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Digital Culture and Community Empowerment: Capacity Building for MSMEs and Artisans in Kemijen

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Abstract: This article discusses how digital culture can help empower communities by supporting Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and local artisans in Kemijen, East Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The program employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method to provide digital literacy training with a focus on promotion through the social media platforms. Participants of the program included mostly female MSME entrepreneurs producing milkfish (*bandeng*), mochi cakes, rice box (*nasi kotak*), and coconut crushed ice cream (*es puter*) contents promoted on Instagram and Facebook. In addition, there were also Javanese dancers, a batik artisan, and *keroncong* musicians whose cultural practices were incorporated into promotional content on YouTube. The program demonstrated both benefits and challenges. The goal was to improve skills in financial recording and digital storytelling on social media, but maintaining participant motivation was challenging. Most of the female entrepreneurs and creative artisans were hesitant to fully embrace digital tools. Unfortunately, the young people with digital knowledge were not interested in managing social media accounts. Therefore, the goal of reaching a broad online audience was only partially achieved. Nonetheless, the participatory approach helped raise awareness of digital opportunities, fostered intergenerational collaboration, and opened discussions about using social media to connect cultural heritage with the digital marketplace. By engaging community members as co-creators, the PAR method shows that true empowerment requires more than just technical training. It requires long-term mentoring, motivation, and shared responsibility. Therefore, follow-up programs are recommended. The digital and community cultural empowerment capacity-building initiative for MSMEs and creative artisans in Kemijen suggests that combining cultural identity with digital promotion through social media can transform local products and tradition into useful tools for economic growth while preserving cultural heritage.

Key words: community empowerment, creative artisans, cultural negotiation, digital culture, MSMEs, PAR, social media promotion.

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji peran budaya digital dalam memperkuat pemberdayaan masyarakat melalui inisiatif peningkatan kapasitas bagi usaha mikro, kecil, dan menengah (UMKM) serta penggiat seni di Kemijen, Semarang. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan Participatory Action Research (PAR), program ini memperkenalkan pelatihan literasi digital

dengan fokus pada promosi melalui media sosial, seperti Instagram, Facebook, dan YouTube. Peserta mencakup perempuan wirausaha yang memproduksi bandeng, kue mochi, nasi kotak, dan es puter; serta penari Jawa, penjahit, perajin batik, dan musisi Keroncong yang praktik budayanya diintegrasikan dalam konten promosi. Inisiatif ini mengungkapkan adanya peluang dan tantangan yang dihadapi. Program ini mengupayakan meningkatnya keterampilan peserta dalam pencatatan keuangan, pencitraan merek, dan digital storytelling pada sosial media, namun muncul kesulitan dalam memotivasi keterlibatan peserta yang konsisten. Para wirausaha perempuan dan penggiat seni ditemukan masih ragu untuk sepenuhnya mengadopsi perangkat digital, sementara generasi muda yang melek digital menunjukkan keengganan dalam mengelola akun media sosial. Akibatnya, target untuk mencapai visibilitas daring yang luas tidak sepenuhnya tercapai, dan harapan untuk membangun budaya promosi digital yang berkelanjutan baru terealisasi sebagian. Meski demikian, sifat partisipatif dari program ini berhasil meningkatkan kesadaran akan peluang digital, mendorong kolaborasi antargenerasi, serta membuka ruang negosiasi budaya dengan memperkenalkan media sosial sebagai platform yang menjembatani warisan budaya dengan pasar digital. Dengan memposisikan anggota masyarakat sebagai co-creators, kerangka PAR menunjukkan bahwa pemberdayaan berkelanjutan tidak hanya bergantung pada pelatihan teknis, tetapi juga membutuhkan pendampingan jangka panjang, dukungan motivasional, dan kepemilikan bersama atas prosesnya. Hasil kegiatan di Kemijen ini menyarankan bahwa pengintegrasian identitas budaya ke dalam promosi digital dapat mentransformasikan tradisi lokal menjadi instrumen yang layak bagi kemajuan sosial-ekonomi sekaligus pelestarian budaya.

Kata kunci: pemberdayaan masyarakat, penggiat seni kreatif, negosiasi budaya, budaya digital, UMKM, PAR, promosi media sosial

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed the way people communicate, participate, and manage their economic activities. Social media like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube no longer serve as means of personal interaction, but develop into strategic space for marketing, expressing cultural concepts, and empowering community. In a leading global culture, like the United States of America, for example, social media have become central to how cultural products, from fashion, food, to entertainment are marketed and disseminated (Kapoor et al., 2018). Companies such as Starbucks have leveraged Instagram to create lifestyle narratives where products like seasonal drinks become cultural moments, and not just consumable items. For communities possessing rich cultural heritage but facing challenges in the access to formal infrastructure, social media open new opportunities to express local identity, to preserve culture, and to broaden the outreach to the public. In practice, not all owners of MSMEs nor traditional artisans could optimally use their social media. As reported by Sari, Ahmad & Irwansyah (2022) and Santosa & Hufadi (2020), low digital literacy, limited motivation, and several cultural barriers can hinder small Indonesian businesses to participate well in digital space.

Kemijen, a subdistrict in East Semarang is an example of a community that has low digital culture. Many women entrepreneurs who produce milkfish, mochi cake, boxed rice, and *es puter* (traditional coconut-based ice cream) and artisans who are Javanese dancers, batik crafts women, tailor, as well as *keroncong* singers and musicians wanted a way to increase their sales. Unfortunately, these people have low capacities in using social media for promotion. They have a smartphone with internet access, but have not effectively utilized social media to promote their products and reach a wider market. Not only do they not know how to use digital technology's

potentials, they themselves are not confident enough to share their business stories in digital space, because they do not understand how to do the right promotional strategies. Meanwhile, the younger generation of Kemijen, who are relatively more digitally literate, are found reluctant to engage in promotional activities because they consider it time-consuming or not in line with their interests.

