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EMPOWERING MSMEs IN INDRAMAYU REGENCY THROUGH WEBSITE BUILDER UTILIZATION AS A BRANDING STRATEGY FOR MARKET EXPANSION

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ABSTRACT

This community engagement initiative addressed digital transformation challenges among rural Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indramayu, where only 30% utilized digital tools despite contributing significantly to Indonesia's economy (Dinas Koperasi Indramayu, 2023). The program provided hands-on training in website development using Wix and WordPress platforms, coupled with mentoring sessions for 30 selected MSMEs. Implementation followed three key phases: (1) digital needs assessment through community surveys, (2) practical workshops on website creation and digital marketing tools, and (3) individualized business mentoring. Post-intervention evaluation revealed that 93.3% of participants successfully established functional business websites, with 85% integrating Google My Business. Participating enterprises reported an average 25% sales increase and expanded market reach, including international orders for 50% of businesses. The initiative achieved multiple sustainable development outcomes: creating 10 digital-related jobs (SDG 8), establishing a replicable digitalization model (SDG 9), and reducing rural-urban disparities (SDG 10). Key challenges included internet connectivity issues (affecting 20% of participants) and requests for ongoing technical support (78% of participants), underscoring the need for infrastructure development and sustained assistance programs. This experience demonstrates that targeted capacity-building interventions can effectively bridge the digital divide for rural enterprises when combined with local partnership approaches.

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INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) serve as the backbone of Indonesia's economy, contributing 61% of the national GDP and absorbing 97% of the workforce (Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, 2023). Despite their critical role, many MSMEs—particularly in rural regions like Indramayu, West Java—face significant challenges in accessing digital markets. While these enterprises produce high-quality agricultural and creative products (e.g., batik, mango-based goods), only 30% utilize digital tools for branding and sales (Dinas Koperasi Indramayu, 2023). This digital divide exacerbates economic disparities, limiting market expansion and growth potential. The rapid digital transformation in global commerce underscores the necessity for MSMEs to adopt digital branding strategies. Research by Sharabati et al. (2024) demonstrates that a professional website significantly enhances business credibility, customer trust, and market reach. However, traditional web development remains inaccessible for many small businesses due to high costs, technical complexity, and lack of digital literacy (Santoso & Wahyuni, 2022).

To bridge this gap, website builders (e.g., Wix, Shopify, WordPress) offer a low-cost, user-friendly alternative, enabling MSMEs to establish an online presence without coding expertise. Studies indicate that such tools can democratize digital access, particularly for rural entrepreneurs (Oliveira et al., 2023). Website builders provide intuitive, drag-and-drop interfaces, customizable templates, and integrated marketing features—allowing small businesses to design websites with minimal technical skills. As such, they represent a scalable, inclusive technology solution aligned with the needs and constraints of grassroots economic actors in developing regions.

Nonetheless, the adoption of website builders among Indonesian MSMEs remains low, with reports suggesting penetration rates below 15% in rural districts (Putri & Hidayat, 2021). This phenomenon reflects not only structural barriers—such as poor internet infrastructure and financial limitations—but also sociocultural and behavioral factors, including limited awareness of digital branding benefits and lack of peer benchmarking. Furthermore, existing digital literacy programs tend to be sporadic and generic, rarely tailored to the contextual realities of specific business sectors or regional economies (Santoso et al., 2022). Therefore, a more targeted, participatory, and sustained approach is essential for bridging the digital divide in a meaningful and lasting way.

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In response to these challenges, this community service initiative was designed to empower MSMEs in Karangsong Village, Indramayu Regency, by providing training and mentorship in digital branding using website builder platforms. The intervention is grounded in the assumption that improving digital capacity must begin with a thorough understanding of community needs, followed by hands-on, context-specific capacity building, and individualized mentoring. The phased structure of this program—comprising digital needs assessment, practical workshops, and personalized business mentoring—ensures not only knowledge acquisition but also the practical application of digital skills in real-world business settings.

The broader aim of this initiative is to assess the feasibility of website builders as a scalable solution for rural MSMEs while examining their effectiveness in enhancing digital presence, increasing sales performance, and expanding market access. In doing so, the initiative aligns with several targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, it contributes to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by strengthening the competitiveness of MSMEs and enabling job creation in the digital economy; SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) by promoting inclusive technology adoption among underserved communities; and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by narrowing the digital divide between urban and rural enterprises.

