



Digital Skills Improvement for MSMEs in Rural Areas for Online Marketing

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Abstract: This Community Service (PKM) aims to improve the digital skills of MSME actors in rural areas, especially in online marketing, through online training using the Zoom platform. This activity is motivated by the low digital skills of MSMEs in rural areas, which limits their access to the digital market. The method used is participatory action research (PAR), involving 30 MSME actors who are selected by purposive sampling. The training lasts four weeks and includes two weekly sessions, covering material on digital marketing, the use of social media, e-commerce, and marketing performance monitoring. The results showed a significant improvement in participants' digital skills, with an average pre-test score of 45 increasing to 80 on the post-test. Implementing the skills learned also resulted in an increase in engagement on social media by 40% and an increase in online transactions by 20%-30%. Participants gave positive feedback regarding the relevance of the training and the application of the skills taught. This activity fills the gap in previous research by focusing on practical strategies adapted to the conditions of MSMEs in rural areas. The main obstacle faced is the problem of internet connectivity, which needs to be considered in the next training. Overall, this activity has succeeded in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs in the digital market.

Keywords: Digital skills; MSMEs; Online marketing; Rural; Community service

Introduction

The advancement of digital technology in the past decade has brought significant changes in various aspects of life, including the micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) sector (Agustono & Yusuf, 2024; Akmir et al., 2024; Astuti, 2019). Information technology, especially the internet and digital platforms, offers new opportunities for MSMEs to expand their markets and increase their competitiveness, even in rural areas that previously had limited access to global markets (Nazar & Tertia Salsabila, 2024; Rajagukguk, 2024; Sifwah et al., 2024; Syamsudin et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, MSMEs play a vital role in the national economy, significantly contributing to labour absorption and gross domestic product (GDP) (Ferdiani

et al., 2024; Yolanda, 2024). However, one of the main challenges MSMEs face in rural areas is the lack of adequate digital skills to harness the potential of online marketing (Andrika & Suroso, 2024; Rokhmah & Yahya, 2022).

Various studies have shown that applying digital technology can significantly improve the performance of MSMEs, especially in online marketing strategies (Gunawan et al., 2021; Hardilawati, 2020). However, most MSMEs in rural Indonesia still face obstacles in accessing digital technology and training, ultimately limiting their ability to compete in the digital market (Hardilawati, 2020; Widjaja, 2024). Several previous training programs have been conducted, but most still focus on essential technology aspects without paying

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attention to the specific needs of digital marketing in the MSME sector (Alamin et al., 2022; Rajagukguk, 2024).

The novelty of this PKM activity lies in its more specific focus on improving digital skills among rural MSMEs in the context of online marketing. This approach provides practical solutions that MSME actors can apply to increase their market reach. Previously, a similar study had been conducted by Haris (2024), which emphasized the importance of digital literacy. Still, the gap that has not been filled is in the implementation strategy of digital marketing based on practical skills adapted to geographical conditions and limited resources in rural areas. Therefore, this program becomes relevant and urgent to be carried out to answer these specific needs.

This PKM activity is essential because it will provide direct training through the Zoom digital platform, which allows the involvement of MSMEs in rural areas without having to leave their area. In addition, this online method is also in line with the development of increasingly digital technology during the pandemic and post-pandemic, where face-to-face interaction is often limited (Depari et al., 2022; Hidayati & Fikri, 2021; Susanti et al., 2022). With this training, it is hoped that MSMEs in rural areas will be able to understand and apply online marketing strategies to expand the market and increase income significantly.

This PKM activity aims to improve the digital skills of MSME actors in rural areas, especially in terms of online marketing, as well as provide practical guidance that can be directly applied to optimize digital technology in their business activities. Thus, MSMEs in rural areas can be more competitive and contribute more to the local and national economy.

Method

This Community Service (PKM) activity uses the participatory action research (PAR) method, where MSME actors are actively involved in every stage of digital training. This method was chosen because the main focus of the activity is empowering MSME actors through improving digital skills for online marketing (Chusniyah & Fauza, 2022; Magvira et al., 2023). The research and training process is conducted online through the Zoom platform, allowing more involvement from MSME actors in rural areas.

Design and Approach

This PKM uses a qualitative approach with participatory techniques. Through participatory action research, researchers work directly with participants to identify specific needs and develop online marketing skills in a targeted manner (Tsabita et al., 2024). This approach is considered adequate for PKM activities

because it allows direct interaction between the research team and participants and allows participants to apply the knowledge gained during the training actively.

Participants

Participants in this activity are MSME actors in rural areas. The selection of participants was carried out using the purposive sampling method to ensure that the participants involved have the potential to utilize digital skills in online marketing. Participant criteria include:

- a. MSME actors who do not have adequate digital skills.
- b. MSMEs that operate in rural areas and have limited access to offline training.
- c. Business actors committed to participating in the entire online training series.

The number of participants in this activity is 30 MSMEs, consisting of various types of businesses such as culinary, handicrafts, and services.

Activity Procedure

This PKM activity consists of several stages, namely:

a. Preparation Stage

The preparation stages carried out are: 1) Identify the needs of MSME actors through an initial online survey to understand the level of digital literacy and challenges faced in online marketing; 2) Prepare training materials which include the introduction of the basics of digital marketing, the use of social media platforms, e-commerce, and analytical tools to monitor online marketing performance; and 3) Determination of online training schedule via Zoom which lasts for four weeks, with two sessions per week.

b. Training Stages

The training stage, namely 1), is carried out in an interactive webinar format. Each session is complemented by presentations, live demonstrations, as well as question and answer sessions; 2) Each participant is given a practical task to directly implement a digital marketing strategy on the platform they are using (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, or local marketplace); and 3) The use of breakout rooms in Zoom allows for intensive mentoring with small groups, where experts in the field of digital marketing facilitate each group.

c. Evaluation Stage

The evaluation is done in two ways: qualitative assessment based on participant feedback and quantitative assessment through digital skill improvement measured using pre-test and post-test.

