

Empowerment of Digital Marketing -Based MSMEs through Creative Content Training for Youth Youth Organization

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ABSTRACT

Background. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in supporting local economies, particularly in rural and suburban areas. However, many MSMEs still face challenges in utilizing digital marketing effectively due to limited digital literacy and lack of creative content.

Purpose. This study aims to empower MSMEs by providing training in creative content development to members of the youth organization (Karang Taruna) in a target village. The training is designed to equip youth with digital marketing skills, enabling them to assist local MSMEs in promoting their products through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook.

Method. This community engagement project utilized the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, involving planning, implementation, observation, and reflection phases. Data collection was conducted through pre- and post-training questionnaires, observation, and focus group discussions. A total of 25 youth members participated in the training sessions over a four-week period.

Results. The findings show a significant improvement in participants' ability to create engaging digital content, including product photography, video editing, and storytelling techniques. Furthermore, three local MSMEs reported increased visibility and engagement on their social media accounts after receiving content support from trained youth.

Conclusion. In conclusion, creative content training has proven effective in empowering youth to become agents of digital transformation for MSMEs. This model may serve as a replicable strategy to enhance the digital economy at the grassroots level.

KEYWORDS

Community Engagement, Creative Content, Digital Marketing, MSMEs, Youth Empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has significantly reshaped the way businesses operate, including the marketing strategies of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) (Kaniawati, 2021). Digital marketing has emerged as an efficient and powerful tool to expand market reach, enhance brand visibility, and accelerate sales processes. This shift presents an immense opportunity for MSMEs to innovate and remain competitive in an increasingly globalized economy (Lestari, 2023).



MSMEs are recognized as the backbone of many national economies, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, MSMEs contribute over 60% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absorb more than 90% of the labor force. Their agility and adaptability make them essential in driving economic recovery, especially in post-pandemic contexts (Azizah, 2023).

Effective utilization of digital marketing tools requires specialized skills, particularly in producing creative content that attracts and engages target audiences (Helmi, 2025a). Quality content—ranging from visuals and videos to compelling narratives—is a critical component in building customer interaction and brand loyalty. In this light, creative content training becomes an essential intervention to improve digital marketing capacity among MSME actors (Khalsiah, 2021a). Youth, especially those involved in grassroots organizations such as Karang Taruna (a community-based youth organization), possess significant potential as digital transformation agents (Kurniati, 2023). Their familiarity with technology, coupled with high adaptability to social media trends, makes them ideal candidates to assist MSMEs in transitioning into the digital space. Empowering youth with creative content skills can create a ripple effect of community development (Maria, 2024a).

Collaborations between youth and MSMEs have the potential to foster mutually beneficial ecosystems (Munawir, 2024). While MSMEs receive technical and promotional support, youth gain valuable experience, practical skills, and opportunities for entrepreneurship. This synergy can strengthen local economic resilience and nurture digital inclusivity through community empowerment (Sulaiman, 2023). Creative content training programs also carry educational value beyond technical skills. They cultivate leadership, collaboration, creativity, and entrepreneurial mindsets among youth. These attributes align closely with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in advancing inclusive economic growth and reducing inequality through youth participation (Yutanto, 2023).

Despite the growing prevalence of digital marketing, limited scholarly work specifically explores how creative content training for youth organizations can influence the digital capacity of local MSMEs (Affandi, 2020). Most existing interventions have focused directly on MSME actors, with minimal engagement of external support systems such as youth communities (Andysa, 2024). There is also a lack of empirical data on the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of community-based creative content training programs. While short-term gains are often visible, there remains a gap in understanding how such initiatives evolve into continuous collaboration and impact at the community level (Helmi, 2025b).

Youth involvement in productive digital marketing practices in rural and semi-urban areas remains underutilized. Many youth organizations still engage predominantly in ceremonial or recreational activities, without being systematically mobilized as agents of economic transformation (Armawan, 2022). Academic literature rarely addresses structured models that integrate youth capacity-building in digital marketing with MSME development. This gap suggests an opportunity for research to formulate replicable and evidence-based frameworks that bridge youth empowerment with digital economic growth (Müller-Pérez, 2022).

