

Digital Marketing Optimization And Production Capacity Improvement In Funny Catering Semarang Smes

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ABSTRAK

This community service activity was carried out by the Finance and Banking Study Program, Semarang State Polytechnic, as a form of academic contribution to supporting community economic strengthening through empowering MSMEs in the digital era. The activity focused on utilizing the WhatsApp application to improve the effectiveness of promotions and customer service at the Funny Catering Semarang MSME. The background to this activity stems from the challenges faced by MSMEs in dealing with changing consumer behavior that is increasingly dependent on digital communication technology. Many small businesses still use conventional promotional methods, thus suboptimally reaching a wider market.

The activity method includes observing partner needs, training on using WhatsApp features, mentoring on implementing digital communication strategies, and evaluating the results of the implementation. The activity was carried out on October 25, 2025, at the Funny Catering MSME business location in Sawah Besar XI, Kaligawe, Semarang, involving lecturers, students, and MSME owners. The training results showed an increase in participants' abilities in managing business communications professionally through product catalog features and automatic messages. This activity proves that WhatsApp can be an effective, easy, and efficient medium for increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs in the digital era.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology in the digital industry era has fundamentally changed the way people interact, work, and do business. In various sectors, particularly the creative economy and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), digitalization is a key factor in a business's success in reaching markets and retaining customers. Indonesians now access the internet via mobile devices and actively use messaging applications for daily activities, including buying and selling. This situation demonstrates that digital communication is no longer merely an add-on, but a core element of modern business strategy.

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have an important role in supporting national economic growth. According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, MSMEs contribute more than 60% to Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ approximately 97% of the workforce. However, in the digital era, consumer behavior has shifted dramatically. They increasingly rely on the internet to search for information, purchase products, and use services. This makes digital transformation a key factor for MSMEs to remain relevant and competitive. This contribution makes MSMEs a strategic sector in inclusive economic development. However, despite this enormous potential, many MSMEs still face obstacles in adopting digital technology, particularly in marketing and business communications.

Digital transformation has become a primary requirement for businesses to maintain competitiveness. Data shows that more than 70% of consumers in Indonesia now seek product information through digital media before making a purchase. This indicates that consumer behavior is increasingly reliant on technology to interact with businesses. This situation requires MSMEs to be able to manage business communications quickly, interactively, and efficiently through digital platforms. However, the digital literacy rate of MSMEs in Indonesia remains relatively low.

The culinary sector is one sector with significant growth potential through digital marketing. However, many businesses have yet to integrate this promotional medium with effective customer communication systems, such as WhatsApp.

This also occurred at Funny Catering, a catering business located in Sawah Besar XI, Semarang City. Funny Catering provides a variety of catering services for office, school, and household events. Based on observations, partners have Instagram accounts but are less active in uploading product photos as a promotional tool. Therefore, this promotion is not fully optimized because it is not connected to responsive customer communication media. Most customers still place orders through regular private messages, without an automated system that can speed up service. This MSME has not optimally utilized technology in its product marketing activities.

The implementation of digital marketing allows buyers to obtain comprehensive product information and conduct transactions online. Furthermore, sellers can monitor and meet consumer needs without time or location constraints. Funny Catering has potential that needs to adapt to developments in marketing technology. Therefore, collaboration between conventional and digital promotional media is crucial for MSMEs to optimize their product marketing efforts (Hendriyani et al., 2020).

Based on research conducted, it was found that MSMEs are still not maximizing their use of digital marketing. This occurs due to a lack of knowledge among MSMEs regarding digital marketing. This problem can be addressed by providing knowledge about the importance of mastering digital marketing in the business world. Internet users in Indonesia have shown a steady increase in growth every year. The increasing number of internet users presents significant potential for MSMEs to utilize online sales platforms. This allows MSMEs to expand their businesses through both offline and online activities (Hendriyani et al., 2020).

WhatsApp can be a strategic solution for partners to improve communication and customer service effectiveness. This application features a product catalog and auto-reply feature that greatly supports promotional activities and customer relations. By combining the use of Instagram Business as a promotional medium and *WhatsApp* as a customer communication channel, Funny Catering has the potential to expand its market reach while enhancing professionalism in service.

