



## **Branding and Digital Marketing Innovation for Siwang MSMEs Empowerment in Indramayu West Java**

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**Abstract:** This community service aims to enhance the branding capacity and digital marketing competencies of “Siwang”, a traditional shrimp-paste-based MSME in Gantar Subdistrict, Indramayu Regency. The intervention employed a participatory approach, encompassing needs assessment, digital literacy training, content creation workshops, and mentorship in utilising social media and online marketplaces. Evaluation was conducted through questionnaires and participatory observation. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to determine partner satisfaction and competency improvements, while qualitative insights were interpreted thematically to capture behavioural changes and contextual relevance. The results indicate a substantial improvement in branding awareness, social media management skills, and production efficiency, supported by the introduction of appropriate digital and production tools. Key evaluation indicators demonstrated achievement rates above 85%, with overall partner satisfaction exceeding 90%. This program not only strengthened the business competitiveness of the MSME but also laid a foundation for sustainable digital transformation rooted in local cultural values. The model is recommended for replication among similar rural enterprises with high artistic and economic potential.

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## **Introduction**

MSMEs are crucial to the economy and exemplify the nation's social fabric. These enterprises are deeply connected to local traditions, creative practices, and a spirit of collective resilience. As the backbone of the national economy, MSMEs contribute more than 60% to the gross domestic product (GDP) and employ over 96% of the workforce. (Kurniadi et al., 2024). They are vital for maintaining economic stability and fostering local sustainability, particularly in rural areas. (Goutte & Sanin, 2024; Mayangsari et al., 2024). However, MSMEs encounter significant structural challenges, especially in rural regions. These challenges include limited access to digital infrastructure, low levels of digital literacy, and a lack of coherent branding strategies. Such hurdles often impede their ability to scale, innovate, and engage effectively in broader market ecosystems (Boom-Cárcamo et al., 2024; Elia et al., 2024).

Digital transformation has substantially altered the economic landscape, presenting unprecedented opportunities for MSMEs to expand their reach, optimise operations, and enhance consumer engagement through digital platforms such as e-commerce, social media, and community-based marketplaces (Marolt et al., 2025). When supported by effective



systems, digitalisation can significantly enhance productivity and inclusivity. Nevertheless, the adoption of technology among MSMEs in Indonesia remains inconsistent. Rural MSMEs often lack the structural and cultural readiness to fully integrate digital tools into their business models (Anatan & Nur, 2023). This insight aligns with the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which posits that innovations are more readily adopted when users perceive them as delivering practical benefits, aligning with their existing values, and demonstrating apparent effectiveness (Cardol et al., 2025).

In digital marketing, branding has become an essential differentiator for local products navigating the crowded online marketplace (Salam et al., 2025). It encompasses more than just visual design; it involves crafting compelling narratives, conveying core values, and establishing emotional connections with consumers. Key elements of strategic branding, including brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and customer loyalty, are crucial for enhancing a product's competitive edge (Sheykhani et al., 2024). Research shows that localised storytelling can significantly boost consumer engagement while emphasising the cultural significance of products from MSMEs (Dyatmika et al., 2023; Redhead & Bika, 2025; Zuhroh & Putri, 2021). The rise of digital transformation has fundamentally altered the economic landscape, offering unprecedented opportunities for MSMEs to expand their reach, optimise their operations, and enhance consumer interactions through e-commerce, social media, and community-focused marketplaces. However, many rural MSMEs face challenges due to low digital literacy levels and limited technical support (Loo et al., 2023). These issues highlight the need for a contextual and inclusive approach to digital adoption.

Community-based engagement programs have showcased positive outcomes by implementing participatory digital interventions. Participatory Action Research (PAR) empowers entrepreneurs to co-create knowledge and act as change agents, fostering a sense of ownership over new practices (Heck, 2024; Ray et al., 2024). This approach ensures that interventions are rooted in local realities, particularly in communities where economic activities are deeply intertwined with tradition and culture. The "Siwang" MSMEs in Gantar Subdistrict, Indramayu Regency, exemplify significant untapped potential. This business specialises in *terasi bawang* (fermented shrimp paste with garlic), representing culinary heritage and traditional craftsmanship. Despite its cultural importance, the product remains largely unknown beyond the local area due to a weak brand identity, limited digital presence, and a lack of practical promotional tools. Preliminary assessments indicate that the enterprise lacks fundamental digital marketing knowledge and is inactive online.