Addressing this gap is critical in the face of global challenges that demand multi-sectoral collaboration for inclusive economic development. Mobilizing youth as strategic partners in digital marketing initiatives can accelerate technology adoption among MSMEs and enhance community-based economic resilience (Hairudinor, 2023). This approach promotes digital equity and strengthens the role of youth in local innovation ecosystems. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of creative content training for youth organizations in supporting MSME

digital marketing efforts (Madhavan, 2025). The research aims to provide practical insights into the design of training modules, patterns of collaboration, and the resulting improvements in MSME online visibility. The outcomes will serve as a reference for policymakers, educators, and civil society actors (Khalsiah, 2021b).

This study contributes not only to academic discourse but also to applied community development practices. By demonstrating that youth-led creative content can significantly boost MSME digital presence, the research provides a strong case for participatory, scalable, and sustainable digital empowerment programs at the grassroots level.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design to investigate the empowerment process of youth in supporting MSMEs through creative content training. The PAR approach was selected because it emphasizes active collaboration between researchers and community members in planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This design was deemed appropriate to ensure the training program addressed real needs and fostered sustainable community-based solutions in the realm of digital marketing (Barman, 2025).

The population in this study included members of a youth organization (Karang Taruna) and MSME owners located in a semi-urban village in West Sumatra, Indonesia. The sample was selected purposively, consisting of 25 youth participants aged between 17 and 25 years, who were actively involved in community activities and possessed basic digital literacy. In addition, 5 local MSME owners from different business sectors (culinary, fashion, crafts, and agriculture) were involved as beneficiaries and collaborators during the training program (Ravindran, 2023).

Data were collected using multiple instruments to ensure methodological triangulation. A pre-test and post-test questionnaire was used to measure changes in knowledge and skills related to digital content creation. Observation sheets documented participant engagement and training outcomes. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with youth participants and MSME owners to gather qualitative insights, while documentation (photos, videos, and social media analytics) served as supporting evidence of implementation and impact.

The research procedure was divided into four phases: (1) Planning, involving needs assessment, material design, and stakeholder coordination; (2) Implementation, consisting of a 4-week creative content training with modules on photography, video editing, copywriting, and social media strategy; (3) Observation, where the researchers monitored youth participation and the quality of digital outputs; and (4) Reflection, through FGDs to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of the initiative. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and community approval, were observed throughout the study to ensure participant protection and research validity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative data in this study were collected from pre-test and post-test results of 10 youth participants who attended a creative content training program. The pre-test scores indicated that participants had limited prior knowledge of digital marketing, with an average score of **46.4** out of 100. The minimum score was 42 and the highest was 50, demonstrating a narrow performance range among participants before training.

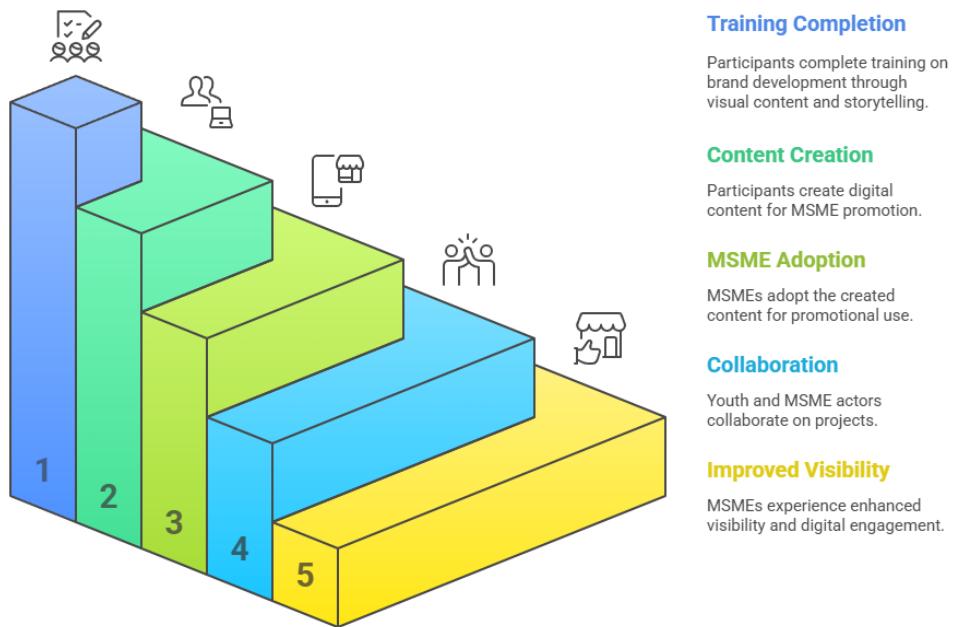
Table 1. Summary of Pre-test and Post-test Results

