

## COMMUNITY-BASED DIGITAL MARKETING EMPOWERMENT: A HOLISTIC STRATEGY FOR EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN MSMEs IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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### Article History

Received : February 25<sup>th</sup> 2025

Revised : February 26<sup>th</sup> 2025

Accepted : February 27<sup>th</sup> 2025

Published : February 28<sup>th</sup> 2025

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### Cite This Article:

Endang Styawati, & Eka Rahayuningsih. (2025). COMMUNITY-BASED DIGITAL MARKETING EMPOWERMENT: A HOLISTIC STRATEGY FOR EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN MSMEs IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. *Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Manajemen*, 4(1), 12–20. <https://doi.org/10.56127/jekma.v4i1.2530>

### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.56127/jekma.v4i1.2530>

**Abstract:** Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have significantly contributed to the development of digitalization, which has spurred economic growth globally, including in Southeast Asia. However, Why rural women-led MSMEs face considerable challenges, such as limited digital literacy, the double burden of work and domestic responsibilities, and restricted access to the digital ecosystem. This study aims to develop a comprehensive community-based strategy to support village women's MSMEs through digital marketing. The article presents a conceptual model for "Community-Based Digital Marketing Empowerment." This strategy integrates technology, gender empowerment, and social sustainability, transcending disciplinary boundaries. Employing a qualitative approach, the study includes case studies from Jono Village in Sugihwaras District and Bojonegoro Regency, alongside a review of relevant Southeast Asian literature and data gathered from in-depth interviews and literature reviews. The findings suggest that community-based approaches can enhance the competitiveness of MSMEs while fostering social cohesion through collaboration, collective digital capacity building, and the incorporation of local values. This model aims to contribute to global literature on the digitalization of MSMEs and promote humanitarian values in the digital age.

**Keywords:** MSMEs, Digitalization, Rural Women.

## INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are an important part of the structure of the world economy and play a major role in creating jobs, innovation, and socio-economic stability in many countries, including in Southeast Asia.(Harvie, 2019) The acceleration of digital transformation in the last twenty years has significantly changed the way MSMEs operate and interact with the market.(Tambunan, 2019) This has opened up new opportunities to improve efficiency, convenience, and competitiveness.(Kallmuenzer et al., 2025) Some people believe that digitalization can improve economic inclusion by allowing previously marginalized groups to participate, including women living in rural areas.(Kallmuenzer et al., 2025) However, there are still real structural inequities behind the story of these technological advancements. In many rural areas of Indonesia, such as Bojonegoro, women's MSMEs face many challenges, including a lack of digital literacy, limited resources, relentless household chores and social inequality that prevent them from participating in the digital economy.(Tambunan, 2019)

This phenomenon shows that digitalization does not automatically provide equal opportunities to all groups of people. Technology can be a key factor in growth, but its

success depends largely on the extent to which local communities can adapt and integrate technology in their socio-cultural contexts.(Rahman et al., 2023; Zant et al., 2023) In this context, a community-based approach to women's empowerment is increasingly important because this approach emphasizes community togetherness, mutual help, reminding each other between community members so that mastery of technology can be achieved together by consistently gathering and following the directions of the companions, and it cannot be separated that the preservation of local values can be built with this community base, and of course the development of community solidarity, which is the basis for the sustainability of the village economy.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 9 (Innovation and Infrastructure), are in line with these methods around the world. Therefore, understanding how the digitalization of village women MSMEs is a strategic step to realize an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable digital transformation in the Southeast Asian region.(Aminullah et al., 2024)

Despite the growing popularity of digitalization around the world, MSMEs managed by women in rural areas still face many complex challenges.(Yadav et al., 2022) Low digital literacy limits their ability to access technology, utilize digital media for promotion, and understand consumer behavior on the internet.(Mwansa et al., 2025) In addition, women face a double burden: doing all the household chores and the economic demands of helping their husbands' finances that force women to be productive. As a result, they don't have enough time or energy to develop digital business innovations. Not being able to access supporting ecosystems such as training, business networks, and technological infrastructure makes the difference between potential and reality even greater. This condition poses a paradox: Digitalization, which is supposed to empower, risks deepening social exclusion if it is not accompanied by an empowerment strategy that is community-based and sensitive to local cultural and gender contexts. Thus, this study aims to develop a holistic community-based strategy that can encourage the empowerment of village women MSMEs by using digital marketing effectively and sustainably. By integrating social and cultural aspects into the digital empowerment framework, this approach seeks to go beyond the technological paradigm.

