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Strengthening Rural MSME Digital Marketing Literacy through Practical Training in Kalipancur Village

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ABSTRACT

This community service program aimed to strengthen the initial digital marketing literacy and practical readiness of rural micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) actors in Kalipancur Village, Bojong District, Pekalongan Regency. The activity was conducted on 23 May 2026 at the Kalipancur Village Hall through a community-development approach. The intervention combined an introductory seminar, demonstrations, guided discussion, and initial facilitation on WhatsApp Business, Instagram, TikTok, marketplaces, product photography, content planning, and the use of Canva and CapCut. Program evaluation relied on descriptive qualitative evidence from implementation observations, participant questions, reported constraints, and immediate responses after the session. No formal pretest-posttest, verified attendance profile, or post-program sales monitoring was available; therefore, the article does not claim increased turnover. Participant interaction indicated improved awareness of the relevance of digital visibility and a clearer understanding of low-cost steps for beginning online promotion. Several participants reportedly started activating WhatsApp Business and searching Instagram and TikTok for content references. Persistent barriers included limited content-creation skills, time constraints, low confidence, and the perception that rural businesses depend only on nearby customers. The program contributed primarily to early-stage digital readiness. Sustainable results require repeated hands-on mentoring, competency-based evaluation, verified participant documentation, and follow-up measurement using account analytics and sales indicators.

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1. Introduction

Digital technology has changed how consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products. Before making a purchase, consumers increasingly search for product information through mobile devices, compare alternatives, view customer responses, and prefer transaction processes that are practical and fast. This shift creates opportunities for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to reach customers beyond their immediate location, but it also places businesses with low digital visibility at a disadvantage. Digital marketing is therefore not merely an additional promotional channel; for many small businesses, it is becoming part of basic market access and customer communication (Amory & Mudo, 2025; Sunarjo et al., 2023b).

The transition from conventional to digital promotion is not automatic. Small businesses may continue to depend on walk-in customers and word-of-mouth communication because these methods are familiar, inexpensive, and embedded in local social relationships. Previous community service and applied studies show that combining conventional and digital marketing can broaden promotional options, while training in social media, digital content, and brand visibility can strengthen the competitive capacity of MSMEs (Rahayu et al., 2024; Sunarjo et al., 2023a; Sunarjo et al., 2024). Nevertheless, access to an application does not guarantee its productive use. Adoption also depends on perceived ease of use, user confidence, relevant knowledge, and the credibility of the technology or information source (Maula & Sunarjo, 2023; Sunarjo et al., 2023b).

This challenge is especially important for rural MSMEs. Business owners may already use smartphones and personal social media, yet remain uncertain about how to convert those tools into structured business accounts, product catalogues, attractive photographs, short promotional videos, or consistent customer responses. Limited time, concerns about technical complexity, and the belief that the market is restricted to nearby residents can reduce willingness to experiment. Consequently, a suitable community intervention should begin with accessible technologies, practical examples, and simple tasks that can be repeated independently rather than with expensive systems or highly technical applications.

Kalipancur Village is located in Bojong District, Pekalongan Regency and has local business activity in areas such as food products and home-based crafts. Preliminary coordination between the Accounting Student Association of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Pekalongan (Himata FEB Unikal), the village government, and prospective participants indicated that participating business actors still relied strongly on conventional promotion. The use of WhatsApp Business, Instagram, TikTok, and marketplaces as coordinated business channels was limited, while product photography and content preparation were viewed as difficult. These findings were obtained qualitatively through coordination and informal problem identification; the organizing records available for this manuscript did not include a formal baseline survey or complete participant profile.

The priority problem was therefore defined as limited initial digital marketing literacy and low practical readiness to begin online promotion. This priority was narrower and more realistic than directly targeting sales growth during a one-day activity. Sales performance is affected by product quality, price, distribution, customer service, seasonality, competition, and the consistency of post-training implementation. Without a sufficiently long follow-up period and verified business records, an immediate claim of increased turnover would be methodologically unjustified. The program consequently focused on awareness, platform understanding, content basics, and the first steps of technology use.

