

Optimizing Marketplace Platforms as Promotional and Sales Channels for Creative MSME Products in Bancak District, Semarang Regency

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Abstract

Creative Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Bancak District, Semarang Regency, face various challenges in the product marketing process, particularly in terms of limited market access and dependence on conventional sales methods. This community service program aims to optimize the utilization of digital marketplace platforms as a medium for promoting and selling creative MSME products. The methods employed include socialization, training, and direct mentoring for 30 creative MSME entrepreneurs over a period of six months. The results indicate an 85% improvement in digital marketing capabilities, a 65% increase in average sales turnover, and an expansion of market reach to consumers outside the local area. This program provides significant benefits in enhancing the competitiveness of creative MSMEs through the adoption of digital technology and effective online marketing strategies.

Key Word: *creative MSMEs; digital marketplace; creative economy; Bancak District; online marketing*

I. INTRODUCTION

The digitalization era has brought fundamental changes to the global economic landscape, with digital technology serving as the primary catalyst for the transformation of traditional business models into a digital-based economy. Indonesia, as a country with a population of more than 270 million people and an internet penetration rate of 77.02% in 2024, possesses enormous digital economic potential. According to Google's *e-Conomy SEA* report, Indonesia's digital economy was estimated to reach USD 82 billion

in 2023 and is projected to grow to USD 110 billion by 2025. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in the Indonesian national economy. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, the number of MSMEs in Indonesia exceeded 65 million business units in 2024. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2024, MSMEs contribute approximately 60% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The MSME sector also represents the largest source of employment in Indonesia, making a substantial contribution to reducing unemployment and poverty.

The creative economy, as a subsector of MSMEs, has demonstrated encouraging growth. The creative economy represents a new innovation in economic activities that incorporates creativity, innovation, and continuous improvement, which have increasingly been adopted by MSME entrepreneurs in Indonesia as a strategy to develop their businesses. This sector encompasses various fields, including culinary arts, crafts, fashion, performing arts, music, and other creative industries that rely on creativity and innovation as sources of added value. Bancak District, Semarang Regency, is one of the regions with considerable potential for creative MSMEs. Geographically, Bancak District is located on the border between Semarang Regency and Boyolali Regency, covering an area of 4,384.55 hectares. According to data from the Population and Civil Registration Office of Semarang Regency (2020), Bancak District has a population of approximately 24,000 people, the majority of whom work as farmers and small-scale entrepreneurs.

However, creative MSMEs in Bancak District continue to face various challenges in developing their businesses. The primary challenges include limited market access, dependence on conventional sales methods, insufficient knowledge of digital marketing, and limited capability to utilize information technology for business development. These conditions prevent locally produced creative products from reaching broader markets and limit the economic benefits obtained by business owners. Digital marketplace platforms have proven to be an effective solution for addressing many of the challenges faced by MSMEs. Research findings indicate that Shopee (67%) remains the most preferred online shopping platform among sellers, particularly due to its integrated services with content creators. It is followed by TikTok Shop (18%), Tokopedia (10%), Lazada (2%), and other platforms (2%). These platforms provide a variety of features that facilitate product

marketing for MSMEs, including product catalogs, secure online payment systems, and integrated delivery services.

The utilization of digital marketplace platforms offers numerous advantages for MSMEs, including expanding market reach across Indonesia and even internationally, reducing conventional marketing costs, providing access to secure digital payment systems, offering data analytics to better understand consumer behavior, and creating opportunities to strengthen brand awareness. This community service program was designed to provide practical solutions for creative MSMEs in Bancak District by optimizing the utilization of digital marketplace platforms. The program is expected to enhance digital marketing capabilities, expand market access, and ultimately improve the income and competitiveness of creative MSMEs in the region.

II. LITERATUR REVIEW

Concept of MSMEs and the Creative Economy

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are defined under Law No. 20 of 2008 on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises as business activities that are capable of expanding employment opportunities and providing broad economic services to the community. MSMEs are classified based on their annual revenue and asset ownership, with micro-enterprises defined as businesses having net assets of no more than IDR 50 million and annual sales revenue of no more than IDR 300 million. The creative economy represents a new innovation in economic activities that incorporates creativity, innovation, and continuous improvement, which have increasingly been adopted by MSME entrepreneurs in Indonesia as a strategy for business development. The creative economy sector possesses unique characteristics that rely on individual creativity, skills, and talent, with the potential to generate wealth and employment through the creation and commercialization of creative ideas and intellectual capital.