WhatsApp business offers features for sharing locations, documents, images, photos, contact lists, and website links. Other additional features owned by *WhatsApp* business include a) Business profile: this feature provides business profile information, business address, contact list, email address, and website; b) Product catalog: this feature is used to add product photos, product descriptions, and also display prices; c) Chat label: this feature is used to manage contacts or chats with chat labels, incoming message categories can be more controlled and directed; d) Automatic messages: this feature provides automatic answers when customers send messages, there are 3 features that can be used, namely away messages, quick replies, greeting messages; e) Message statistics: this feature is used to find out statistics on sent and received messages so that the percentage of messages that reach consumers can be seen. Through *WhatsApp*, it is easier for business actors to share management decisions, plan meetings, use the location sharing feature to provide information to customers, and advertise products through *WhatsApp* (Tri Romadloni et al., 2023).

Digital marketing skills training plays a significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of the MSME sector. Given the shift towards a digital economy, business owners need to understand effective digital marketing strategies. This community service activity aims to develop MSMEs' capabilities in utilizing digital platforms to expand market reach and increase sales. Through training,

workshops, and mentoring, MSMEs are equipped with practical knowledge of appropriate digital marketing strategies. Qualitative evaluations were conducted to assess the effectiveness and impact of the training on participants. The research findings are expected to significantly contribute to local economic growth and MSME independence (Bong et al., 2020).

Mastering digital marketing skills is also crucial for MSMEs in Malang. Many businesses lack an effective understanding of digital marketing, resulting in suboptimal utilization. Without mastering these skills, MSMEs will struggle to compete in an increasingly competitive market. Therefore, digital marketing training and mentoring are crucial first steps. This mentoring is tailored to the individual needs of each business owner. Training results demonstrate an increase in MSME sales skills and frequency, a positive impact of these activities (Wati et al., 2020).

To support this transformation, the Finance and Banking Study Program at Semarang State Polytechnic (Polines) conducted a Community Service activity focused on training and mentoring on WhatsApp utilization to improve promotional effectiveness and customer service at the Funny Catering Semarang MSME. This activity aimed to help partners understand digital communication strategies, optimize WhatsApp usage, and integrate social media with customer service to ensure more efficient and professional promotions.

As a basis for implementing activities, the following is a summary of the problems faced by partners, the solutions offered, and the targets expected to be achieved through this community service program:

Table 1. Problems, Solutions, and Target Achievements of MSMEs

Partner Issues	The solutions offered	Target Achievement
Business promotion is still carried out conventionally and has not been integrated with digital communication platforms.	Training on using WhatsApp for digital promotion with catalog and automated messaging features.	Partners are able to utilize WhatsApp features for promotions and customer communication.
Partners rely solely on personal WhatsApp for product promotion.	Targeted assistance using WhatsApp so that customers	Increased customer interaction and ease of access to ordering services.

	can immediately place orders.	
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IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

Community Service (PKM) activities are carried out in stages for 5 months starting from May 2025 to October 2025. The location of the PKM is at the location of the MSME partner, precisely on Jalan Sawah Besar XI, Kaligawe, Semarang. The service team consists of 13 lecturers involving 3 students from the Banking Finance Study Program, Semarang State Polytechnic. The stages of implementation of the community service activities are arranged in a framework so that the results of the activities can achieve the targets efficiently and effectively as shown in Figure 1 below:

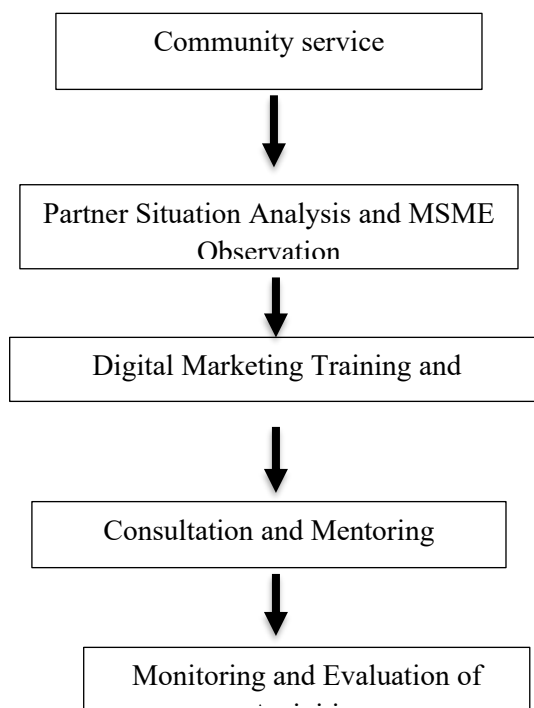


Figure 1. Community Service Activity Stages

The first stage, a situation analysis and observation, was conducted to identify partners' needs and challenges. During this stage, the community service team conducted direct interviews with business owners and observed the existing promotional system. Observations revealed that Funny Catering had a quality product and a loyal customer base, but its promotional strategy was limited. Promotion was conducted solely through Instagram and direct communication via private messages, without utilizing WhatsApp's professional features.