The study resulted in a conceptual model of "Community-Based Digital Marketing Empowerment", which combines elements of technology, women's empowerment, and social sustainability. This research is expected to provide an empirical understanding relevant to the local context and contribute to the global literature on inclusive digitalization and community-based social transformation. This will be achieved through a qualitative approach based on case studies in Jono Village, Sugihwaras District, Bojonegoro Regency, as well as conducting a literature review of Southeast Asian regional literature. Previous studies have shown that most research on the digitalization of MSMEs in Southeast Asia focuses on economic and technological aspects without considering social and gender aspects as a whole.(Fizzanty & Maulana, 2024) Technology-focused methods often ignore the social structures and local principles that determine how effective technology is at the grassroots level.(Zant et al., 2023) In addition, many MSME empowerment programs are still individual and temporary, focusing on technical training without building collective capacity and sustainable social solidarity.(Tambunan, 2019) These limitations suggest that a new theoretical framework is needed, one that combines digital technologies, women's empowerment, and community empowerment in an interconnected system. Indonesia, with its cultural and

social diversity, offers an important contribution to filling that gap and enriching global perspectives in the study of digital empowerment.

Using the "Community-Based Digital Marketing Empowerment" model, this research presents conceptual novelty. This model places communities as centers for digital transformation and the main agent for the economic empowerment of rural women. This method is cross-disciplinary and participatory, combining the theories of digital marketing, women's empowerment, and community-based development in one related framework. In contrast to the previous model that emphasized individual adaptation to technology, this study emphasizes collective transformation through social collaboration, better shared digital literacy, and strengthening local values. Academically, this research expands the discourse on inclusive digitalization and human-centered innovation. Practically, this research provides strategic guidelines for policymakers, MSME companion institutions, and civil society organizations to make sustainable and gender-equitable digitalization interventions. As a result, this research not only helps build academic literature but also aids humanitarian-focused development practices in the digital age.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this research is to gain a deep understanding of village women's empowerment practices through the digitization of MSMEs. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth analysis of social experiences, local values, and community dynamics that cannot be quantitatively measured.(Okoko et al., 2023) This study combines the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method with an analysis of the Southeast Asian regional literature to provide a rich and interdisciplinary view of the issues studied. This is done to increase the contextual validity and depth of the analysis. The place of this research is Jono Village, which is located in Sugihwaras District, Bojonegoro Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The socio-economic characteristics of this rural village are very strong, and there is a lot of potential for local MSMEs, especially batik and opak products managed by housewives. In this study, ten (10) women working in small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) were selected by purposive sampling based on several criteria. They include housewives, run small businesses independently, have experience marketing products using digital media, and are involved in community social activities. By selecting these locations and informants, the goal is to provide a representative picture of the social realities and challenges of digitalization in a community-based economy.

Two main approaches, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and literature review, were used to collect data.(Khan & Abedin, 2022) The FGD was conducted in two structured discussion sessions lasting approximately 90 minutes each, and was guided by moderators using semi-structured question guides. Four main themes are central to the discussion: the use of digital technologies in marketing, the role of communities in enhancing digital capabilities, gender and social barriers, and the role of local values in business collaboration.(Riemer et al., 2019) This method (FGD) allows for dynamic interaction between participants, which results in reflective and contextual data about collective experiences perempuan desa.(Khan & Abedin, 2022) In addition, a literature analysis was conducted to look at studies, policy reports, and scientific works related to the digitalization of MSMEs and women's empowerment in Southeast Asia. The results of this study serve as a conceptual basis and empirical comparison to field findings.

Thematic analysis created by Braun and Clarke (2006) is used to analyze data in six stages: (1) familiarization with the data; (2) the provision of initial codes; (3) grouping the code into themes; (4) theme review and validation; (5) naming and definition of themes; and (6) the preparation of analytical narratives.(Braun & Clarke, 2006) The analysis is carried out inductively by ensuring that there is a relationship between empirical data and the theoretical framework of Community-Based Digital Marketing Empowerment.(Joshi et al., 2025) To maintain the validity of the data, triangulation of sources and methods was used, including individual interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) results, and supporting literature.(Sciberras & Dingli, 2023) In addition, member reviews are conducted to ensure the interpretation of participants' mothers' experiences Each step of research is carried out by considering the principles of academic ethics.(Almusaed et al., 2025) Before the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) activity began, each participant was given clear information about the research objectives and asked to provide informed consent. To protect participants' privacy and social security, their identities are kept anonymous. To maintain methodological validity, an analysis process, known as a trail audit, is recorded, and carefully thought out about possible interpretive biases. This research is expected to strengthen the global literature on digital transformation that is inclusive, gender-equitable, and socially sustainability-oriented by providing conceptual and empirical contributions on how community-based digital marketing can be an instrument of socio-economic empowerment for rural women.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Table**