Moreover, the outcomes of this program are expected to provide empirical evidence to support policy innovation in MSME development at the regional and national levels. Through structured documentation and evaluation, this study aims to offer a replicable and adaptable model for community-based digital empowerment. The practical learnings derived from this initiative can inform the design of future interventions, particularly in terms of participatory planning, localized content development, and sustained post-training support mechanisms.

From an academic perspective, this initiative also contributes to theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Digital Divide Theory, and the Resource-Based View of the firm. It examines how perceived usefulness and ease of use influence adoption behavior among digitally inexperienced entrepreneurs, how targeted interventions can mitigate structural exclusion, and how digital capabilities can serve as strategic resources for competitive advantage in local markets.

In summary, this study offers a timely and practical contribution to the discourse on inclusive digital transformation in the Global South. By showcasing how simple, affordable

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technologies like website builders—when coupled with community-based facilitation and personalized mentoring—can generate measurable socioeconomic benefits, it emphasizes the importance of equity-driven innovation. The findings are expected to be relevant not only for local policymakers and development practitioners but also for international stakeholders interested in fostering digitally inclusive economies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The digital transformation of business ecosystems has created new opportunities for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to enhance their market positioning and operational efficiency. However, significant disparities persist in digital adoption rates, particularly among rural MSMEs in developing economies such as Indonesia (Santoso & Wahyuni, 2022). Empirical evidence indicates that while MSMEs constitute 61% of Indonesia's GDP and employ 97% of the workforce (Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, 2023), only 30% utilize digital marketing tools, with rural enterprises disproportionately affected by technological exclusion (Dinas Koperasi Indramayu, 2023). This digital divide stems from multifaceted barriers including limited technological literacy (Santoso et al., 2022), prohibitive development costs for digital assets (Putri & Hidayat, 2021), and inadequate ICT infrastructure in peripheral regions (Saura & Palacios-Marqués, 2023). Conversely, scholarly research demonstrates that digital engagement yields substantial benefits, with MSMEs maintaining online presence reporting 40% greater sales growth (Sharabati et al., 2024), enhanced brand equity through professional digital branding (Google for Small Business, 2023), and expanded market reach transcending geographical limitations (Santoso, 2022). This dichotomy underscores the imperative for accessible digital solutions that can bridge the technological divide while accommodating the resource constraints characteristic of MSME operations. Contemporary scholarship identifies website builder platforms as a potentially transformative intervention in this context, offering intuitive, cost-effective digital presence solutions through their drag-and-drop functionality and templated designs.

Global case studies demonstrate the efficacy of such platforms, with MSME adopters in India realizing 35% sales growth (Panda & Mishra, 2022) and African enterprises achieving 50% export expansion (Sharabati et al., 2024). The Indonesian context, however, reveals markedly lower adoption rates at just 15% (Dinas Koperasi, 2023), notwithstanding empirical evidence of 25% revenue enhancement among adopters (Putri & Hidayat, 2021). This adoption gap persists due to three principal factors: limited platform awareness, organizational

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inertia among traditional enterprises, and persistent digital infrastructure deficiencies (Google for Small Business, 2023). Academic investigations further establish that professional websites confer competitive advantages through enhanced brand credibility, customized digital identity formation, and improved search engine visibility (Google for Small Business, 2023). These benefits manifest concretely in operational outcomes, as evidenced by Malaysian SMEs achieving 40% sales growth through platform adoption (Panda & Mishra, 2022) and Indonesian textile producers realizing 30% order increases through integrated digital marketing strategies (Santoso, 2022). Importantly, such digital empowerment initiatives demonstrate strong alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8 through employment creation and economic growth, SDG 9 via inclusive technological innovation, and SDG 10 by mitigating spatial inequalities in development opportunities. Notwithstanding these demonstrated benefits, the literature reveals significant research gaps requiring scholarly attention, including longitudinal studies of adoption sustainability, investigations into sociocultural barriers to digital transformation, and policy analyses regarding potential governmental interventions.

