

EMPOWERING MSME WOMEN: A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO DIGITAL LITERACY AND MARKETING SKILLS

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Abstract

This study investigates a community-based digital literacy education model aimed at empowering women micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by improving their digital literacy and marketing skills. The research addresses the critical gap in digital competency among women entrepreneurs, which hinders their ability to compete in an increasingly digitalized market. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 members of the MSME Group from the Indonesian Muslim Entrepreneurship Organization in Palembang and analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that most participants possess a high school education and less than five years of business experience, facing significant challenges in adopting digital technologies and ensuring online security. To address these issues, a comprehensive community-based model was developed, comprising Digital Literacy Class Mentor-Mentee Programming, Networking Meetings, Best Practices, and Special Skills Training. This model effectively improved participants' digital marketing capabilities, demonstrating its practical potential to enhance local economic growth by supporting the marketing efforts of women MSMEs. The study's novelty lies in its integrated and replicable framework, which combines digital literacy education with hands-on marketing skills development tailored to the unique needs of women entrepreneurs. The proposed model has broader implications, as it can be adapted for similar communities beyond the study's scope, contributing to the global discourse on fostering digital inclusion and economic empowerment among women MSMEs.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, Marketing Skills, MSME Empowerment.



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INTRODUCTION

Women who own MSMEs, or micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, in many nations frequently encounter substantial hurdles while selling their goods or operations. These barriers,

including limited access to resources and lack of understanding of digital technology, are problems that not only occur in developing countries but also in developed countries (Shaikh, 2020; Fanani & Sulthon, 2022; Dessi, & Shah, 2023). This challenge is further exacerbated by low digital literacy, which hinders the ability of women MSMEs to utilize online platforms effectively, build a digital presence, and compete in the competitive global marketplace (Laberinto Solina, 2020; Rahmayani et al., 2023; Susanti et al., 2023). On the other hand, digital literacy is acknowledged as a critical aspect that can transform the concept of marketing and provide new prospects for women in small and medium-sized (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021; Fitriani, Triandafillidis, & Thao, 2023; Yadav et al., 2023). Digital literacy, which includes skills in using digital technologies and online platforms, is considered a determining factor in overcoming these barriers and facilitating business growth (Giang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2017). Success in modern marketing relies heavily on the ability to adapt to digital technology and leverage it to reach a wider audience (Ellitan, 2020; Ugurhan et al., 2021; Chumburidze et al., 2023). Therefore, increasing digital literacy is not only important but also essential in designing effective and sustainable marketing strategies for MSME women in the current digital era.

However, although the challenges faced by MSME women in marketing their products or services are widely recognized, existing research on digital literacy and marketing skills is still relatively limited, especially in terms of developing educational models that focus on community empowerment (Putriningsih et al., 2016; Pantiyasa et al., 2023; Setiyani, Baharin, & Jesse, 2023). For example, Idawati et al. (2016) conducted research in South Sulawesi with 25 women entrepreneurs to assess the efficacy of a community-based training program for increasing entrepreneurial capacity. Although this study demonstrates an increase in entrepreneurial capacity, it does not go into detail on the participants' basic skills, or the teaching techniques employed during the training. Aside from that, Tambunan (2019) investigated how MSME women might use online platforms to assist with the longevity of their enterprises. However, this model does not explain how data security and marketing issues are addressed in the training. Overall, although there are efforts to increase the capacity of MSME women in marketing and digital literacy, existing research is not yet comprehensive enough in exploring and integrating these two elements in the context of community-based education. Therefore, it is important to develop a community-based education model that can effectively improve the digital literacy and marketing skills of women in MSMEs, as well as address the gaps that exist in previous research.