The Role of Digital Technology in MSME Development

This growth has been largely driven by the ability of business owners to reach broader markets through digital platforms. Digital technology has transformed the way MSMEs operate, from production processes and marketing activities to product distribution. The digital transformation of MSMEs involves not only the adoption of technology but also fundamental changes in business mindsets and overall business

strategies. The MSME Level Up 2024 Program aims to encourage MSME entrepreneurs to adopt digital technologies more extensively, particularly to expand market access, improve operational efficiency, strengthen competitiveness, foster innovation, and increase transaction values. This government initiative demonstrates a strong commitment to accelerating the digital transformation of MSMEs in Indonesia.

Digital Marketplaces as Marketing Platforms

Digital marketplaces are electronic platforms that connect sellers and buyers within a virtual marketplace. These platforms provide various services, including payment systems, logistics, customer service, and marketing tools that facilitate online transactions. These features enable sellers to collaborate with content creators who promote products through recommendations, reviews, and product demonstrations using creative and educational content. The advantages of digital marketplaces for MSMEs include easy access without substantial initial investment, extensive market reach, secure payment systems, integrated logistics support, and sophisticated marketing tools. Research findings indicate that these interactive and entertainment-oriented features allow consumers to view products in more realistic contexts, thereby encouraging faster purchasing decisions.

Digital Marketing Strategies for MSMEs

Digital marketing refers to marketing strategies that utilize digital technologies to reach and engage customers. These strategies encompass various channels, including websites, social media, email marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and digital marketplaces. For MSMEs, digital marketing provides opportunities to compete with larger companies at relatively affordable costs. The community service program employed socialization activities, training sessions, and direct mentoring for MSME entrepreneurs in the target area. This approach has proven effective in improving the ability of MSMEs to utilize digital platforms for product marketing.

The Development of Creative MSMEs in Semarang City

Based on previous research findings and discussions, the creative industry in Semarang City has continued to experience significant growth. Among the 17 creative economy subsectors, the city is dominated by five major subsectors: culinary arts (81.93%), music (9.67%), crafts (1.83%), performing arts (1.64%), and fashion (1.17%).

These data demonstrate the substantial potential of the culinary sector as the primary driver of the creative economy in Semarang and its surrounding areas. Previous studies have shown that the development of the creative economy requires a collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders. To further strengthen the growth of the creative economy in Semarang City, it is necessary to optimize the role of each stakeholder, including academia as researchers, government as regulators and facilitators, the private sector as investors and initiators, the community as both producers and consumers, and the media as mediators and promoters.

III. METHODS

This community service program was implemented using a participatory approach that directly involved creative MSME entrepreneurs throughout all stages of the program. The method adopted a community development-based approach, emphasizing community empowerment through the enhancement of participants' capacities and skills.

Location and Implementation Period

This community service program was conducted in Bancak District, Semarang Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The location was selected based on its considerable potential for creative MSMEs, while recognizing the need for assistance in optimizing the utilization of digital technologies. The program was implemented over a six-month period, from March to August 2024, following a structured and sustainable sequence of activities.

Target Participants

The target participants were creative MSME owners in Bancak District who had marketable products but had not yet utilized digital marketplaces optimally. The participant selection criteria included: operating a business for at least six months, producing marketable creative products, being between 18 and 60 years of age, and demonstrating motivation to develop their businesses through digital platforms. A total of 30 creative MSME owners participated in the program, representing various creative sectors, including culinary products, handicrafts, fashion, and locally processed products.

Program Implementation Stages

The community service program was implemented through five main stages. The Preparation and Preliminary Survey stage involved identifying creative MSMEs in

Bancak District, analyzing their needs and challenges, and developing training modules tailored to local characteristics. The service team also coordinated with village and district authorities to obtain institutional support and accurate data. The Socialization and Participant Recruitment stage included introducing the program to the local community, recruiting participants according to the predetermined criteria, and establishing communication groups to facilitate coordination. Program dissemination was conducted through meetings with community leaders, announcements at village offices, and direct outreach to prospective MSME participants.

