

MSME Actors' Perceptions of Digitalization Training for Branding and Digital Marketing in Payung Village

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Abstract

Digital technology requires Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to adapt in order to survive and compete. MSMEs in Payung Village, Majalengka Regency, still manage branding, promotion, and business administration largely in conventional ways, and many owners equate digitalization with simply opening a social media account. This community engagement study explored MSME actors' perceptions of the digitalization training delivered through PRISMA 3.0, the community empowerment program of Politeknik Siber Cerdika Internasional (SCI Polytechnic), and identified the changes in branding and digital marketing practices they reported. A qualitative descriptive case study design was used. Data were collected through observation and semistructured interviews with 10 purposively selected MSME owners out of 25 training participants, conducted before and two weeks after the training, and were analyzed thematically with triangulation and member checking. Three themes emerged: a shift from viewing branding as a logo toward viewing it as product identity and story; early adoption of digital marketing, as 7 of 10 informants created or reactivated business social media accounts and 6 redesigned their packaging labels; and persistent barriers related to content production skills, time, and internet access. Participants reported perceived improvements in product visibility and customer inquiries, although changes in sales and competitiveness could not yet be measured. The findings indicate that digitalization training mainly contributes to changes in mindset and early practice, and that continuous mentoring is required before measurable competitiveness outcomes can be expected.

Keywords: MSME digitalization; branding; digital marketing; community engagement; Payung village.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology requires Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to be able to adapt in order to survive and compete in the digital era. The development of the digital economy has brought major changes in marketing and business management patterns (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Verhoef et al., 2021). MSMEs as the backbone of the village economy are required to be able to adapt in order to survive and develop. At the global level, digitalization has become a basic condition for the survival and growth of small businesses. The OECD, (2021) reports that SMEs lag behind large

firms in the adoption of most digital technologies, ranging from a basic online presence to more advanced applications such as data analytics.

Digital transformation is therefore understood not merely as adding an online sales channel but as a process that changes how firms create, deliver, and capture value (Kraus et al., 2022; Vial, 2019). In emerging economies, the use of social media by small firms has been associated with stronger customer relationships, wider market access, and better performance (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Qalati et al., 2021). However, Eller et al., (2020) show that SME digitalization depends on IT resources, employee skills, and the digital strategy of the firm, which explains why many small businesses remain at an early stage of digital adoption even when digital tools are inexpensive and widely available.

In Indonesia, MSMEs are regulated under Law Number 20 of 2008 (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2008) and form the vast majority of business units while absorbing most of the national workforce (Tambunan, 2019). Based on data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, Indonesia has about 64.2 million MSMEs, which contribute 61.07 percent of gross domestic product and absorb 97 percent of the total workforce (Indonesia, 2021). The government has therefore included the digitalization of MSME marketing among its main support programs (Indonesia, 2021), and earlier Indonesian studies argued that digital marketing can become a source of competitive advantage for MSMEs (Wardhana, 2015).

Nevertheless, marketing constraints and the limited use of technology remain among the main obstacles for micro and small enterprises, and Tambunan, (2019) recommends training that focuses on online marketing and entrepreneurship. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesian SMEs also followed different digital transformation paths depending on their resources and digital readiness, and some of them only reached the stage of using digital tools for promotion and sales without transforming their business model (Priyono et al., 2020).

Based on the results of interviews and observations in Payung Village, most MSME actors are still running businesses conventionally. This business digitalization is still understood to be limited to using social media or online sales, not including mindsets, branding strategies, and business sustainability. In addition, many MSME actors in Payung Village have not yet developed a brand identity supported by an attractive logo, packaging, and product narrative. Preliminary observation by the service team identified around 40 active MSMEs in the village, mostly in processed food, agricultural products, and handicrafts, and estimated that only about one quarter of them used social media for business purposes, mainly through personal WhatsApp status.

