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Training on Optimizing Digital Marketing Management for MSME Entrepreneurs to Enhance Business Competitiveness in the Digital Economy Era

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Abstract: The development of the digital economy requires micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to manage technology-based marketing in a more structured manner. Many MSMEs have used social media and messaging applications, yet their use often remains spontaneous, lacks consumer segmentation, has inconsistent brand identity, and is not supported by measurable marketing evaluation. This community service activity aims to provide counseling on optimizing digital marketing management for MSME actors to improve business competitiveness in the digital economy era. The activity employed a participatory-educational approach through needs assessment, material delivery, discussion, content preparation simulations, hands-on practice with social media and WhatsApp Business, and an evaluation of participant understanding. The counseling materials

Abstrak: Perkembangan ekonomi digital menuntut usaha mikro, kecil, dan menengah (UMKM) untuk mengelola pemasaran berbasis teknologi secara lebih terstruktur. Banyak UMKM telah memanfaatkan media sosial dan aplikasi pesan instan, namun penggunaannya masih bersifat spontan, belum memperhatikan segmentasi konsumen, memiliki identitas merek yang belum konsisten, serta belum didukung oleh evaluasi pemasaran yang terukur. Kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk memberikan pendampingan dalam mengoptimalkan pengelolaan pemasaran digital bagi pelaku UMKM guna meningkatkan daya saing usaha di era ekonomi digital. Kegiatan ini menggunakan pendekatan partisipatif-edukatif melalui identifikasi kebutuhan, penyampaian materi, diskusi, simulasi penyusunan konten, praktik penggunaan media sosial dan WhatsApp Business, serta evaluasi terhadap

covered digital marketing concepts, target market identification, strengthening brand identity, creating promotional content, managing customer interactions, utilizing online marketplaces, and digital marketing performance indicators. The results indicate that counseling can enhance digital literacy, particularly by helping MSME actors understand that digital marketing is not merely about uploading product photos, but rather a managerial process involving planning, implementation, control, and follow-up. This activity recommends further mentoring so that MSMEs can consistently and measurably implement digital marketing action plans.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; MSMEs; Competitiveness; Digital Economy; Counseling.

pemahaman peserta. Materi pendampingan meliputi konsep pemasaran digital, identifikasi pasar sasaran, penguatan identitas merek, penyusunan konten promosi, pengelolaan interaksi dengan pelanggan, pemanfaatan marketplace, serta indikator kinerja pemasaran digital. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa pendampingan ini mampu meningkatkan literasi digital peserta, terutama dalam membantu pelaku UMKM memahami bahwa pemasaran digital tidak sekadar mengunggah foto produk, melainkan merupakan suatu proses manajerial yang mencakup perencanaan, pelaksanaan, pengendalian, dan tindak lanjut. Kegiatan ini merekomendasikan adanya pendampingan lanjutan agar UMKM dapat mengimplementasikan rencana aksi pemasaran digital secara konsisten dan terukur.

Kata Kunci: Pemasaran Digital; UMKM; Daya Saing; Ekonomi Digital; Penyuluhan.

A. Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are one of the main pillars of the Indonesian economy, making a significant contribution to economic growth, job creation, and the equitable distribution of social welfare. The presence of MSMEs, which extend down to the village level, makes them drivers of the local economy capable of strengthening the economic resilience of communities in the face of various development challenges. Data from KADIN Indonesia indicates that MSMEs dominate the national business structure and are a vital component of Indonesia's economic growth (KADIN Indonesia, 2024). Therefore, strengthening the capacity of MSMEs is a strategic priority that must be continuously advanced—not only in terms of production

and capital but also in their ability to manage marketing strategies aligned with technological advancements and shifts in consumer behavior.