When used with correct strategies, social media can provide economic benefits and increases social visibility and empowerment. Various studies have shown how a strong relationship between social media use and empowerment can increase that visibility. One of the most used social media is Instagram. It plays an important role in promoting product and building brand identity of small business enterprises. For example, a study by Hanifa, Fitria, Puspa, & Rizaldi (2022) examines how SMEs utilizes Instagram for online marketing. This study found that the social media help the business reach new customers and manage brand image. Their findings are supported by another research. Apidana & Rusvinasari (2024) demonstrated that social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, dan TikTok had a positive impact on the MSMEs performance. This is especially successful when the business owners implemented creativity and innovation. Their research confirmed that Instagram was not only a communication tool, but it was the media capable of enhancing economic achievement.

Social media has been utilized by community service programs, too. Hakim et al. (2020) reported that digital content creation training for teenagers and the women of Plesungan village, which focused on promoting local food, souvenirs, and healthy lifestyle, had successfully increased the community's participation and creativity. The content produced was later shared through Instagram dan YouTube, which helped to promote local potential and showing that social media training could be a tool to empower the community. In the context of women participation at MSMEs, Purwaningtyas (2021) showed that Instagram account provided room for women to express themselves, share their knowledge, and have empowering discussion. Accounts managed by women or by women group increased the visibility as well as strengthened the community ties and build reciprocal support among marginalized women.

In general, all studies indicated that when Instagram was used effectively, it provided economic benefits such as increasing sales, expanding customer reach, and strengthening brand identity. The platform also supported social visibility, community participation, self-efficacy, and empowerment. However, success on Instagram needed more than merely having an account. To become an effective platform, the MSMEs owners must have creative and innovative content, consistent engagement, and ongoing support to encourage and maintain participation. Empirical studies have shown that social media, in general, could play a key role in empowering marginalized groups that supported urban community empowerment in Indonesia by raising awareness and enabling residents to participate in civic life (Wijaya & Widagdo, 2021; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

To benefit from social media, MSMEs must possess digital literacy, which encompasses technical skills (i.e. using devices and apps), cognitive skills (i.e. evaluating and creating digital content), and socio-emotional skills (i.e. confidence and motivation to engage). This belief follows Ng (2012) who emphasized that all three dimensions must interact with each other. Technical proficiency alone is, therefore, seen insufficient without socio-emotional readiness to

adopt new practices. Having digital literacy is thus, the key to increase the competitiveness of MSMEs.

Having digital literacy and social media skills are important. However, both of them cannot exist in isolation. The success of utilizing digital technology also depends on the mindset transformation, motivation, and sense of belonging toward the ongoing process and results. Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach offers an effective method to encourage the changes. PAR encourages collaboration between researchers and community members, as well as places the participants as active parties in building knowledge. Through repeated stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection, PAR helps participants implement new practice in their daily life while maintaining the cultural values and local needs (Rahmat & Minawati, 2020).

In the context of MSMEs, PAR is beneficial to increase technical skills and to overcome motivational and cultural challenges. Various studies in Indonesia shows that the MSMEs owners are more willing to adopt digital promotion when they are directly involved in designing the program and when the training is conducted in line with the cultural background. PAR approach can, thus, increase a community's practical skills, in addition to build self-efficacy and positive attitude toward the utilization of social media.

Despite the findings, several gaps exist. Most researches discuss social media promotion, digital literacy, or PAR separately, without integrating it as one approach. Additionally, few researches focus on community which holds their cultural heritage as the most important factor in their daily economy practices. This article aims to explore a research gap, i.e. on how a PAR-based digital literacy program can empower MSMEs and creative artisans in Kemijen to adopt social media promotion effectively. Four guiding questions frame the inquiry:

1. What challenges do MSMEs and artisans face in adopting digital promotion strategies when viewed from technical, cognitive, motivational, cultural perspectives?
2. How can PAR facilitate capacity building in digital literacy and social media promotion?
3. What are the outcomes and limitations of introducing digital promotion in a culturally rich but socio-economically vulnerable community?
4. What implications do findings hold for sustainability and empowerment in similar contexts?

These questions are asked to seek three kinds of contributions. First, theoretically, the study extends literature on digital culture by integrating Ng's (2012) digital literacy framework with Rahmat & Minawati's (2020) PAR. The findings are hoped to demonstrate that technical skills alone are insufficient without a community's socio-emotional engagement and cultural framing. Second, empirically, it provides a case study of Kemijen, which documents how women MSMEs, Batik artisans, Javanese dancers, and *keroncong* musicians negotiate digital adoption. Third, practically, it seeks to offer insights for policymakers and educators on effective digital empowerment, which requires not only training but also mentorship, intergenerational collaboration, and strategies that embed local culture within digital practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Social Media, Innovation, and MSME Performance

Hanifa, Fitria, Puspa & Rizaldi (2022) and Apidana & Rusvinasari (2024) have reported that a social media, such as Instagram is beneficial for the promotion of MSMEs. The belief is supported by Titin et. al. (2024) who wrote an article on the *Effect of Business Digitalization and Social Media on MSME Performance with Digital Competence as a Mediating Variable* for MSMEs located in Lamongan Regency. Their work showed that business digitalization, which includes the use of social media significantly improves MSME performance. MSMEs with higher digital skills draw more benefit from social media usage. Yet, as informed by Apidana & Rusvinasari (2024) the social media adoption and government support both contribute positively to performance, with innovation capability as a key lever.