The Training and Workshop stage constituted the core of the program and consisted of a three-day intensive training covering digital marketplaces and their features, digital marketing strategies for MSMEs, product photography and copywriting techniques, online store management and customer service, as well as sales data analysis and business growth strategies. Each participant received a training module and engaged in hands-on practice by creating marketplace accounts. The Implementation and Mentoring stage was conducted over a three-month period. During this phase, participants received continuous assistance in applying the knowledge acquired during the training, setting up online stores across various marketplace platforms, obtaining individual consultations to address operational challenges, and monitoring sales performance on a regular basis.

The Evaluation and Sustainability stage included assessing program outcomes using predefined success indicators, preparing the program report, and designing sustainability plans for future activities. Evaluation was conducted by comparing participants' conditions before and after the program using both quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using several valid and reliable instruments. Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to assess participants' improvements in digital marketing and marketplace knowledge. Structured questionnaires were used to collect participant profiles, business conditions, and feedback on the program. In-depth interviews were conducted with selected participants to obtain more comprehensive qualitative insights. Participatory observation was carried out throughout the training and mentoring processes to understand participants' learning dynamics. In addition, Focus Group Discussions

(FGDs) were conducted to gather participants' perspectives and evaluate the overall implementation of the program.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive analysis techniques. Quantitative analysis was performed to measure improvements in participants' knowledge, sales turnover, and other program success indicators. Qualitative analysis was employed to understand changes in participants' behavior, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the utilization of digital marketplaces. Data triangulation was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the analytical findings.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Participant Profile and Initial Conditions of Creative MSMEs

This community service program successfully involved 30 creative MSME owners in Bancak District with diverse characteristics. Based on the demographic data, 60% of the participants were women and 40% were men, with the majority (73%) aged between 25 and 45 years. The participants had varied educational backgrounds, with 47% graduating from senior high school/vocational high school, 30% holding diploma or bachelor's degrees, and 23% graduating from junior high school.

The participants represented various creative business sectors. The culinary sector accounted for the largest proportion (43%), producing local processed food products such as cassava chips, jackfruit dodol, and traditional cakes. The handicraft sector represented 27%, producing knitted bags, home decorations made from recycled materials, and unique souvenirs. The fashion sector accounted for 20%, producing batik clothing, accessories, and bags. The remaining 10% operated in processed agricultural products and ornamental plants.

The initial business conditions indicated that 87% of the participants still relied on conventional sales through small retail shops, traditional markets, and door-to-door selling. Only 13% had attempted to use social media for marketing purposes, although their efforts were neither optimal nor systematic. Before the program, the participants' average monthly turnover ranged from IDR 2–8 million, with relatively low profit margins due to limited market access. The main challenges identified included limited

knowledge of digital technology (93%), difficulty accessing broader markets (87%), limited capital for business expansion (73%), and inadequate skills in inventory and financial management (67%). Most participants (83%) expressed a strong interest in learning digital marketing but experienced difficulties due to limited knowledge and access to information.

Implementation of the Training and Workshop Program

The training program was conducted in the form of a three-day intensive workshop at the Bancak Village Hall with adequate supporting facilities. The training materials were designed to be practical and application-oriented using a learning-by-doing approach.

The first day focused on introducing digital marketplaces, account registration, and basic online store setup. Participants were guided to create accounts on the three major marketplace platforms: Shopee, Tokopedia, and TikTok Shop.

The second day covered effective digital marketing strategies for MSMEs. The training materials included smartphone product photography techniques, persuasive copywriting, pricing strategies, and online customer service. Each participant practiced taking attractive product photographs and writing compelling product descriptions. The community service team also provided simple photography props that participants could easily replicate at home.

The third day focused on online store management and performance analysis. Participants learned how to manage inventory, process customer orders, handle customer complaints, and interpret sales analytics to support business decision-making. Online transaction simulations were conducted to provide participants with practical experience in managing digital stores.

Participants demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm throughout the training program. The attendance rate reached 97%, with active participation in every session. Participants who initially felt hesitant and lacked confidence in using digital technology gradually showed significant improvements in their confidence. Daily evaluations indicated that participants' level of understanding increased substantially, rising from 23% in the pre-test to 78% in the post-test conducted on the third day.

Implementation and Mentoring

The implementation phase was a crucial stage in which participants began applying the knowledge they had acquired to their actual business practices. During the three-month mentoring period, the community service team conducted regular visits to participants' business locations, provided online consultations through a WhatsApp group, and organized individual consultation sessions to address specific challenges encountered by the participants.