This study provides a unique approach by creating an inclusive education model specifically geared to increase the digital literacy and advertising abilities of women in MSMEs (Sultan & Sultan, 2020; BoangManalu, Iqbal, & Garcia, 2024; Suryani et al., 2024). The uniqueness of this model lies in the approach that places the community at the center of learning. This approach not only strengthens digital literacy but also builds a support network that facilitates collaboration between members (Jang et al., 2021; Bastomi et al., 2023; Yusnidar et al., 2023). This concept is aimed to solve many problems experienced by MSME women, including as adopting technology and issues with security online (AM et al., 2022; Helmi & Setyadi, 2022; Aung et al., 2024; Yolviansyah et al., 2023). By optimizing interactions between community members through learning methods that are specific and relevant to local needs, this model enables learning that is more effective and appropriate to the local context (Sahela et al., 2021; Sedyastuti et al., 2021; Rini et al., 2023). The success of this approach in various global contexts shows its ability to overcome technological challenges, build strong support networks, and significantly strengthen the market presence of women MSMEs.

The implementation of this model is expected to help MSME women overcome challenges in technology adoption and improve their marketing skills significantly. Practically, this model not only supports local economic development through increasing the marketing capacity of women MSMEs, but also has the potential to be adapted in a wider context outside the community studied. From an academic standpoint, this research provides a basis for the ongoing development of successful teaching approaches in developing digital literacy and advertising abilities, especially in the context of community-based education and MSMEs. Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap in previous research which did not explore the relationship between digital literacy and the marketing skills of women in MSMEs. In addition, this research aims to explore and analyze the potential of community-based education models in empowering MSME women through increasing their digital literacy and marketing skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study takes a qualitative perspective (Creswell, 2022) and using the case study (Creswell & Clark, 2011) method to investigate digital literacy and marketing abilities among MSME women. The case study method was chosen because of its ability to explore phenomena in real contexts in depth, providing comprehensive insight into the experiences and perspectives of individuals and groups in the MSME community. With this approach, research can explore the dynamics and context that influence the use of digital technology and marketing strategies by MSME women, as well as identify factors that influence the development of their skills in the business world. The study included 15 informants who were part in the Indonesian Muslim Businessmen Organization (APMI) in Palembang. Informants were chosen based on specific criteria: possess expertise in the MSME industry, at least high school level education, and active involvement in marketing activities. These criteria are designed to ensure that research subjects have a range of experiences and knowledge relevant to the topic of digital literacy and marketing skills. In this way, the research results can reflect the diverse perspectives and challenges faced by MSME women in Palembang, as well as provide a more complete picture of their context and needs.

The data in this research was collected through in-depth interviews with selected community members. The interview guide was designed to explore two main themes: digital literacy and marketing skills. Interview questions are designed to explore various aspects, including experience of using digital technology in business, obstacles faced in adopting digital technology, and marketing strategies and skills applied. By focusing on these themes, the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how women MSMEs utilize digital technology and manage marketing in the context of their businesses. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively utilizing a theme-based method, allowing for the identification of designs, topics, and linkages in the information collected during interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The assessment technique involves several steps, starting from data coding to identify and categorize emerging patterns and themes, to data comparison to analyze differences and similarities in answers between informant (AM & Purnama, 2024). The use of analysis software such as NVivo supports this process by providing tools to systematically manage and analyze data, allowing for more in-depth and structured analysis.

Data validity is maintained through several techniques. Data triangulation was performed by using various sources for knowledge to evaluate findings and assure the precision of the data (Creswell, 2012). Researcher triangulation involves multiple researchers in the analysis process to reduce the potential for individual bias and ensure consistency of interpretation. Furthermore, member validation is performed by presenting analysis results to informants in order to gain verification of data meaning, hence boosting the accuracy and trustworthiness of study findings.

This research complies with ethical principles by taking several important steps. The informed consent was obtained by requesting authorization in writing from participants prior to completing the interview, confirming that they understood and agreed to participate in the study. Information about the purpose of the research, use of the data and how it is stored is provided transparently to participants to respect their rights. In addition, data confidentiality is maintained through encryption and anonymization, so that the privacy of participants' identities remains protected during and after the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 15 respondents were involved in this research, of which 80% had a minimum education level of high school. This shows that there is uniformity in the level of education in the community. Furthermore, 60% of the participants had fewer than five years of MSME business experience, while the remaining 40% have operated for more than five years, demonstrating a variety of histories among business actors. unexpectedly 75% of respondents regularly take part in marketing activities such as training, workshops, and promotional events. This action demonstrates that most of the attendees of the Indonesian Muslim Businesses Association Palembang are eager to improve their marketing abilities.