Addressing these challenges necessitates more than mere technical assistance; it requires a culturally grounded and human-centred approach. Empowerment efforts should honour local wisdom and foster reciprocal learning between facilitators and community members. Digital innovation should enhance, rather than replace, traditional values by linking heritage with modern market opportunities (Del Soldato & Massari, 2024; Sun et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). The establishment of effective connections among universities, communities, and local enterprises necessitates a foundation of mutual respect and collaborative engagement. This community service initiative seeks to enhance the branding and digital marketing capacities of the "Siwang" Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through a culturally responsive and participatory framework. The initiative pursues several objectives: (1) to assess the digital readiness and branding requirements of the MSMEs; (2) to deliver targeted training in brand identity and visual design; and (3) to elevate digital competencies pertinent to social media and online marketplaces. Ultimately, this



initiative aspires to empower rural MSMEs to actively participate in the digital economy while simultaneously preserving and promoting the cultural identity of Indonesia's products.

This initiative is designed not only as a vehicle for the transfer of digital and branding skills but also as a culturally integrative process that aligns contemporary marketing practices with local values and identities. The program incorporates culturally embedded narratives into branding strategies, leveraging community storytelling traditions, local idioms, and culinary heritage as distinctive market differentiators. Rather than adopting a top-down approach to digital transformation, this program fosters collaborative environments wherein MSME stakeholders are encouraged to reinterpret their products through a contemporary lens while remaining rooted in their traditional meanings. Expected outcomes include the co-creation of a unique brand identity that authentically reflects local culture, the establishment of digital touchpoints such as social media platforms, digital catalogues, and online stores, as well as an increase in market visibility that extends beyond local boundaries. Furthermore, this initiative aims to cultivate sustainable digital autonomy by embedding acquired skills within the routine practices of the MSMEs, thereby reducing dependence on external actors. It is anticipated that this culturally sensitive model will serve as a replicable blueprint for empowering other rural enterprises of significant socio-cultural value, enabling them to flourish within the digital economy without sacrificing their heritage.

## Method

The community service program adopts a participatory and applicative approach, with systematically designed stages tailored to the specific needs of the "Siwang" MSME partner located in Gantar Subdistrict, Indramayu Regency, West Java. The program was carried out using the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), a capacity-building process that positions the community as active partners in every phase of the activity (Loudon et al., 2024; Mehdipour et al., 2025). This approach is considered effective in enhancing program outcomes, as it facilitates collaborative learning and the development of solutions grounded in local needs. The community service program was implemented in four main phases, the detailed explanation of the aforementioned stages is as follows:

- 1) The program began with field observations and direct interviews with the partner to identify business potential, key challenges, and capacity-building needs.
- 2) Training was conducted using an experiential learning and andragogical approach, covering the following topics:
  - Introduction to basic concepts of branding and brand storytelling,
  - Visual design for branding and product packaging using Canva,
  - Basic product photography techniques using a smartphone,
  - Utilisation of business-oriented social media platforms (Instagram, WhatsApp Business).
- 3) Following the training sessions, intensive mentoring was provided to support the implementation of the strategies developed. This included:
  - Creating digital business social media accounts,
  - Developing promotional content (photos, videos, product narratives),
  - Uploading products to social media and online marketplaces,
  - Simulating interactions with online consumers.
- 4) Monitoring was carried out for four weeks after the training through observation, documentation of activities, and reflective discussions with the partner. Evaluation was conducted by comparing the partner's condition before and after the program



regarding digital skills, engagement on online platforms, and the increased visibility of their products. Quantitative data from self-assessment questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics to measure changes in knowledge, skills, and satisfaction levels. Meanwhile, qualitative data from reflective discussions and field notes were examined using thematic analysis to capture patterns of behavioural change, challenges encountered, and perceived program value. The program concluded with a joint reflection session to identify best practices and areas for improvement.