The intervention was designed as a low-cost, smartphone-oriented learning sequence. It introduced platforms already familiar to the community, including WhatsApp Business, Instagram, TikTok, and marketplaces, and combined these platforms with basic product-photography techniques, a simple content mix of education, entertainment, and promotion, customer-response etiquette, and supporting applications such as Canva and CapCut. The added value of the program was the integration of these elements into an accessible starting pathway for rural MSME beginners. The approach also used examples of food and craft businesses that were close to the participants' context, allowing abstract concepts to be linked to recognisable business situations.

This design is consistent with community-development approaches that emphasise participation, direct interaction, and problem-oriented learning. Training becomes more useful when participants can connect new information to actual business constraints and discuss the steps they can perform with existing resources (Sunarjo & Nurhayati, 2024). Related community programs also indicate that digital-literacy activities are more sustainable when they are accompanied by follow-up support and local organisational involvement rather than being treated as isolated seminars (Sunarjo et al., 2025).

Accordingly, this community service program aimed to strengthen the initial digital marketing literacy and practical readiness of MSME actors in Kalipancur Village. The expected immediate outcomes were: (1) a clearer understanding of

the relevance of digital visibility; (2) recognition of appropriate low-cost platforms; (3) basic knowledge of product photography and content planning; (4) willingness to begin using WhatsApp Business and social media for business purposes; and (5) identification of barriers requiring further mentoring. The principal output was an initial learning and facilitation session that could serve as the foundation for periodic, practice-based village MSME assistance.

2. Methods

The program used a community-development approach with direct education, demonstration, guided discussion, and initial facilitation. It was conducted on Saturday, 23 May 2026, beginning at 13:00 Western Indonesian Time at the Kalipancur Village Hall, Bojong District, Pekalongan Regency. The program was organised by Himata FEB Unikal in coordination with the Kalipancur Village Government and involved local MSME actors and interested residents. Dr. Wenti Ayu Sunarjo, S.Kom., M.M. served as the resource person. The event documentation and manuscript source did not contain a verified participant count, attendance composition, or complete demographic profile; the study therefore avoids presenting an unverified numerical participation rate.

Needs assessment was conducted through coordination with village representatives and informal identification of marketing constraints among prospective participants. The priority issues agreed for the session were limited understanding of business digitalisation, uncertainty in selecting promotional platforms, difficulty preparing product photographs and content, and low confidence in beginning online promotion. Because the needs assessment was qualitative and not supported by a structured questionnaire, the baseline is reported as a contextual description rather than as a numerical score.

The intervention covered: the meaning and urgency of MSME digitalisation; changes in consumer search and purchasing behaviour; the use of WhatsApp Business, Instagram, TikTok, and marketplaces; basic product-photography techniques; a simple educational-entertainment-promotional content formula; social media posting practices; common digital marketing mistakes; customer-response etiquette; and the use of Canva and CapCut. The session used explanations, examples, demonstrations, and question-and-answer interaction. The activity was presented under an operational event theme that referred to increasing sales; however, the present article limits its evaluation to immediate learning and readiness outcomes because sales data were not monitored after the event.

The implementation process consisted of four stages. First, the planning stage included coordination with the village government and identification of priority needs. Second, preparation included selecting the venue, preparing presentation and demonstration materials, coordinating the resource person, and inviting participants. Third, implementation included the opening session, delivery of material, practical illustrations, facilitated questions, and direct responses to participant problems. Fourth, immediate evaluation and follow-up identification were conducted through observation of participation, analysis of questions and reported barriers, and documentation of initial responses after the activity.

Table 1. Program stages, activities, and immediate evidence.

Stage	Main activity	Expected output	Evidence source
Planning	Village coordination and qualitative identification of marketing constraints.	Priority problems and target materials.	Coordination notes and team observations.
Preparation	Venue, invitation, materials, examples, and resource-person coordination.	Training materials and implementation readiness.	Implementation documents.
Training	Seminar, demonstration, examples, discussion, and initial facilitation.	Platform awareness and basic content knowledge.	Observation, photographs, and participant questions.
Immediate evaluation	Review of questions, reported constraints, and initial post-session responses.	Identification of early readiness and follow-up needs.	Descriptive qualitative notes.

