

## Empowering Women and Youth through Entrepreneurship and MSME Training Based on Digital Marketing in Rural Communities

Andini Nur Anisyah<sup>1\*</sup>, Cindy Fransisca<sup>2</sup>, Haura Nabillah<sup>3</sup>, Nurul Yesila Pohan<sup>4</sup>, Ika Sandra Dewi<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>University of Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah, Medan, Indonesia

Email: <sup>1\*</sup>[anisyahandini468@gmail.com](mailto:anisyahandini468@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup>[cindyfransisca2004@gmail.com](mailto:cindyfransisca2004@gmail.com), <sup>3</sup>[ahauranabillah168@gmail.com](mailto:ahauranabillah168@gmail.com),  
<sup>4</sup>[nurulyesilapohan435@gmail.com](mailto:nurulyesilapohan435@gmail.com), <sup>5</sup>[ikasandradewi@umnaw.ac.id](mailto:ikasandradewi@umnaw.ac.id)

\*Email Corresponding Author: [anisyahandini468@gmail.com](mailto:anisyahandini468@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Rural communities often face limited access to digital skills and entrepreneurial resources, particularly among women and youth. This community engagement program was designed to strengthen their capacity to manage micro and small enterprises through applied digital marketing training. The activities combined socialization sessions, practical workshops, and mentoring programs conducted in Empat Negeri Village, Batu Bara Regency, involving 30 local participants. The training covered topics such as creating digital business profiles, developing promotional content, and managing sales through online platforms. Evaluation was carried out using observation, pre- and post-assessment, and qualitative interviews to measure knowledge, skill, and confidence growth. The results showed an average increase of 40–55% in participants' understanding of online marketing strategies, digital content creation, and customer engagement techniques. In addition, several participants successfully expanded their market reach through social media. Beyond technical gains, the activities fostered collaboration among women and youth, encouraging innovation and economic independence within the community.*

*Keywords: community empowerment; digital marketing; entrepreneurship training; MSMEs; women and youth*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation brought about by digital technology has opened significant opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in rural areas. Despite this progress, many women and young people in rural regions remain left behind in digital participation. Barriers such as limited access to the internet, insufficient technological literacy, and the lack of understanding of digital marketing strategies continue to hinder their ability to compete and sustain their businesses (Husna et al., 2025). Therefore, training programs that integrate entrepreneurship with digital marketing education are becoming increasingly crucial as tools to strengthen local economies and empower marginalized groups.

Several recent studies have demonstrated that the utilization of digital platforms—especially social media and e-commerce—plays a major role in improving the performance of small businesses. According to (Fadhli et al., 2024), digital marketing training that uses familiar applications like WhatsApp and Instagram enables MSME owners to expand their marketing networks and improve customer engagement. Likewise, (Conference et al., 2022) highlighted that digital marketing initiatives targeting *womenpreneurs* help them manage online enterprises more effectively, enhance product exposure, and contribute positively to household income. These empirical findings reinforce the notion that digital training initiatives are not merely about technical capacity-building but about fostering long-term empowerment and transformation at the community level.

Engaging young people in entrepreneurial activities also contributes to strengthening local innovation. (Lee et al., 2024) noted that involving youth organizations in creative digital content workshops can enhance their digital skills and entrepreneurial confidence. In a similar vein, (Rukanda et al., 2021) found that online-based marketing programs play a key role in developing the entrepreneurial mindset and digital adaptability among the younger generation. Complementing these findings, (Trisninawati & Sartika, 2024) designed a participatory digital literacy model that effectively improved marketing competencies among women-led MSMEs. Together, these studies provide a conceptual basis for implementing a community-based digital marketing training model that supports both skill enhancement and empowerment.