Future research directions should prioritize comparative platform efficacy studies, gender-disaggregated impact analyses accounting for the unique challenges faced by female entrepreneurs (Saura & Palacios-Marqués, 2023), and examinations of emerging technological integrations such as artificial intelligence applications. The extant literature collectively affirms the transformative potential of website builder platforms as an accessible digital solution for MSMEs while highlighting the necessity for holistic interventions addressing both technological and structural barriers to inclusive digital participation.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively evaluate the impact of website adoption among MSMEs in Karangsong Village. The research unfolded in three sequential phases:

1. Digital Needs Assessment through Community Surveys
   The initial stage involved an in-depth digital needs assessment through structured community surveys and focus group discussions. This stage aimed to map the demographic profile of local MSMEs, assess their level of digital literacy, and identify key technological barriers. Data were collected through interviews with business owners

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and village officials to identify which enterprises lacked digital tools and to tailor subsequent interventions accordingly.

2. Practical Workshops on Website Creation and Digital Marketing Tools
   Based on the findings of the needs assessment, a two-month intensive workshop series was conducted. These workshops provided hands-on training in using Wix and WordPress platforms to build business websites. Training sessions also included the fundamentals of digital marketing such as search engine optimization (SEO), metadata management, branding content design, and integration of Google My Business to enhance visibility. The sessions combined didactic instruction with practical assignments, enabling participants to build and refine their websites progressively.
3. Individualized Business Mentoring
   Following the workshops, each of the 30 selected MSMEs received personalized mentoring over a two-month implementation period. Mentoring sessions were tailored to the specific digital and branding needs of each business, ranging from layout adjustments and content editing to product cataloging and social media integration. This personalized support helped bridge the gap between training and practice, ensuring that MSMEs could operate their digital platforms independently.

The final evaluation phase during months five and six involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Pre- and post-intervention surveys measured sales performance and web traffic metrics, while in-depth interviews captured participants' experiences. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired t-tests, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative transcripts to extract patterns and insights.

Table 1. List of Participants in the Website Builder Utilization Workshop for MSMEs

Entrepreneur Category	Number of Participants
Fisheries Product Processing	8
Aquafarming Enterprise	6
Street Food Vendor	7
Cultural Merchandise	3
Neighborhood Retailer	2
Processed Snack Manufaturer	4
Total	**30**

The intervention itself unfolded across three sequential phases, beginning with an intensive two-month training period covering practical website creation using Wix or WordPress platforms, fundamental search engine optimization techniques including keyword

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selection and meta tag implementation, and establishment of Google My Business profiles.

The subsequent two-month implementation phase provided personalized mentorship to support participants in successfully launching their digital platforms. The final evaluation phase during months five and six employed Google Analytics for objective performance tracking alongside structured feedback sessions. Quantitative data analysis utilized paired t-tests to statistically compare pre- and post-intervention sales figures and web traffic metrics, while qualitative data underwent rigorous thematic analysis of interview transcripts to identify patterns and substantive themes in participants' experiences with digital transformation. This methodological approach allowed for both statistical validation of outcomes and nuanced understanding of implementation challenges.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The community engagement initiative commenced with a rigorous digital needs assessment in Karangsong Village. Researchers administered structured surveys to 30 MSMEs and conducted focus group discussions involving district authorities, local community leaders, and business actors. This baseline assessment revealed significant digital exclusion, particularly among traditional enterprises, and guided the customization of training materials. Subsequently, practical workshops were implemented over a two-month period, emphasizing intuitive, step-by-step instruction on website creation using drag-and-drop platforms such as Wix and WordPress. Participants received direct guidance on creating homepages, product pages, and contact information sections, while also learning how to integrate digital marketing tools like Google My Business and basic SEO configurations. Participant engagement was reinforced through iterative assignments and peer review sessions.

To strengthen post-training application, the program delivered individualized business mentoring. Each MSME worked closely with assigned mentors who provided one-on-one consultation tailored to specific industry needs—such as layout optimization for food vendors or bilingual site structuring for souvenir businesses targeting international markets. This mentoring ensured technical troubleshooting was addressed in real-time and that business owners gained confidence in managing and updating their digital presence.

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Figure 1. Focus group discussion with entrepreneurs and district government representatives

This preliminary phase yielded baseline data encompassing: (1) the demographic distribution of MSME actors, (2) needs assessment analysis, and (3) preliminary identification of technological gaps. The demographic mapping revealed a diverse landscape of entrepreneurs engaged in fisheries product processing, aquafarming, street food vending, cultural merchandise production, neighborhood retail, and snack manufacturing. Most participants operated micro-enterprises with limited digital exposure and minimal formal education in ICT. This context highlighted the necessity for highly contextualized and accessible interventions.

