultural human-resource policy (Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture No. 04/2019). Crucially, for many of them, becoming a farmer is neither an economic escape nor a forced circumstance, but a conscious choice propelled by strong internal motivation.

A growing body of research has addressed farmer regeneration and young people's engagement with agriculture. One strand examines the self-representation of millennial and young farmers in digital media (Sukmayadi et al., 2025; Unay-Gailhard et al., 2025) and the use of digital media to attract youth into farming (Herlon et al., 2025). Another strand investigates the factors that shape young people's interest (or

disinterest) in the agricultural sector (Ardyanti et al., 2024; Consentino et al., 2023; Sitanggang et al., 2025). A third strand explores the identity work of young farmers, including identity gaps and their negotiation (Widiyanti et al., 2020), the shifting meaning of “farmer” from young farmers’ perspectives (Prayoga et al., 2020), youth perceptions of the farming profession (Erliaristi et al., 2022), and the self-concept of millennial farmers (Ningrum & Rajiyem, 2023).

Yet little research has examined how the image (or branding) of the farming profession is constituted as *meaning* within farmers’ own communicative experience as social actors who build professional branding in everyday life, both online and offline. Existing studies tend either to analyse media texts and digital self-presentation or to survey outsiders’ perceptions, leaving the first-person, lived construction of the profession’s brand largely unexplored. Three shortcomings make this omission consequential. Empirically, studies of digital self-representation take the finished media text as their unit of analysis and therefore cannot recover the motives, negotiations (Sukmayadi et al., 2025; Unay-Gailhard et al., 2025), and offline encounters out of which that text is produced; conversely, survey and perception studies establish what outsiders think of farming but not how farmers themselves work on that image (Ardyanti et al., 2024; Consentino et al., 2023; Erliaristi et al., 2022; Sitanggang et al., 2025). Theoretically, identity-oriented studies of young farmers stop at the level of self-concept and identity negotiation, treating stigma as something to be absorbed or defended against, and do not ask how identity work is converted into deliberate, audience-directed branding of the occupation as a whole (Ningrum & Rajiyem, 2023; Prayoga et al., 2020; Widiyanti et al., 2020). The personal-branding literature, in turn, has been developed almost entirely around knowledge workers and high-prestige careers in the Global North (Gorbatov et al., 2018), leaving unexamined whether its individualistic, career-capital logic holds where the brand under management is a stigmatised and collectively held agrarian occupation. The gap addressed here therefore lies at the intersection of these three bodies of work: the absence of a first-person, phenomenological account of how professional branding is constituted as meaning by actors who are simultaneously its authors and its objects. Understanding this meaning-making matters: it holds a key to strengthening farmer regeneration in Indonesia and can shape millennial farmers’ decisions to persist in (or abandon) the profession. These strands converge on a single synthesis. The regeneration crisis is sustained not only by unfavourable farm economics but by a spoiled occupational brand; that brand is neither fixed nor externally imposed but is produced, contested, and potentially rewritten in the everyday communication of the people who carry the occupation; and reaching that production process requires a method capable of accessing first-person meaning rather than aggregate perception. Schutz’s phenomenology, with its dual structure of *because* and *in-order-to* motives, supplies exactly this access, because it allows the biographical grounds of the decision to farm and the projects toward which that decision is oriented to be reconstructed as the actors themselves constitute them. This study therefore seeks to understand how millennial farmers construct the meaning of the professional branding of the farming profession through their communicative experiences. Three questions guide the inquiry: (1) What motives underlie millennial farmers’ decision to pursue farming? (2) What meanings do they attach to the farming profession? (3) Through what communicative experiences and strategies do they construct the professional branding of the profession in everyday life?

The study is situated in Tegal Regency, an agrarian area of Central Java Province currently undergoing an agricultural transformation driven by the involvement of its younger generation. This transformation is anchored by the presence of P4S (Pusat Pelatihan Pertanian dan Perdesaan Swadaya, the Self-Reliant Agricultural and Rural Training Centre) Satria Tani Hanggawana, a millennial-farmer community that actively develops agricultural innovation. The community serves not only as a hub of production but also as a space for knowledge sharing and digital marketing, and for cultivating the professional branding of farmers through a range of public activities. Tegal Regency was selected for three reasons that distinguish it from other agrarian districts in Java. First, it combines a conventional agrarian structure with a documented shift toward high-value, technology-intensive commodities: greenhouse-grown premium melon, shallot, and fruit horticulture are cultivated alongside the region’s staple food crops, so that the traditional and the modern faces of farming are observable within a single locality rather than across separate research sites. Second, the district hosts a P4S that is registered under the Ministry of Agriculture’s scheme yet run by millennial farmers themselves rather than by state extension officers, which means that the professional branding examined here is generated from below by practitioners rather than delivered top-down through government campaigns; districts whose millennial-farmer activity is organised primarily by extension services would not permit the same observation. Third, Tegal carries a strong regional culture of *merantau* (out-migration for

work and trade), which historically routes its young people toward urban commerce and services; the decision to remain and farm is consequently a conspicuous and socially contested one, so that stigma and its communicative management are unusually pronounced, articulate, and therefore observable in this setting. By reconstructing the motive structures, meanings, and communicative branding practices of these farmers, the study contributes empirically a stigma-to-strategy account of occupational rebranding from below; theoretically, it extends personal-branding scholarship by grounding branding in the Schutzian temporality of motives; and practically, it informs extension and regeneration policy.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Schutz's Phenomenology and the Structure of Motives

Phenomenology offers a distinctive vantage point for social inquiry by directing attention to the meanings that form within the reality of everyday life, positioning informants as subjects, social actors in their daily lifeworld (Nindito, 2013). Alfred Schutz's phenomenology of the social world holds that human action is meaningful action: actors continuously interpret their experiences through a socially derived stock of knowledge and through typifications shared intersubjectively with others (Schutz, 1967). Meaning, in this account, is neither purely private nor externally imposed; it is accomplished in the ongoing interplay between an actor's sedimented biography and the intersubjective world of everyday interaction. Central to Schutz's framework is the distinction between two orders of motive. *In-order-to motives* are future-oriented: they concern the goals, intentions, plans, hopes, and interests toward which an act is projected. *Because motives*, by contrast, are anchored in the actor's past: they refer to lived experiences that have sedimented into preconstituted knowledge and that furnish the reasons or grounds of present action (Mulyana, 2024; Schutz, 1967). Reading occupational choice through this dual structure allows the researcher to reconstruct both the biographical genealogy of the decision to farm and the projects toward which that decision is oriented, precisely the temporal depth that survey-based accounts of "interest in farming" cannot capture.

2.2 Professional Branding as a Communicative Accomplishment

Personal branding has been consolidated in management and communication scholarship as "a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based on a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery" (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 6). Communicatively, such branding rests on the dramaturgical work of self-presentation: actors manage the impressions others form of them by orchestrating appearance, manner, and setting on the "front stage" of social life (Goffman, 1959). In this study, *professional branding* is understood at two connected levels: (a) the socially constructed image of the farming profession that circulates in society, and (b) the intentional communicative practices (online and offline) through which practitioners shape, contest, and re-signify that image in everyday interaction. Because social reality is itself built up through processes of externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), an occupation's brand is never fixed: it is continuously reproduced or transformed through communication.