This community service program is distinct in its integrated approach, combining entrepreneurship education with digital marketing capacity-building for women and youth in rural settings. While prior studies have mostly focused on urban entrepreneurs or gender-specific programs, this initiative emphasizes collaboration and shared learning between generations. (Mridha et al., 2024) observed that social media not only serves as a promotional tool but also stimulates creativity and innovation among young female entrepreneurs. The field assessment in Empat Negeri Village, Batu Bara Regency, revealed that local entrepreneurs—especially women and youth—still face significant challenges in digital adaptation. Most MSMEs continue to depend on traditional marketing methods, have limited market access, and lack self-confidence in utilizing online platforms. (Relations, 2019) emphasized that without consistent mentoring and entrepreneurial mindset development, women-led MSMEs often struggle to maintain competitiveness. Hence, a holistic entrepreneurship and digital marketing training framework is required to close this gap and enable inclusive participation in the digital economy.

Community involvement forms the core of this program's implementation. The activities are designed through participatory collaboration involving women's groups, local youth communities, and MSME actors at every stage—from needs identification to training delivery and evaluation. As argued by (Nursanti & Nurhayati, 2024), the empowerment of rural women entrepreneurs through digital marketing cannot rely solely on technology transfer; it requires sustained mentoring, peer collaboration, and the cultivation of a supportive learning culture. Therefore, this initiative prioritizes community ownership, enhances local capacity, and fosters a sustainable empowerment model relevant to the digital era.

## 2. METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION

The activities carried out in this community service program were structured to respond to the limited digital marketing capacity and entrepreneurial awareness among women and young people in rural settings. The overall approach emphasized active community involvement through collaborative training, mentoring, and assessment stages. Each step was arranged to build practical knowledge and strengthen the participants' self-confidence in applying digital marketing tools to promote and grow their micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

### 1. Strategy for Problem Solving

To overcome the existing problems and reach the expected outcomes, a comprehensive and participatory model was applied. The first step was a field assessment involving interviews and focus group discussions with representatives of women's associations, youth groups, and small-business owners to map their current challenges. Based on this mapping, the facilitators designed training sessions focused on entrepreneurial mindset building, product development, branding, and practical use of online media for marketing purposes.

This community-based learning structure followed the model proposed by (Dafa et al., 2024), who stress that digital empowerment should blend conceptual understanding with direct practice. In the following mentoring stage, participants were guided to develop social-media business profiles and digital content suited to their products. Regular coaching ensured that the process did not stop at training but continued through consistent mentoring, in line with the recommendations of (Anggara & Hanoselina, 2025), who underline the importance of continuous evaluation to sustain the long-term impact of entrepreneurial support programs.

### 2. Data Gathering Techniques

A mixed-methods design was used to collect data, combining quantitative measurement and qualitative insight. Primary information came from participant surveys, interviews, and direct observations during workshops, while secondary data were obtained from community documentation and local MSME profiles. The participants—25 women and 15 youth entrepreneurs—were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on individuals actively engaged in or planning to develop small enterprises in Empat Negeri Village.

Before implementation, all research instruments were reviewed by academic experts and tested on a small external group to ensure their clarity and accuracy. The survey achieved a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, reflecting a high level of reliability. Triangulation of interviews, observations, and survey data further strengthened the validity of the findings and reduced potential researcher bias.

### 3. Data Analysis Procedures

Both descriptive statistics and qualitative interpretation were used to analyze the collected data. Numerical data from pre- and post-training questionnaires were compared to identify changes in participants' understanding of entrepreneurship and digital marketing. Qualitative data—derived from interviews, observations, and participant feedback—were analyzed thematically to capture behavioral changes, self-confidence growth, and levels of digital engagement.

Program success was evaluated using clear indicators such as improvement in participants' digital skills, increased online visibility of MSME products, and a rise in sales or customer interaction. The program was regarded as effective when at least three-quarters of the participants showed measurable progress in content creation, platform management, and online networking within a month after completion. This evaluation design mirrors the measurable-impact approach described by (Anggara & Hanoselina, 2025) and the practical empowerment framework developed by (Dafa et al., 2024).

### 4. Location, Duration, and Schedule

The community service project was implemented in Empat Negeri Village, Batu Bara Regency, North Sumatra, chosen because of its active but digitally under-equipped MSME community. The program took place over two months—from July to August 2025—and consisted of three sequential phases:

1. Initial preparation and needs identification (Weeks 1–2);
2. Entrepreneurship and digital-marketing workshops (Weeks 3–6);
3. Mentoring, follow-up evaluation, and reporting (Weeks 7–8).