Building upon these findings, the research team developed a sequential intervention strategy grounded in participatory design principles. First, a comprehensive survey instrument was administered to catalog MSMEs' existing utilization of website builders, digital tools, and online sales channels. This helped establish a dichotomous participant classification (adopters vs. non-adopters), which informed the level of support and content customization each group required. Non-adopters were prioritized for capacity-building interventions due to their higher vulnerability to digital exclusion.

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Figure 2. Instructional session on website builder implementation

The targeted capacity-building sessions were delivered in modular formats, enabling flexibility for participants with differing learning speeds and schedules. These sessions featured three core components:

1. Didactic components on website builder fundamentals
   These sessions introduced basic digital concepts, including domain names, website architecture, content writing, image optimization, and branding principles. The goal was to build foundational knowledge that demystifies the digital space and enables informed decision-making.
2. Hands-on technical mentoring for business website development
   Participants engaged in step-by-step tutorials to create real-time websites using Wix or WordPress. Facilitators guided them through setting up templates, organizing navigation menus, embedding contact forms, linking social media, and configuring SEO-friendly content. These exercises fostered practical skills and provided participants with a tangible digital asset by the end of each session.
3. Iterative feedback mechanisms to ensure skill acquisition
   Each participant received constructive feedback from facilitators and peers after completing assigned tasks. The use of screen-sharing sessions, breakout discussions, and individual progress tracking enabled personalized learning experiences. Iterative

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reviews allowed for correction of common mistakes, reinforcement of successful practices, and continuous improvement of participants' digital competencies.

This community engagement initiative has yielded substantial empirical evidence regarding the digital transformation of rural micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), with significant implications for both academic discourse and development practice. The findings reveal that digital adoption among rural entrepreneurs is not merely a matter of infrastructure, but also one of cognitive readiness and trust in the process. The structured and adaptive nature of the intervention allowed participants to move from digital skepticism to digital confidence, as evidenced by the significant increase in website creation and integration of digital tools into daily business operations.

Moreover, the phased approach proved effective in building momentum and maintaining participant motivation. Many MSME owners reported that the hands-on nature of the workshops, combined with culturally relevant examples and language, helped bridge the abstract nature of digital tools with their concrete business realities. This suggests that digital literacy programs in rural contexts must go beyond technical instruction and foster a deeper sense of relevance, ownership, and community empowerment. The lessons from this initiative can thus serve as a model for future digital inclusion efforts aimed at strengthening economic resilience in underserved regions.

Digital Literacy and Technological Adoption

The intervention achieved a remarkable 93.3% success rate (28 of 30 participants) in facilitating functional website development, substantially exceeding comparable initiatives documented in the literature (Santoso & Wahyuni, 2022). This outcome suggests that the program's scaffolded learning approach—combining structured training with individualized mentoring—effectively addressed the digital skills gap prevalent among rural entrepreneurs. The high adoption rate (85%) of Google My Business integration further demonstrates participants' ability to implement complementary digital tools, enhancing their online visibility and discoverability. These quantitative outcomes are reinforced by qualitative evidence, as exemplified by the Batik Paoman entrepreneur's testimonial: *"Our business paradigm has fundamentally transformed from local trading to digital commerce."* This narrative reflects not merely technical acquisition but a cognitive shift in business operations and market orientation.

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The shift from analog to digital operations also encouraged entrepreneurs to rethink their branding strategies, inventory systems, and customer engagement models. Many participants reported increased confidence in managing their own digital platforms and expressed interest in expanding their online channels through e-commerce integration and social media marketing. This signals the emergence of a new entrepreneurial mindset—one that views technology not as a barrier, but as a critical enabler of business growth.

Furthermore, the participatory and localized nature of the training fostered peer learning and mutual support among MSME owners, reinforcing the long-term sustainability of digital adoption. Collectively, these outcomes indicate that with the right pedagogical approach, rural MSMEs can not only adopt digital tools but also internalize digital thinking as part of their strategic business development.

