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Empowering Rural Culinary MSMEs Through Digital Literacy And Branding Strategies

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Abstract

This community service aimed to help rural culinary MSMEs strengthen their ability to use digital marketing for wider market reach and consistent branding. The program applied a participatory approach through digital literacy training, logo creation, and the use of social media and marketplace platforms. The main beneficiary was Resty Catering & Cake, located in Pesisir Selatan, Indonesia. Activities included on-site training, mentoring, and follow-up monitoring. The results were observed qualitatively and through performance indicators, such as activating two marketplace accounts, publishing promotional content, and initiating online transactions. Within two weeks, the partner recorded five online sales and recruited ten resellers, demonstrating better digital engagement and market access. The results show that digital literacy, combined with technology-based empowerment, has become the primary driver of rural business. The mentoring model introduced here combines branding and digital marketing, offering a practical approach that can be replicated for similar MSMEs to support inclusive economic growth.

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INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are recognized as one of the main pillars of the Indonesian economy (Suharyanto et al., 2024). Their contribution is significant not only in developing countries but also in advanced economies because they drive growth and create employment opportunities (Sinambela & Darmawan, 2025). Data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs show that MSMEs contributed more than 60% to the national gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024, with approximately 65 million business actors (Aghni & Anzie, 2025). Strengthening entrepreneurship is therefore considered an important strategy to reduce unemployment (Winedar et al., 2022). MSMEs not only improve community welfare but also support national economic stability (Septiani et al., 2024). The government's commitment to encouraging entrepreneurship further reinforces economic development (Laiko Ramadhan, 2025).

Despite this strategic role, MSMEs continue to face challenges, such as limited capital, weak management, intense competition, low product competitiveness, and slow technology adoption (Irawan, 2025). Many rural MSMEs continue to rely on conventional methods, such as direct selling or word-of-mouth, which restricts market reach (Salsabila et al., 2024). Limited access to training and a shortage of skilled workers for digital technology implementation further weaken competitiveness (Ningtyas et al., 2025). In today's competitive market, adopting digital-based marketing strategies has become essential for MSMEs to survive and grow (Syah et al., 2025). Digital marketing enables MSME products to reach both local markets and national audiences.

The partner in this community service activity is Resty Catering & Cake, an MSME located in Koto Tuo, Nagari IV Koto Hilie, Batang Kapas District, Pesisir Selatan Regency. This business offers a variety of products for daily needs and special events. Although it has been operating for seven years, growth remains limited due to its remote location and narrow market segmentation, resulting in low sales. Currently, Resty Catering & Cake's business processes operate conventionally, with marketing and order placements relying solely on organic posts on personal Facebook accounts and word-of-mouth from existing customers. Consequently, the resulting market reach remains highly limited, covering only the local area surrounding the partner's operational site. With strong local resource potential, this partner is an appropriate target for digital marketing training.

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Digital marketing is an effective strategy for promoting products quickly and accurately (Fadhilah & Pratiwi, 2021). It uses technologies such as the Internet, applications, and social media to build relationships between sellers and consumers (Barus et al., 2023). Digital marketing is not tied to a single platform but can stand alone as a flexible approach (Rizkita et al., 2025). The growing trend of digital-media use reflects increasing public interest in this method (Adnan et al., 2024). Social media, which is used by many people, provides significant opportunities to promote digital content of MSMEs' products (Ramadhan et al., 2021). The easiness information access from social media improves the future prospect of digital marketing (Karimudin et al., 2022). Furthermore, digital marketing enables the promotion of a product's uniqueness to a wider audience.

Various studies have confirmed that implementing digital marketing strategies positively impacts MSME development. Syaifuddin (2025) emphasized the importance of utilizing social media and e-commerce to expand the market and increase revenue. The growing number of MSMEs using marketplaces as marketing tools demonstrates the significant role of digital marketing (Budiarti et al., 2024). Despite these opportunities, obstacles such as low digital literacy, technological limitations, lack of capital, and weak digital-based business management remain challenges, particularly in rural areas (Irfan & Anirwan, 2024; Rahmawati, 2023).