The digitalization of MSMEs is not only interpreted as the use of social media or marketplaces but also includes changes in mindset, business strategy and business sustainability (Verhoef et al., 2021; Vial, 2019). Branding is an important aspect because it is able to build consumer image, trust and loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Odoom, Narteh, et al., 2017; Tjiptono, 2019). Digital marketing, in turn, extends the reach of a brand through low cost online channels that allow small firms to interact directly with customers (Kannan & Li, 2017; Sanjaya & Tarigan, 2009). In the training examined in this study, the resource person conveyed this relationship through a simple metaphor: branding gives a product its "spirit", while digital marketing gives it "wings" to reach a wider market.

Several previous studies are directly relevant to this problem. Chatterjee & Kar, (2020) found that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and compatibility encouraged the use of social media marketing among Indian SMEs, whereas cost had a negative effect, and that its adoption improved business outcomes. Qalati et al., (2021) showed that technological, organizational, and environmental factors drive social media adoption among SMEs in developing countries, and that adoption in turn improves performance. Odoom, et al., (2017) similarly reported performance benefits of social

media use among SMEs in an emerging market. Regarding branding, Odoom, Narteh, et al., (2017) reviewed SME branding research and concluded that small firms tend to treat branding informally and that the evidence remains scattered, while Malodia et al., (2023) demonstrated that the digital self efficacy of the entrepreneur strongly influences how far an SME advances in its digital transformation journey.

These studies provide valuable evidence, but most of them rely on surveys of firms that have already adopted digital tools or on established SMEs in urban settings. Less is known about how rural micro entrepreneurs with very limited digital experience perceive a short digitalization training, how they translate it into branding and marketing practices, and which barriers remain after such an intervention. Community engagement reports also tend to describe training activities without systematically documenting the perceptions of participants and the changes they report. The novelty of this study lies in treating branding and digital marketing as one integrated training content in a village context and in using qualitative evidence collected before and after the training to distinguish improved understanding, early changes in practice, and outcomes that are not yet observable, such as competitiveness.

This condition has an impact on the low competitiveness of MSME products in Payung Village, both in attracting new consumers and building loyalty with customers. Therefore, training and mentoring in MSME digitalization that integrate branding and digital marketing are needed as an initial step to strengthen the readiness of MSMEs to compete in the digital era. Accordingly, this study aims to explore the perceptions of MSME actors in Payung Village of the digitalization training delivered through PRISMA 3.0, the community empowerment program of Politeknik Siber Cerdika Internasional (SCI Polytechnic), and to identify the changes in branding and digital marketing practices that they report after the training.

Specifically, the study addresses three questions: (1) what were the branding and digital marketing conditions of MSMEs before the training, (2) how did participants perceive the training content, and (3) what changes and remaining obstacles did they report afterwards. Theoretically, the study adds qualitative evidence on the early stage of SME digital transformation in a rural setting. Practically, the findings can guide village governments, universities, and MSME support agencies in designing follow up mentoring that moves MSMEs from awareness toward sustained digital practice and, eventually, measurable competitiveness.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design embedded in a community engagement (community service) program and followed a participatory approach, in which the service team worked directly with MSME partners in Payung Village (Sugiyono, 2019). The activity focused on engaging directly with the community and identifying the needs of MSME partners so that the outcomes could have a meaningful and sustainable impact on MSME digitalization.

Research Location and Participants

The study was conducted in Payung Village, Majalengka Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The training was attended by 25 MSME actors, and ten of them were selected as key informants through purposive sampling using three inclusion criteria: (1) owning and running an active business for at least one year, (2) attending the full training session, and (3) being willing to be interviewed before and after the training. The informants consisted of six women and four men aged 29 to 52 years who run businesses in processed food, beverages, agricultural products, and handicrafts, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of key informants

Cod e	Gender, age	Type of business	Years in operati on	Branding and digital use before the training
I1	Female, 41	Cassava crackers	6	No logo; promotion through personal WhatsApp status
I2	Female, 35	Cakes and pastries	4	No logo; personal WhatsApp status
I3	Male, 46	Jaboticaba (Brazilian grape) seedlings, brand “Gentar”	5	No logo or label; sales by word of mouth
I4	Female, 38	Chili sauce	2	Simple logo on printed label; no business account
I5	Male, 29	Ground coffee	3	Logo; personal WhatsApp status
I6	Female, 52	Dodol (traditional sweet)	10	Plain plastic packaging; no logo
I7	Male, 44	Bamboo handicrafts	8	No logo; orders through acquaintances
I8	Female, 31	Frozen food	2	No logo; personal WhatsApp status
I9	Female, 48	Herbal drinks (jamu)	7	Logo on printed label; no business account
I10	Male, 39	Mango and other farm produce	5	No logo; sales to collectors and at the market

Source: Interview and observation data processed by the authors.