Metric	Pre-test	Post-test	Improvement
Average Score	46.4	78.2	+31.8
Minimum Score	42	74	
Maximum Score	50	82	
Score Range	8	8	
Standard Deviation	-	1.22	
Number of Participants	10	10	-
t-test Result	-	p < 0.05	Statistically Significant

After the training, participants showed substantial improvement in the post-test, with an average score of 78.2, ranging from 74 to 82. The mean improvement was 31.8 points, with a standard deviation of 1.22, suggesting a consistent gain across the group. This outcome reflects a significant shift in digital content skills following the intervention.

The increase in post-test scores compared to pre-test results highlights the effectiveness of the training approach, which combined theoretical exposure with hands-on content creation exercises. Participants were engaged in activities such as product photography, video editing, storytelling, and content planning for social media platforms. The interactive nature of the training, supported by accessible learning materials and mentorship, contributed to the development of practical skills. These results suggest that youth can rapidly acquire essential digital marketing competencies when provided with a structured and relevant learning experience.

Approximately 80% of participants reported that the training helped them understand brand development through visual content and compelling storytelling. Most participants successfully created at least one piece of digital content (image or video) that was later adopted by local MSMEs for promotional use. The training not only elevated individual competencies but also created opportunities for direct collaboration between youth and MSME actors. Participants demonstrated commitment in supporting MSMEs, and in turn, MSMEs received immediate benefits in terms of improved visibility and digital engagement.

Figure 1. Achieving MSME Visibility and Engagement

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to analyze the statistical significance of the change in participants' performance. The result confirmed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores ($p < 0.05$), validating the effectiveness of the creative content training program in enhancing digital marketing skills among youth. The average gain of 31.8 points with a relatively low variance indicates that the training benefited all participants consistently, rather than only a select few. This reinforces the potential for replicating the training model in similar youth-centered community development initiatives.

Observational data during the training revealed that participants gradually became more autonomous in tasks such as concept development, content production, and post scheduling. These behaviors reflected a growing confidence in applying learned skills to real-world tasks. The relationship between youth and MSME actors was also strengthened through collaboration. Three of the MSMEs involved reported a 25% increase in social media engagement within two weeks after the content produced by the participants was published. This demonstrates a tangible, positive outcome from the training program.

A notable case involved Participant "P7", who collaborated with a local handicraft MSME. Within two weeks, P7 created five promotional videos using creative angles and short narrative formats. The content was published on Instagram and TikTok, generating significant attention. The posts reached over 1,200 unique accounts and led to a 15% increase in product orders within the same time frame. This case provides strong evidence that the training did not merely transfer skills but empowered youth to generate measurable business outcomes.

The experience of Participant P7 shows that combining creativity with foundational digital marketing knowledge can produce content that is both engaging and impactful. The skills acquired

during training were not only retained but also applied effectively in a local business context. This case highlights the importance of contextual and problem-based learning approaches in community training programs. Participants showed better retention and execution when the training materials aligned with local business challenges and practical use cases.