Digital Literacy

In-depth interviews with MSME members at the Indonesian Muslim Entrepreneurs Association Palembang revealed that most respondents face significant challenges related to digital literacy. Their

knowledge about using digital technology for marketing is still very limited. Some respondents' responses reflect their difficulties in mastering technology.

“I have accepted that I still struggle with knowledge of the internet. I've never used online platforms to advertise my products. When when concerns web-based advertising use, I feel left out. “I don't know much about SEO or analyzing data to enhance sales... (Informant Advertisement, 35 years old)

“I recently tried a platform for online shopping, but I'm still unsure about its functioning. Knowledge of technology is a major difficulty for me. Technology education is like accessing a new universe, and I need to know more but find it tough... (Informant CS, 39 years old)

“My utilization of online platforms is really limited. I simply have an email address and an account with WhatsApp to connect with clients. Other than that, I'm not too familiar with other technologies. I've tried looking for internet instructions, but I still get confused. This lack of comprehension makes me cautious to engage in additional discussions...” (Informant Rd is 32 years old).

The findings in these interviews show that many respondents had difficulty accepting digital technology, particularly in terms of adjusting to and understanding sophisticated features. Additionally, there are worries about electronic safety, and many respondents believe they need to learn more about securing online corporate data. These findings emphasize that digital literacy difficulties include technological and safety issues that must be treated carefully.

“... I often struggle with technological advances. For example, gaining access to e-commerce sites or sending online communications can be difficult. I occasionally get uneasy when using new technology.” (Informant BH is 39 years old)

“... I understand the need of digital security, but I still have some questions about how to safeguard my company from possible threats. “I continue to learn approximately this.” (Informant As is 42 years old).

These findings indicate that digital literacy is a significant barrier for members of the MSME sector at the Indonesian Muslim Entrepreneurship Group Palembang. Most of the participants recognize their limits in using digital technology for company activities and marketing. Many of them feel left out and uneasy while integrating innovative platforms or features. Participants' concerns about digital security highlight the need for additional measures to enhance their understanding of online firm information protection. Considering increasing technology advancements, efforts to enhance digital literacy are critical. Communication within the business society government, and educational institutions is highly vital to provide necessary guidance and instruction so that MSME members may use technological innovations optimally and safely to build their firms.

Marketing Skills

In-depth interviews were performed with representatives of the Indonesian Muslim Businessmen Organization Palembang, who have become part of the Muslim small business community, to better understand their promotion abilities and expertise. Interview results show that although some members have knowledge about online marketing, limitations in understanding digital technology are the main barrier in adopting digital marketing strategies.

“o market my items, I still use traditional means like brochures, booklets, and print adverts. I acknowledge that my knowledge of technological advances is inadequate, thereby I have not participated in internet marketing...” (Informant Ag, 29 years old)

“I believe that taking part in local exhibition and community events is the most successful marketing technique. I prefer to connect with the customers and explain items face to face. However, I'm still learning about social media and how to build my company website...” (Informant Ss is 40 years old.)

The research results indicate the MSME umbrella women continue to rely on traditional marketing abilities owing to barriers associated with digital technology. Although they realize the importance of adapting to technological advances, the high level of digital complexity is an obstacle in adopting digital marketing strategies.

As a result, there is an urgent need to provide support and strategies that promote enhanced digital literacy among community members. Overcoming digital knowledge obstacles and facilitating the widespread utilization of methods for digital marketing can be accomplished through training programs, workshops, and instructional materials that provide a thorough understanding of digital tools and practices. Collaboration among industry actors, governments, and educational institutions is critical in building an environment that encourages the development of digital literacy among MSMEs. Understanding these problems in greater depth reveals that acquiring digital marketing abilities can create new opportunities and boost MSMEs' competitiveness. As a result, efforts to enhance digital literacy must be strengthened by making information widely accessible and relevant, as well as encouraging students to learn over time.