The second phase was digital marketing training and discussion, which focused on improving participants' digital literacy and understanding of modern

marketing strategies. The training was led by Muhammad Sidik, S.Kom., M.Kom., a lecturer and information technology expert with experience in digital marketing. The material provided included an introduction to digital marketing concepts, business communication strategies through social media, and the use of WhatsApp as a promotional and customer service tool. Participants were trained to create digital product catalogs and set up automated messages. The training was conducted interactively, combining discussion methods with hands-on practice using participants' mobile phones.

The third stage is consultation and mentoring, which aims to ensure participants are able to independently implement the training findings. During this stage, the community service team provides intensive mentoring after the training to help participants develop promotional content, create digital catalogs, and efficiently manage customer messages. The mentoring also includes strategic consultations on maintaining consistent digital promotions and customer service.

The final stage is monitoring and evaluation of the activity, which is conducted to assess the effectiveness of the training and the sustainability of WhatsApp implementation in business activities. The evaluation involved completing a questionnaire via Google Forms to gauge participants' understanding and perceptions of the program's benefits. Furthermore, observations were made regarding improvements in customer interaction and communication effectiveness after implementation. The evaluation results indicated that participants experienced increased knowledge and skills in using WhatsApp.

Overall, the community service program ran smoothly and met its intended objectives. Through several stages, the program successfully enhanced the digital capabilities of MSMEs, strengthened their technology-based promotional strategies, and assisted Funny Catering in building a more professional and efficient customer communication system.

DISCUSSION

This community service activity was carried out by a team of lecturers and students from the Finance and Banking Study Program at Semarang State Polytechnic in collaboration with Funny Catering, a small and medium-sized catering business in Semarang. The main objective of this activity was to improve the partners' knowledge and skills in utilizing digital technology, specifically WhatsApp, as an effective communication and promotional tool.

Prior to the implementation of the activity, the community service team conducted observations and a situational analysis to identify the partners' current situation. The analysis revealed that Funny Catering had a Business Instagram account but was less active in uploading promotional content, including product photos. However, this promotion was still one-way and lacked an integrated customer communication system. Ordering was still handled

through traditional private messages, which often resulted in delayed responses to customers.

This community service activity was designed using a participatory and applied approach, directly involving partners in every stage of the activity. The program focused on digital marketing training and mentoring on WhatsApp usage, which is expected to help partners understand the potential of digital media in business development. Speakers presented material on digital marketing concepts, the benefits of communication technology for MSMEs, and an introduction to WhatsApp features such as business profile creation, product catalogs, and auto-reply messages.

The training and mentoring sessions ran smoothly and received positive feedback from participants. Observations showed that all participants were able to follow the activities effectively and understand each topic. Participants successfully experienced the process of creating a business profile and creating a simple product catalog. Through these activities, partners gained an understanding of how WhatsApp can be used to accelerate communication and expand promotional reach.

Previously, partners were unaware that WhatsApp had a business version with more comprehensive features than the regular app. After attending the training, participants began to understand the benefits of each feature, such as the product catalog, which can display menus digitally, and automated messaging that can help provide initial customer responses. During the practical session, participants also created a sample catalog listing some of Funny Catering's main menu items, along with prices and simple photos.

Although partners' use of WhatsApp is still limited to the training phase, this activity has provided them with basic knowledge and skills that they can apply independently in the future. Participants stated that the app is very easy to use and has great potential to help improve promotional efficiency. Furthermore, partners recognized the importance of integrating their Instagram and WhatsApp accounts so that customers can place orders directly through links provided on their social media profiles.

This activity also had a positive impact on participants' motivation and enthusiasm for business development. During the discussion, participants put forward various ideas for utilizing other digital features, such as broadcast messages to send weekly menu information and using digital catalogs as a promotional tool for loyal customers. With increasing awareness of the importance of digital technology, partners demonstrated their readiness to adapt to business developments in the digital era.