Economic Outcomes and Market Transformation

The intervention generated statistically significant economic impacts, with participating enterprises recording an average sales increase of 25% ($p < 0.05$). This finding aligns with but surpasses previous studies reporting 15-20% growth following digital adoption (Sharabati et al., 2024). More significantly, half of the participants successfully expanded their market reach to international buyers through integrated social media marketing, demonstrating the potential of digital tools to overcome geographical constraints. The comparative metrics reveal profound transformations: from complete absence of digital presence to near-universal website adoption (0% to 93%), and from minimal to predominant use of business listing services (5% to 85%). These outcomes substantiate the hypothesis that targeted digital interventions can effectively bridge the rural-urban digital divide in emerging economies.

Implementation Challenges and Structural Barriers

Despite these successes, the initiative encountered persistent structural challenges. Connectivity issues affected 20% of participants, consistent with national data indicating only 65% of rural Indonesia has reliable internet access (Ministry of Communication and Information, 2023). Furthermore, participants' requests for ongoing technical support highlight the limitations of one-time interventions in sustaining digital adoption. These findings corroborate Saura and Palacios-Marqués' (2023) contention that digital transformation requires continuous support systems rather than discrete training events. The data suggest that while

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initial adoption barriers can be overcome through intensive training, long-term sustainability depends on addressing systemic infrastructure limitations and establishing permanent support mechanisms.

Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals

The initiative's impacts extend beyond individual enterprises to contribute meaningfully to the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda. The creation of 10 new digital-related positions supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by generating employment opportunities with higher skill requirements and fostering inclusive economic participation in rural areas. These new roles include web content managers, digital marketing assistants, and e-commerce coordinators, many of whom were sourced directly from local communities—ensuring that capacity building translates into tangible job creation.

Furthermore, the development of a scalable, replicable model for digital empowerment among MSMEs directly aligns with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). The program demonstrates how low-cost, high-impact digital technologies like website builders can be effectively deployed even in regions with limited internet access and technological familiarity. By leveraging community partnerships and localized training approaches, the initiative illustrates a pathway for inclusive innovation.

Finally, the intervention actively advances SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by narrowing the rural-urban digital divide and increasing the competitiveness of enterprises in traditionally marginalized areas. These cumulative outcomes reflect a holistic contribution to sustainable development—one that integrates technology, inclusion, and economic resilience into a unified community empowerment strategy.

Theoretical Implications

The results offer three key contributions to academic discourse:

1. Validation of the Extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)
   This study confirms that perceived usefulness and ease of use—core constructs of TAM—strongly influence technology adoption among rural MSMEs. The positive correlation between training participation, website implementation, and post-intervention outcomes (e.g., sales increase, expanded market reach) illustrates that

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when digital tools are perceived as relevant and manageable, even low-tech users can embrace them enthusiastically. This extends TAM's applicability to low-resource, community-based contexts where digital uptake has traditionally lagged.

2. Empirical Support for the Digital Divide Theory
   The intervention demonstrates that structured, localized efforts can meaningfully reduce the digital gap between urban and rural enterprises. By combining infrastructure-sensitive design with community engagement, the program showcases how access disparities can be addressed through intentional programming rather than passive policy frameworks.
3. Reinforcement of the Resource-Based View (RBV)
   The findings substantiate the notion that digital platforms, when effectively integrated into business strategy, serve as valuable, rare, and inimitable resources. Participants' increased visibility, credibility, and market responsiveness underscore the role of digital assets as enablers of sustainable competitive advantage in the MSME sector.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This initiative demonstrates that comprehensive, well-structured digital empowerment programs can significantly enhance the competitiveness of rural MSMEs. The results confirm that while technological barriers can be overcome through targeted training, achieving lasting impact requires addressing systemic infrastructure limitations and establishing sustainable support ecosystems. These findings contribute to both academic understanding and practical approaches to digital inclusion, offering a replicable model for similar contexts in the Global South. In addition, the program highlights the importance of combining technical capacity building with continuous mentoring and localized pedagogical strategies to foster not just adoption, but long-term integration of digital tools. The cognitive shift observed among participants—from traditional, offline sales to digital commerce—underscores the transformative potential of participatory digital education.

Future efforts should build on these lessons to develop more holistic, long-term solutions for equitable digital development. Policymakers and development practitioners are encouraged to invest in ongoing support structures, including digital helpdesks, refresher training, and public-private partnerships to improve rural connectivity. Such measures are essential to ensure that the benefits of digital transformation are inclusive, sustainable, and aligned with broader national development goals.

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