Evaluation was aligned with the revised objective. The evidence consisted of participant engagement, the content of questions, self-reported obstacles, and immediate behavioural responses mentioned during or shortly after the activity. These qualitative data were organised into categories of awareness, platform readiness, content capability, confidence, and follow-up needs, then interpreted descriptively. No statistical test was applied because no structured pretest-posttest instrument was administered.

Institutional support was provided by the Kalipancur Village Government through permission, venue facilitation, participant mobilisation, and participation in the opening and discussion. Program sustainability was planned conceptually through periodic mentoring and the proposed formation of a village-level digital MSME communication group. These follow-up activities had not yet been systematically implemented or evaluated at the time the manuscript was prepared.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Baseline Needs and Program Implementation

The qualitative baseline confirmed a gap between everyday smartphone use and the systematic use of digital channels for business. Participants were familiar with personal messaging and social media, but several expressed uncertainty about creating business-oriented content, managing promotional accounts, and deciding where to begin. Promotion remained closely connected to local customers and word-of-mouth communication. This condition is consistent with the broader observation that conventional marketing remains important for many small enterprises, while the transition to digital channels requires practical capability rather than access alone (Jaelani & Dalimunthe, 2025; Rahayu et al., 2024).

The program was held at the Kalipancur Village Hall and opened by a representative of the village government, who emphasised support for local MSME development. The resource person then introduced the theme of business upgrading in the digital era and explained digitalisation as the use of digital technology to simplify business processes, communication, promotion, transactions, and record keeping. The discussion positioned online visibility as a means of helping potential customers find and evaluate local products, not as a replacement for product quality or offline customer relationships.



Figure 1. Delivery of introductory digital marketing material at the Kalipancur Village Hall.

Source: Implementation team documentation, 2026.

3.2 Platform and Content Learning

Participants were introduced to WhatsApp Business, Instagram, TikTok, and marketplaces as platforms with different functions. WhatsApp Business was presented as an accessible starting point because it can support catalogues, automated replies, daily status updates, and direct customer communication. Instagram was associated with visual identity and product presentation, while TikTok was introduced for short video content with wider discovery potential. Marketplaces were discussed as structured sales channels that can complement, rather than automatically replace, direct communication.

The learning sequence also addressed five simple starting steps: using a clear business name, preparing a basic logo, taking attractive product photographs, creating a dedicated business account, and posting consistently. Product photography was explained through practical principles such as sufficient lighting, a clean background, several viewing angles, and clear product detail. The content formula combined education, entertainment, and promotion, with examples including product-use instructions, production processes, customer testimonials, and special offers. Food and craft examples were used to connect the material with businesses found in the village.

A further discussion covered common weaknesses in small-business digital marketing, including irregular posting, dark or blurred photographs, slow responses, excessively long captions, and missing price or contact information. Canva and CapCut were introduced as free supporting applications for simple visual design and video editing. This integrated approach reflects previous community-service experience showing that digital marketing support is more useful when

technical platform knowledge is combined with content, branding, and customer-service practices (Sunarjo et al., 2023a; Sunarjo et al., 2024).



Figure 2. Interactive discussion involving the village representative and the resource person.

Source: Implementation team documentation, 2026.

3.3 Participant Responses and Immediate Outcomes

The question-and-answer session was active and revealed the main barriers experienced by participants. Questions focused on how to create content with limited skills, how to manage social media alongside daily production work, and how to begin when the business had previously depended on nearby customers. These responses indicate that the main challenge was not simply lack of platform access. Participants also faced time limitations, low confidence, uncertainty about content standards, and a perception that rural location reduced the relevance of online promotion.

The resource person responded by emphasising consistency, gradual experimentation, continuing to learn from relevant examples, and prompt customer responses. Several participants reportedly began activating WhatsApp Business and searching Instagram and TikTok for product-photo and video ideas. These are immediate behavioural responses rather than evidence of sustained adoption. They nevertheless indicate movement from abstract interest toward initial exploration, which is an appropriate short-term outcome for an introductory program.