The online store setup process proceeded smoothly, with 100% of the participants successfully creating accounts on at least two marketplace platforms. Shopee was the most preferred platform (97% of participants) due to its user-friendly interface and attractive promotional programs for new sellers. Tokopedia was selected by 83% of participants, while TikTok Shop was chosen by 67%, particularly by those offering visually appealing products. During the initial product listing stage, participants encountered several technical challenges, including difficulties in optimizing product photographs, writing engaging product descriptions, and setting competitive prices.

The mentoring team provided individualized assistance to address these challenges. After two weeks, the quality of participants' product listings had improved significantly, with more professional product photographs and more persuasive descriptions. The first online transactions began to occur during the third week of implementation. On average, participants completed three to five transactions during the first month, with transaction values ranging from IDR 50,000 to IDR 200,000 per order. Culinary products demonstrated the best performance, achieving a conversion rate of 12%, followed by handicrafts (8%) and fashion products (6%). Challenges encountered during the implementation phase included difficulties in managing inventory during periods of increased demand, limited understanding of digital payment systems, and inadequate packaging capabilities. These issues were addressed through additional training on basic inventory management and collaboration with local packaging service providers.

Improvement in Digital Marketing Competencies

The improvement in participants' digital marketing competencies was evaluated through a comprehensive assessment measuring various aspects of their skills. The results demonstrated substantial improvements across all measured indicators. Participants'

ability to utilize marketplace features increased from 15% to 85%, indicating successful technology adoption.

Product photography skills improved dramatically from 20% to 78%. Participants who had previously relied on basic product images became capable of producing visually appealing photographs with appropriate lighting and composition. Several participants also began applying flat-lay photography techniques and simple props to enhance the visual attractiveness of their products.

Copywriting skills improved from 18% to 72%. Participants learned to create product descriptions that were not only informative but also persuasive. Their ability to use relevant keywords for search optimization also improved considerably. Online customer service competencies increased from 25% to 80%, enabling participants to respond to customer inquiries more quickly and professionally.

Sales data analysis remained an area requiring further development. Although competency improved from 10% to 55%, many participants continued to experience difficulties interpreting analytics data for strategic business decision-making. This finding is understandable given the complexity of data analysis and the deeper understanding required regarding online consumer behavior.

Overall online store management skills increased from 22% to 81%. Participants became capable of managing inventory, processing customer orders, and handling product returns effectively. Customer complaint rates also declined significantly due to improvements in service quality.

Improvement in Sales Turnover and Market Reach

Sales data collected during the three-month implementation period demonstrated encouraging outcomes. Participants' average monthly sales turnover increased by 65% compared with the baseline condition. Participants operating in the culinary sector recorded the highest increase (85%), followed by handicrafts (58%) and fashion products (45%). This improvement resulted not only from marketplace sales but also from positive spillover effects on offline sales due to increased brand awareness.

Market reach expanded considerably. Before the program, 95% of sales occurred within a 10-kilometer radius of participants' business locations. Following marketplace implementation, market coverage expanded throughout Central Java (78% of

participants), as well as East Java and West Java (45% of participants). Moreover, 23% of participants successfully sold their products outside the island of Java. This geographical expansion enhanced business sustainability by reducing dependence on local markets.

Participants also diversified their sales channels instead of relying on a single marketing platform. On average, participants utilized 2.7 sales channels, including marketplaces, social media, and offline sales. This diversification reduced business risks while creating multiple revenue streams.

Profit margins increased by an average of 32% due to lower marketing costs and improved pricing opportunities resulting from stronger branding. Participants also reported higher customer loyalty, attributed to more convenient transaction processes and improved service quality. The repeat purchase rate reached 34%, indicating a high level of customer satisfaction. Several participants successfully established loyal customer communities through WhatsApp groups and social media platforms, providing added value through product usage tips and exclusive promotional offers.

Social and Economic Impacts

This community service program generated positive impacts extending beyond the direct participants. From an economic perspective, increased income among MSME owners contributed to improved purchasing power within the local community. Several participants began employing additional workers to meet growing demand, thereby contributing to employment generation in the area. The program also generated multiplier effects through the emergence of supporting businesses, including packaging services, product photography services, and local raw material suppliers. These developments contributed to the creation of a creative economic ecosystem that strengthened the collective competitiveness of creative MSMEs in Bancak District.