Difficulty accessing training and mentoring is also a barrier for MSMEs in remote areas (Pramiana & Suprapto, 2024). Structured and effective mentoring programs are therefore needed to improve entrepreneurial capacity. Good mentoring not only enhances skills but also builds confidence (Apriliani et al., 2024). Although digital marketing has been widely adopted by MSMEs in urban areas, rural entrepreneurs still face limitations in digital literacy, technology access, and structured mentoring. To date, few community service programs have focused on practical digital marketing training for MSMEs in remote areas such as Nagari IV Koto Hilie. This situation highlights the need for appropriate mentoring so that MSMEs can utilize digital technology to expand markets and improve competitiveness. Based on these conditions, this community service activity aims to strengthen MSMEs' ability to optimize digital marketing strategies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

To make the program effective, several resources were prepared and tailored to the needs of SMEs in Nagari IV Koto Hilie. The main materials included training modules on digital marketing strategies, social media management, and content creation, provided in both printed and digital formats for easy access. Practical tools, such as laptops and smartphones, were used during sessions so that participants could apply concepts directly, supported by a stable internet connection for real-time demonstrations. Visual aids, such as presentation slides and short video tutorials, were also included to simplify complex topics and keep participants engaged.

Methods

The program combined participatory rural appraisal (PRA), experiential learning, and project-based learning to ensure active involvement and practical results. PRA was applied at the start to identify MSMEs' digital literacy levels and marketing challenges through interviews and short surveys. Training sessions adopted experiential learning by emphasizing hands-on practice, such as creating social media accounts and designing promotional content. Project-based learning was implemented by assigning participants a mini-project to promote their businesses online.

Effectiveness was assessed using pretest and posttest results analyzed descriptively, complemented by feedback forms to capture participants' perceptions. The process consisted of four stages: preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Preparation began with a field survey and discussions with business owners to identify challenges, which revealed that conventional marketing strategies were ineffective in expanding market reach. Based on this, digital marketing training was designed as a solution.

Training was conducted face-to-face at the partner's location, Resty Catering & Cake, in Batang Kapas District, Pesisir Selatan Regency. It covers basic marketing concepts, brand identity, and digital strategies through social media and marketplaces. The participants learned to create business accounts, use promotional features, and develop marketing content. The four-hour session included lectures, demonstrations, and practical hands-on experience.

Monitoring occurred one week after training to review implementation progress through direct observation and online communication. Evaluation was conducted via interviews and documentation, using indicators such as marketplace account activity, quality of promotional content, and partner initiatives to expand distribution networks. Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative methods to illustrate program success.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This community service activity has had a tangible impact on increasing partners' capacity to manage digital marketing. Fig. 1 shows the training process.

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Fig. 1. Marketing trainning

After the training, the partners successfully identified their flagship product, "Rendang Ibu," as their business identity and adopted a single logo to strengthen their branding. This logo featured distinctive Minangkabau elements, including a traditional house and a smoking pot, representing the product's authenticity and the "fresh from the kitchen" concept. Fig. 2 shows the Resty Cake & Catering business logo.



Fig. 2. Single Logo of MSME

The digital strategy was implemented by creating business accounts on Facebook and Shopee, which began to be actively used for promotions and sales. Partners also regularly publish promotional content to increase market reach. Fig. 3 shows the Rendang Ibu Facebook account, and Fig. 4 shows the Rendang Ibu Shopee account.

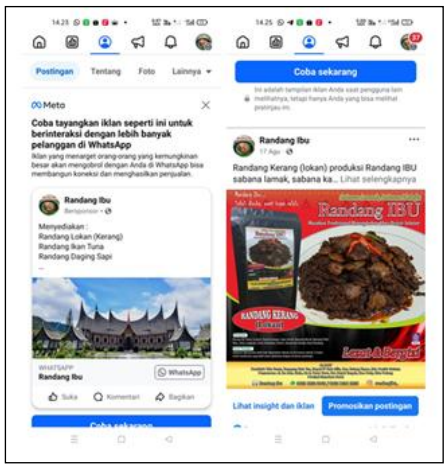


Fig. 3. Facebook account of MSME

Monitoring has shown a shift in partner behavior, leading to a more proactive use of digital technology. Within two weeks of training, partners recorded several sales transactions through marketplaces and social media. Furthermore, partners initiated reseller recruitment to expand their distribution networks. Currently, ten resellers are members of a WhatsApp group for communication and coordination (Fig. 5).