The program results support the view that perceived ease and confidence are central to technology use. When digital marketing was translated into small, familiar actions, participants appeared more willing to consider implementation. However, the absence of a structured competency assessment means that increased knowledge cannot be expressed as a numerical gain. Likewise, the event did not establish whether participants subsequently posted consistently, expanded their audience, or converted online interaction into transactions.



Figure 3. Direct facilitation and dialogue between the resource person and a participant.
Source: Implementation team documentation, 2026.

Table 2. Qualitative comparison of initial conditions and immediate program outcomes.

Indicator	Initial condition	Immediate evidence	Achievement status
Digital-marketing awareness	Online promotion was perceived as difficult or unnecessary for locally oriented businesses.	Questions and discussion showed clearer recognition of digital visibility and customer behaviour.	Qualitatively achieved.
Platform readiness	Business use of WhatsApp Business, Instagram, TikTok, and marketplaces was limited.	Several participants reportedly started WhatsApp Business activation and explored social-media references.	Partially achieved; not verified longitudinally.
Content capability	Participants reported difficulty producing product photographs and promotional content.	Participants identified lighting, background, content types, and free editing applications.	Initial knowledge indicated; practical competence not scored.
Sales performance	No verified baseline sales record was collected.	No post-program turnover or transaction data were collected.	Not established and not claimed.

3.4 Challenges, Limitations, and Sustainability

The principal challenges were limited content-creation confidence, competing demands on participants' time, and the assumption that online marketing offers little value when most current customers live nearby. These barriers suggest that a single seminar is insufficient. Practical repetition is needed so participants can create a catalogue, photograph a real product, write a concise caption, upload content, and review customer responses with a facilitator. A village-based peer group could also reduce the burden of learning individually and provide locally relevant examples.

The program and this article have several limitations. First, the activity was conducted in a single afternoon and did not include repeated mentoring. Second, a verified attendance list and complete participant characteristics were not available for analysis. Third, the evaluation did not use a pretest-posttest instrument, practical competency rubric, account analytics, or sales records. Fourth, the immediate responses reported by participants were not independently verified through longitudinal observation. These limitations require the results to be interpreted as evidence of initial awareness and readiness, not as proof of increased sales or sustained digital adoption.

For sustainability, subsequent programs should establish a village MSME digital communication group and implement a staged mentoring cycle. The cycle may include account setup, catalogue development, product-photo practice, content-calendar preparation, posting assistance, and monthly review of simple indicators such as number of posts, response time, reach, enquiries, orders, and turnover. This approach would transform the current introductory activity into a measurable empowerment program and allow future claims to be supported with stronger evidence. The need for

continuing organisational support is consistent with community-literacy programs that emphasise institutional strengthening and follow-up rather than one-off delivery (Sunarjo et al., 2025).

4. Conclusions

The community service program provided an accessible introduction to digital marketing for rural MSME actors in Kalipancur Village. Through platform demonstrations, content examples, product-photography guidance, and interactive discussion, participants obtained a clearer view of the basic steps required to begin online promotion. Participant responses also revealed persistent barriers related to skills, time, confidence, and perceptions of a geographically limited market. Several participants reportedly began exploring WhatsApp Business and social-media content references, indicating early-stage readiness.

The program did not collect verified pretest-posttest scores, participant profiles, account analytics, or sales data. It therefore cannot be concluded that the activity increased turnover. Its defensible contribution is the strengthening of initial awareness and practical orientation. Future implementation should use repeated hands-on mentoring, documented attendance, competency rubrics, and follow-up indicators of digital activity and sales. Establishing a village-level digital MSME group is recommended to support peer learning and continuity.

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6. Authors Note

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The manuscript has been revised to avoid unsupported claims of sales growth. The authors confirm responsibility for the originality of the manuscript and for obtaining appropriate permission for the publication of identifiable activity photographs.

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