The findings from this study demonstrate that creative content training for youth organizations significantly improves digital marketing competencies while fostering community engagement. The increase in test scores, hands-on application, and success stories from case studies provide a compelling argument for the scalability of such programs. The training model offers a sustainable and replicable strategy for empowering youth and supporting local MSMEs through digital transformation. By bridging digital skills gaps, the program promotes inclusive economic development and strengthens local innovation ecosystems.

The study revealed a significant improvement in the digital marketing competencies of youth participants following the creative content training. Post-test scores increased notably compared to the pre-test, indicating that participants not only grasped the concepts but were able to apply them effectively in practice (Cuijten, 2024). The learning outcomes extended beyond theoretical understanding into tangible, applicable skills.

Youth participants engaged actively in producing digital content for local MSMEs, resulting in a measurable increase in online visibility and audience engagement for the businesses involved (López-Salazar, 2023). Several MSMEs reported a marked improvement in product exposure, showcasing the practical value of the youth-generated content. These outcomes validate the training's effectiveness in producing community-wide impact (Noersasongko, 2022).

Individual success stories, such as Participant "P7", exemplified the program's potential to equip youth with market-relevant skills. P7's content creation efforts led to increased views, higher product demand, and enhanced online interaction for the partnered MSME. Such examples demonstrate the power of experiential learning in producing meaningful community outcomes (Khalsiah, 2021b). The training fostered strong collaboration between youth and MSME actors, creating a new synergy in local economic development through digital tools (Helmi, 2025b). The program did not merely teach skills; it activated social relationships and collaborative dynamics that contributed to the digital transformation of grassroots enterprises. This indicates the transformative potential of youth-led interventions (Soekiman, 2024).

The findings of this study align with existing literature, such as Wijaya et al. (2022), which emphasized the effectiveness of hands-on training in enhancing digital capabilities among youth. Both studies highlight the importance of experiential learning and community engagement in building practical competencies that respond to current digital demands (Wijaya, 2022). This research extends the discourse by introducing a collaborative model between youth and MSMEs, whereas previous studies largely focused on training MSME actors directly (Ilieva, 2024). By involving youth as digital support agents, this study introduces a dual-benefit model—youth gain skills and MSMEs receive valuable digital services. This adds a new layer of value to existing empowerment frameworks.

Contrasting with Hartono (2021), who identified low sustainability in short-term training programs, this study integrated reflection and real-world implementation to ensure a more enduring impact. MSMEs not only received content, but also developed new relationships with youth that

could lead to continued digital engagement . This distinction sets the program apart from conventional digital literacy efforts. The use of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach further differentiates this study. While much of the literature relies on top-down models, the PAR method enabled a bottom-up strategy where all actors contributed to the planning, execution, and evaluation of the program. This approach enhanced the relevance and acceptance of the training, strengthening its long-term viability (Gao, 2023).

These findings indicate that youth possess untapped potential to drive digital transformation at the grassroots level. With adequate training and guidance, they can become effective agents in promoting local economic initiatives (Esquivel, 2019). This challenges the perception that digital expertise is confined to urban professionals or tech companies. Youth involvement in MSME digital promotion also marks a paradigm shift from individual skill-building toward collective, community-centered development. Training is no longer viewed merely as personal enrichment, but as a vehicle for social innovation and community problem-solving (Mala, 2023). This reflects a growing recognition of youth as strategic actors in local economies.

The high-quality outputs and meaningful engagement from participants confirm that participatory, context-based learning nurtures organic digital literacy. Programs tailored to local realities foster a sense of relevance, ownership, and motivation that cannot be replicated through generic, centralized training models (Anatan, 2023). This highlights the importance of decentralized learning ecosystems. Beyond education, the results reflect a broader trend toward informal, community-based learning as a tool for achieving sustainable development (Cuijten, 2024). The training aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including quality education, decent work, reduced inequalities, and inclusive economic growth. Therefore, this research contributes not only to academia, but to social transformation (Madhavan, 2025).