The massive digital transformation that has taken place in recent years has changed the patterns of interaction between producers and consumers. Today, consumers tend to seek product information through various digital platforms—such as social media, marketplaces, search engines, and messaging apps—before making a purchase decision. This situation means that conventional marketing is no longer sufficient to reach an increasingly broad and competitive market. MSME operators who fail to adapt to technological advancements risk missing out on market opportunities, while those who have adopted digital platforms but have not managed them strategically may not necessarily achieve optimal results. Thus, marketing digitalization must be understood as a managerial process encompassing market understanding, the formulation of communication strategies, the selection of promotional media, customer service, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of marketing activities.

Digital marketing is essentially a marketing activity that utilizes digital technology to create, communicate, and deliver value to customers. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) explain that digital marketing strategies must be designed through systematic stages, ranging from planning and implementation to measurement and continuous improvement. Therefore, simply having social media accounts or a store on a marketplace is not enough to guarantee the marketing success of a business if it is not accompanied by the ability to manage a targeted marketing strategy. MSME owners need to understand how to identify target markets, determine product advantages, create engaging promotional content, and evaluate consumer responses through various simple indicators such as comments, customer reviews, incoming messages, transaction rates, and repeat purchases.

The urgency of strengthening digital marketing is increasing in tandem with the growing business competition in the digital economy era. A business's competitiveness is no longer determined solely by low prices or a strategic business location but is also

influenced by the quality of product information, brand identity consistency, service speed, ease of transactions, the credibility of testimonials, and the ability to build long-term relationships with customers. Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan (2021) emphasize that modern marketing must be able to integrate technology with a human touch so that the relationship between producers and consumers retains its value. In the context of MSMEs, this approach can be realized through digital media management that is not only promotion-oriented but also focuses on the customer experience—from the information-search stage, through the communication process and transaction, to post-purchase service.

Various studies show that the implementation of digital marketing has a positive impact on the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Jadhav, Gaikwad, and Bapat (2023), through a systematic literature review, found that digital marketing contributes to improved marketing, strengthened customer relationships, and enhanced performance of small and medium-sized enterprises. Meanwhile, Andika, Jennifer, Huang, and Sebastian (2021) explain that the successful adoption of digital marketing by SMEs is influenced by various factors, including human resource readiness, organizational readiness, costs, technological suitability, and management support. These findings indicate that digital transformation is not merely a matter of technological availability but is also closely tied to business owners' readiness to understand and effectively utilize such technologies.

Social media has become one of the most widely used digital marketing tools by SME business owners because it is relatively easy to access and does not require significant upfront costs. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) state that social media enables users to create and exchange content interactively. These characteristics provide opportunities for SME business owners to introduce products, build communication with customers, receive direct feedback, and strengthen their business image. However, the effectiveness of social media heavily depends on business owners' ability to present information that is engaging, consistent, and responsive to customer needs. Poorly

managed content, unclear product information, or slow responses to customer inquiries can erode consumer trust and reduce sales potential.

In addition to social media, marketplaces are also a vital tool in supporting SMEs' digital marketing. Marketplaces provide various features—such as product catalogs, payment systems, shipping services, and customer review sections—that can boost consumer trust. In practice, social media and marketplaces can be used in tandem to expand market reach while streamlining the transaction process. Consumer trust—a key factor in digital transactions—can be built through the provision of accurate information, the use of authentic product photos, price transparency, prompt responses, and satisfactory service. Djakasaputra et al. (2021) demonstrate that digital marketing and service quality play a significant role in improving SME sales performance in the digital age.

Although digital marketing offers immense opportunities, many SME operators still face various challenges in implementing it. One of the main issues is low managerial digital marketing literacy. Some SME operators already have social media accounts or marketplace profiles but do not yet understand how to develop promotional strategies, identify target markets, manage content on a scheduled basis, use digital catalogs, or evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing efforts. Others still believe that digital marketing is synonymous with high advertising costs, leading them to feel unable to compete with larger businesses. In reality, various digital marketing activities can be carried out simply and gradually, in line with the business's capacity.

