



Go Digital! Empowering MSMEs in Kragan Village, Sidoarjo to Enhance Digital Marketing Skills

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has become a critical need for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), especially those in rural areas, to remain competitive in today's market. This community service program was designed to enhance the digital marketing capabilities of MSMEs in Kragan Village, Gedangan Subdistrict, Sidoarjo Regency, East Java. The program was initiated in response to the low levels of digital literacy, limited access to online platforms, and the challenges MSMEs face in adapting to the evolving digital economy. Using a participatory approach, this initiative provided targeted training on social media marketing, e-commerce platforms, content creation, and basic digital tools such as WhatsApp Business and Canva. The methodology consisted of three phases: (1) problem identification and proposal submission, (2) implementation of workshops and hands-on mentoring, and (3) post-program evaluation through surveys and interviews. Results showed significant improvements in participants' ability to utilize digital platforms, increased confidence in online business promotion, and a rise in customer engagement. Moreover, the training fostered knowledge sharing among MSME actors and strengthened their awareness of digital branding. The theoretical framework draws upon the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), highlighting how perceived usefulness and ease of use influence digital adoption. The program also applied the Community of Practice (CoP) approach to encourage peer learning and collaboration. This initiative demonstrates that with proper support and contextualized training, rural MSMEs can transition toward digital platforms effectively. The project also produced an Intellectual Property (IP) output in the form of training modules and digital marketing guides tailored for MSMEs. The findings call for ongoing mentorship, policy support, and infrastructure investment to ensure sustainability.

Keywords: Digital Empowerment; Msmes; Digital Marketing; Rural Development; Community Engagement;

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed how businesses operate, especially in the marketing sector. The shift from conventional to digital platforms has reshaped consumer behavior, purchasing processes, and market competition. In this digital era, businesses are expected to possess the adaptability to implement digital marketing strategies to maintain competitiveness and sustainability. This transformation, however, presents challenges, particularly for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which often lack digital literacy and the capacity to optimize technology.

Indonesia, as a developing country, is currently undergoing a massive digital transformation. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information (Kemenkominfo), more

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than 200 million Indonesians are connected to the internet, and over 60% are active social media users (We Are Social, 2023). This trend presents tremendous opportunities for MSMEs to reach a broader market through platforms such as

Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp Business, Shopee, and Tokopedia. Nevertheless, many MSMEs especially in rural areas have not yet harnessed the full potential of these digital platforms due to a lack of training, infrastructure, and digital mindset (Tambunan, 2019; Putri & Santosa, 2022).

Kragan Village, located in the Gedangan District of Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, reflects this nationwide phenomenon. The village is home to many MSMEs engaged in food processing, traditional crafts, and household-based enterprises. These businesses contribute significantly to the village's economy and provide employment for local residents. However, based on preliminary observations and interviews conducted by the community service team, it was found that the majority of MSME actors still rely on conventional marketing methods. Products are typically sold from home, distributed to nearby stalls, or displayed in occasional local fairs. This limited market access not only restricts income growth but also hampers the sustainability of these businesses in the face of increasing competition.

The root of the issue lies in the low level of digital marketing literacy. Many business owners are unfamiliar with how to manage social media accounts professionally, how to create attractive promotional content, or how to optimize marketplace platforms. They often do not understand the importance of branding, storytelling, and product positioning. Some do not even own smartphones with adequate specifications or stable internet connections to support digital marketing activities (Suyanto et al., 2021). This condition widens the digital divide between rural and urban businesses, further marginalizing rural MSMEs.

Academic institutions play a crucial role in bridging this gap through community service activities that aim to transfer knowledge and technology. The involvement of higher education institutions in community empowerment is mandated by the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi, one of which is community service. By collaborating with local governments and stakeholders, universities can provide training, mentorship, and tools that are accessible and applicable to the target community. In this context, a community empowerment program titled “Go Digital! Empowering MSMEs in Kragan Village, Gedangan District, Sidoarjo to Improve Digital Marketing Skills” is initiated. The program is designed to enhance the digital capabilities of MSME actors and equip them with practical skills in digital marketing.

The objectives of this program are threefold: (1) to provide basic knowledge and awareness of digital marketing and its benefits; (2) to offer hands-on training in managing social media business accounts, producing content, and utilizing online marketplaces; and (3) to ensure sustainable implementation through mentoring and the development of accessible digital tools. This comprehensive approach aims not only to educate but also to motivate MSMEs to shift toward digital platforms and adapt to market dynamics.

Moreover, the urgency of digital transformation for MSMEs is heightened by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many businesses to pivot online to survive. Research has shown that digital adoption has become a survival strategy for small businesses during the pandemic, and those with digital readiness were more resilient (OECD, 2020). This context emphasizes the need to accelerate digital capacity-building programs, especially in rural settings where support is limited.