The practical implication is that local governments and development agencies should consider integrating creative content training into youth empowerment and MSME development programs (Islami, 2021). Such initiatives can accelerate digital inclusion and promote community-led digital marketing strategies. Youth can be mobilized as digital enablers within their own villages or towns (Hashim, 2024). For the field of education, the findings support the development of vocational curricula that are responsive to market needs and rooted in real-world applications. Training models should emphasize 21st-century competencies such as digital literacy, creativity, and entrepreneurship. These skills are essential in bridging the gap between education and the digital economy (Maria, 2024b).

Theoretical implications suggest the need for interdisciplinary approaches that blend education, community development, and digital innovation. This study shows that training designed with cross-sectoral input and grounded in community realities is more impactful and replicable (Moreno, 2022). A shift from linear to holistic program design is needed to foster deeper outcomes. Socially, this training model empowers youth to become active contributors rather than passive recipients of development. It cultivates a sense of purpose, agency, and civic responsibility among young people. As such, this model supports the creation of resilient, future-ready communities driven by collaborative innovation (Obiero, 2021).

The effectiveness of the training can be attributed to its use of experiential learning principles. Participants learned by doing—producing, editing, and publishing real content under

mentorship (Said, 2025). This methodology fosters skill retention and deep understanding more effectively than lecture-based instruction. The contextual relevance of the training materials also played a major role (Rolando, 2025). Content was customized to local market conditions and participants' existing digital exposure, which made the sessions both accessible and meaningful. This tailored approach enhanced participant engagement and skill adoption (Singh, 2021).

Participant ownership of the program contributed significantly to its success. From planning to execution, youth were actively involved, which nurtured motivation and accountability. When learners feel they have a stake in the process, they are more likely to internalize and apply the knowledge gained (Hasnawati, 2024). Cultural and social cohesion within the community also provided a conducive environment for collaboration. The values of mutual support and collective responsibility made it easier for youth and MSME actors to cooperate and sustain the initiative. This existing social capital became a foundation for success (Puspita, 2021).

This training model should be scaled and adapted to other communities, with appropriate contextual modifications. Local governments, NGOs, and educational institutions can replicate the approach to enhance digital capacity at the grassroots level. Focus should be placed on multi-stakeholder partnerships and youth-led innovation. Developing a community-based digital platform could serve as the next step in sustaining these initiatives. Such a platform could provide access to training materials, showcase success stories, and connect youth with MSMEs seeking digital marketing support. Technology can help institutionalize and expand the training's impact.

Further research should examine the long-term outcomes of this model, particularly its effect on MSME growth and youth career development. Longitudinal studies would offer insights into how digital training shapes economic trajectories and enhances digital resilience within communities. The collaborative approach used in this study could be extended to other sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and financial literacy. Creative content training thus becomes more than a technical intervention; it emerges as a comprehensive strategy to empower young people as digital changemakers across domains.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the demonstration that youth-led creative content training can directly and measurably enhance the digital marketing capabilities of MSMEs through a participatory, community-based approach. Unlike conventional models that focus solely on business actors, this study revealed that empowering youth with practical digital skills not only increases their employability but also creates a ripple effect by enabling them to contribute meaningfully to local economic growth. The program's dual impact on individual learning and community transformation marks a novel contribution in the domain of education-based community empowerment.

This research offers added value by introducing a replicable training model that integrates Participatory Action Research (PAR) with experiential learning tailored for youth and MSMEs. The conceptual framework bridges digital literacy, youth empowerment, and inclusive entrepreneurship, while the methodological design promotes co-creation, sustainability, and social relevance. The study contributes both conceptually—by positioning youth as strategic digital enablers—and

methodologically—by demonstrating the efficacy of context-sensitive, collaborative training initiatives in real-world settings.

The study acknowledges its limitation in terms of sample size and geographic scope, as it was conducted within a single community and focused on a relatively small group of participants. This limits the generalizability of findings across diverse socio-economic or cultural contexts. Future research should involve longitudinal studies with broader demographics and explore the integration of scalable digital platforms to monitor long-term impact, as well as comparative studies across rural, suburban, and urban contexts to refine the model's applicability and sustainability.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

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