B. Women Entrepreneurs and Digitalization

Several studies focus specifically on women as MSME owners, showing that gender, socio-cultural norms, and motivational differences affect digital adoption. The study on *Women and the Digitalization Strategies of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises in the New Normal Era* by Laksmanawati & Yuniawan (2021) surveyed women entrepreneurs in Semarang. They found that many began their businesses out of financial necessity, and with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization became less optional due to weak internet access. However, even among women entrepreneurs, there was wide variation in access to the resources of smartphones and the internet, prior to technical skills, and confidence in using social media or digital platforms for promotion. Meanwhile, another relevant article, *Use of Social Media Marketing among MSMEs: Driving and Inhibiting Factors* by Sulasih, Novandari, Suroso, & Setyanto (2024), which studied MSMEs in Banyumas, found that driving factors for social media use included consumer engagement and marketing reach. However, the inhibiting factors were many: (1) lack of time to create consistent content, (2) difficulty in planning topics, (3) limitations of phone hardware, and (4) finding followers. Interestingly, many of these barriers were more pronounced among women-owned MSMEs.

These findings suggest that for women entrepreneurs, challenges such as technical access, confidence, cultural expectation, and time constraints are particularly noticeable. Any program aiming to support them needs to address workshops on how to use social media, but also on why participants may be reluctant, and how to reduce those reluctances. Giving examples on how to provide support, incentives, and role modelling are ways to successfully reach community empowerment.

C. Digital Literacy: Definitions and Impacts

Digital literacy has several dimensions, including technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills. Although some researches refer to the theoretical model for digital literacy as proposed by Ng (2012), studies in Indonesia show that those dimensions are relevant in local context. Ayuningtyas, Widati, & Suparno (2025) found that the utilization of social media content, such as short videos and infographic, can help MSMEs owners increase their financial management skill. After six months, about 67.8% of Ayuningtyas, Widati, & Suparno's respondents reported an improved attitude in finance, including the improvement in recording their income and

expenses. The finding shows that social media strengthens digital finance literacy. The finding is supported by other researches.

A study by Wediawati et al. (2024) in Jambi Province demonstrates that literacies in entrepreneurship, finance, and digital are significantly related to MSMEs performance. The findings indicate that digital literacy is not only influenced by the use of social media, but also by the skill of managing the resources and understanding business process. In line with that study, the research done by Perdana, Ngirfan, & Rahmayani (2024) in West Java found that digital finance literacy and financial inclusion support MSMEs in accessing finance and managing business efficiently, especially in the utilization of digital payment system.

D. Challenges to Adoption: Cultural, Generational, Motivational Barriers

When digital tools are available and training is offered, adoption by the MSMEs may not be automatic. Several studies have highlighted cultural beliefs, generational divides, motivational barriers, and habit formation issues. First, Sulasih, Novandari, Suroso, & Setyanto (2024) finds the lack of consistency in posting content and time constraints as the main inhibiting factors. With MSMEs often having irregular schedules and other responsibilities, the producers find it challenging to regularly upload interesting content. Second, *Driving Digital Adoption within Small Business: A Study Case of Indonesia Micro-Small-Medium-Enterprises* by Dwiputri, Permana, & Prastiwi (2025), showed qualitative findings that suggest for many MSMEs that are reluctant to digital adoption due to costs of time and money. Most of the MSMEs, unfortunately, do not see immediate returns from social media use. Most of the MSME producers are from the old generation X, who are skeptical in using digital technology because they prefer offline methods. Third, the article on *Empowering Batik MSMEs in Semarang through Live Video Content Creation* from the Diponegoro University Service Program (Safira et al. 2025), gives evidence that live video trainings increased the ability and enthusiasm among batik artisans for digital content. It is at the same time, however, sustaining live video sessions which was difficult due to lack of equipment, fear of live broadcasting, and irregular audience engagement.

These readings show that in addition to the technical and literacy gaps, there are motivational, cultural, and generational barriers that are rarely documented. Examples of motivational barriers include the fear of mistakes, and uncertainty. The cultural barriers include the beliefs about authenticity and direct experience. Additionally, the generational barriers of the youthful Generation Y and Z are competing against the Generation X who believes that collaboration amongst different generations are difficult.

E. PAR (Participatory Action Research) and Community Empowerment

PAR approaches are frequently used in Indonesia to not just teach skills but to surface beliefs, values, and motivate change through participation and reflection. While there has been no study that exactly matches the Kemijen context in all respects, some service-learning and PAR-type programs offer comparable lessons. For example, *Inclusive Financial Empowerment for MSMEs* (Perdana et. al. 2024) used participatory workshops, counselling, and monitoring to help MSMEs integrate digital financial tools and financing schemes. In the report, the participants not only learned but reflected on their own practices and obstacles. Another article, *Digitalization of Financial Literacy and Social Media as a Sustainable Economic Strategy in Food & Beverages* (Hamdan et al., 2024) examined how MSMEs in food and beverage used brand personality, creative communication, and user-generated content in social media, and involved community feedback

in designing what content should be. This method resonates with PAR's participatory emphasis, whose strength is to rely on enabling voice, contextualizing training, and helping participants negotiate their own pace and meanings for digital promotion, especially in culturally rich settings.