## Result and Discussion

Based on the activity methods that had been carefully designed, the following section outlines the implementation stages, achieved outcomes, and reflections from the community service program conducted with the “Siwang” MSMEs in Gantar Subdistrict, Indramayu Regency:

### A. Problem Analysis, Program Design, and Socialisation Stage

The initial phase was carried out from 3 to 7 May 2025, focusing on mapping the partner's business conditions, coordinating with village authorities and MSME stakeholders, and introducing the program objectives. This stage produced several key outcomes that served as the foundation for implementation:

- Introducing the program to the partner through a participatory approach;
- Identifying expectations, challenges, and specific needs of the MSMEs, particularly in the areas of digital marketing and brand identity;
- Developing a collaborative work plan with the partner, including training schedules and mentoring schemes;
- Establishing initial commitment and readiness of the partner to participate actively in each program stage.



**Figure 2. Program Preparation**

### B. Branding Training and Digital Literacy

During the second week, the first training session focused on branding fundamentals and digital media use for MSMEs. This session covered key topics such as the basic concepts of branding, market segmentation strategies, logo design, and principles of product storytelling grounded in local values. Participants were engaged in hands-on practice using design applications such as Canva to create logos and product labels. The content and instructional approach were based on the principles of customer-based brand equity (Bacon, 2024) and supported by empirical studies highlighting the importance of brand identity in MSME product marketing (Sari et al., 2023; Supatminingsih et al., 2025). An interactive and





experiential learning approach was employed to ensure that participants understood the concepts and could apply them independently. The training continued with sessions on social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp Business. The instructor guided participants through setting up business accounts, uploading engaging content, and understanding the logic behind digital platform algorithms. Previous research has demonstrated that social media adoption can significantly enhance MSME business performance (Aligarh et al., 2023; Fatorachian et al., 2025; Kurniasari et al., 2025). Participants began to recognise the importance of building a digital presence to expand market reach in real time. The outcome of this training was the development of a new visual identity for the "Siwang" product, featuring an improved logo and packaging design, as well as a product narrative that resonates with emotional and local cultural elements.



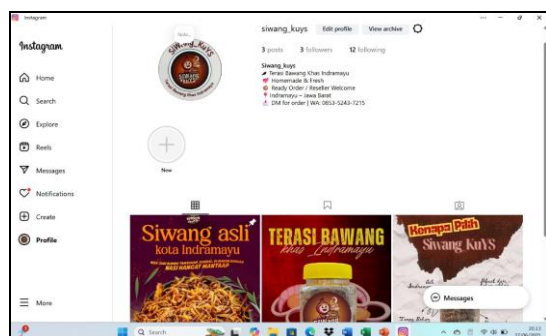
**Figure 3. Logo**



**Figure. 4. Product packaging changes**

### C. Digital Marketing Mentoring: From Understanding to Implementation

The program proceeded with two weeks of intensive mentoring sessions following the training. During this phase, the MSME partner was guided in creating social media accounts for business purposes, such as Instagram and WhatsApp Business, conducting basic product photography using proper lighting techniques, and designing promotional content. The mentoring was delivered in a personalised and adaptive manner, aligned with the partner's learning pace. The partner gradually understood how social media algorithms operate, the optimal times for posting content, and the importance of maintaining consistency in visual communication. Customer engagement on social media is a critical determinant in building trust in local products (Fatorachian et al., 2025; Sudaryanto et al., 2025). The outcome of this activity was establishing a dedicated Instagram business account and producing visual content to support the branding and promotion of the "Siwang" product.



**Figure 5. Social media of Siwang**



**Figure 6. Product storytelling visual design**



**Figure 7. Implementation of programs**

**Figure 8. Examples of promotional designs**

**D. Evaluation of Achievement and Understanding of Partners**

This community service program has successfully enhanced the digital literacy and branding capacity of 'Siwang' MSMEs, as presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Achievement of Community Service Programs**