Digital marketing is not merely about online promotion; it encompasses a range of strategic activities including market research, consumer engagement, brand communication, and sales management through digital channels (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). MSMEs that implement digital marketing effectively are more likely to improve visibility, gain customer insights, personalize customer experience, and ultimately increase sales (Alalwan et al., 2017). Therefore, equipping MSMEs with this knowledge and ability is a strategic investment for local economic development.

In the case of Kragan Village, the transformation toward digital marketing is not only expected to improve individual business performance but also to stimulate the overall village economy. As MSMEs grow, they create more job opportunities, attract local investment, and enhance the branding of Kragan as a productive and creative village. This multiplier effect is in line with the government's vision of digital economic inclusion and sustainable development (Bappenas, 2021).

To ensure the program's success, a participatory approach is applied, involving MSME actors in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. The materials are tailored to their specific needs and local context, delivered in simple language with real-life examples. The training methods combine workshops, simulations, and mentoring, supported by the development of a digital marketing guidebook and tutorial videos as learning tools. These materials are also designed to be registered as intellectual property (HKI), serving as a replicable model for other communities.

This community service project represents an effort to transform traditional rural enterprises into adaptive, tech-savvy businesses that are ready to compete in the digital economy. The project stands as a model for university-based community engagement that combines education, empowerment, and innovation. Ultimately, it aspires to create a sustainable ecosystem where MSMEs in Kragan Village can thrive and contribute more significantly to the regional economy.

LITERATURE

In the era of rapid technological advancement, the ability to utilize digital tools has become a key determinant of the competitiveness and sustainability of small businesses, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Digital marketing, in particular, serves as an enabler for MSMEs to reach broader markets, establish brand identity, and increase revenue (Laudon & Traver, 2021). In rural contexts, however, the adoption of digital technologies by MSMEs remains constrained by infrastructure, digital literacy, and access to training.

Digital transformation among MSMEs has emerged as a significant driver of economic inclusion. According to Chatterjee and Kumar (2020), digital marketing empowers small enterprises to overcome geographical limitations and cost barriers associated with traditional marketing channels. Through social media platforms, search engines, and e-commerce marketplaces, businesses can build direct relationships with customers, target niche markets, and measure campaign effectiveness in real time.

Despite its promise, the adoption of digital marketing tools among rural MSMEs often lags behind urban counterparts. Several studies highlight that limited awareness, lack of technical skills, and perceived complexity inhibit digital engagement (Kurnia et al., 2015; Qureshi, 2018). Moreover, MSMEs in rural areas tend to rely heavily on informal networks and conventional word-of-mouth methods, which while trusted, may not be scalable or sustainable (Wijayanti & Suryani, 2022).

Training and capacity-building programs have been recognized as critical mechanisms for bridging the digital divide. As per Setiadi and Saputri (2021), community-based digital literacy interventions have proven effective in enhancing MSME digital engagement in various rural settings in Indonesia. These programs typically combine hands-on training with ongoing mentorship and localized content, which resonate better with adult learners and community members with limited prior exposure to technology.

In line with this, digital storytelling and branding emerge as vital components of MSME marketing in the digital age. Creating compelling product narratives and visually engaging content not only attracts customers but also enhances perceived value (Morris et al., 2013). Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, as widely accessible platforms, have transformed into digital storefronts that offer cost-effective promotion options for rural entrepreneurs (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020).

Furthermore, e-commerce integration is increasingly viewed as a game changer. According to Hermawan and Febrianto (2021), the use of online marketplaces such as Tokopedia, Shopee, and Bukalapak provides MSMEs with a structured platform to sell, receive payments, and track customer preferences. However, the transition to e-commerce often requires MSMEs to understand logistics, inventory, digital payment systems, and customer service mechanisms areas where capacity gaps remain prevalent.

Several scholars have also emphasized the importance of support ecosystems. Collaboration between local governments, universities, and community organizations plays a significant role in the

successful digital transformation of rural enterprises (Rahardjo et al., 2022). University-community engagement models, such as community service programs, provide a platform for knowledge transfer, participatory learning, and innovation.

Importantly, research by Nugroho et al. (2020) underscores that the success of digital marketing capacity building lies not only in delivering content but also in fostering motivation, changing mindset, and demonstrating tangible benefits. Many MSMEs begin to embrace digital practices once they witness peer success stories or receive personalized guidance in applying tools to their business context.

Lastly, evaluation and sustainability are essential for long-term impact. Programs that include monitoring mechanisms, feedback loops, and follow-up training tend to have more enduring effects on behavior and outcomes (Rustandi & Putri, 2021). Without continued support or access to refresher training, initial gains from digital training often diminish over time.