Overall, the training results demonstrated an improvement in participants' understanding of basic digital marketing concepts and WhatsApp usage. Initial evaluations using a short questionnaire revealed that 90% of participants felt they had a better understanding of digital media functions after

the training. Participants also noted that the delivery method, coupled with hands-on practice, helped them master the application more quickly. This demonstrates the effectiveness of field-based training methods.

The activity evaluation was conducted to assess the training's success in improving participants' understanding of digital technology. The evaluation was conducted through direct observation, questionnaires, and informal interviews with participants. The evaluation results showed a significant increase in partner knowledge and readiness. Before the training, participants reported not understanding WhatsApp features in detail, but after the training, they were able to re-explain basic functions such as creating business profiles, organizing catalogs, and the benefits of automated messaging.

In addition to increasing knowledge, this activity also impacted participants' attitudes and perspectives on digital technology. Previously, participants believed using business applications required advanced technical skills. However, after trying them out, they realized they were easy to use and highly relevant for small businesses. Partners expressed interest in gradually implementing WhatsApp after the activity, particularly to facilitate customer communication and ordering.

In terms of implementation, this activity was deemed very successful and effective. Participants demonstrated active participation during the training and discussion sessions. The implementation team also assessed that the allocated time was appropriate, although further sessions were needed for implementation guidance. Evaluations from the student participants indicated that this activity provided valuable experience in applying digital marketing knowledge in practice and improved students' social communication skills with the business community.

The evaluation concluded that the training successfully achieved its initial objective, which was to provide business owners with an understanding of the importance of effective digital communication. Although the technology has not yet been fully implemented, this activity represents an initial step towards digital transformation for MSMEs. The community service team also recommended ongoing mentoring to help partners consistently implement WhatsApp features until they become part of their operational systems.

Overall, this community service activity provided significant benefits for both partners and the implementation team. Partners gained new knowledge and preparedness to adapt to digital technology developments, while lecturers and students gained empirical experience in the community empowerment process. Through this activity, it is hoped that Funny Catering's MSME will continue to improve its digital capacity, enabling it to compete and maintain its existence in the era of increasingly rapid digital transformation.



Figure 2. Presentation of material regarding WhatsApp by resource person and lecturer Muhammad Sidik, S. Kom., M.Kom.



Figure 3. Mentoring MSME partners regarding features on WhatsApp by students



Figure 4. Community service team with Funny Catering UMKM partners

CONCLUSION

The community service activities carried out by the Finance and Banking Study Program of Semarang State Polytechnic at the Funny Catering UMKM have run well and achieved their main objective, namely providing increased knowledge and understanding for business actors regarding the use of digital technology in supporting promotional activities and customer service.

Through the training and mentoring provided, partners gained new insights into the importance of implementing digital marketing strategies and the benefits of using WhatsApp as an effective business communication medium. Participants were able to understand the app's basic functions, such as creating business profiles, product catalogs, auto-replies, and social media integration. Although direct implementation has not yet been fully implemented, this activity has successfully raised digital awareness and increased partners' readiness to adapt to technological developments in the business world.

This activity also provided other benefits, such as increased business confidence in utilizing digital media for promotions, and broadened students' and lecturers' insights into the real-world needs of MSMEs. The hands-on, hands-on training proved effective in helping participants grasp the material quickly and accurately. This demonstrates that a participatory approach that actively involves partners can create meaningful and sustainable learning.

Overall, this community service activity successfully marked the first step towards digitalization for Funny Catering. It also demonstrated that simple technology like WhatsApp can be an effective tool for enhancing service professionalism and promoting potential for MSMEs. With the insights gained, it is hoped that Funny Catering can begin implementing this application independently to strengthen its competitiveness and expand its market reach in the era of digital transformation.

SUGGESTION

To ensure the program's sustainability, the community service team recommends several things. First, continued mentoring is needed to ensure partners consistently implement WhatsApp features and adapt them to their daily operational needs. Second, additional training is needed on digital content strategies, such as creating promotional designs, managing customer interactions, and leveraging customer data to increase loyalty. Third, similar activities should be expanded to other MSMEs in the Semarang area to benefit more businesses and prepare them for the digital era.

Furthermore, collaboration between universities, businesses, and local governments needs to be continuously strengthened to ensure the sustainability of technology-based community empowerment programs. This way, community service activities will not only focus on increasing knowledge but also lead to real-world applications that can sustainably enhance the competitiveness and independence of MSMEs.

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