Given these conditions, outreach activities on optimizing digital marketing management have become a relevant and necessary form of intervention for SME owners. These outreach sessions serve not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a platform to raise awareness, build skills, and encourage business behavior changes that are more adaptive to technological advancements. Through these outreach activities, participants can understand the basic concepts of digital marketing, identify challenges faced in their businesses, and gain practical solutions that can be

implemented immediately. In the context of community service, universities play a strategic role as agents of empowerment that bridge community needs with advancements in science and technology.

The implementation of these outreach activities is based on a theoretical framework that integrates the concepts of digital marketing management, customer value creation, market segmentation, the utilization of social media and marketplaces, and the adoption of digital technology by MSMEs. This framework serves as the foundation for developing the materials and implementation strategies for the activities, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Theoretical Framework for Optimizing Digital Marketing Management for SMEs

No	Theoretical Aspect	Explanation	Implications for SMEs
1	Digital Marketing Management	Digital marketing is understood as a process of planning, implementation, control, and evaluation.	SMEs need to have a promotional plan, a content schedule, and simple evaluation metrics.
2	Creating Customer Value	Marketing is focused on meeting customer needs and strengthening relationships with customers.	SMEs need to highlight product benefits, provide prompt service, and offer clear information.
3	Market Segmentation and Targeting	Consumers are grouped based on their needs, characteristics, and purchasing behavior.	SMEs need to identify their key customers before creating promotional content.
4	Social Media and Digital Interaction	Social media enables two-way communication between businesses and consumers.	SMEs need to actively respond to customer messages, comments, and testimonials.
5	Marketplaces and Trust	Marketplaces provide a space for transactions, reviews, and digital reputation evidence.	SMEs need to manage their catalogs, product descriptions, inventory, and customer reviews.
6	Technology Adoption	Technology adoption is influenced by readiness, ease of use, cost, and	SMEs need to implement technology gradually in accordance with their

		perceived benefits.	business capacity.
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Based on the above, this community service activity aims to enhance the understanding and skills of SME operators in optimizing digital marketing management to strengthen business competitiveness in the digital economy era. Through educational and participatory outreach activities, it is hoped that SME operators will be able to develop more effective marketing strategies, expand their market reach, improve service quality, and build stronger relationships with customers so that business sustainability can be maintained amid increasingly complex business competition.

B. Method

This community service activity employs a participatory-educational approach. The participatory approach is used because SME operators are not merely positioned as recipients of information but also as active participants who share their experiences, challenges, and business needs. The educational approach is used to strengthen participants' knowledge of digital marketing through the presentation of materials, examples, simple exercises, and discussions. This method was chosen because digital marketing challenges faced by SMEs generally relate not only to the availability of devices but also to mindset, promotional habits, communication skills, and the ability to interpret market responses.

The target audience for this activity consists of SME owners who need to strengthen their basic knowledge and skills in managing digital marketing. Participant profiles can be tailored to the actual activity data, such as business type, number of participants, partner locations, and the level of digital media usage prior to the training. In this document, the activity focuses on SMEs that have used or will use social media, WhatsApp Business, and online marketplaces as promotional and sales channels. The target audience was determined based on the need for SMEs to expand their marketing

reach, strengthen their product image, and enhance their competitiveness through the use of easily accessible digital technologies.

The implementation stages consist of needs assessment, material development, training delivery, hands-on practice, comprehension evaluation, and follow-up. During the needs assessment stage, the implementation team examines participants' initial conditions, including the promotional channels they use, challenges in creating content, their ability to respond to customer messages, use of product catalogs, and obstacles in utilizing marketplaces. This information is used to ensure that the materials presented are not overly theoretical and are tailored to the needs of MSME operators.

The material development phase involved designing concise handouts and practical examples. The materials were organized in stages, covering the basics of digital marketing, target market mapping, brand identity strengthening, content creation, social media management, using WhatsApp Business, leveraging marketplaces, and evaluating marketing performance. The selection of materials took into account the characteristics of MSMEs, which generally have limited time, capital, and human resources. Therefore, the materials were designed to be practical, concise, and immediately applicable by participants.