This conceptualisation intersects with research on young-farmer identity. Widiyanti et al. (2020) show that Indonesian young farmers experience identity gaps (tensions between how they see themselves and how others see the profession) and must negotiate validation through self-verification. Ningrum & Rajiyem (2023) likewise demonstrate that millennial farmers' self-concepts are forged in interaction with significant others, in the manner of the looking-glass self. What remains open is how such identity work scales up into deliberate branding of the profession itself. By combining Schutz's motive structure with a dramaturgical account of branding, the present study traces the full arc from biographically grounded motives, through the meanings attached to farming, to the communicative strategies by which a stigmatised occupational image is actively re-branded.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to understand social phenomena as they appear in the consciousness of those who live them. Phenomenology becomes especially valuable when applied practically as the animating spirit of social research, particularly for observing the patterned conduct of individuals as social actors in society; it offers a fresh way of seeing the research focus by excavating meanings formed within the reality of everyday life (Nindito, 2013). The design follows the descriptive

orientation of Schutzian phenomenology, operationalised through the systematic procedures elaborated by Moustakas (1994), and is appropriate here because the object of inquiry (the meaning of professional branding) exists precisely as lived, first-person experience rather than as an externally measurable variable.

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

Fieldwork was conducted in Tegal Regency, Central Java, with millennial farmers affiliated with the P4S Satria Tani Hanggawana network and its wider community. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, a technique in which data sources are chosen on the basis of specific considerations: for instance, possession of the knowledge and capacities the study requires, or a position that enables the researcher to probe the phenomenon in depth. Nine active millennial farmers participated, selected against six criteria: (1) belonging to the millennial generation (born 1982–2000; aged 26–44 at the time of fieldwork) and domiciled in Tegal Regency, Central Java; (2) owning private farmland and/or a greenhouse; (3) having run a farming enterprise for at least five years; (4) managing the farm independently and working directly in the field; (5) representing both “established” and “still striving” categories of farmers, to capture contrasting experiences; and (6) possessing recognised knowledge and capacity as farmers with direct involvement in enterprise management. The nine informants (aged 30–38) cultivate a range of commodities, from premium melon and shallot to vegetable and fruit horticulture and goat husbandry; their profiles are summarised in Table 1 (Section 4.1). Identities are anonymised using initials.

3.3 Data Collection

In qualitative research, data collection unfolds in natural settings. Primary data were gathered through three complementary techniques. First, participant observation: the researcher was directly involved in the daily activities of the informants under study, including on-farm routines and the community’s public events. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to access layers of informants’ interpretation of situations and phenomena that observation alone cannot reach; interviews were conducted face-to-face at informants’ farms and homes during the first three weeks of May 2026, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Third, document review, covering both personal and institutional materials: field photographs, organisational records of P4S Satria Tani Hanggawana, and informants’ relevant social-media posts. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, frequently inflected with Javanese expressions; quotations presented in this article were translated by the authors, with key vernacular terms retained in italics and glossed to preserve their situated meaning.

3.4 Data Analysis

Analysis followed the phenomenological sequence of (1) *epoché*, the deliberate suspension of theoretical assumptions, prior knowledge, and personal presuppositions so that the phenomenon could be “seen” as it appears in informants’ consciousness; (2) phenomenological reduction, in which significant statements were extracted (horizontalisation), coded, categorised, and clustered into themes, producing rich individual descriptions; and (3) imaginative variation and essential synthesis, in which the phenomenon was imagined across variations of time, context, and perspective to test the robustness of themes and identify essential elements, before textural and structural descriptions were integrated into a statement of essence (Moustakas, 1994). Coding proceeded from verbatim excerpts to codes, sub-themes, and themes; the full coding matrix is available as a supplementary file. Concretely, coding proceeded in four steps. First, each transcript was read in full and then line by line, and every statement bearing on motives, meanings, or communicative practice was extracted verbatim as a significant statement; overlapping and repetitive statements were then removed so that each retained horizon was non-repetitive and non-overlapping. Second, significant statements were assigned open codes phrased as closely as possible to informants’ own wording, so that Javanese and Indonesian vernacular categories were preserved at the first analytic level (for example *eman-eman*, roughly “a waste”; *wong enom gila*, “a crazy young man”; *ayem*, “ease of mind”). Third, codes recurring across informants were compared and clustered into sub-themes on the basis of shared meaning rather than shared vocabulary, and sub-themes were aggregated into the three major themes reported in Section 4; each candidate theme was tested against the criteria of internal homogeneity (the codes it contains cohere) and external heterogeneity (it is distinguishable from neighbouring themes). Fourth, themes were refined and validated in three ways: by returning to the complete transcripts to confirm that every theme was grounded in the accounts of

at least three informants and that no significant statement remained unaccounted for; by discussing the coding frame among the authors until disagreements about code boundaries were resolved through consensus; and by member checking, in which the theme structure and the quotations attributed to each informant were returned to that informant for confirmation or correction. Codes that could not be sustained under this scrutiny were merged or discarded, and the theme structure was fixed only once the remaining data were generating no new codes. The analysis yielded three major themes (motives for becoming a farmer, meanings of the farming profession, and communicative experiences of professional branding), whose structure is summarised in Table 2 (Section 4.1).

3.5 Trustworthiness

Data validity was pursued through source triangulation, testing the credibility of findings by cross-examining and comparing data obtained from interviews, observation, and documentation, and through member checking, in which interpretations and interview transcripts were returned to informants for confirmation. Transferability was supported by thick description of the setting and informants; dependability and confirmability were maintained through an audit trail comprising transcripts, the codebook, and analytic memos (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.6 Research Ethics

All informants took part voluntarily after being informed of the study's aims, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time; verbal and written informed consent was obtained prior to interviews and recording. Informants' identities are protected through the use of initials, and quotations were cleared through the member-checking process. Formal clearance from a research ethics committee was not required for this study. The research involved no biomedical or clinical intervention, no collection of biological material, and no participation by vulnerable groups; it was a non-interventional qualitative study conducted with competent adult participants, a category for which institutional ethics review is not mandated for social-science research in the Indonesian context. In place of formal clearance, the study followed the established ethical protocol for qualitative social research: written permission to conduct fieldwork was obtained in advance from the management of P4S Satria Tani Hanggawana; participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any point without consequence; informants were free to decline any question or to have material removed from the record; all recordings, transcripts, and field notes were stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team; identities were anonymised using initials; and no quotation was published without the informant's confirmation during member checking.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Informant Profile and Thematic Overview

The findings draw on in-depth interviews with, and observation of, nine millennial farmers in Tegal Regency whose demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. All informants fall within the millennial cohort (aged 30-38 at the time of fieldwork), own and personally manage their enterprises, and have farmed for at least five years across commodities ranging from greenhouse-grown premium melon to shallot, vegetable and fruit horticulture, and goat husbandry.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics and profile of informants

No.	Code	Age (years)	Commodity / agricultural enterprise
1	KR	31	Premium melon
2	AT	35	Premium melon
3	DL	30	Shallot
4	SJ	35	Goat husbandry
5	AM	30	Horticulture (vegetables)
6	RD	38	Horticulture (fruit crops)
7	JS	31	Horticulture (vegetables)
8	WD	37	Water apple (jambu air)
9	IS	37	Premium melon

Note. Informants are identified by initials to protect confidentiality.