F. Integrating Culture, Identity, and Digital Promotion

Several studies show that promotional efforts are more successful when they clearly highlight cultural identity. Safira et al. (2024) found that video live streaming on *batik* in Semarang attract audience more when they include stories on the *batik* process, local motifs, and cultural heritage. The video live streaming helps feature *batik* making skills directly. Even though the scale is small, the participants reported the increased sense of pride in their creations followed by sales. Next, in *Digitalization of Financial Literacy and Social Media* (Hamdan, Nabila, Gunawan, Valentie, & Perez 2024), MSMEs in food and beverage used content that emphasized heritage local flavors and traditional recipes. There are also employed interactive formats in the videos and user content that allowed consumers to engage with cultural narratives. This kind of cultural framing is found to have increased both consumer interest and producer motivation. Studying these reports, cultural identity, thus, acts as both motivator and content resource in helping the MSMEs to differentiate themselves, appeal to local and potentially global audiences, and maintain authenticity in digital spaces.

In connection to this study, the above review of literature has pointed out that the team will only be significant when giving solid proof on a positive correlation between social media adoption, digital literacy, and innovation capability of the creative artisans and MSME performance. First, there will be barriers in women MSMEs who have low socio-cultural, motivational, and access matters. Second, PAR or participatory models can be the tool to help surface deeper barriers and produce more contextually appropriate interventions. Third, when known the cultural identity of a community, it will help the integration process of a digital content such as in the crafting of traditional food, and storytelling heritage narratives. The study in Kemijen is significant due to (1) the potential of the gaps on women MSMEs producing traditional food and creative artisan products of *batik* and performances of the Javanese dancers and *keroncong* music, (2) youth as content creators and the challenges in sustaining their contribution, (3) the habit formation of posting videos, and content consistency, as well as the daily routines of financial recording management, and, on (4) the focus of the community's cultural identity as foundational to digital promotion to Kemijen.

METHOD

A. Research Design

This study used qualitative method with a PAR design (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000), which emphasizes collaboration between researchers and participants through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. PAR was chosen because it allows not only the transfer of digital skills but also the transformation of community beliefs, motivations, and practices surrounding digital technology. PAR approach was used in this study to empower MSMEs and artisans in Kemijen, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia.

B. Data Sources

This study used primary data, which were collected through interviews, focus group discussion (FGDs), participatory workshop, and observation during training sessions. Those data recorded experiences, challenges, and the participants' reflection on digital promotion. The study also used secondary data, which were collected through a record of social media activities of MSMEs owners and relevant academic literature on digital literacy and community empowerment.

C. Research Instruments

To collect primary data, several instruments are prepared:

1. Interview guide (semi-structured) with sample questions such as:
 - a. Who are your target market for the product you are selling?
 - b. How do you usually market your products offline?
 - c. What social media have you used to do your online promotion?
 - d. How confident are you in making visual contents such as flyer and video reels in your social media?
 - e. What challenges do you face in promoting your products through social media?
 - f. What motivates or discourages you from using platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube?
 - g. What role do you think younger generations (*Karangtaruna*) should play in digital promotion of community products?
 - h. How do you manage your daily financial recording?
 - i. Do you have any setbacks from recording you finance daily?
2. Questionnaire to measure the level of digital literacy based on three dimensions (Ng, 2012) were on:
 - a. Technical literacy, which is the ability to use smart phone, social media platform, and application like Canva and Instagram.
 - b. Cognitive literacy: ability to create, evaluate, and manage content.
 - c. Socio-emotional literacy: motivation, confidence, and willingness to engage online.
3. Observation checklist to record participation levels, interaction between participants, and skill adoption during training workshops.

D. Research Procedure

PAR cycle was conducted in four main stages that is in accordance to Cahyani & Sriwardani's (2022) model as follows:

1. On the planning stage, the team did initial meeting with the community leaders, including the MSMEs coordinator and the artisans, to identify the challenges in doing digital promotion. Based on the information, the team compiled the training guidance focusing on how to use social media for promotion, how to make simple video, and how to make basic financial record.
2. As an action, training sessions were held frequently during the months. Activities included hands-on workshops on creating flyers via Canva, producing short videos/reels for Instagram and Facebook, setting up YouTube accounts, and managing basic digital book keeping reports. On the action stage, the training was conducted for several months. These activities included workshop on flyer making using Canva, short video making or reels making for Instagram and Facebook, creating YouTube account, and simple digital financial recording management.
3. During the observation stage, the team consisting of lecturers and students documented the level of participation, challenges, and the achievement reached by the community. The team then observed how the participants used digital tools and whether the content was done independently or collaboratively.
4. On the reflection stage, focus group discussion (FGD) and interviews were conducted after every cycle gathered feedback, evaluated the results of the activities, and perfected the follow-up activities. On this stage, the participants reflected their experience, the challenges, and ideas to maintain the continuity of the digital promotion after the program ended.

E. Method of Analysis and Interpretation

The data were analyzed using Braun & Clarke (2006)'s thematic analysis approach. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and questionnaire reports were coded to identify the main themes related to digital literacy, motivation, cultural identity, dan empowerment. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire, such as digital literacy level, were analyzed to describe the preparedness and the improvement of the participants.

The findings were interpreted using PAR framework by linking the challenges faced by the community with the action done during the running of the program. To what extent the action affects the skills, the attitude, and the daily practice was also analyzed. Furthermore, the data from interviews, questionnaires, observations, and the trainings were compared to confirm the data consistency. Later, the findings were discussed using the reference from previous research on digital literacy, community empowerment, and participatory culture, to ensure its relevancy to the theories and practical values.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to review how PAR-based training can empower MSMEs owner and the artisans in Kemijen, Semarang, through the improvement of digital literacy and the utilization of social media to promote business. Initially, it is assumed that the young generation can support MSMEs in adopting digital strategy, and that women entrepreneurs can quickly adopt the digital platform to promote their products. However, the findings show that the reality is more complex.