Community-Based Model Design

Based on info indicating that the level of knowledge and proficiency with digital technology remains low, and promotional abilities remain in the traditional realm, researchers developed a community-based model for strengthening the marketing ability of the MSME umbrella women at the Indonesian Muslim Startups Organization Palembang. This methodology attempts to promote the use of technology and increase the success rate of advertising techniques in the framework of micro, small, and medium businesses. In detail, the stages of each step are depicted in the following chart:

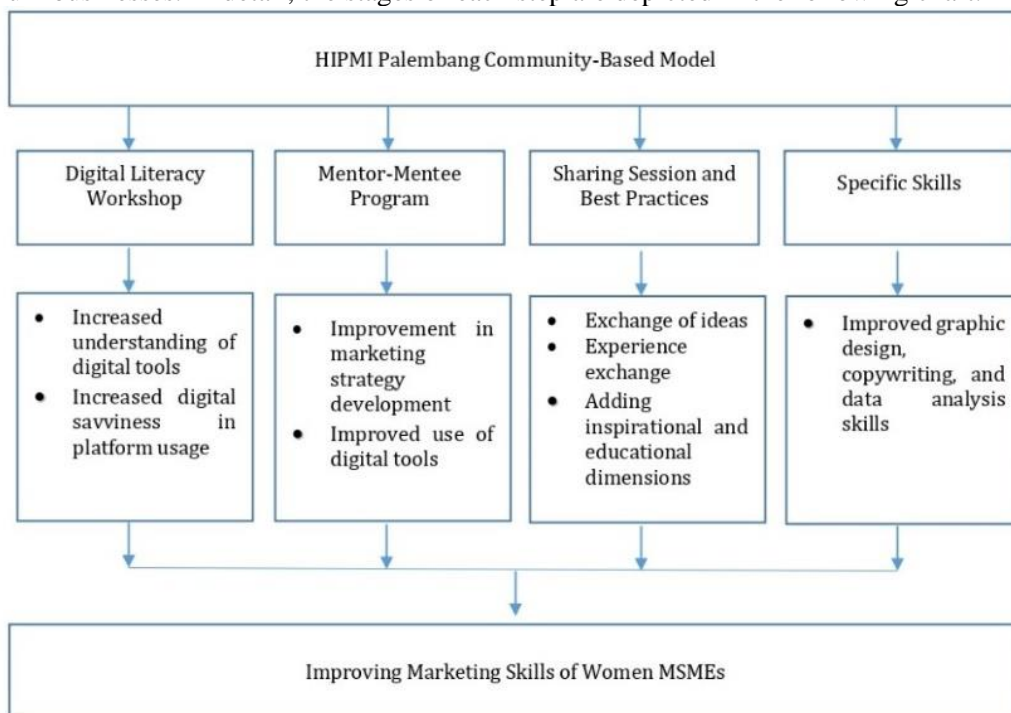


Figure 1. A Digital Literacy Approach for Enhancing the Advertising Skills of MSME Women with a Community-Based Educational Technique.

a. Digital Literacy Workshop

The Digital Skills Program aims to improve participants' knowledge and mastery of methods for digital advertising. This program will involve intense training on how to use different forms of digital media, as well as informative seminars on digital security. The workshop's effectiveness will be judged by greater comprehension of digital devices and an awareness of digital security when using platforms. Previous study indicates that boosting digital literacy can boost online participation, which improves interest on digital platforms (Ervianti et al., 2023; Sultanuddin et al., 2023; Khoviriza et al., 2024) . Aside from the contrary, grasp the computer security theory is very significant, because

knowledge and awareness of security concerns can limit possible dangers to online corporate data (Moustafa et al., 2021; Herawati, Khairinal, & Idrus, 2023).

b. Mentor-Mentee Program

The Mentor-Mentee Program is an initiative aimed at strengthening collaboration between members with higher marketing skills and members who need guidance. Mentors will provide practical guidance and in-depth insight into marketing (Hidayati et al., 2024). This program includes consultation sessions that allow mentors and mentees to discuss directly. The focus is on developing marketing strategies and providing relevant guidance based on the mentor's experience. The success of this program will be measured through improving the mentee's marketing skills and establishing a strong support network.