Phenomenological analysis of the interview, observation, and documentary data produced three interlocking themes: (1) the motive structure underlying the decision to become a farmer; (2) the meanings informants attach to the farming profession; and (3) the communicative experiences through which the professional branding of the profession is constructed, comprising both the lived experience of stigma and support, and a repertoire of strategic branding efforts. Table 2 summarises this thematic structure; the sections that follow present each theme with illustrative evidence.

Table 2. Thematic structure of the findings

Theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative categories
1. Motives for becoming a farmer	Because motives (sedimented past experience)	Family farming heritage and parental influence; social inspiration from successful entrepreneurs; transformative learning experiences; early intrinsic interest in agriculture
	In-order-to motives (future-oriented projects)	Economic aspiration and agribusiness opportunity; self-development and application of knowledge; psychological comfort, autonomy, and flexibility; commitment to farmer regeneration
2. Meanings of the farming profession	Economic meaning	Farming as a source of livelihood and income
	Ideational meaning	A noble, life-sustaining profession; a form of struggle and devotion
	Affective meaning	An enjoyable and calming vocation; pride and personal fulfilment
	Self-actualising meaning	A space for continuous learning; freedom and flexibility of work
3. Communicative experiences of professional branding	Lived experiences of the profession	Stigma, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination; doubt from close circles; social support and recognition
	Strategic branding efforts	Self-presentation (online and offline); impression management of the modern farmer; credibility building; relationship maintenance; persuasive communication for regeneration

Note. The complete coding matrix (verbatim excerpts, codes, sub-themes, and themes for all nine informants) is provided as a supplementary file.

4.2 Thematic Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the 25 selected articles generated six major themes: (1) AI as an enabler of digital transformation; (2) AI for efficiency and productivity; (3) AI and innovation capability; (4) AI for adaptability, competitiveness, and resilience; (5) AI and MSME sustainability; and (6) barriers and enabling conditions for AI implementation. These six themes are interconnected and demonstrate the evolution of AI utilization from a technological function toward the development of strategic MSME capabilities.

4.2. Theme 1: The Motive Structure of Becoming a Farmer

The decision of millennial farmers to pursue the farming profession does not rest on a single motive; it is a composite of biographical background and projected aspiration, and it is dynamic, developing as each informant's experience accumulates. In Schutz's terms, these motives are of two orders: *in-order-to motives*, which articulate the goals, plans, hopes, and interests an informant pursues, and *because motives*, which refer to past experiences sedimented into preconstituted knowledge and oriented toward the actor's biography (Mulyana, 2024; Schutz, 1967). The analysis found both orders at work, with because motives arising from external experiences (family background, social influence, and learning) as well as internal dispositions (intrinsic interest), and in-order-to motives spanning economic, self-actualising, psychological, and social projects.

4.2.1. Because motives: the biographical grounds of the decision

Family farming heritage and parental influence. The family's background in agriculture emerged as a dominant ground for informants' decisions. Having grown up watching and joining the family's farm work, informants came to understand farming not merely as a job but as a family legacy to be continued:

"Orang tuaku itu sudah menggariskan. Ketika berempat saudara, itu harus ada yang memang meneruskan perjuangan Bapak Ibu... berarti kan ada mimpi yang harus diwujudkan" [My parents had drawn the line: of the four siblings, one truly had to continue Father's and Mother's struggle... so there was a dream that had to be realised] (JS, 31)

"Alasannya karena sebenarnya niat awalnya cuma bantu orang tua gitu ya. Buat ngelola pertanian bawang gitu" [Honestly, my initial intention was simply to help my parents, to manage the shallot farm] (DL, 30)

The family thus operates as the first circle in which agricultural knowledge, values, and experience are formed, furnishing the ground on which informants later continue the family enterprise. Beyond heritage, parents' concrete sacrifices (support for education, the inculcation of life values, and the material effort invested in schooling) became a second, morally charged ground. The magnitude of parental investment in formal (agricultural) education generated an awareness that the knowledge acquired ought to be applied in its own field, an awareness that matured into a felt responsibility to honour parents' efforts through an occupational choice congruent with one's competence:

"Karena kan kayaknya ilmunya sia-sia kalau ga di pertanian. Orang tua udah biayain besar malah kerjanya di bank, kayak gitu kan. Kan eman-eman" [The knowledge would feel wasted if it were not used in farming. My parents had paid so much, and then I would end up working in a bank? That would be such a waste (eman-eman)] (KR, 31)

"Langsung dibayarkan, Mba. Di situ saya, jangan sampai saya itu dibikin kecewa. Saya harus bisa mengembalikan nilai itu, bagaimanapun caranya" [The tuition was paid straight away. From that moment, I must never let them down. I had to return that value, whatever it took] (JS, 31)

In Schutz's perspective, these experiences exemplify because motives: they originate in the informant's past and become the basis of present action in choosing the farming profession.

Social inspiration from successful entrepreneurs. Interaction with agricultural entrepreneurs also shaped the decision. Informants who had not previously farmed drew inspiration from the trajectories of business owners who grew step by step from small beginnings, encounters powerful enough to prompt a career U-turn into farming:

"Sering ketemu sama beliau-beliau, nasabah-nasabah, yang mereka pelaku-pelaku usaha... Dari nol mengajukan kredit sekian, tiba-tiba selang berapa bulan atau tahun depannya, tambah maju-tambah maju. Jadi termotivasi" [I often met those customers, all of them business people [while working at a bank] They started from zero, applying for a small loan, and within months or a year they kept advancing and advancing. It motivated me] (IS, 37)

Such encounters became a reference point and a source of conviction that agriculture is a field with substantial room to grow, that the farming profession offers sound economic prospects when managed professionally.

Transformative learning experiences. Learning about agriculture likewise functioned as a because motive. Interest did not appear instantaneously; it developed through study that widened informants' knowledge of the agricultural world:

"Ternyata cukup sangat menarik ketika memang dipelajari. Kayak kita belajar pupuk aja, gitu kan, banyak sekali variannya, kandungannya, dan sebagainya. Ternyata asik juga di pertanian kalau memang dipelajari dengan sedemikian rupa" [It turns out to be genuinely fascinating once you study it. Take fertilisers alone: there are so many varieties, so many compositions. Farming is actually fun when you learn it properly] (AM, 30)

The deeper the knowledge acquired, the stronger the pull toward the field: learning operated not merely as a means of acquiring knowledge but as a subjective experience that reworked informants' perception of agriculture until it became a chosen career path.