Many MSMEs owners, mostly women who produce traditional food, such as milkfish, mochi, rice box, and *es puter*, as well as the Javanese dancers, the seamstress, batik artisan, and *keroncong* musicians, still hesitate and are unprepared to manage social media content.

Meanwhile, the young adults in the community, who are more familiar with the social media, at least for their personal needs, hesitate to engage in the making of content for community ventures. Moreover, the practices of financial record-keeping are not popular as well as most participants are unable to consistently apply simple financial recording techniques even after the training.

This section discusses the detail of the findings by showing some quotations from the interviews to demonstrate main themes, analyze the results by linking it with the previous researches, and interpret its effects on digital culture, community empowerment, and sustainability.

A. Digital Literacy Barriers among MSMEs

Many participants still felt uncomfortable using digital technology, although the training introduced them to social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Canva. Their difficulties were caused by both technical issues and low motivation.

Transcript 1 – an MSME woman entrepreneur (*Bandeng*/milkfish producer):

Saya hanya bisa pakai HP untuk WhatsApp, kalau harus bikin akun Instagram dan upload foto produk, bingung. Apalagi harus bikin tulisan promosi... rasanya takut salah dan malu kalau dilihat orang. (I can only use my phone to open my WhatsApp, if I must make an Instagram account and upload product photos, I will be confused. In addition, if I must make promotional writing... I think I'm afraid of making mistakes and being embarrassed if people see it.)

The excerpt shows socio-emotional aspect of digital literacy as explained by Ng (2012). Although the participants were technically able to use smartphone, they are not confident and have low motivation to create a promotional content. The result of the questionnaire which showed low confidence in creating visual contents as many as 54.5% of the participants below also confirmed the issue (see Fig. 1);

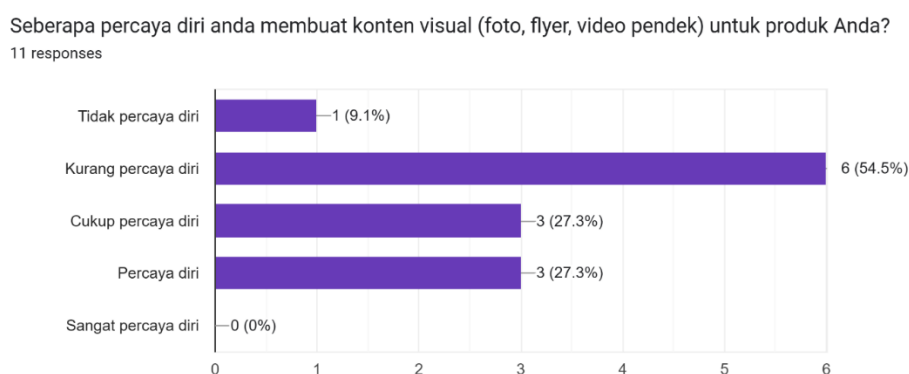


Figure 1:

Confidence of participants in creating visual contents (photo, flyer, short video reels)

The findings are in line with Laksmanawati & Yuniawan (2021)'s research which found that many woman entrepreneurs experienced difficulties to adopt digital strategy because they are afraid of criticism and lack of self-confidence.

Other participants reflected similar anxieties, often associating social media with personal rather than business use, such as learned from transcript 2 below.

Transcript 2 – a woman *batik* artisan:

Batik itu harus dilihat langsung supaya orang bisa merasakan kainnya. Kalau hanya lihat lewat foto, saya ragu orang bisa menghargai kualitasnya. Bukannya saya tidak mau belajar membuat konten secara rutin di media sosial Facebook saya, tetapi saya sudah senior, banyak mengerjakan sendiri untuk memproduksi kain batik saya, maka saya lebih senang menunggu pembeli datang daripada repot setiap hari mengurus sosial media saya. (Batik needs to be seen in person so people can truly experience the fabric. I doubt people will appreciate its quality if only seeing photos. It's not that I don't want to learn to regularly create content for my Facebook platform, but I'm already a senior and I do a lot of the work myself to produce my batik, so I prefer waiting for buyers to come to me rather than doing the daily hassle of managing my social media.

This statement shows how cultural beliefs about the nature of *batik*, that is valued through tactile experience, is believed to limit acceptance of digital promotion. Here, the reluctance of daily content creating for social media platforms is not a matter of skill and time but also of cultural perception. This result is supported by the questionnaire which showed 61.5% of the participants know exactly who their target market is (see Fig. 2):

Apakah Anda mengetahui siapa target pasar utama produk Anda (usia, lokasi, selera konsumen)?
13 responses

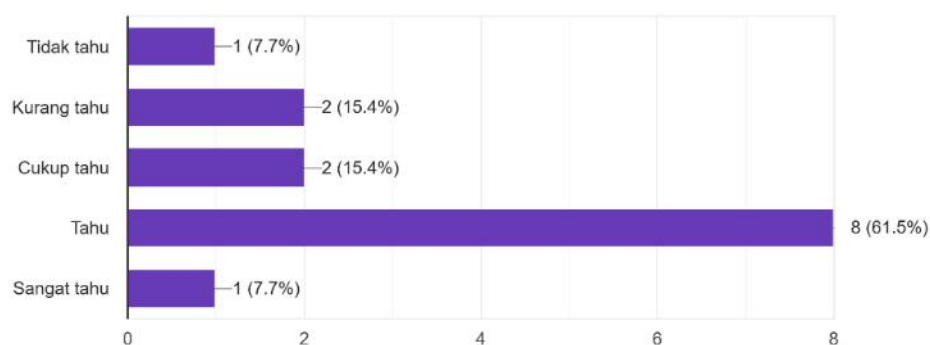


Figure 2:

Knowledge of target market

Similar dynamics were observed in the study by Cahyana & Sriwardani (2022), who emphasized the need for cultural embedding when applying PAR in arts-related community projects.