Thus, literature suggests that a well-structured, localized, and context-sensitive intervention is vital to empower rural MSMEs to navigate the digital economy. The program conducted in Desa Kragan aligns with these insights, focusing on practical skill-building, mentorship, and ecosystem collaboration to drive digital marketing adoption among MSMEs.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This community service initiative adopts the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which emphasizes collaboration between the implementation team and community stakeholders (in this case, MSMEs in Kragan Village) in identifying problems, designing solutions, implementing programs, and conducting evaluations. This model is suitable for empowering local communities through practical and inclusive learning processes. The theoretical foundation for this design is supported by:

1. Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003): This theory explains how innovations (such as digital marketing tools and platforms) are adopted and diffused within a social system over time. The project stages knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation are reflected in the structure of this community engagement activity.
2. Digital Readiness Assessment: This framework helps assess the capacity of individuals and organizations to adopt and integrate digital technologies effectively. It evaluates dimensions such as digital skills, infrastructure, access to tools, and motivation for adoption.

Table 1. Research Design Based on PAR and Diffusion of Innovation.

Stage	Main Activities	Objective	Methods	Expected Output
1. Problem Identification	Field survey, observation, and FGD with MSMEs and village leaders	To identify digital marketing needs and key barriers	Questionnaire, semi-structured interview, observation	Baseline digital literacy profile, community needs mapping
2. Planning	Designing training modules, mapping resource persons, creating implementation schedule	To design a strategic, tailored program based on community needs	Desk study, planning meeting, needs validation	Finalized training modules, structured activity proposal
3. Implementation	Conducting digital marketing training, mentoring sessions, and content creation practice	To improve participants' digital skills and practical use of online platforms	Lectures, workshops, simulations, mentoring	Active business accounts, product catalogs, sample promotional content
4. Evaluation and Reflection	Post-training evaluation, feedback sessions, planning for sustainability	To assess the impact and ensure program continuity	Pre- and post-tests, impact assessment, FGD	Final evaluation report, documentation, draft for scientific article and IP filing

Table 2. Data and Collection Techniques

Data Type	Source	Data Collection Method
Primary Data	MSME actors, village stakeholders	Interviews, surveys, direct observation
Secondary Data	Village documents, related literature	Document review, literature study
Evaluative Data	Participant test results, content samples	Pre/post-tests, content analysis

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the digital marketing training program for the Kragan Village UMKM community yielded significant improvements across multiple domains. The comparison between the pre-training and post-training performance is visualized in the bar chart above, highlighting key areas of transformation:

Table 3. Result

Category	Before Training (%)	After Training (%)
Social Media Use	40%	85%
E-commerce Platform Use	25%	70%
Digital Marketing Skill	35%	80%

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that targeted capacity-building programs grounded in participatory engagement and contextual relevance can significantly enhance digital readiness among rural microenterprises. These findings align with the broader literature that underlines the positive influence of digital transformation training on small business sustainability (Barki & Parente, 2020; OECD, 2021).

First, in terms of social media adoption, this result is in line with research by Dwivedi et al. (2016), who argue that simplicity and accessibility of mobile-based platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp have drastically lowered the barriers for digital marketing adoption in small-scale enterprises. The 45% increase in social media utilization post-training in our study is a direct manifestation of such accessibility when supported with training.

Second, the adoption of e-commerce platforms rose from 25% to 70%, consistent with Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation Theory which explains that exposure, perceived advantage, and peer use all contribute to increased uptake. Participants noted that observing fellow UMKM successfully making sales through Shopee and Tokopedia motivated them to join.

Third, the significant boost in digital marketing skills echoes the findings of Kolb (1984) regarding experiential learning. When the training involved live demonstrations, simulations, and practice-based assignments, participants internalized skills more effectively (Bradbury, 2015; Nutley et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the application of Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles allowed the program to be adaptive and reflective of the unique needs and constraints faced by the Kragan villagers. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), co-created interventions foster higher trust and ownership, resulting in better outcomes.

Perceived sales performance, which increased from 45% to 78%, though subjective, was supported by anecdotal data from participants who reported higher online engagement and inquiries. While not yet confirmed by quantitative sales figures, this aligns with findings from Damsgaard & Lyytinen (2001) and Greenhalgh et al. (2004) that perception often drives future technology retention and sustained usage. Several success factors contributed to this outcome:

1. Community-centered approach: As Holte-McKenzie et al. (2006) emphasized, programs that align with local business culture tend to yield better engagement.
2. Use of familiar tools: Instead of introducing complex CRM systems, the training focused on WhatsApp Business, Instagram, and Shopee tools already partially understood by the participants.
3. Continuous mentoring: Saleminck et al. (2017) stress the importance of post-training support in rural digital transformation, which was implemented through a WhatsApp-based support group and weekly check-ins.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Some older participants struggled with smartphone use, consistent with findings by UNCTAD (2019) about digital exclusion risks for older and low-literacy populations. This highlights the need for differentiated training modules (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). In terms of broader implication, this program supports the assertion that digital inclusivity, when paired with context-aware pedagogies and participatory planning, is not only feasible but highly impactful for rural economies (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Rogers, 2003).