Early intrinsic interest. Finally, the decision was not driven by external factors alone. An internal disposition (interest, attraction, and desire toward the agricultural world) had been present early and continued to develop:

"Pertamanya sih karena suka... untuk senang ke pertanian sebenarnya dari lama, dari jaman kuliah juga saya udah senang" [At first, simply because I loved it... I had been fond of agriculture for a long time, since my university days] (RD, 38)

"Jadi petani ya kalau saya, ya tadi, saya memang pengennya dari dulu pengen jadi petani-peternak gitu istilahnya"

[Becoming a farmer: for me, I had wanted all along to be a farmer and livestock keeper, so to speak] (SJ, 35)

These statements show that the decision was also grounded in pre-formed personal preference. In Schutz's reading, such subjective experience represents a because motive rooted in inner disposition: an interest that had become part of lived biography and shaped informants' view of farming as a profession fitting the self, a passion. The decision to farm is thus the outcome of internalised experience and preference that emerged and matured before the decision itself was enacted.

4.2.2. In-order-to motives: the projects toward which farming is oriented

Economic aspiration and agribusiness opportunity. Looking forward, informants framed farming as a field of exceptional economic promise. The calculus could be strikingly concrete:

"Melihatnya cuma ada potensi, duit banyak, itu tok. Yang dihadirkan dulu itu, kenapa saya tertarik: modalnya 20 juta, lahan seperempat hektar... setelah 2 bulan itu menghasilkan 60 juta" [What I saw was potential: serious money, that was all. What drew me in at first: a capital of twenty million rupiah on a quarter-hectare... returning sixty million after two months] (AT, 35)

"Dan ternyata sebenarnya peluangnya itu sangat besar sekali... kelihatan prospek jangka panjang, kan tidak ada putusnya untuk di pertanian" [The opportunity is actually enormous... the long-term prospects are visible; in farming, demand never runs out] (WD, 37)

Self-development and the application of knowledge. For several informants, the projected goal was less pecuniary than developmental: farming as a field for applying formal training and for continuous capacity building:

"Jadi, enakanya di pertanian kayak gitu. Selalu ada hal baru yang kita belajar... Cuan nomor dua. Ilmu nomor satu dulu" [That is the nice thing about farming: there is always something new to learn... Money comes second; knowledge comes first] (RD, 38)

Psychological comfort, autonomy, and flexibility. Informants also projected farming as a route to inner calm and self-directed work, an aspiration set explicitly against the pressures of formal employment:

"Dan nyaman juga kan, aku juga bisa sambil keliling kemana-mana. Bisa santai. Tidak ada tuntutan dari siapapun. Tidak ada pressure. Itu buat aku yang bikin nyaman" [And it is comfortable: I can travel around, take it easy. No demands from anyone, no pressure. That is what makes it comfortable for me] (DL, 30)

"Saya merasa di petani itu lebih tenang aja, sih, Mbak... Di sawah juga tenang. Lihat yang hijau-hijau... jadi merasa ada kesenangan batinnya sendiri" [I simply feel calmer as a farmer... The field is peaceful. Looking at all the green... there is an inner joy of its own] (AM, 30)

Commitment to farmer regeneration. Strikingly, the informants' projects extended beyond the self: several articulated an explicit social mission to reproduce the profession in the next generation:

"Saya juga ada misi sendiri, biar anak-anak ketika lulus itu biar mau jadi petani, Mba" [I also have a mission of my own: that when the youngsters graduate, they will be willing to become farmers] (KR, 31)

"Aku ingin mewujudkan anak-anak ini real berpenghasilan di atas UMR. Targetku mereka di Tegal ini 5 juta per bulan per anak" [I want these young people to genuinely earn above the regional minimum wage. My target for them here in Tegal is five million rupiah per month each] (AT, 35)

Taken together, the findings show that millennial farmers' because motives accumulate from life experience acquired through interaction with their social environment, while their in-order-to motives project farming as simultaneously an economic, developmental, psychological, and social undertaking. This dual structure (biographically grounded yet future-projected) forms the motivational bedrock on which the meanings of the profession, examined next, are built.

Read across the nine cases, the motive structure converges on one point and diverges on two. The convergence is temporal: for every informant the decision to farm was legitimated by reaching backwards into biography before it was projected forwards as a plan, so that no in-order-to motive in these data stands free of a because motive that authorises it. The first divergence concerns the source of that biographical grounding. Among informants raised in farming households (JS, DL, KR), the because motive is inherited and morally charged, and the vocabulary is one of obligation: *meneruskan perjuangan* (continuing the struggle), a debt that must be repaid, a promise never to disappoint. Among career-changers with no farming background (IS, AM), it is acquired and cognitive, and the vocabulary is one of discovery and persuasion:

farming became compelling because the success of others was observed at close range, or because the subject itself turned out to be absorbing once studied. The second divergence concerns the scope of the projected future. All nine informants project economic returns, but only those who have already achieved visible success (AT, KR) articulate regeneration as an explicit in-order-to motive with concrete targets attached to it. This ordering carries analytical weight: it suggests that the collective mission is not a starting condition of millennial farming but an achievement that becomes available once the individual project is secure, and therefore that the motive structure is sequential rather than static, with earlier motives creating the conditions under which later and more socially oriented ones can be formed.

4.3. Theme 2: Meanings of the Farming Profession

Informants' significations of farming cluster into four registers: economic, ideational, affective, and self-actualising. Economically, farming is first of all a source of livelihood: *"as a source of life and of livelihood... because the main income is there"* (DL, 30); *"for me it is work: I figured I could live from it, as long as I can read the opportunities"* (SJ, 35). JS (31) condenses this register in a Javanese aphorism:

"Walaupun tidak nyugih, tapi nguripi, Mbak. Tapi ketika sudah nguripi, ya Alhamdulillah" [Although it may not make you rich (ora nyugih), it keeps you alive (nguripi). And once it sustains life, thank God] (JS, 31)

Ideationally, farming is elevated into a noble, life-sustaining profession and a form of struggle and devotion. KR (31) reasons from the arithmetic of the nation's food system:

"Petani lebih dari sekedar profesi. Pertanian itu menjaga kehidupan biar tetap hidup. Dari 285 juta total warga Indonesia, itu cuma petani yang menghidupi, berarti kurang lebih 28 juta petani... Kalau petaninya punah ya otomatis impor. Ya petani ya profesi yang mulia sih" [A farmer is more than a profession. Farming keeps life alive. Of Indonesia's 285 million people, it is only the farmers who feed everyone, roughly 28 million of them... If farmers go extinct, we automatically import. Farming is a noble profession] (KR, 31)

"Lebih dari profesi, Mbak. Itu perjuangan. Perjuangan yang sangat mulia, lebih hebat daripada tentara, menurutku... Mereka tetap menjalani. Mereka merasa ini pengabdian. Kalau saya enggak menanam, masyarakat kita akan makan apa?" [More than a profession: it is a struggle, a truly noble struggle; to my mind, greater than a soldier's... [Farmers] keep going. They feel it is devotion: if I do not plant, what will our people eat?] (AT, 35)

Affectively, the profession is signified as enjoyable and calming: *"Farming is extraordinary. Farming is fun, and farming is enjoyable... my heart simply feels at peace"* (AM, 30); *"the best thing about being a farmer is the ease of mind (ayem)"* (IS, 37), and as a source of pride and personal fulfilment born of demonstrable mastery:

"Yang dirasakan sih pastinya ya bangga lah. Karena ya ternyata kok aku bisa menanam tanaman yang mungkin dikatakan orang itu kelas premium, itu kan sulit" [What I feel is pride, of course: realising that I could actually grow a crop people call premium class, which is difficult] (IS, 37)

Finally, in the self-actualising register, farming is meaningful as a space of continuous learning and of freedom: *"So far, I feel proud. It means we are doing what we love, and we can share the knowledge too... the knowledge comes, and the money comes"* (RD, 38); *"we are free: we can arrange our own time... many friends who visit actually wish they could build something like this and work from home"* (IS, 37). Across the four registers, one feature stands out: informants' meanings systematically invert the terms of the public stereotype. Where the societal image says poverty, they answer livelihood and opportunity; where it says low prestige, they answer nobility and devotion; where it says exhausting drudgery, they answer calm, joy, and self-mastery. The profession's meaning, in other words, is constructed in argument with its spoiled public brand, an argument whose communicative dynamics constitute the third theme.

The four registers are not, however, evenly distributed across the sample, and the pattern of their distribution is itself analytically informative. Economic meaning is universal: every informant articulates it, and almost all offer it first, which indicates that it functions as the minimum warrant of the profession's legitimacy, since farming must be shown to pay before it can credibly be claimed to be noble. The ideational register is voiced most emphatically by informants cultivating high-value commodities at scale (KR, AT), for whom the national food system is a plausible frame of reference; informants with smaller enterprises gravitate instead toward the affective and self-actualising registers, where the profession's value is measured in *ayem* (ease of mind), autonomy, and continuous learning rather than in national significance. The registers also differ in rhetorical direction: informants from farming families defend the profession's worth against a

stereotype they have carried since childhood, whereas career-changers contrast farming favourably with the salaried employment they left, so that the same conclusion is reached from opposite starting points. What unites all nine is the structure of the claim rather than its content. In every case the meaning of farming is stated in the grammatical and rhetorical form of a rebuttal, which confirms that these are not free-standing significations but positions taken up within an ongoing argument with the profession's public image.

4.4. Theme 3: Communicative Experiences in Constructing Professional Branding

4.4.1. Living the profession: stigma, doubt, and support

Every informant, without exception, recounted stigmatising encounters upon entering the profession. The stigma took the form of belittlement and interrogation of results: *"being looked down on, for sure... people kept asking, so what have you got to show for it?"* (AM, 30), of ridicule for "wasting" an education: *"why go to school that high if you end up holding a hoe?"* (SJ, 35), and of outright labelling:

"Dulu aku sempat dikatakan itu 'wong enom gila' di kampung... karena setelah kuliah kok ora merantau, tapi aku malah menjadi petani, Mbak" [I was once called wong enom gila (a crazy young man) in the village... because after university I did not migrate for work; instead, I became a farmer] (JS, 31)

For AT (35), extraordinary harvests were met not with admiration but with accusations of sorcery: *"I was even suspected of nyupang [using occult means] many simply refused to believe"* The stigma even penetrated his most intimate circle: *"my parents-in-law did not speak to me for nine months when I decided to become a farmer... ashamed of having a farmer for a son-in-law."* RD (38) faced a definitional stereotype: *"they think a farmer is only someone planting rice in the paddy field... the outlook is still, how shall I put it, colonial"* The stereotype shaded into local exclusion: despite nearly a decade of practice, he was regularly invited as a speaker and consultant outside his area, *"but never once asked to share in my own village"*, and his repeated applications for a farmer's card were rejected while rice-planting neighbours were approved. Doubt also came from the closest quarters: *"at first my wife had doubts: could we even survive on this? My friends too: are you really resigning, won't you regret it?"* (IS, 37).

Compared across informants, the stigma proves uniform in occurrence but stratified in form, and its form tracks both the social distance of its source and the visibility of the informant's success. From distant others it arrives as a category judgement about the occupation itself, as in the assumption that a farmer is by definition someone planting rice in a paddy field. From within the village, it arrives as a judgement about the person, in labels such as *wong enom gila* and in the reproach that education has been squandered. From intimates it arrives, most painfully, as withdrawal rather than as speech, as when AT's parents-in-law stopped speaking to him for nine months. A second pattern is that success does not dissolve stigma but shifts its register: AT's exceptional yields were reinterpreted as sorcery and RD's expertise was welcomed everywhere except in his own village, so that the more demonstrably successful the informant, the more the stigma migrates from doubt about competence to suspicion about legitimacy. RD's case adds a third, institutional layer absent from the other accounts: exclusion expressed not interpersonally but administratively, through the repeated refusal of a farmer's card to a horticulturalist who does not plant rice. Stigma in these data is therefore not a single obstacle but a graded field operating at categorical, interpersonal, intimate, and institutional levels, and the branding strategies described below are calibrated, as the analysis will show, to these different levels.

Yet the communicative field was not uniformly hostile. Informants also recorded affirming encounters, support and recognition that validated the choice: *"many of the mothers here, themselves from farming families, actually encouraged me: farming is good: when you harvest you receive real money, and your time is your own"* (IS, 37). JS (31) reframed hostility itself as fuel: *"when they called me crazy, I did not weaken; it fired me up."* It is precisely this dialectic (stigma pressing against conviction, punctuated by moments of recognition) that generates the strategic branding work described next: informants do not merely endure the profession's spoiled image; they set out deliberately to rewrite it.

4.4.2. Strategic efforts: five communicative strategies of professional branding

Self-presentation, online and offline. The most immediate strategy is the open, even emphatic, presentation of the farmer identity. KR (31) literalises the brand on cloth: *"for branding I mostly wear the farmer shirt, Satria Tani Hanggawana. I print new shirts every year and distribute them to the youngsters and to our partners"*, while running social media *"for branding and for promotion."* DL (30) claims the title in high-status settings: *"even to officials I say: I am a farmer... and why am I confident to say it? Because my income comes from farming"* He also

fixes it at the top of his social-media profile: "shallot farmer." WD (37) sustains a routine documentary presence: "I often post my activities in the orchard (the fruit, the plants) on TikTok, YouTube, Facebook" RD (38) has even amended his family-card occupation from lecturer to farmer, instructing his daughter: "if school asks, your father is a farmer."