The training sessions are conducted through presentations, Q&A sessions, case discussions, and simulations of promotional plan development. Participants were guided to examine business accounts or product examples, then identify the strengths and weaknesses of the marketing information presented. The simulation involved asking participants to draft product descriptions, generate content ideas, define target customers, and design a simple posting schedule. Through these activities, participants not only listened to explanations but also began applying the material to the context of their own businesses.

Evaluation is conducted through observation of participation, reflective discussions, and pre- and post-test instruments. The pre-test is used to assess participants' initial understanding of digital marketing concepts, while the post-test is

used to measure improvements in understanding following the training. Evaluation can also be conducted by assessing the action plans created by participants, such as the completeness of their business profiles, the clarity of their target markets, content designs, and simple evaluation indicators. The evaluation results serve as the basis for formulating follow-up recommendations so that the initiative does not end with a single training session.

Table 1. Stages of Outreach Activity Implementation

No	Stage	Main Activities	Expected Outputs
1	Identify needs	Assess the initial conditions of MSMEs, the promotional media they use, and the challenges they face in digital marketing.	Mapping participants' needs and determining the focus of the course material.
2	Material Preparation	Compiling handouts, sample content, pre-tests, post-tests, and action plan worksheets.	The training materials are ready for use.
3	Outreach	Delivering digital marketing material, leading discussions, and conducting Q&A sessions.	Participants understand the basic concepts and benefits of digital marketing.
4	Practical Simulation	Creating sample captions, content schedules, product catalogs, and promotional plans.	Participants have an initial implementation plan.
5	Evaluation and Follow-Up	Conducting a post-test, reflection, and development of an action plan.	Recommendations for guidance and strategy improvements.

C. Results and Discussion

Initial Conditions and the Urgency of Digital Marketing Literacy

The findings indicate that the primary needs of MSME operators in digital marketing relate to understanding strategy, consistency in media management, and the skills to craft promotional messages. Many MSMEs are familiar with social media, but

their use is still limited to showcasing products without content planning. Some participants also fail to distinguish between the function of social media as a tool for building rapport with consumers and marketplaces as a more structured transaction platform. This situation indicates that the main issue is not merely access to technology, but also the ability to manage that technology as part of a business strategy.

During the discussion, frequently raised issues included a lack of confidence in creating content, limited promotional ideas, the absence of a consistent brand identity, and confusion about determining the optimal posting times. Another issue is that SME owners are not yet in the habit of collecting customer data, requesting reviews, or evaluating content that generates engagement. In fact, this simple data can help business owners understand which products are in demand, what questions frequently arise, and what complaints need to be addressed. This aligns with the view of Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) that the use of digital marketing channels by SMEs must be supported by strategic capabilities and a proper understanding of those channels.

The training session then emphasized that digital marketing must be understood as an ongoing process. This process begins with identifying who the potential buyers are, what their needs are, how the product addresses those needs, what message needs to be conveyed, which media are most appropriate, and how the results of the promotion are evaluated. With this understanding, participants were guided to focus not only on the number of posts but also on the quality of the information and the relevance of the message. Good content isn't always complex; rather, it's content that is clear, honest, engaging, and helps consumers make decisions.

Strengthening Brand Identity and Product Differentiation

One of the key topics covered in the training is strengthening brand identity. A strong brand identity is essential so that MSME products are more easily recognized and distinguished from similar products. This identity can include the business name, logo, colors, packaging, tone of voice, slogan, and the product's core values. In practice, many MSMEs have good products but lack a consistent brand image. Product photos,

packaging designs, and caption writing styles often fluctuate, making it difficult for consumers to remember the business's unique character. Yet, brand consistency helps build trust and strengthen the business's market position.

Kotler and Keller (2016) explain that marketing is about creating value and managing customer relationships. In the context of SMEs, a product's value lies not only in its basic functions but also in its story, service quality, ease of accessing information, and consumer trust in the business owner. Therefore, participants were guided to describe their product's unique selling points in simple terms. For example, a product can be highlighted as homemade, made with local ingredients, featuring a distinctive flavor, accepting custom orders, or offering neat packaging. These unique aspects need to be consistently showcased in digital content.