No	Evaluation Indicators	Average Score (Scale 1–5)	Percentage Achievement
1	Understanding of the basic concepts of local product branding	4,6	92%
2	Ability to manage social media for promotion	4,5	90%
3	Digital visual content creation (photos and promotional narratives)	4,4	88%
4	Basic understanding of social media algorithms and optimal time to upload content	4,3	86%
5	Technical readiness to use the marketplace	4,1	82%
6	Efficient production time with operational support tools	4,7	94%
7	Ability to be independent in managing post-training activities	4,2	84%
8	Commitment to sustainability and adaptation of digital strategies in the medium term	4,3	86%

Participants' average level of achievement in understanding and implementing the material provided reached more than 90%. Indicators such as *understanding branding* concepts, *creating digital content*, and *using social media for marketing* showed substantial improvements. This indicates that participatory approaches, contextual training, and hands-on practices used during activities have proven effective in building locally relevant digital literacy and brand awareness. This achievement aligns with the findings of (Febrianty et al., 2024; Louw, 2023), who stated that digital literacy, supported by practice-based training and contextual relevance, can encourage meaningful digital transformation in MSME actors. In this context, branding is not only understood as an aesthetic effort but as a strategic instrument to build emotional relationships and differentiate the value of products in a competitive digital market. However, increasing human capital must be balanced with strengthening production and marketing infrastructure. For this reason, this program also supports functional facilities for post-training sustainability. This support includes equipment directly relevant to the partner's business activities, ranging from strengthening the production side (such as processing and packaging process aids) to digital devices to support online promotional activities.



**Figure 9. Program support equipment grants**

The provision of grant support is not only intended as a complementary facility but as part of a comprehensive intervention strategy that combines technical, social, and cultural dimensions. The success of MSME transformation in the digital context is determined by individual skills and the availability of facilities that support implementing these skills in daily business practices (Wijaya et al., 2025). In particular, some of the devices provided have been adapted to the actual needs of the partners. The equipment includes digital operational tools, online marketing support, and simple production tools that allow the business process to run more efficiently and hygienically. With this support, partners are equipped with knowledge and skills and given access to work tools that support their business productivity and professionalism.

To promote sustainability, a follow-up plan has been established, featuring periodic mentoring sessions every two months over the next six months. These sessions will focus on monitoring digital engagement metrics, refining content, and evaluating sales performance across online platforms. Furthermore, partners will be encouraged to participate in a local MSME peer-learning network, supported by the university, to facilitate ongoing knowledge exchange and collaborative growth. The creation of straightforward operational guidelines and video tutorials, tailored to the specific production and marketing contexts of the partners, will also form an integral part of the long-term empowerment strategy. These initiatives aim to ensure that the skills and tools provided continue to develop in response to evolving market dynamics and the capacities of the partners.

## **Conclusion**

Community service activities conducted with MSME partners at "Siwang" in Ganttari District, Indramayu, have successfully enhanced the understanding and skills of business operators in product branding and digital marketing. Through digital literacy training, promotional content creation, and assistance with social media usage, partners have learned to manage their brand identities more professionally and leverage online platforms to expand their market reach. This success is further supported by providing production and digitalisation facilities, which enhance operational efficiency and ensure consistent promotion. Program evaluations indicate high levels of satisfaction and achievement across all training indicators. Overall, this initiative has had a significant positive impact on strengthening the business capabilities of partners and has opened doors for program replication in other MSME regions or communities with similar characteristics.





## Recommendation

To ensure that the results of this community service project last, we need a clear follow-up plan. We should set up regular training sessions focused on digital marketing, improving visual content, and managing online marketplaces. Local universities or community education programs can help with this. These efforts will build lasting skills and digital strength among MSMEs. We also recommend ongoing mentoring and support so that participants can use their new skills and adjust to changing market needs. For traditional MSMEs in rural areas, we suggest forming peer learning groups. These groups will encourage sharing knowledge and learning from each other. Creating digital communication groups, like on WhatsApp or Telegram, can keep participants engaged and help with problem-solving and motivation. Involving local youth as digital ambassadors can help bridge generational gaps and support the ongoing digital changes.

To make this effort even stronger, we encourage stakeholders such as universities, local governments, and NGOs to think about applying this successful model in other areas with similar cultures and economies. Lastly, any future provision of technology tools must meet the specific needs of the target MSMEs. Providing tailored support can greatly improve how they operate and increase the value of local products, helping promote inclusive and culturally relevant digital development.

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