The findings of this community empowerment program are consistent with a growing body of literature that emphasizes the necessity of digital literacy for enhancing rural economic participation (Misra & Sahoo, 2019; Bada & Madon, 2006). The notable improvements in the digital marketing capabilities of Kragan Village's microentrepreneurs underscore that digital transformation is not limited by geography or income level but instead hinges on access to relevant training and contextualized capacity-building (Qiang et al., 2009).

One of the key enablers of success in this program was the alignment with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are critical determinants in technology adoption (Davis, 1989). The tools taught such as Instagram Business and WhatsApp Business were perceived as both useful and easy to implement. This is similar to the findings of Oliveira & Martins (2011), who found that TAM constructs were particularly relevant in predicting technology uptake among SMEs.

Furthermore, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) also helps explain the results. According to Venkatesh et al. (2003), four determinants performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions drive technology acceptance. Our intervention supported all four:

1. Performance expectancy was fulfilled by demonstrating sales growth potential.
2. Effort expectancy was addressed through hands-on training.
3. Social influence emerged as participants saw peers using digital tools successfully.
4. Facilitating conditions were built through mentoring and WhatsApp support groups.

This holistic approach follows Goh and Kauffman's (2013) recommendation that training in rural contexts must not only address cognitive skill-building but also foster behavioral change through practical exposure and community validation. Additionally, this program's success echoes empirical findings from Lee et al. (2016) on digital empowerment, showing that confidence in using digital platforms increases when learning is peer-supported and aligned with business goals. The rise in post-training usage of platforms such as Shopee and Tokopedia indicates that digital training, when grounded in real use cases, can overcome digital inertia.

Another significant factor is the psychological empowerment felt by the participants. Zimmerman (1995) explains that psychological empowerment consists of intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components. Many participants expressed increased confidence (intrapersonal), better understanding of opportunities (interactional), and the motivation to act (behavioral), illustrating empowerment as a core outcome of this program.

Moreover, community-based learning models, such as those advocated by Wenger (1998) in his theory of Communities of Practice, were clearly at play. Participants formed informal groups that shared marketing strategies, created promotional videos together, and exchanged product photos. This

supports the idea that knowledge dissemination is more effective when community members co-create content and support each other.

On the other hand, challenges remain, particularly in overcoming generational digital divides. As Warschauer (2003) and UNESCAP (2021) have noted, digital skill acquisition is highly dependent on prior exposure, education, and access to devices. Some older entrepreneurs needed repeated reinforcement and follow-up visits, indicating a need for tiered training approaches.

From a gender perspective, it was also noted that female entrepreneurs who made up 70% of the participants were highly responsive to the training. This aligns with studies by Hafkin & Taggart (2001) that show digital inclusion programs disproportionately benefit women entrepreneurs in rural settings, especially when family-based or home-based business models are supported.

To conclude, this program has both local implications improving the digital and entrepreneurial resilience of Kragan Village and broader academic contributions to the understanding of rural digital transformation and community-centered training models.

CONCLUSION

This community engagement program has successfully demonstrated that digital literacy and marketing training can significantly empower micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in rural areas like Kragan Village, Sidoarjo. Through a structured approach grounded in established theories such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), and Community of Practice (CoP), the intervention facilitated meaningful knowledge transfer, skill development, and behavioral change among participants. The adoption of digital platforms ranging from WhatsApp Business and Instagram to e-commerce applications revealed not only the participants' adaptability but also the strategic potential of digitalization in expanding market reach, strengthening customer engagement, and improving overall business competitiveness. Moreover, the program cultivated a strong sense of psychological empowerment, collaboration, and innovation within the local MSME community, indicating that the benefits of such initiatives go beyond technological proficiency. Despite the success, challenges such as digital disparities, generational gaps, and varying learning speeds remain. These insights suggest the need for sustained mentorship, differentiated learning modules, and stronger infrastructure support from stakeholders. In summary, this program offers a replicable model for digital empowerment in rural economic development, reaffirming that inclusive digital transformation is achievable when training is contextual, participatory, and supported by continuous engagement.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declared that no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and publication of this article.

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