Each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire before and after the training to measure the improvement of knowledge and skills in online

marketing. Monitoring is also carried out by implementing marketing strategies taught using digital analytics tools (e.g. increased engagement on social media, the number of website visitors, or online transactions).

Data Analysis Techniques

The data was analyzed using the descriptive qualitative analysis method. Data from pre-test and post-test surveys were analyzed to see changes in participants' digital skills. In contrast, qualitative data from interviews and participant feedback were processed to understand the challenges and success of implementing digital marketing skills.

Furthermore, the results of this evaluation will be compared with previous studies to assess the effectiveness of this training method in the context of digital marketing among rural MSMEs. Evaluation criteria include changes in digital knowledge, the level of application of skills taught, and the impact on the performance of MSME online businesses.

Result and Discussion

Result

This Community Service (PKM) activity was successfully carried out online through the Zoom platform for four weeks, with the active participation of 30 MSME actors in rural areas. The results of this activity can be seen from several aspects, namely:

1. Digital Upskilling

Based on the results of the pre-test and post-test, there was a significant improvement in participants' digital understanding and skills. Before the training, the participants' average pre-test score was at a value of 45 out of 100, which indicates that the majority of participants have minimal basic digital skills. After taking the training, the average post-test score increased to 80 out of 100, indicating a significant improvement in knowledge of digital marketing strategies.

Table 1. Improvement of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Digital Skills

Indicator	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)
Basic Understanding of Digital Marketing	40	85
Use of Social Media	50	75
Marketing on E-commerce Platforms	30	78
Marketing Performance Monitoring	35	82
Average	45	80



Figure 1. Online Training Materials

2. Implementation of Digital Marketing Skills

During the training, participants were required to practice the skills learned, such as creating business accounts on social media, managing content, and using e-commerce platforms to sell their products. The results of this implementation are also evaluated through direct feedback from participants and analytical data from the digital platforms used.

Most participants reported increased engagement on their social media, with an average 40% increase in follower count and customer interaction. Some participants also reported a rise in online transactions by 20%-30% after participating in the training.

3. Participant Feedback

The qualitative feedback obtained through the interviews showed that participants found this training very relevant and helpful in improving their digital marketing skills. Some participants stated that they are now more confident in using digital platforms to market their products, and some even plan to continue learning independently.

Discussion

The results of this PKM activity show that online digital training through the Zoom platform effectively improves the digital skills of MSME actors in rural areas, especially in online marketing. A significant increase in post-test scores showed that participants could absorb the material provided well, especially in essential aspects such as social media and e-commerce. This is in line with the research of Bidasari et al. and Firmansyah et al., which found that good digital literacy can improve the performance of MSMEs in the digital era (Bidasari et al., 2023; Firmansyah et al., 2022).

The fact that participants successfully implemented the skills learned and reported an increase in the number of followers on social media and an increase in online transactions confirmed the effectiveness of the practice-based learning methods applied in this activity. These results support the findings of Estiarto et al., which

highlight the importance of practical digital training tailored to the specific needs of MSMEs (Estiarto et al., 2023).

In addition, online technology in this training allows MSME actors in rural areas to access training materials without being limited by distance. This is important considering rural MSMEs' many physical limitations, as also identified by Endrawati et al. (2023). Online training provides greater flexibility and affordability, so it can cover more MSME actors who need digital skills.

In terms of innovation, this activity is novel in terms of focusing on digital marketing adapted to geographical conditions and limited resources in rural areas. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Nurahman et al., have focused more on the general digital literacy aspect without paying attention to specific implementation strategies for MSMEs in rural areas (Nurahman et al., 2023). Therefore, this PKM activity can fill the research gap by providing more practical solutions that can be directly applied.

However, several obstacles were found during the activity. The main obstacle is the problem of internet connectivity in some rural areas, which causes some participants to experience difficulties attending the entire training session. This needs to be a concern in the planning of similar training in the future, where it is necessary to provide asynchronously accessible materials to overcome these technical limitations.

Implication

The results of this activity show that online training can effectively improve the digital skills of MSMEs in rural areas, which will ultimately help improve their competitiveness and business performance in the digital market. In the future, similar training can be further developed by expanding the reach of participants and enriching the material with more complex digital strategies, such as paid advertising or search engine optimization (SEO), which can significantly impact MSME online marketing.

Conclusion

Based on the Community Service (PKM) activities that have been carried out, it can be concluded that online-based digital training through the Zoom platform is efficacious in improving online marketing skills for MSME actors in rural areas. A significant increase in post-test scores showed that participants successfully understood and applied digital marketing strategies, especially using social media and e-commerce platforms. The results of implementing the trained skills are also proven by the increase in the number of followers on social media and online transactions in

several MSMEs. This training contributes to the empowerment of MSME actors in rural areas with limited access to digital training. The novelty of this activity lies in a practical approach focused on online marketing tailored to the specific needs of MSMEs in rural areas, filling gaps that have not been answered in previous studies. The internet connectivity constraints faced during the training showed the importance of better planning for the future, including providing asynchronous materials so that participants could continue fully participating in the training. Overall, this PKM activity has succeeded in improving the digital skills of MSMEs and has the potential to be further developed to strengthen the competitiveness of MSMEs in the digital market.

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