B. Limited Support from Younger Generations

Digital program often expects young generation to initiate and lead the content making because they are more familiar with the social media. However, this research found that most teenagers and young adults in Kemijen are not willing to get involved with or assist the MSMEs.

Transcript 3 – a young adult (University student, 19 years old):

Saya tahu cara bikin TikTok atau Instagram story, tapi itu untuk akun pribadi. Kalau harus bikin untuk UMKM orang tua atau tetangga, apalagi harus dilakukan secara rutin, waktu saya tidak memungkinkan karena saya masih kuliah dan kerja paruh waktu. Saya merasa itu bukan tugas utama saya. (I know how to make TikTok or Instagram story, but I use my own accounts. If I had to help my parents' or neighbors' MSMEs make the accounts, especially when the help was regularly, I have no time because I'm still studying in a university and working part-time. I don't think that it is my main responsibility.)

Transcript 4 – a teenager (High school student, 16 years old):

Saya sering main Instagram, tapi saya tidak tahu cara membuat konten jualan. Itu beda dengan following, posting foto teman atau ngonten sendiri. (I often use Instagram, but I don't know how to make content to sell things. It is different from following, posting my friends' photos, or creating my own content.)

The testimonies of the teenagers and young adults show that the gap exists between digital media for personal use and for community empowerment. In the questionnaire, as many as 54.5% claim they are not confident enough in creating their own content (see Fig. 1) above. Although Jenkins (2006) stated that young generations actively create and share content in the participatory culture, the findings of this research show that those skills are not automatically useful in the context of community empowerment or business development if the participants are not willing to take part in the process. Jenkins' opinion is in line with the idea of Perkins & Zimmerman (1995) who said that empowerment is not only about the skills, but also responsibility and agency, i.e. the two aspects which are not possessed by the teenagers and young adults involved in the research.

C. Weakness in Financial Recording Management and Financial Literacy

Alongside digital promotion, simple financial recording management through Google Sheets application were introduced as part of the training. The importance of doing so is to help the MSME producers know how much they have used their economy for family versus business income and expenditures. Yet, many participants struggled to apply these tools consistently.

Transcript 5 – a MSME woman entrepreneur (Mochi seller):

Saya biasanya hanya ingat-ingat saja berapa modal dan berapa uang masuk. Kalau harus tulis di buku atau aplikasi, sering lupa atau malas. Lagipula hasil jualan saya kecil-kecilan, sehingga saya belum perlu tenaga staf, dan belum memerlukan cara pembukuan yang tersistem. (I usually just remember how much capital I have and how much money I've earned. If I have to write down in a book or app, I would often forget or feel lazy to do it. Besides, my sales are small, so I don't need any staff, and I don't feel, I need any kind of systematic financial recording.)

Transcript 6 – a MSME woman entrepreneur (Rice box seller):

Kemarin saya sudah diajari agar saya melakukan pembukuan keuangan saya dengan tabel yang sederhana, tapi setelah pelatihan selesai, saya bingung lagi cara menggunakannya. Jadi, akhirnya saya kembali ke kebiasaan saya yang hanya mencatat di kertas seadanya, yang

kadang hilang juga. (Yesterday, I was taught how to keep my financial records using a simple spreadsheet, but after the training, I was once again confused about how to use it. So, I ended up going back to my usual habit of simply recording on scrap paper, which unfortunately, I sometimes lose.)

This finding is consistent with the result of the Questionnaire which showed 50% of the participants seldom record their financial activities (see Fig. 3):

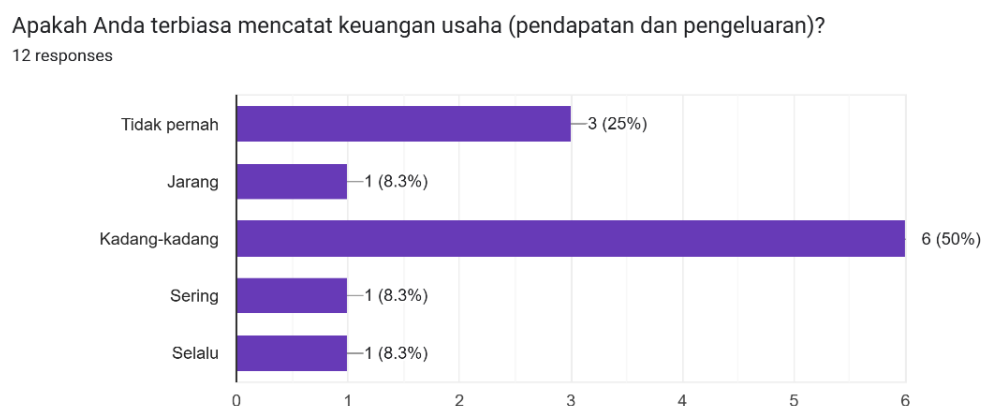


Figure 3:

Frequency of daily financial recording

Interestingly, Ayuningtyas & Suparno (2024) found the explanation that MSME actors often perceive financial literacy tools as unnecessary when businesses are small-scale, despite clear benefits in planning and accountability. The challenge also results from a lack of habit formation, as PAR cycles alone were unable to work effectively in the limited period of time.