Research Instruments

The main instrument was a semistructured interview guide developed from the concepts of brand identity, digital marketing use, and perceived business change (Kannan & Li, 2017; Kotler & Keller, 2016). The guide covered four areas: business profile, current branding and promotion practices, understanding of digitalization, and changes and obstacles after the training. An observation checklist was used to record the presence of a logo, packaging label, business social media account, marketplace listing, and posting frequency, so that reported changes could be compared with observable practices.

Data Collection Procedure

The first stage involved observing the needs of MSMEs. The service team conducted direct surveys and interviewed MSME actors to obtain information about their business conditions. The team also directly observed MSME activities in Payung Village, particularly their use of digital media. This stage was carried out one week before the training. The second stage involved interviews with MSME actors. The service team explored the issues faced by MSME actors through semi-structured interviews, focusing on their understanding, implementation, and experiences regarding business digitalization. Each interview lasted about 30 to 45 minutes, was conducted in Indonesian or Sundanese by two members of the service team at the informant’s place of business, and was audio recorded with the consent of the informant.

The third stage was the digitalization training. The training was held in a one day session at the Payung Village hall and was delivered by a practitioner resource person

together with the SCI Polytechnic team. The material covered three modules: the digitalization mindset, branding and product identity, and digital marketing through social media and online marketplaces. Participants practiced creating a business account, taking product photos with a smartphone, and designing a simple logo and label with a free design application.

The fourth stage involved post-training assistance provided by the presenters and the service team. The assistance was conducted in person, allowing participants to identify and discuss obstacles encountered in their business activities. Follow up interviews and observations of the same ten informants were carried out two weeks after the training. The final stage involved documentation, including photographs of the activities, activity records, and materials related to MSME digitalization. The overall procedure is summarized in Figure 1.

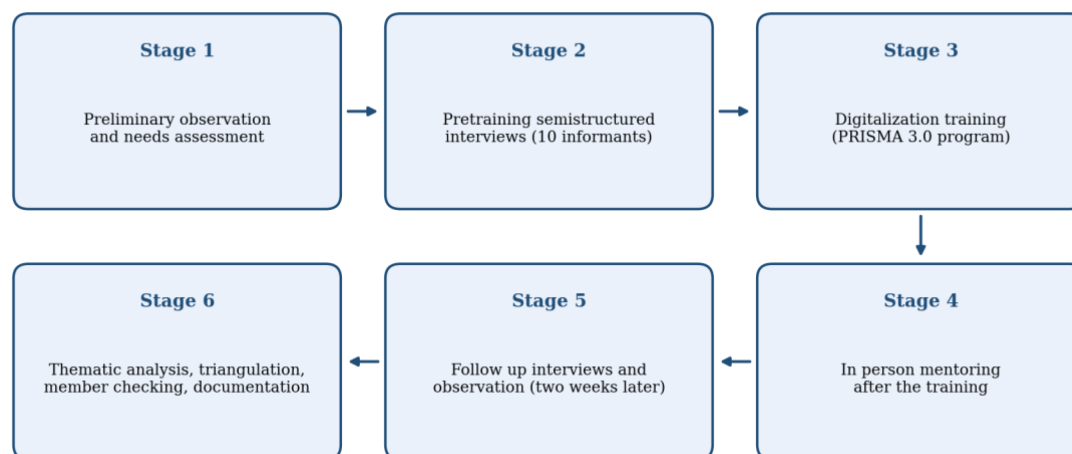


Figure 1. Research and community engagement procedure

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, translated into English for reporting, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis followed six phases: familiarization with the data, initial coding, generating candidate themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. Coding was conducted manually by two researchers who worked independently and then discussed their differences until agreement was reached.

Trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation (owners and family members involved in the business), method triangulation (interviews, observation checklists, and documentation), and member checking, in which summaries of the findings were confirmed with the informants (Nowell et al., 2017). The before and after observation records were tabulated descriptively to support, rather than replace, the qualitative interpretation.

Research Ethics

Participation was voluntary. All informants received an explanation of the purpose of the study, gave oral informed consent before the interviews, and were told that they could withdraw at any time. Their identities were anonymized using the codes I1 to I10, the recordings were stored only by the research team, and photographs were taken and published with the permission of the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings according to the three research questions and the themes generated from the thematic analysis (Table 2), followed by a discussion that compares the findings with previous studies and relevant theory.

Results

Initial Condition of MSMEs before the Training

The results of this interview show that most MSME actors do not have a clear brand identity, such as logos, attractive packaging, and product narratives. Marketing still relies on direct sales and word-of-mouth promotion. Before the training, only 3 of the 10 informants had a logo, 2 used a printed label, and 4 occasionally promoted their products through personal WhatsApp status, while none had a dedicated business account or marketplace listing (Table 1).

One informant explained, “I sell my dodol the same way my mother did; people come to the house or I bring it to the market. I never thought about a logo” (I6). Another stated, “Online selling is for young people. I was afraid of being cheated” (I10). These conditions show that, before the intervention, digitalization was understood mainly as an optional promotional activity rather than as part of business strategy, which is consistent with the problem identified in the introduction.

Participants’ Perceptions of the Training Content

The training focused on understanding the basics of MSME digitalization, branding, and digital marketing. The material was delivered in simple language so that it was easy to understand by the community and MSME actors. Participants were introduced to the importance of the meaning of a brand, the use of social media, and strategies for building relationships with consumers.

Participants perceived the practical sessions as the most useful part of the training. As I2 said, “Usually training is only listening. Here we immediately made the account and the logo on our own phones, so I can repeat it at home.” Several informants also remembered the metaphor of the “spirit” and the “wings” of a product, which helped them see branding and marketing as one process.

Table 2. Themes, codes, and supporting evidence from the thematic analysis

Theme	Main codes	Illustrative evidence
1. From logo to identity: a shifting understanding of branding	Branding equals logo (before); product name and story; consistent label; being remembered by customers	“A brand is not only a sticker. The name, the story of my grandmother’s recipe, and the package must say the same thing” (I6)
2. Early adoption of digital marketing practices	Creating business accounts; product photos; new labels; posting routine; customer inquiries	7 of 10 informants created or reactivated business accounts; 6 redesigned labels; I8 received five new inquiries in two weeks
3. Persistent barriers and the need for mentoring	Limited content skills; lack of time; weak signal and data costs; dependence on children; fear of online fraud	“Making content takes time and the signal in my workshop is weak. I need someone to accompany me” (I7)

Source: Interview and observation data processed by the authors.

From Logo to Identity

After participating in the training, MSME actors began to understand that branding is not just a logo, but how their products are remembered by consumers. Some MSME actors began to try to market their products through social media and improve the appearance of packaging. Digital marketing is starting to be considered able to expand market reach and open up new consumer opportunities.

For example, I3, who sells jaboticaba (Brazilian grape) seedlings, explained that buyers used to know his plants only as “the Brazilian grape from Payung”, whereas after the training he consistently used the brand name “Gentar” on every pot label and on his Facebook page “so that buyers can find me again”. Similarly, I6 stated, “A brand is not only a sticker. The name, the story of my grandmother’s recipe, and the package must say the same thing.” These statements show a change in understanding from branding as a visual element toward branding as a consistent identity and narrative.