c. Sharing and Best Practices Sessions

Dialogue as well as Excellence seminars are intended to enable sharing of ideas and advertising strategies among members. This program allows members who are successful in a particular marketing strategy to share their experiences and provide inspiration and practical insight to other participants. Discussions on marketing strategies are also part of this session, providing members with the opportunity to exchange ideas and understand best practices in marketing. The success of the session will be measured through the level of member participation and how well members can apply the strategies learned. Research supports the importance of sharing experiences and strategies in improving marketing skills (Matidza et al., 2020)

d. Help and Support Center

The Help and Support Center provides essential resources for MSME members encountering difficulties in implementing digital marketing strategies. The center will offer guidance on the use of digital tools, expert consultations, and technical support. The primary objective is to deliver practical assistance to resolve technical challenges and enhance the understanding of digital tools. The success of the center will be measured by the frequency of support service usage and member satisfaction with the assistance provided. According to (Gai et al., 2018; Moustafa et al., 2021), technical support is critical in enabling the effective use of digital technology and overcoming user barriers. This component of the model ensures that members have access to ongoing support, which is vital for the successful implementation of digital marketing initiatives.

This study investigates a community-based digital literacy education model aimed at empowering women micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by improving their digital literacy and marketing skills. The research addresses a critical gap in digital competency among women entrepreneurs, which limits their competitiveness in the digital economy. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 members of the MSME Group from the Indonesian Muslim Entrepreneurship Organization in Palembang and analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that most participants have a high school education and less than five years of business experience, facing significant challenges in adopting digital technologies and addressing online security issues.

To address these barriers, a novel integrated model was developed, combining Digital Literacy Class Mentor-Mentee Programming, Networking Meetings, Best Practices, and Special Skills Training. This comprehensive approach effectively enhances both technical and strategic competencies, enabling women MSMEs to implement effective marketing strategies and strengthen their competitiveness in the digital economy. The model demonstrates practical implications by significantly improving participants' marketing skills, with the potential to contribute to local economic growth.

The study's novelty lies in its holistic and adaptable framework, which integrates digital literacy education with actionable marketing strategies tailored to the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. General implications suggest that this model can be scaled and applied to broader contexts, providing a replicable strategy for empowering MSMEs globally. Continuous evaluation of this approach will be essential for ensuring sustainability, while future research should investigate the long-term impact and scalability of such interventions on the global competitiveness of MSMEs.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights that most members of the MSME group under the Indonesian Muslim Enterprises Organization in Palembang have only completed high school education, and many possess less than five years of business experience. This indicates a uniform level of formal education among the participants, coupled with varied business experience. Interviews revealed that the primary challenges faced by these business actors are digital literacy and marketing skills. Many respondents struggle with implementing technological innovations and express concerns about information security, which impedes their ability to fully leverage digital advertising and technology to enhance their business effectiveness. These findings are consistent with previous studies that identify digital literacy and technological adaptation as critical challenges for MSMEs. However, this research contributes new insights by specifically highlighting the security concerns and lack of experience among the respondents, which have not been extensively documented in prior research. The implications of these results suggest a pressing need for targeted interventions to improve digital literacy and marketing skills within the MSME community. We recommend a community-based model that includes training sessions, mentor-mentee programs, knowledge-sharing events, and specialized skill development workshops. Such initiatives are expected to provide practical support and address the specific challenges faced by MSME business actors. This study's limited scope may not fully capture the range of challenges faced by all MSME business actors. Future research should expand the scope to provide a more comprehensive understanding of these challenges. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of various intervention types in different contexts could offer valuable insights into the most effective strategies for enhancing digital literacy and marketing skills among MSMEs.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SH and BS designed this study and determined the research methodology. RS is responsible for providing resources and monitoring the project. All authors, namely SH, BS, and RS, contributed to writing the initial draft. MAA contributed to editing manuscript and revision.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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