Product differentiation is also a crucial part of enhancing competitiveness. In the digital marketplace, consumers can easily compare products from various sellers. If SMEs are unable to clearly explain their products' strengths, consumers tend to focus solely on price comparisons. The training emphasized that price wars are not the only way to compete. SMEs can build competitiveness through clear product benefits, high-quality photos, customer testimonials, fast service, a unique business story, and consistent communication. Thus, digital marketing helps SMEs not only sell products but also build a perception of value.

Digital Promotional Content Management

The material on promotional content is designed to help participants craft messages that are concise, clear, and persuasive. Digital promotional content must, at a minimum, include product information, benefits, pricing or ordering instructions, location or service coverage, and a call to action. Much of the content produced by SMEs is ineffective because it only features photos without adequate explanations. Conversely, some content is too long and fails to focus on consumer needs. Therefore, participants are introduced to a simple structure: the consumer's problem, the solution

offered by the product, evidence or reasons to trust the product, and a call to contact the seller.

Content management also involves varying the types of posts. Content doesn't always have to be direct promotions. SME owners can create educational content, testimonials, production processes, product usage tips, customer stories, ingredient information, seasonal promotions, or behind-the-scenes activities. This variety is important so that business accounts do not appear monotonous. Tiago and Veríssimo (2014) emphasize that digital marketing and social media provide broader opportunities for interaction between businesses and consumers. Such interaction can be enhanced through content that invites a response, rather than merely offering products.

During the training sessions, participants are guided to create a simple content calendar. This calendar can include three to four types of posts per week, tailored to the business owner's capabilities. The goal is not to burden SME owners but to help them maintain consistency. Content consistency is crucial because both social media algorithms and consumer behavior require a regular presence. If a business account is rarely active, consumers may assume the business is inactive or unresponsive. Conversely, an active, informative, and responsive account will find it easier to build trust.

Product photos and videos receive special attention because the visual presentation is the first thing potential buyers see. Participants were given basic guidance, such as using adequate lighting, a clean background, and shooting angles that clearly showcase the product, as well as including important information without making the design too cluttered. SMEs do not need to use expensive equipment. Their existing smartphones can be used effectively if business owners understand the basic principles of lighting, composition, and product clarity. With simple improvements, visual quality can be enhanced, and products will appear more convincing.

Utilizing Social Media and WhatsApp Business

Social media was discussed as a space for building relationships with customers. Participants were encouraged to understand the distinct characteristics of Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp. Instagram can be used to showcase visual catalogs, testimonials, and brand imagery. Facebook remains relevant for reaching local communities and buying-and-selling groups. TikTok can be used for short videos that highlight processes, stories, or product demonstrations. WhatsApp Business serves as a direct communication channel, a simple catalog, and a tool for managing customer messages. Understanding these distinct characteristics is crucial so that SME owners do not use all platforms in the same way without a clear objective.

Syaifullah, Syaifudin, Sukendar, and Junaedi (2021) found that the use of social media marketing has a positive impact on SME performance, particularly in terms of increased sales, customer relationships, productivity, and creativity. These findings are relevant to this training session because participants are guided to view social media not merely as a promotional tool, but as a means of building relationships. Relationships with customers can be built through prompt responses, polite language, clear information, and follow-ups after a purchase. Effective communication can encourage repeat purchases and recommendations from customers to others.

WhatsApp Business serves as a practical tool because many SME owners already use WhatsApp for daily communication. However, not all participants take full advantage of its business features. Features such as the business profile, catalog, welcome messages, out-of-hours messages, customer labels, and quick replies can help SME owners work more efficiently. For example, new customers can be assigned a specific label, customers who have already paid can be labeled differently, and customers requiring follow-up can be noted. Simple management practices like these help SMEs reduce the risk of missed messages and enhance the professionalism of their service.