Early Adoption of Digital Marketing Practices

Changes in practice were observed during the follow up visit two weeks after the training (Figure 3). Seven of the ten informants created or reactivated a business account on WhatsApp Business, Facebook, or Instagram, six redesigned their packaging labels, and seven had a logo compared with three before the training. Four informants posted product content at least twice a week, and two listed their products on an online marketplace. Informants also reported early market responses.

I8 stated, “After I opened WhatsApp Business and posted the catalog, five new people asked about my frozen dumplings in two weeks, three of them from outside the village.” In total, five informants reported more customer inquiries, but most of them were cautious about attributing changes in sales to the training. As I2 explained, “I post photos regularly now, but it is too early to say whether my sales have increased.”

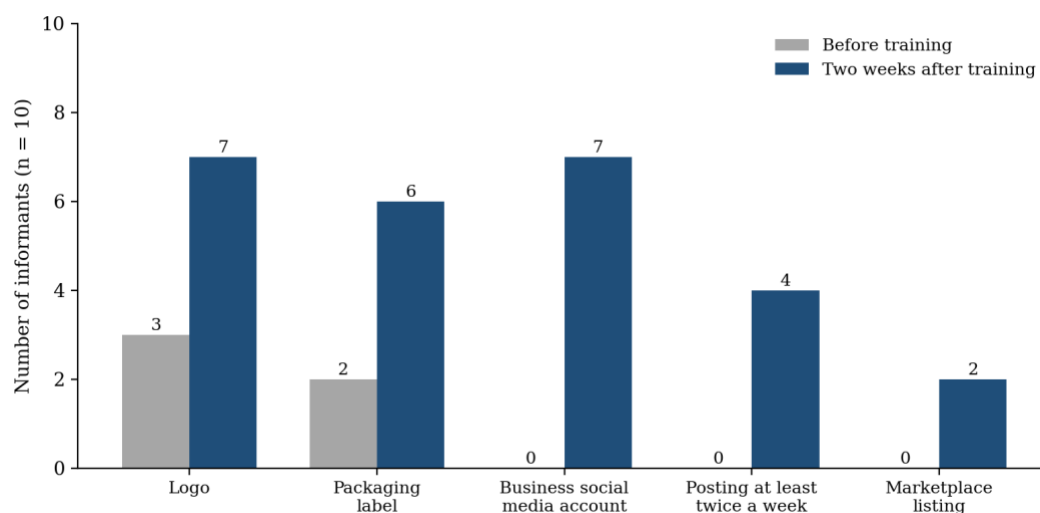


Figure 2. Branding and digital marketing practices of the informants before and two weeks after the training (n = 10)

Persistent Barriers and the Need for Mentoring

Not all informants were able to translate the training into practice. Three informants had not yet created a business account at the time of the follow up visit. The main obstacles were limited skills in producing photos and captions, lack of time because the owners also handled production, weak internet signal and data costs, and dependence on younger family members to operate the applications. I7 said, “Making content takes time and the signal in my workshop is weak.

I need someone to accompany me,” while I10 admitted, “My children help me; without them I would be confused with the applications.” These barriers explain why participants strongly requested continued mentoring. The activity was closed with a discussion, evaluation and documentation session with participants and MSME actors. MSME actors expressed their hope that mentoring activities can continue, especially in the practice of using digital platforms and business management. The closing session is documented in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Closing discussion and evaluation session with MSME participants in Payung Village

Discussion

The first finding, the shift from viewing branding as a logo toward viewing it as identity and narrative, is consistent with brand theory, which treats a brand as a set of associations that differentiates a product and builds trust and loyalty among consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Tjiptono, 2019). It also echoes the conclusion of Odoom, et al., (2017) that SMEs often approach branding informally and need simple frameworks to connect brand identity with marketing activities. In Payung Village, the metaphor of the “spirit” of a product functioned as such a framework. However, this study can only show a change in understanding and in visible brand elements such as names, logos, and labels; whether consumers actually perceive these brands differently was not measured.