E. Integration of Findings with Literature

The findings from Kemijen are in line with and even enrich other studies. Previous studies show that digital literacy and the use of social media increase the MSMEs performance (Sari, Ahmad & Irwansyah, 2022; Maitri, Putra, Laksmi & Sukarnasih, 2024). However, this research shows that cultural perception, low engagement of young generation, and weak financial management practices are factors that hinder the effective adoption of digital tools. Although the findings show these kinds of weaknesses, as many as 46.2% of the participants found the workshops given by the research team as being useful (see Fig. 4).

To encourage the continued use of social media as way of promoting the MSME's and artisan's efforts, the researchers collaborated with the MSMEs and artisans to produce the following visual contents on social media:

1. MSME – *bakmi goreng* (Gepeng)
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSRTsF8gWTw/?igsh=MWxpbHg3ajNtcTdxaw==>
2. MSME – *bandeng presto* (Lestari)
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSRUfmBgUHu/?igsh=b2ZlM3RweG9scWl4>
3. MSME – *jahit* (Modiste Shavira)
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSG_brega2g/?igsh=MThlbXhuOHM5cjgyNA==

4. MSME – *mochi* (Dewa mochi)
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSRW18TgZYW/?igsh=MW05Z2doaDdvZTk1dA==>
5. MSME – *nasi kotak* (Candra Dewi)
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSRV6XeAcH6/?igsh=MW5hMnB2cmZ3NDI0cA==>
6. MSME – *gorengan* and others
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSRWaI9geYR/?igsh=MTkxaXRrb2h0ZDd6cg==>
7. MSME/ ARTISANS – *batik Semarangan* (Aster Batik) <https://youtu.be/Y2Q1VnwqGMY>
8. ARTISANS – *Tari Krenteg*
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DSRcqpAgbXU/?igsh=MXF0ZzhyZ2ozYmIxdA==>
9. ARTISANS – *Jembatan Merah* <https://youtu.be/1fFg1wxIG64>
10. ARTISANS – *Tari Yaik* <https://youtu.be/OL8Bze05ZpQ>
11. ARTISANS – *Selendang Sutera* https://youtu.be/g7N_de6nW1A

Apakah setelah mengikuti pelatihan, Anda merasa lebih mampu mengelola usaha dengan lebih profesional?

13 responses

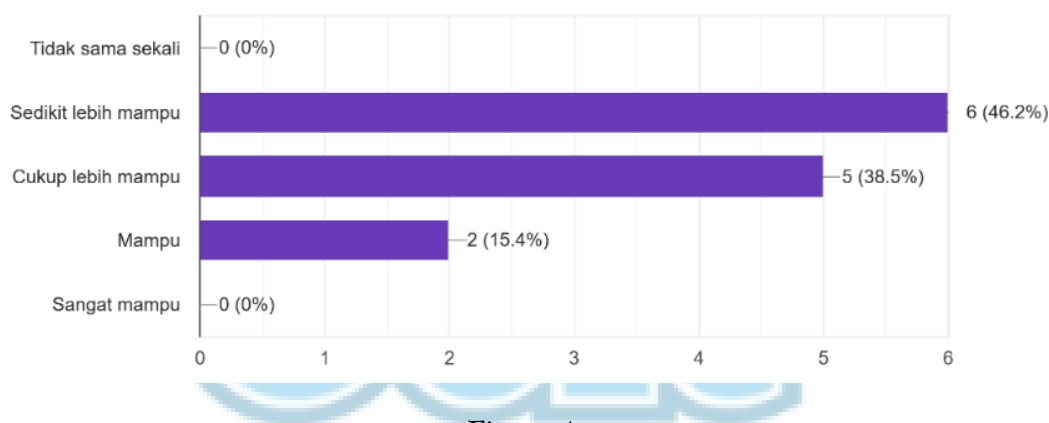


Figure 4:

Usefulness of workshops

From the perspective of PAR, the findings confirm the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. The participants involvement in the reflection process brought up the lack of self-confidence, problems in dealing with cultural values, and technical challenges often left unrevealed during the top-down training. However, PAR cycle done in a relatively short period of time during the project duration has not been able to fully overcome motivational and cultural barriers that are rooted deeply. As confirmed by Wallerstein & Duran (2017), PAR needs a long-term commitment to achieve sustainable changes in community practices.

F. Towards a Culturally Embedded Digital Culture

The research findings show that the digital empowerment in community like Kemijen cannot be simplified as a mere technical training. Effective strategies need to be rooted on local culture context, involving intergenerational collaboration.

1. Cultural embedding is the most important. *Batik* or *keroncong* promotion needs to feature stories about tradition, skills, and cultural heritage. Without the cultural framework, digital promotion felt unfamiliar and unrelated to the artisans' everyday practices. The

findings are consistent with Buell (1995) who emphasizes that cultural identity must be integrated to the practice.

2. Intergenerational collaboration also calls for attention. The low engagement of the teenagers and the young adults in the community empowerment and business development indicates the need for clear role division as well as sufficient incentive. Community-based program can create youth ambassador model, where the young people's involvement in managing MSME content receive recognition, attractive incentive, or the benefits of digital portfolios.
3. Financial habits are still a challenge. The inconsistent financial recording practices show that digital culture is not only about promotion, but also business management. The integration of financial literacy in the daily routines, such as the using of basic mobile application or peer group support, may potentially build sustainable habit.
4. Socio-emotional readiness is equally significant. The participants' hesitation in being involved in digital empowerment highlights the need for psychological support to overcome fear and low confidence. Mentoring, acknowledgement of small achievement, and peer review that consider cultural values can increase confidence and encourage participation.