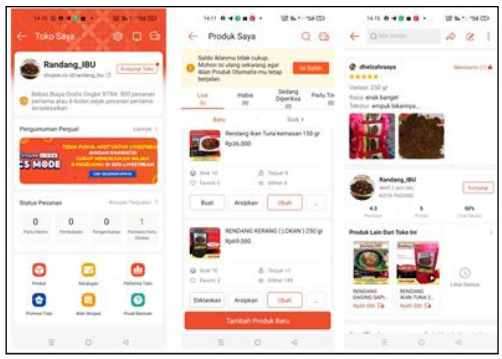


Fig. 4. Shoppe account of MSME

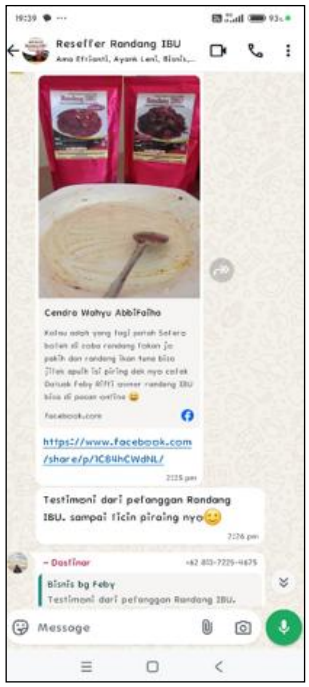


Fig. 5. Whatsapp group of randang ibu's reseller

This shift reflects a new awareness of the importance of digital marketing strategies and business sustainability. This change not only enhances technical skills but also drives social transformation through the emergence of collaborative work patterns between partners and resellers.

Table 1 summarizes the success indicators achieved during the community service activities. All targets were successfully exceeded, such as marketplace account creation, publication of

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promotional content, and reseller recruitment. This demonstrates that the training not only improved partners' technical skills but also encouraged behavioral changes to become more adaptive to digital technology. This success demonstrates that MSMEs can effectively implement digital marketing strategies to expand market reach and increase competitiveness.

Table 1. Success indicator

Indicator	Target	Achieved
Active marketplace account	2 platforms (Shopee, FB)	Shopee & Facebook are actively used
Publish promotion content	Minimum 5 contents	Minimum 3 contents everyday
Online sales transaction	Minimum 3 transactions at the beginning	5 transactions within 2 weeks, 70% from Facebook and 30% From Shopee
Reseller recruitment	Minimum 5 person	10 reseller joined
Communication grup exist	1 WhatsApp group	Grup WhatsApp is actively used

Discussion

The results of the community service program indicate that digital marketing training can improve partners' skills in utilizing technology to expand market reach. This finding aligns with Syah et al. (2025) and Fadhilah et al. (2021), who emphasize the effectiveness of digital marketing in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. The implementation of a branding strategy through a single logo also supports the literature, which states that brand identity plays a crucial role in building consumer trust (Sinambela & Darmawan, 2025).

Beyond its technical impact, this activity generated social change in the form of collaborative work patterns through the recruitment of resellers and the formation of communication groups. This demonstrates a new awareness of the importance of community-based distribution networks, which is an indicator of social transformation in community services. Thus, this community service program not only addresses conventional marketing issues but also creates a sustainable empowerment model (Aghni et al., 2025; Budiarti et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This community service program began with a needs assessment through interviews and observations, followed by digital marketing training, branding assistance, and integration of social media and marketplace platforms. The results indicate improved partner capacity in utilizing technology for market expansion, affirming the role of digital literacy in strengthening MSME competitiveness. Key contributions include the adoption of a unified logo, collaborative communication patterns, and more adaptive business practices. The success of this community service program is demonstrated by measurable achievements across all target indicators. Specifically, the program successfully integrated two digital platforms (Shopee and Facebook), established one active WhatsApp communication group, adopted a unified business logo to strengthen brand identity, and recruited 10 new resellers (surpassing the initial target of five). Furthermore, digital marketing implementation led to continuous daily content publication (minimum three contents/day) and generated five online sales transactions within two weeks, with most transactions originating from Facebook promotions and the remaining transactions generated through Shopee. However, the short training duration and lack of continuous mentoring limit the evaluation of long-term impact. Future activities should emphasize content management, paid advertising, and online payment integration to support broader transactions. Expanding the scope to include sales data analytics and AI-based marketing tools will enable partners to make data-driven decisions and remain competitive in the digital economy.

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