The second finding, the early adoption of social media and marketplace practices, parallels the results of (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Qalati et al., 2021), who reported that perceived usefulness, low cost, and compatibility with existing routines encourage small firms to adopt social media. The practical, smartphone based format of the training appears to have lowered the perceived difficulty of these tools, which supports the argument of Malodia et al., (2023) that the digital self efficacy of the entrepreneur is a key driver of digital transformation. Unlike these survey based studies, which link adoption with firm performance, the present study found only early signals such as customer inquiries. This difference is expected because the observation period was short and because, as Eller et al., (2020); Priyono et al., (2020) show, performance effects tend to appear only after firms move beyond promotional use toward deeper changes in their business model and capabilities.

The third finding highlights that digitalization in a village context is constrained less by the availability of technology than by skills, time, infrastructure, and trust. This is in line with (Eller et al., 2020), who identified employee skills and IT resources as antecedents of SME digitalization, and with (Tambunan, 2019), who emphasized the limited capacity of micro enterprises in marketing and technology. It also reflects the

challenges of managing digital content and online presence noted by (Dwivedi et al., 2021). From the perspective of digital marketing frameworks, the informants have entered the stage of building presence and interaction on digital channels but have not yet reached the stages of systematic content planning, customer data use, and performance measurement (Kannan & Li, 2017; Sanjaya & Tarigan, 2009).

Taken together, the findings make it necessary to distinguish three levels of outcome. The first level, improved understanding of branding and digital marketing, was reported by almost all informants. The second level, changes in practice, was observed in about two thirds of them. The third level, improved business competitiveness in terms of sales, market share, or customer loyalty, could not be demonstrated by the available evidence. Accordingly, this study does not claim that the training increased competitiveness; rather, it shows that the training built the initial capabilities on which competitiveness can later be developed, in line with earlier arguments that digital marketing and integrated promotion can become sources of competitive advantage for Indonesian MSMEs (Rangkuti, 2009; Wardhana, 2015). Table 3 summarizes how the present findings relate to previous studies.

Table 3. Comparison of the findings with previous studies

Study	Context and method	Main finding	Position of the present study
Chatterjee & Kar, (2020)	Indian SMEs; survey	Usefulness, ease of use, and compatibility encourage social media marketing use, cost hinders it, and adoption improves business outcomes	Supported for adoption drivers; performance link not yet observable
Qalati et al., (2021)	SMEs in developing countries; survey	Technological, organizational, and environmental factors drive social media adoption, which improves performance	Similar adoption pattern; competitiveness outcomes not measured
Odoom, Anning-Dorson, et al., (2017)	Systematic review of SME branding	SME branding is informal and research evidence is fragmented	Confirmed before the training; the training introduced a simple identity framework
Priyono et al., (2020)	Indonesian SMEs; multiple case study	Digital transformation follows different paths depending on digital maturity	Informants are at the initial path of promotional digitalization
Malodia et al., (2023)	Indian SMEs; mixed methods	Digital self efficacy of entrepreneurs drives digital transformation	Practical sessions appeared to raise confidence; low confidence explains remaining barriers

Source: Interview and observation data processed by the authors.

These findings have practical implications for MSME actors in Payung Village and for program organizers. For MSME actors, a consistent brand name, label, and product story is a low cost first step that can be strengthened gradually through regular content.

For SCI Polytechnic and the village government, a single training session should be followed by scheduled mentoring, peer learning groups in which younger family members support older owners, and simple tools for recording sales and customer inquiries, so that future evaluations can measure business outcomes rather than relying on perceptions alone.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perceptions of MSME actors in Payung Village of the digitalization training and the changes they reported in branding and digital marketing through qualitative evidence collected before and after the training. Informants shifted from viewing branding as a logo toward viewing it as a product identity and story. Most informants took early steps in digital marketing, such as creating business accounts and redesigning labels, and some reported more customer inquiries.

Skills, time, internet access, and confidence remained barriers, so the observed changes represent improved understanding and early practice rather than demonstrated gains in business performance or competitiveness. Practically, MSME actors in Payung Village can start with consistent branding and regular content, while program organizers should provide continuous mentoring. Future research could examine long-term impact of MSME digitalization by measuring changes in business performance, market reach, customer engagement, and revenue before and after the implementation of digital strategies.

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