In conclusion, even though social media and digital literacy have the potential to transform the community, their implementation is influenced by complex social and cultural reality. In Kemijen, the MSME owners remain in doubt and are unready; the involvement of young people is not optimal; and financial recording practices remain left behind due to the inability to do daily financial recording. PAR approach helps reveal those challenges as well as open a way to a more sustainable empowerment rooted on local culture. At the end, digital culture cannot be established through training alone, but it needs a long-term mentoring, intergenerational collaboration, and strategies aligned with cultural identity and community daily practices.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusion

This research studies how digital culture can empower the MSMEs and the creative artisans in Kemijen using PAR approach. The findings highlight challenges, process, outcome, and important implications to build the digital capacity in a community that has a rich culture but is economically vulnerable. They are:

1. Challenges faced by MSMEs and artisans: The research findings show that the challenges in adopting digital promotion is multidimensional. Technically, the majority of MSME owners are familiar with basic tools such as WhatsApp, but they lack confidence in managing Instagram, YouTube, dan other promotional platforms. Those platforms are commonly used to communicate, follow other account, and consume contents, not to create content of business promotion. Cognitively, the participants faced challenges in writing captions, planning content, and doing simple financial recording. In terms of motivation, the fear of making mistakes, and the low confidence hinder consistent involvement. Culturally, the artisans and the artists voice their concern about the inability

of digital platform to represents the originality of *batik* processing, *keroncong* performance, and other traditional culture practices. The findings confirm that digital literacy does not only involve technical skill, but also the socio-emotional readiness and cultural legitimacy.

2. The role of PAR in facilitating capacity building: PAR approach is proven effective to provide participation space for MSME owners and the artisans to express doubts and reflect their digital practices. The training sessions introduce technical skulls, while the reflection reveals more in depths challenges on the confidence and cultural perception. However, the relatively short duration of reflective cycle limits the development of sustainable new habit, thus demonstrating that sustainable empowerment needs long-term and repeated involvement.
3. Outcomes and limitations of introducing digital promotion: This program produces simple yet meaningful outcome. The participants received basic skills in branding, financial recording, and digital storytelling; some young adults have started experimenting with photo and video productions; and the artisans have started to see the potential to integrate cultural performance with MSME product promotion in digital promotion. However, limitations can be seen clearly. The efforts to involve young people as a digital medium have not shown success because the lack of social connection, unclear roles, and low incentive. The findings show that the community's digital promotion initiative is potential yet vulnerable.
4. Implications for sustainability and empowerment: The findings of the research show that digital literacy program must handle technical, cognitive, motivational, and cultural problems simultaneously. Intergenerational collaboration needs a more structured role division, a clearer incentive, and trust-building mechanisms. Integrating cultural identity into the digital content can increase legitimation and decrease resistance from the artisans. Furthermore, the continuation of the program requires continuous mentoring, recognition system, and long-term PAR cycle, not only a short-term intervention training.

In sum, digital culture has potential to empower MSMEs and artisans. But the empowerment is limited when the digital strategy does not explicitly consider socio-emotional challenges, cultural legitimacy, and the need for sustained, participatory engagement.

B. Suggestions

Based on the findings, some recommendations are proposed to strengthened digital literacy and ensure long-term impact in Kemijen:

1. Build structured mentoring systems: A short-term workshop must be replaced by continuous mentoring, such as monthly follow up. MSMEs owners should be paired with the mentors (lecturers, students, or trained participants) who give support in product photography, caption writing, and social media management. Mentoring needs to focus on the development of habits in using digital tools in daily business.
2. Formalize youth roles and incentives: The members of youth organization (*Karang Taruna*) should be trained not only as participants, but also as digital content creators. Their roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined. The recognition in the form of certificate,

stipend, or public acknowledgement can increase the sustainable involvement. The establishment of content creator club can also encourage collaboration and peer learning.

3. Develop intergenerational collaboration models: Collaboration can be strengthened by pairing young digital content creators with certain MSMEs owners or artisans. Routine meetings enable MSMEs owners to deliver cultural narration, while the young people translate it to digital content. This pattern helps establish confidence and decrease the confusion in the role division.
4. Embed cultural identity in digital promotion: Javanese culture elements, such as *batik* motifs, *keroncong* music, and traditional culinary needs to be promoted as the main attraction in digital storytelling. The artisans can explain the cultural meaning of their product, while the youth can help visualize it in the form of photos and videos. This approach helps decrease the artisans' resistance as it positions digital media as a mean of cultural preservation instead of commercialization.
5. Integrate financial literacy with digital training: Digital promotion needs to be aligned with simple financial recording practices. MSMEs owners need to understand that online sales must involve recording the expenses and profits. Therefore, a printed version of simple financial recording template or an application should be made available.
6. Leverage institutional and government partnerships: Collaboration with local government (Kemijen Subdistrict) can be done to promote MSMEs content via website and official social media. Furthermore, partnership with universities through student internship program or community outreach is important to maintain the sustainability of the mentoring program. Next, explore partnerships with banks or fintech companies to provide training on digital payment systems that complement online promotion.
7. Create community-based digital hubs: Establish a Digital Promotion Corner at the *Kelurahan Kemijen* office or community center, that is equipped with internet access, basic cameras, and editing tools. Later, this hub can serve as a shared resource where MSMEs and youth collaborate on content creation.
8. Measure and celebrate achievements: Regularly showcase successful MSME digital campaigns in community gatherings or local exhibitions. This can then be followed by a program that celebrate youth contributions by highlighting them on institutional social media accounts, creating a sense of pride and recognition.

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