Impression management of the modern farmer. A second strategy curates the profession's look and feel against the stereotype of the dirty, impoverished peasant. AT (35) is explicit that this is calculated performance:

"Kalau dulu memang personal branding seperti itu ya, Mbak. Kita menghadirkan sosok saya petani muda. Outfit kita perhatikan, karena masyarakat kita melihatnya dari visual dulu... Saya beli mobil, saya beli sepatu agak mahal... itu sebetulnya untuk mencari perhatian anak-anak muda ini" [In the beginning it really was personal branding. We presented the figure of the young farmer. We paid attention to the outfit, because our society judges from the visual first... I bought a car, I bought rather expensive shoes... honestly, to capture the attention of these young people] (AT, 35)

"Yang paling mudah untuk menggandeng para anak muda ini adalah kita wujudkan flexing privilege-nya. Petani itu nggak kotor. Mereka putih, bersih, kaya raya. Makanya anak-anak kalau sudah panen, tak sarankan facial perawatan" [The easiest way to bring the young people on board is to make the privilege visible. Farmers are not dirty; they are fair-skinned, clean, prosperous. That is why, after harvest, I tell my crew to go and get a facial treatment] (AT, 35)

The same repertoire recurs across informants: DL (30) models the farmer-entrepreneur: "farmers must do business... most millennial farmers are already entrepreneurs: we plant, and we already know which markets to reach; that is what earns respect... it should look cool, like American farmers with their boots and shirts, or a greenhouse" RD (38) and IS (37), meanwhile, foreground technology: "farming no longer has to mean playing in the mud... today a farmer can use a remote; everything can be controlled from a phone; it can even be run from home" (RD, 38); "being a farmer is actually pleasant... you must simply have more knowledge and command of technology" (IS, 37).

Credibility building. Because a rebranded image invites suspicion, informants anchor it in demonstrable competence and integrity. AT (35) practises radical transparency with investors: "I am open about everything: I carry a debt of four hundred million and I tell my investors myself... my present condition and my business plan going forward" JS (31), in turn, lets results argue:

"Nyata, Mbak, dari modal 60 juta itu aku tembus di 220 juta... Tapi orang yang ngatain gila itu, ternyata curi-curi pandang... Ketika butuh validasi, ayo kita main ke lahan" [It was real: from a capital of sixty million I broke through to two hundred and twenty million... And the very people who called me crazy began stealing glances... When someone needs validation, I say: come, let us go to the field] (JS, 31)

Credibility is further institutionalised through recognised expert roles: RD (38) progressed through the agricultural training centre's stages to become a certified trainer and has been invited to speak as far afield as Sleman, while JS (31) serves as a regular resource person at IPB University's Department of Plant Protection. WD (37) delivers village-level training on organic fertiliser production. As RD (38) summarises: "what matters is that the experience is solid, not just knowledge on paper, but in practice; that is what convinces partners."

Relationship maintenance. The brand is also sustained through the steady tending of networks. IS (37) keeps partners close through continuous low-intensity contact: "when we harvest I post it on my status; we comment back and forth, we chat on WhatsApp" He also converts neighbours into resellers at harvest time, "and they are happy." RD (38) brings partners physically into the enterprise: "if they need to see a crop, we go together, straight to the site"; WD (37) notifies buyers ahead of every harvest. These practices weave the rebranded farmer into durable webs of reciprocity and trust.

Persuasive communication for regeneration. Finally, branding is turned outward as advocacy: deliberate attempts to change how society, and especially rural youth, see the profession. RD (38) smuggles farming into existing communicative spaces: "we have a religious-study circle; I insert farming and business themes... the point is, sell the knowledge first." AT (35) sequences his appeals: "I always offer the enjoyable side first, never the hard part... I open with an interesting video, and they read the potential for themselves" WD (37), for his part, mobilises local exemplars: "I point to farmers around here who have become quite successful, and some of them get interested." In each case, the informant's own branded person functions as the persuasive text: the visible, prosperous, technologically fluent young farmer is the argument.

Set side by side, the five strategies are neither used uniformly nor selected at random; they are distributed according to the audience each informant most needs to convince and the resources each has available. Self-presentation and impression management appear in every account, because they address the most general audience and require only the informant's own body, clothing, and social-media feed. Credibility building and relationship maintenance appear where an informant depends on external parties for capital or market access (AT with investors, IS and WD with buyers and resellers), and these are the strategies in which the burden of proof is heaviest: here the claim must be redeemable in figures, in disclosure of debt, or in an open invitation to inspect the field. Persuasive communication for regeneration, by contrast, is concentrated among informants who occupy an institutional role — RD as a certified trainer, JS as a university resource person, AT as the employer of a young crew — which suggests that this final strategy is less an individual choice than a capacity conferred by position. The strategies also differ in the version of the modern farmer they project: AT's is a performance of conspicuous prosperity, DL's is entrepreneurial, RD's and IS's are technological, and KR's is communal, expressed in a uniform shirt distributed across the whole community. What holds these variants together is a shared negation, since each targets a specific element of the stereotype — poverty, subsistence, drudgery, isolation — and offers a visible counter-image in its place. The single point of complete convergence is the insistence on demonstrability: across all nine accounts the branded claim is ultimately settled not by argument but by an invitation to look, whether at a harvest figure, a greenhouse, or a body that does not resemble the one the stereotype predicts.

4.5. Synthesis: The Essence of the Phenomenon

Integrating the textural and structural descriptions yields the essence of the phenomenon, modelled in Figure 1. The professional branding of the farming profession, for these millennial farmers, is not a cosmetic layer applied after the fact; it is the communicative continuation of their biography. Because motives (family heritage, parental sacrifice, social inspiration, learning, intrinsic interest) and in-order-to motives (prosperity, self-actualisation, calm and autonomy, regeneration) jointly generate a set of counter-stereotypical meanings of the profession. Those meanings are then tested daily in a communicative field polarised between stigmatising and affirming encounters. Rather than retreating, informants convert the friction of stigma into deliberate branding energy, deployed through five strategies (self-presentation, impression management, credibility building, relationship maintenance, and persuasive communication), whose cumulative effect feeds back into, and re-signifies, the public image of the profession itself. In short: the millennial farmer's professional brand is stigma transformed into strategy: ongoing, intersubjective meaning work performed at once for the self, for the market, and for the next generation of farmers.

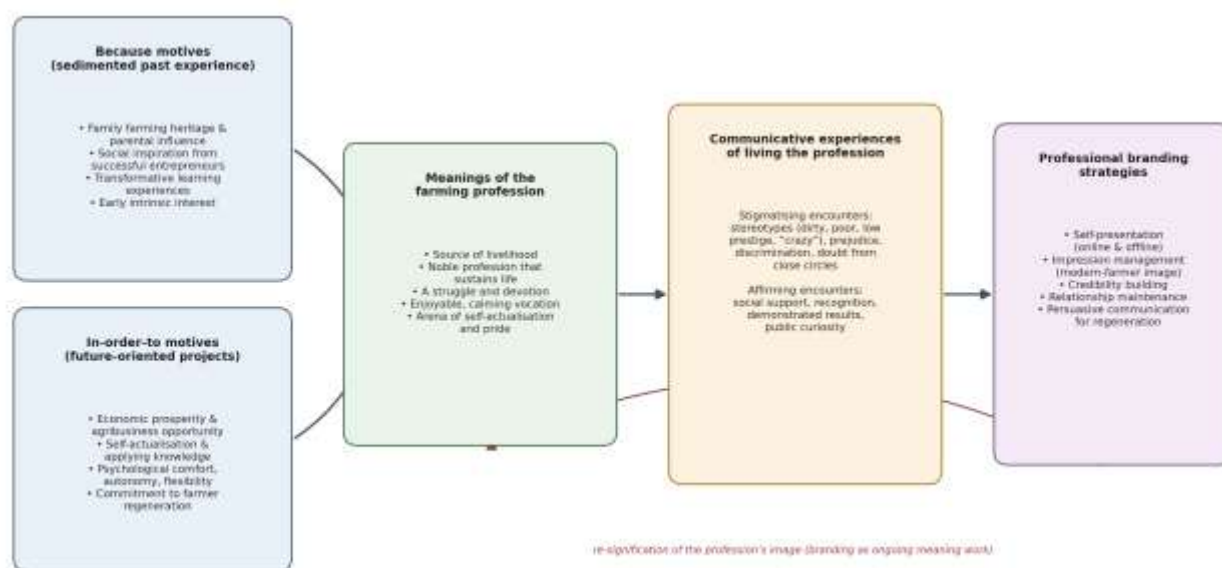


Figure 1. The stigma-to-strategy model of meaning construction of professional branding among millennial farmers

Source: Authors' construction based on the phenomenological analysis.