All sessions were conducted in local community spaces such as the village hall and a nearby school computer laboratory. Interactive discussions, group projects, and digital simulations were used to keep the learning process contextual and engaging. Ongoing interaction between facilitators and participants encouraged the community to sustain the new skills and apply them independently after the program ended.

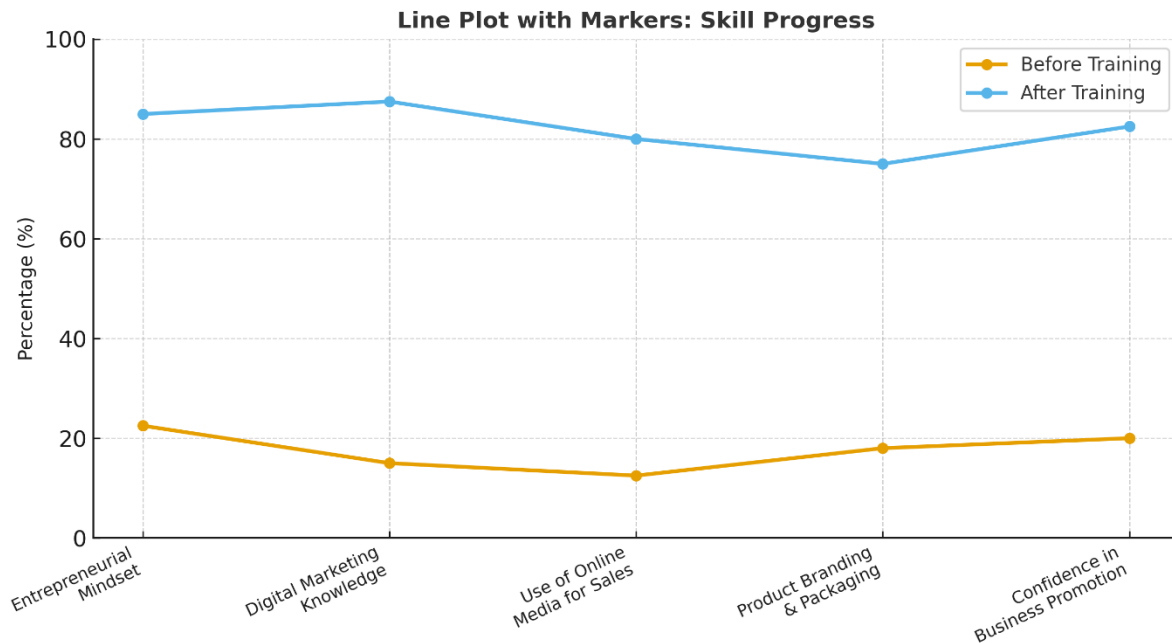
## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Results

The community engagement project was carried out from July to August 2025 in Empat Negeri Village, Batu Bara Regency, involving 40 local participants—comprising 25 women and 15 youth—who actively joined the entrepreneurship and digital marketing training series. Before the intervention, data gathered through preliminary surveys indicated that participants' entrepreneurial and digital competencies were relatively low. Only around one-fifth (22.5%) of them possessed basic business knowledge, while less than 15% understood the fundamental use of digital platforms for marketing. In fact, only five participants had ever tried to promote their products online, and even then, their activities were inconsistent and lacked strategy.

By the end of the two-month program, remarkable progress was recorded. Most trainees demonstrated clear improvements in both conceptual understanding and practical application. Roughly 87% of participants were able to design digital business profiles, manage product catalogs on social media, and engage with customers through online communication channels. Likewise, 32 of the 40 participants (80%) successfully produced at least one creative digital content—ranging from product videos to promotional posters—showing that they were able to apply branding principles introduced during the training.

The increase in entrepreneurial literacy and marketing proficiency was further illustrated in the survey analysis. The following **Figure 1** depicts the overall improvement in participants' competencies before and after the training.