The training also emphasized digital communication ethics. SME owners need to avoid excessive promotion, unverifiable claims, using others' photos without permission, or spamming multiple contacts. Honesty in product information is a key component of consumer trust. In digital marketing, a reputation can be built quickly, but it can also be damaged just as quickly if consumers feel deceived or poorly served. Therefore, optimizing digital marketing must go hand in hand with improving service quality.

Utilizing Marketplaces and Consumer Trust

Marketplaces are channels that can help SMEs expand their sales reach. Unlike social media, which emphasizes interaction and promotion, marketplaces are more structured in terms of product catalogs, transactions, shipping, and customer reviews. Workshop participants were guided to understand that marketplaces require detailed management of product information. Product titles must be clear, categories must be accurate, photos must match the actual items, descriptions must be complete, and inventory levels must be kept up to date. Incorrect information can reduce customer satisfaction and lead to negative reviews.

Consumer trust is a critical element in digital transactions because buyers cannot always see the products in person. Djakasaputra et al. (2021) demonstrate that service quality and digital marketing play a role in SME sales performance in the digital era. This indicates that promotion must be balanced with good service. SME operators need to ensure that information regarding price, size, materials, flavor, weight, shipping, and ordering terms is communicated clearly. Clear information reduces misunderstandings and enhances the customer experience.

Customer testimonials and reviews were discussed as social proof that can boost the trust of potential buyers. However, participants were also reminded that testimonials must be obtained honestly and not manipulated. Authentic reviews carry more weight than one-sided claims. SME owners can politely ask customers to leave a review after a purchase. These reviews can be reposted on social media as part of the business's

content. This strategy helps potential buyers see previous customers' experiences and assess the business's credibility.

Marketplaces also create opportunities for fiercer competition because similar products can be easily found. Therefore, SMEs need to manage non-price factors, such as photo quality, response speed, neat packaging, product variety, and after-sales service. If SMEs compete solely on price, profit margins may be squeezed. Conversely, if SMEs can build added value and trust, consumers will have a reason to choose their products even if they aren't the cheapest. This is part of sustainable competitiveness.

Evaluating Digital Marketing Performance

One common weakness in SME marketing is a lack of evaluation. Business owners often judge the success of a promotion based solely on gut feelings or the number of posts, rather than on observable metrics. The training session introduced simple metrics that can be used without complex analytics tools. These metrics include the number of views, likes, comments, incoming messages, price inquiries, orders, repeat purchases, customer reviews, and the most frequently asked-about products. These simple metrics can be tracked weekly to identify patterns.

Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of research and measurement in the development of digital marketing and social media. For SMEs, measurement does not have to involve complex methods. Simple notes in a notebook or spreadsheet can help business owners understand which content is most effective. For example, if content about the production process receives a lot of engagement, business owners can create variations of similar content. If promotional content generates many inquiries but few transactions, perhaps the ordering information needs to be clarified or the price needs to be compared to the value offered.

Evaluation is also necessary to avoid wasting time and money. Not all platforms need to be actively used if they do not align with the market's characteristics. SMEs need to choose the most effective channels based on consumer responses. If customers ask more questions via WhatsApp, then the WhatsApp catalog needs to be improved. If

more sales occur through marketplaces, then managing the online store needs to be prioritized. If Instagram is effective at building brand image, then visual quality needs to be enhanced. Through evaluation, SME owners can make decisions based on simple data.

The training encourages participants to develop weekly action plans. These action plans include refining business profiles, creating catalogs, content schedules, content types, promotional targets, methods for soliciting testimonials, and evaluation metrics. These action plans are crucial to ensure that the training's impact extends beyond mere knowledge gain. Tangible changes only become evident when participants apply the material to their business operations. Therefore, follow-up measures such as mentoring, monitoring, or digital marketing clinics are highly recommended.

The Impact of Training on Improving the Competitiveness of MSMEs

In general, the training contributes to participants' increased understanding of the importance of digital marketing management. Participants gain the insight that digital marketing does not have to be an expensive endeavor but can begin with small, consistent improvements. These improvements include a clear business identity, better product photos, informative captions, prompt customer responses, a well-organized catalog, and simple evaluations. In the short term, these changes can boost consumer trust. In the long term, they can strengthen a business's competitiveness.