4.6. Discussion

Read through Schutz's phenomenology, the findings reveal occupational choice and occupational branding as two moments of a single meaning-making arc. The because motives uncovered here (family heritage, parental sacrifice, social inspiration, transformative learning, and early passion) constitute the sedimented stock of knowledge from which informants' present action springs, while their in-order-to motives project that biography toward economic, developmental, psychological, and social futures (Mulyana, 2024; Schutz, 1967). The prominence of psychological comfort among these projected futures resonates with wider evidence that the everyday information and communication environments in which young people live bear directly on their well-being (Widjaya & Komara, 2023). This dual temporality refines existing accounts of why young Indonesians farm. The centrality of family succession and parental influence resonates with Ningrum and Rajiyem's (2023) finding that millennial farmers' self-concepts are forged through significant others, and with survey evidence that family background conditions youth interest in agriculture (Ardyanti et al., 2024; Sitanggang et al., 2025). The prominence of economic aspiration echoes the perception clusters identified internationally by Consentino et al. (2023). What the phenomenological lens adds is the demonstration that these "factors" are not discrete variables but biographically entangled experiences whose meaning informants themselves actively work up: a filial debt becomes a vocation; a banking career becomes an apprenticeship in entrepreneurial imagination.

Stated more precisely, these findings both extend and press against Schutz's formulation in two respects. Schutz treats because and in-order-to motives as analytically separable orders, distinguishable by the tense in which the actor renders them, the former reconstructed from a completed past and the latter projected toward a completed future (Schutz, 1967). The present data indicate that in a stigmatised occupation the two orders are not merely sequential but mutually constitutive and continuously reworked. Informants do not consult a settled biography in order to project a future; they retro-narrate the biography in the terms that the projected future requires, so that a parent's tuition payment becomes a debt of knowledge owed to agriculture, and a period spent in banking becomes, retrospectively, an apprenticeship in entrepreneurship. The stock of knowledge is thus not simply drawn upon but actively curated, and the curation is itself communicative, performed for audiences who are demanding that the actor justify a choice they regard as irrational. A second extension concerns the reach of the framework. Schutzian phenomenology is designed to recover how an actor constitutes meaning from the typifications available in the lifeworld; it says considerably less about actors who set out to alter the typifications through which others will constitute them. The farmers studied here work directly on the typification "farmer" held by their contemporaries, using the existing stock of typifications as raw material for its revision. The lifeworld, on this evidence, accommodates not only meaning-taking but strategic meaning-making, and the intersubjective typification is available as an object of deliberate intervention rather than only as a resource for interpretation.

The meanings informants attach to farming (livelihood, nobility and devotion, joy and calm, pride and self-actualisation) mirror, with striking independence, the identity dimensions documented among millennial farmers elsewhere in Indonesia: pride in being agents of agricultural sustainability, the framing of farming as a noble though unpopular profession, and the preservation of familial occupational heritage (Sukmayadi et al., 2025). The convergence across different regions and research teams suggests that a coherent counter-narrative of the profession is crystallising among Indonesia's millennial farmers. Crucially, the present study shows that this counter-narrative is constructed dialectically: each meaning is an answer to a specific accusation in the profession's spoiled public image. This extends Widiyanti et al.'s (2020) analysis of identity gaps in an important direction. Where their young farmers negotiated the tension between personal and ascribed identities largely defensively, seeking validation through self-verification, the farmers studied here move onto the offensive: the gap itself (being called crazy, suspected of sorcery, excluded from village forums) becomes the raw material and motive force of deliberate rebranding. Stigma, in this account, does not only wound; under conditions of strong because motives and communal support, it energises.

The five branding strategies identified (self-presentation, impression management of the modern farmer, credibility building, relationship maintenance, and persuasive communication) map closely onto the dramaturgical repertoire theorised by Goffman (1959): informants curate personal fronts (branded shirts, groomed appearance, symbols of success such as cars and greenhouses), manage settings (inviting doubters and partners "to the field" as a backstage-turned-proof), and script performances for distinct audiences (of-

ficials, investors, village youth, online publics). They likewise satisfy the definitional core of personal branding as the strategic creation, positioning, and maintenance of a differentiated positive impression (Gorbatov et al., 2018). Yet two features distinguish the phenomenon from the individualistic, career-capital branding that dominates that literature. First, the target of the brand is double: informants brand themselves, but explicitly in order to rebrand the profession: their personal front is consciously deployed as a synecdoche for farming itself. Second, the intended beneficiary is collective: the recurring in-order-to motive of regeneration means the brand is built as persuasive infrastructure for recruiting the next generation, from wage targets for young crew members to farming themes inserted into religious-study circles. Professional branding here is thus best understood as communal meaning work (a grassroots communication campaign for an occupation) rather than as private reputation management. This carries a specific implication for the personal-branding literature. Gorbatov et al.'s (2018) synthesis defines the referent of the brand as the individual and its outcome as career capital accruing to that individual; the present case describes a configuration in which the individual brand is instrumental and the occupational brand is the end, with the resulting capital flowing to the profession as a category. Personal-branding theory, developed largely around knowledge workers in high-prestige labour markets, therefore requires a category-level extension before it can account for branding under conditions of occupational stigma, where an individual cannot be branded successfully unless the occupation is rebranded alongside them.

These results also nuance the digital emphasis of recent scholarship. Studies of urban and millennial farmers' online portrayals show that social media can reshape farming-career perceptions and aspirations (Herlon et al., 2025; Sukmayadi et al., 2025; Unay-Gailhard et al., 2025). The Tegal farmers certainly exploit TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp; but their branding is emphatically embodied and offline as much as mediated: worn on shirts, performed at training podiums, demonstrated in harvest figures, and enacted in face-to-face persuasion. For a rural audience that "judges from the visual first," the co-present body of the prosperous young farmer remains the most credible medium. Effective occupational rebranding in agrarian settings, this suggests, is a cross-platform accomplishment in which digital content and embodied performance authenticate each other.