**Figure 1. Improvement After Training**

### 3.2 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that community-based digital marketing training can effectively elevate entrepreneurial capacity among women and youth in rural settings. The participatory nature of the sessions—combining interactive lectures, practical exercises, and real-time mentoring—encouraged deeper engagement and skill retention. Participants were not passive learners but active contributors who shaped the direction of their own progress.

Before the program began, marketing in the village relied almost entirely on traditional word-of-mouth systems and physical markets. The participants faced both digital illiteracy and social hesitation to promote online. Following the intervention, however, there was a visible behavioral shift: trainees began adopting digital tools as everyday business assets. This transition reflects an important adoption of innovation, where technology is gradually normalized and embraced as a tool for empowerment rather than a source of difficulty.

The level of community involvement significantly strengthened the outcomes. Participants organized peer discussions, shared best practices, and helped each other create digital content even after formal sessions ended. Such mutual collaboration fostered a sense of collective ownership and sustainability, ensuring that the benefits of the project continued beyond the program's duration.

From an economic perspective, the early impacts were equally promising. Several women's groups collaborated to manage online stores collectively, allowing them to reach a wider audience and streamline logistics. Meanwhile, the youth participants, who initially joined as trainees, began mentoring others within the community—creating a ripple effect of knowledge transfer. Another notable change was in creativity and cultural integration. Many participants started embedding local identity and traditional motifs into their online branding efforts. Their

marketing visuals and storytelling incorporated village heritage, making their products more appealing and distinctive in digital spaces. This synthesis between local wisdom and modern marketing illustrates how digital empowerment can reinforce, rather than replace, community values. The overall comparison between conditions before and after the training reflects a substantial transformation not only in technical capability but also in mindset. Participants became more proactive, digitally literate, and optimistic about sustaining their microbusinesses. The measurable outcomes—supported by descriptive survey data and participant feedback—indicate that structured mentorship and inclusive community engagement can serve as powerful drivers of long-term empowerment in rural digital entrepreneurship.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of this community-based initiative has shown that providing structured entrepreneurship and digital marketing training can meaningfully enhance the capacity, confidence, and performance of women and youth entrepreneurs in rural environments. The combination of interactive workshops, hands-on sessions, and continuous mentoring allowed participants to translate theoretical understanding into practical business strategies. Most participants were able to design and manage online business pages, develop promotional content, and communicate effectively with their target markets. These achievements illustrate how experiential learning supported by mentoring can stimulate both personal growth and collective empowerment within the community. The program also delivered substantial social and economic benefits. Women participants gained greater financial independence and improved management of their household enterprises, while the younger participants developed stronger initiative, creativity, and technical adaptability. The rise of joint online ventures and peer mentoring networks among participants signifies that empowerment, when grounded in collaboration, can generate a self-sustaining ecosystem of innovation and cooperation. Furthermore, the inclusion of local cultural elements in marketing materials helped strengthen community identity and gave their products a distinctive value in the digital marketplace. Nevertheless, several obstacles surfaced during the program's execution. Intermittent internet access, limited availability of digital devices, and unequal levels of prior education occasionally hindered learning continuity. These issues highlight the need for a more inclusive framework that combines online and offline learning opportunities, coupled with long-term mentoring and infrastructure support. Addressing these barriers in future programs will help ensure that the empowerment process remains accessible to all segments of the rural population. Beyond its practical outcomes, this initiative also contributed conceptually to the development of a Community-Based Digital Entrepreneurship Empowerment Framework (CB-DEEF). This model integrates entrepreneurial mindset development, digital literacy, and participatory mentoring into four interconnected phases: (1) identifying community needs, (2) collaborative and contextual learning, (3) applying digital marketing practices, and (4) sustained peer mentoring and evaluation. Supported by the data collected throughout the project, this framework provides a replicable strategy for other community service programs seeking to advance rural digital entrepreneurship in a sustainable and inclusive manner. Empowering women and youth through a balanced blend of entrepreneurial education and digital marketing skill development has proven to be an effective pathway for promoting local economic growth and strengthening digital inclusion. With continuous adaptation, institutional support, and community involvement, this empowerment model has the potential to serve as a blueprint for future digital transformation efforts in other rural communities across Indonesia and beyond.

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