From a social perspective, the program contributed to improved digital literacy within the wider community, extending beyond the program participants themselves. Knowledge transfer occurred naturally as participants shared their newly acquired knowledge with family members and neighbors. An informal digital marketing community also emerged, allowing members to assist one another in solving technical problems and exchanging marketing strategies. Women's empowerment became another

significant outcome, considering that 60% of the participants were women, most of whom were homemakers. The program enabled them to generate independent income without neglecting their domestic responsibilities. Improved economic status among women also contributed to better family welfare and educational opportunities for their children.

Analysis of Success Factors

The success of this program was supported by several key factors. The participatory approach, which actively involved participants throughout every stage of the program, fostered a strong sense of ownership and motivation to apply the knowledge they had acquired. Participants perceived themselves as active contributors rather than passive beneficiaries. Another critical factor was the relevance of the training materials to participants' actual needs. The community service team conducted a comprehensive needs assessment to ensure that the training content was both relevant and applicable. The learning-by-doing approach, emphasizing practical exercises, enabled participants to understand and retain the training materials more effectively.

Support from the local government, particularly through the provision of facilities and promotional assistance, also contributed significantly to the program's success. The Head of Bancak Village strongly supported the initiative by allocating village funds to provide free internet access at the village hall, allowing participants to continue learning and practicing after the formal training sessions. Intensive mentoring during the implementation phase distinguished this program from many similar initiatives. While numerous training programs conclude after delivering instructional materials, this program continued providing assistance until participants became fully capable of independently managing their online stores.

Appropriate marketplace selection also contributed to the program's effectiveness. The community service team conducted a thorough analysis of the characteristics of each marketplace platform and guided participants in selecting platforms that best matched their products and target markets

Challenges and Solutions

Although the program was generally implemented successfully, several challenges emerged during its execution. Limited internet infrastructure in certain areas

of Bancak District represented the primary obstacle. Unstable network connectivity affected product uploads and communication with customers. To address this issue, the program collaborated with telecommunications providers to improve network quality and establish free Wi-Fi access at strategic locations. Participants were also encouraged to schedule bandwidth-intensive activities during periods when network performance was more stable.

Technical challenges related to the use of advanced marketplace features were addressed through the development of simple instructional video tutorials and the establishment of a buddy system, in which participants who learned more quickly assisted others experiencing difficulties. The program's WhatsApp group also proved to be an effective platform for knowledge sharing and peer support. Limited financial resources for improving packaging quality and diversifying products were addressed through collaboration with microfinance institutions and local government funding programs. The community service team facilitated participants' access to financing schemes that matched the needs of their businesses.

The highly competitive marketplace environment also required participants to continuously innovate. To address this challenge, regular discussion groups were established to facilitate the exchange of ideas regarding new product development and marketing strategies. The community service team additionally invited external experts to provide insights into market trends and niche market opportunities.

V. CONCLUSION

The community service program on optimizing digital marketplaces as a promotional and sales platform for creative MSME products in Bancak District, Semarang Regency, achieved highly satisfactory outcomes. The 85% improvement in participants' digital marketing competencies demonstrates the successful transfer of knowledge and skills in utilizing digital technologies for business development. Furthermore, the 65% average increase in sales turnover confirms that digital marketplaces can serve as an effective solution for expanding market access and increasing the income of creative MSMEs. The expansion of market reach to customers outside the local area, including regions beyond the island, highlights the significant potential of the local creative economy to compete in the national market.

The positive impacts of the program extended beyond economic improvement by contributing to community empowerment, enhancing digital literacy, and strengthening the local creative economy ecosystem. The establishment of an informal digital marketing community and the emergence of supporting businesses indicate the program's strong sustainability. The key success factors included the participatory approach, the alignment of training materials with participants' needs, support from the local government, intensive mentoring throughout the implementation process, and the appropriate selection of marketplace platforms. Challenges encountered during the program, such as limited infrastructure and financial resources, were effectively addressed through multi-stakeholder collaboration and the optimal utilization of available resources.

This program can serve as a replicable model for implementation in other regions, with appropriate adjustments to local characteristics and the dominant types of MSMEs. Program sustainability should be maintained through the establishment of independent participant groups, collaboration with educational institutions, and integration with other community empowerment initiatives. Future program development is recommended to include expanding participant and geographical coverage, developing advanced training modules for participants with higher levels of digital proficiency, integrating marketplace training with business financing programs, and establishing local marketplace platforms to further strengthen regional economic development.

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