Set against recent international scholarship, the pattern is one of substantial convergence and one clear contradiction. Consentino et al. (2023) find that young Europeans' orientation toward agricultural careers is structured by perceived economic viability and by the profession's social image rather than by agromonic interest alone, which matches the priority informants here give to demonstrable earnings before any claim about nobility is advanced. Calafat-Marzal et al. (2026) show that territorial characteristics, including market access and the presence of dynamic agricultural activity, condition whether a region attracts young farmers, and Tegal's concentration of high-value horticulture around an active farmer-run training centre is consistent with their account of what makes a locality attractive. Unay-Gailhard et al. (2025) report that the online portrayal of urban farmers actively shapes how farming careers are imagined by those considering them, an assumption on which the informants here plainly operate. The contradiction concerns where the persuasive weight ultimately rests. In much of this literature, and in the digital-humanities framing adopted by Herlon et al. (2025), the mediated portrayal is treated as the primary instrument of career-image change; in Tegal, digital content is necessary but insufficient and repeatedly subordinate to co-present demonstration. The recurring move in these accounts is not "look at my post" but "come to the field", and the most consequential audiences, among them parents-in-law, village neighbours, and the young people an informant employs, are reached face to face. A second and smaller divergence concerns the direction of causality in the identity literature. Whereas Widiyanti et al. (2020) and Ningrum & Rajiyem (2023) describe stigma as a pressure that identity work must absorb, the present findings show it functioning, for informants with secure motives and community backing, as a resource supplying both the content and the motive force of branding. Stigma here is generative rather than only corrosive, and that difference may be attributable to a structural condition these informants share: as owners of independent enterprises, the cost to them of defying local expectation is comparatively low.

Three sets of actors can act on these findings directly. For agricultural institutions, above all the extension service and P4S-type training centres, the implication is that branding capability should be treated as a trainable competence rather than as a by-product of commercial success: modules on narrative construction, harvest documentation, transparent financial reporting to investors and buyers, and the management of open-farm visits can be appended to existing technical curricula at low cost, and the five strategies identi-

fied here supply a ready syllabus. Extension officers might correspondingly be repositioned, since the persuasive authority in this field visibly belongs to practitioners rather than to officials; their comparative advantage lies in brokering access, connecting young farmers to platforms, buyers, and speaking opportunities, rather than in delivering messages themselves. For universities, particularly faculties of agriculture and of communication, the findings argue for embedding agricultural communication and enterprise branding within undergraduate curricula, for engaging certified farmer-practitioners as teaching resources in the manner already practised by the institution that invites one informant here as a regular resource person, and for designing internships that place students inside working millennial-farmer enterprises where branding work can be observed rather than only described. For government agencies implementing the millennial-farmer agenda, three measures follow: fund farmer-led communities as branding incubators rather than solely as recipients of equipment grants; audit the administrative instruments of farmer registration and subsidy eligibility, which in this study excluded an innovative horticulturalist because he did not plant rice and which therefore transmit an official definition of “farmer” that contradicts the modern image the same government is promoting; and evaluate regeneration programmes against communicative indicators, such as the visibility of local exemplars and the number of young people recruited through practitioner networks, alongside the production targets by which they are currently judged.

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

This study set out to understand how millennial farmers in Tegal Regency construct the meaning of the professional branding of the farming profession through their communicative experiences. It concludes that professional branding in a stigmatised occupation is not a promotional layer applied to an occupational identity but the communicative continuation of that identity. The decision to farm is legitimated biographically before it is projected as a plan; the meanings informants attach to farming take the form of rebuttals to specific public accusations rather than of free-standing values; and stigma, where motives are secure and community support is present, is converted into both the energy and the content of deliberate branding work. The essence of the phenomenon is captured in the stigma-to-strategy model: an ongoing, intersubjective process in which the farmer’s biography, the profession’s image, and the future of the sector are negotiated at once, and in which the individual brand is built as an instrument for rebranding the occupation as a whole. The wider implication is that farmer regeneration is not only an economic problem but a communicative one, and that strengthening the communicative capacity of young farmers is therefore a regeneration intervention in its own right rather than a supplement to it.

The practical implications follow directly. For farmer-regeneration policy (including the millennial-farmer agenda articulated in Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture No. 04/2019), the findings indicate that programmes should treat communication not as an accessory but as core infrastructure: supporting P4S-type communities as branding incubators, equipping young farmers with narrative and media competencies, and amplifying credible local exemplars whose demonstrated results (“come, let us go to the field”) do the persuading that campaigns alone cannot. Extension services, for their part, should recognise and correct the exclusionary dynamics documented here, in which innovative young farmers are celebrated outside their villages while remaining unregistered and unheard within them.

Four concrete recommendations follow from this. First, for policymakers, communication competence should be made an explicit and funded component of the millennial-farmer agenda articulated in Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture No. 04/2019, with a defined budget line for media production, branding training, and the documentation of local exemplars within existing regeneration programmes rather than as an unbudgeted addition to them. Second, for agricultural communication programmes, the unit of intervention should shift from the message to the messenger: certified farmer-practitioners should be resourced as the primary communicators, since the evidence here indicates that persuasive authority in this field rests on demonstrated results and co-presence rather than on institutional standing, and a practical instrument would be a district-level roster of young farmer exemplars available to schools, vocational colleges, and village youth organisations. Third, for farmer-regeneration initiatives, the open-farm visit should be adopted as a standard programme component, since in every account examined here the decisive persuasive act was an invitation to inspect the enterprise directly; it should be paired with transparent disclosure of costs and returns, which informants used to convert curiosity into credibility. Fourth, for local government, the administrative definitions embedded in farmer registration, card issuance, and subsidy eligibility should be re-

viewed so that non-rice, greenhouse, and technology-intensive enterprises are recognised as farming, because an official apparatus that fails to recognise the modern farmer undercuts every campaign designed to recruit one.

Several limitations bound these claims. The study is anchored in one regency and one community network, with nine informants whose experiences, however information-rich, support transferability through thick description rather than statistical generalisation. The account rests principally on self-reported experience, triangulated with observation and documents but not with audience-reception data; whether the branding work described here actually shifts the perceptions of rural youth remains an empirical question. Four research designs would address these limits directly. First, a comparative cross-regional study sampling millennial farmers in districts with contrasting agrarian structures and migration cultures — for example a rice-dominated district in Java, a plantation district in Sumatra, and a peri-urban horticultural district — would establish whether the stigma-to-strategy pattern is general or specific to high-value commodity contexts. Second, a longitudinal design following a cohort of new entrants over three to five years would test the sequential claim advanced here, namely that regeneration-oriented motives emerge only once individual economic security has been achieved, and would capture branding trajectories as they are built rather than as they are recalled. Third, a mixed-method design combining a phenomenological account with a survey of rural youth would allow the five branding strategies to be tested as predictors of agricultural career intention, converting an interpretive model into a measurable one; an experimental variant exposing youth respondents to embodied as against purely mediated branding messages would test this study's central contention about the primacy of co-present demonstration. Fourth, a digital ethnography of the same farmers' platformed content, analysed alongside interview data, would make it possible to compare what is claimed in interviews with what is performed online, and to trace how audiences respond in comments, shares, and subsequent contact.

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