Patma, Wardana, Wibowo, Narmaditya, and Akbarina (2021) demonstrated that social media marketing played a role in the sustainability of Indonesian SMEs during the pandemic. Although the pandemic context had unique characteristics, the lesson to be learned is that digital channels can serve as a means for businesses to adapt when market conditions change. In the era of the digital economy, such adaptation is no longer merely a matter of necessity but has become a strategic imperative. SMEs capable of managing digital marketing have a greater chance of retaining customers and reaching new markets.

Digital marketing is also linked to financial performance and transaction systems. Daud et al. (2022) demonstrate that digital marketing, digital finance, and digital payments influence the financial performance of Indonesian SMEs. This finding reinforces the understanding that digital marketing should not be separated from transaction and payment aspects. If digital promotions successfully attract customers but the payment process is complicated or confirmation is slow, transaction opportunities may be lost. Therefore, SMEs need to integrate promotions, communication, payments, and customer service in a more organized manner.

This outreach activity also highlights the importance of universities' role in supporting the transformation of SMEs. Many SME operators need mentors who can explain digital concepts in simple language and using examples relevant to their daily business operations. Higher education institutions can contribute through training, content mentoring, digital catalog development, local brand strengthening, and strategy evaluation. These forms of support can be tailored to the institution's capacity and the needs of its partners. In this way, community service can become an integral part of the ecosystem for strengthening the local economy.

Table 2. Core Outreach Materials and Expected Competencies

No	Content	Expected Competencies
1	Concepts of Digital Marketing	Participants understand digital marketing as a management process, not just uploading products.
2	Target Market and Segmentation	Participants are able to identify potential customers and their primary needs.
3	MSME Brand Identity	Participants understand the importance of a name, logo, packaging, tone of voice, and visual consistency.
4	Promotional Content	Participants are able to create simple photos, captions, testimonials, and calls to action.
5	Social Media and WhatsApp Business	Participants will be able to use business profiles, catalogs, automated messages, and posting schedules.
6	Marketplaces	Participants understand how to write product descriptions, manage inventory, and build

		reviews.
7	Digital Marketing Evaluation	Participants are able to interpret simple metrics such as incoming messages, interactions, orders, and reviews.

Table 3. Simple Evaluation Metrics for SMEs

No	Indicator	How to Monitor	Follow-Up
1	Content Interaction	Check the number of likes, comments, saves, and shares.	Repeat the content patterns that receive a positive response.
2	Incoming Messages	Track the number of questions received via WhatsApp or social media.	Clarify information on prices, sizes, inventory, and how to order.
3	Sales Conversion	Compare the number of inquiries with the number of transactions.	Improve offers, service, and the clarity of the call to action.
4	Customer Reviews	Collect customer testimonials and complaints.	Use testimonials as social proof and complaints as a basis for improvement.
5	Repeat Purchases	Track customers who make repeat purchases.	Build follow-up communication and offer complementary products.

Theoretical Discussion and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this activity demonstrates the relationship between marketing concepts, technology adoption, and the competitiveness of SMEs. Digital marketing cannot be separated from the fundamental principle of marketing, namely the creation of value for customers. Technology is merely a tool, while value is still determined by the entrepreneur's ability to understand consumer needs and offer relevant solutions. Therefore, strengthening digital marketing for MSMEs must begin with an understanding of the market and the product, not merely with technical training on how to use applications.

The Marketing 5.0 concept emphasizes the use of technology to enhance the human experience in the marketing process (Kotler et al., 2021). In the context of SMEs, technology does not always have to take the form of sophisticated systems. Simple features such as WhatsApp catalogs, Instagram Highlights, customer groups, or order logs can serve as strategic tools when used appropriately. This is important because many SMEs have limited resources. Strategies that are too complex can actually be difficult to implement. Therefore, effective training must simplify digital concepts into practical steps that align with participants' capabilities.

A study by Jadhav et al. (2023) shows that digital marketing impacts various aspects of small and medium-sized businesses, but these impacts depend on the context of implementation. This means there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for all SMEs. Food products, handicrafts, services, and retail each have distinct marketing characteristics. Therefore, training programs need to encourage participants to tailor their approaches. Food business owners can highlight visuals, taste, testimonials, and order speed. Service providers can emphasize their portfolio, expertise, reviews, and trustworthiness. Craft business owners can showcase the uniqueness of their designs, production processes, and local stories.

The first practical implication is the need for a simple digital marketing plan. This plan should include objectives, target customers, media channels, content types, posting frequency, and evaluation metrics. Without a plan, MSME business owners tend to operate reactively. They only post when they have time or when sales decline. With a plan, promotions become more organized and can be evaluated. The plan doesn't have to be lengthy; a one-page action plan is sufficient to initiate change.

The second practical implication is the importance of strengthening visual literacy and product storytelling. In the digital space, products are first judged by their appearance and the accompanying information. Even high-quality products may be less appealing if the photos are blurry, the background is messy, or the information is unclear. Conversely, well-composed photos and effective narratives can enhance the

perception of professionalism. SMEs need training in taking simple product photos, writing captions, and explaining product benefits in consumer-friendly language. These skills can be learned gradually without significant cost.

The third practical implication is customer relationship management. Digital media allows SMEs to interact directly with customers, but these interactions must be managed. Slow response times, inconsistent information, or impolite communication can erode consumer trust. Therefore, SME owners need to establish simple service standards, such as response times, quick-response templates, price lists, shipping information, and procedures for handling complaints. These standards help businesses appear more professional even while still operating on a small scale.

The fourth practical implication is the need for follow-up mentoring after training sessions. A one-time training session can raise awareness, but behavioral change is a process. Mentoring can be provided through digital marketing clinics, discussion groups, monitoring of business accounts, or content creation assignments. Higher education institutions can serve as facilitators that help SMEs refine their strategies on a regular basis. This mentoring also allows community service teams to measure the changes that occur, such as improved content consistency, catalog enhancements, an increase in testimonials, or a rise in transactions.

From a competitiveness perspective, digital marketing management can help SMEs build a competitive edge through market access, differentiation, communication efficiency, and increased trust. These competitive advantages do not happen automatically. SME owners must manage technology in a conscious and measured manner. Therefore, the core of the training is not merely introducing applications, but fostering a strategic mindset. When SME owners understand the purpose of each digital activity, they can select the most appropriate channels and avoid using media that are not.

D. Conclusion

The outreach program on optimizing digital marketing management for MSME owners has made a positive contribution to enhancing participants' understanding of marketing strategies in the digital economy era. This program emphasizes that digital marketing does not focus solely on the use of social media but also encompasses managerial processes such as identifying target markets, strengthening brand identity, content planning, leveraging digital platforms, managing customer relationships, and evaluating marketing performance. Through this understanding, MSME owners are expected to be able to utilize digital technology more effectively to expand their market reach and enhance their business competitiveness.

The results of the activity indicate that the main challenges faced by SME operators relate to low digital marketing literacy, a lack of consistency in promotions, and limited ability to manage and evaluate digital media. The use of social media, WhatsApp Business, and online marketplaces can be effective tools when supported by a clear strategy, accurate product information, prompt responses, and professional service. These factors play a crucial role in building customer trust and enhancing business sustainability.

To support the successful implementation of digital marketing, MSME operators are advised to develop a simple marketing plan that includes target customers, a content schedule, promotional channels, and evaluation metrics aligned with their business capacity. Additionally, universities and community service teams need to provide ongoing guidance through advanced training, content clinics, social media account evaluations, and monitoring of business progress. It is hoped that this continuous mentoring will strengthen the digital capabilities of SME owners so they can adapt to market dynamics and increase their contribution to local economic growth.

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