The thematic analysis applied through six stages Braun and Clarke identified three main themes that became the conceptual framework for village women's empowerment through community-based digital marketing, namely: (1) Social Collaboration and Community Support, (2) Collective Digital Capacity Building, and (3) Integration of Local Values and Spirituality in the Digital Economy. These three themes show that digital transformation at the grassroots level will not materialize without consequences. Women MSME actors in Jono Village build an informal network based on trust and togetherness in the production of opak and batik, share basic digital skills, and utilize social media to expand the market

Table 1. Results of Thematic Analysis of Community-Based Digital Empowerment

<i>Main Theme</i>	<i>Description of Field Findings</i>	<i>ImpactOnEmpowerment</i>
<i>Social Collaboration and Community Support</i>	The existence of informal learning groups and collaboration between women's MSMEs in online promotion.	Social cohesion and increased mutual trust are formed.

<i>Collective Digital Capability Enhancement</i>	Digital literacy is enhanced through shared learning and community-based training.	Increase the confidence, efficiency, and creativity of digital marketing.
<i>Integration of Local Values and Spirituality</i>	The values of <i>mutual cooperation</i> , honesty, and sincerity are integrated into digital business strategies.	Produce ethical and sustainable social entrepreneurship models.

The results support the view that digital technology used through value-based social interaction is more effective in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs than individualistic methods.(Van Veldhoven & Vanthienen, 2022) This is in line with the Islamic principle of *ta'awun* (help) as stated by Allah in the Qur'an. Al-Ma'idah [5]:2: "*And help yourselves in virtue and piety, and do not help each other in sins and enmity.*" The results of the study incorporate the Community-Based Digital Marketing Empowerment (EDM-BC) model to expand discussions on community-based empowerment and digital transformation theory. Gender, technology, and social-spiritual values support each other in this model.

According to the EDM-BC model, access to technology and the social and moral networks of the community play an important role in digital empowerment. This model can be used to build regional policies, participatory digital training, and values-based women's empowerment curricula. This model also represents the spirit of Islam's *maslahah* (common benefit), which emphasizes that technological progress must improve social well-being and economic justice. The results of this study cannot be generalized because they are only limited to the local context in Jono Village, Sugihwaras District. However, using a case study methodology allows for a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics involved in the digitization of women's micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). In addition, although data triangulation has been conducted through a study of the Southeast Asian regional literature to strengthen the findings, the use of group focus and in-depth interviews may lead to interpretive bias. Critical reflection shows that digital empowerment is not just a matter of technology; It also relates to aspects of social justice, access, and inclusion, which need to be continuously examined in various contexts.

Research shows that community-based digitalization strengthens women's position in local economies and strengthens social cohesion and human values. Digital transformation is a tool to expand social participation, reduce the digital divide, and uphold digital gender justice.(Bentley et al., 2024) Regardless, there is a moral responsibility to ensure that the use of technology does not perpetuate social discrimination, as stated in the Qur'an. An-Nahl [16]: 90, Islamic ethics is the basis that allows digital innovation to be carried out with the principles of justice and profit.

*"Indeed, Allah commands (you) to be just and to do good, to give to relatives, and Allah forbids evil deeds, iniquity, and enmity."*

This verse contains a moral message that justice (*'adl*) and virtue (*ihsan*) must be the basic principles of every form of social and economic transformation, including in the digital realm. The social implication is the need for ethical and local value-based digital



empowerment policies, so that digitalization not only increases economic efficiency, but also strengthens the dignity, solidarity, and spirituality of the community.

According to this study, community-based digital marketing is a complex process that combines technology, social, and spirituality to encourage village women to be better. A humanistic, inclusive, and equitable development model is created when the practice of digitalization is combined with local values and Islamic teachings.

Thus, Community-Based Digital Marketing Empowerment (EDM-BC) not only makes an empirical contribution to the literature on the digitization of MSMEs, but also offers a transdisciplinary approach that affirms the close relationship between economic empowerment, social solidarity, and Qur'anic humanitarian values.

## CONCLUSION

Digitalization is a social and cultural transformation rooted in local values of humanity, collaboration, and spirituality, according to the study. It is not just a technological process. Through the application of a community-based approach, women working in MSMEs in Jono Village have succeeded in increasing competitiveness and economic independence through the integration of collective digital literacy, social support, and local Islamic values.

The study found that the Community-Based Digital Marketing Empowerment (EDM-BC) model shows that women's digital empowerment power depends not only on their technological capabilities, but also on social cohesion and gender justice based on ethical and spiritual values. The EDM-BC model is relevant to be applied as a transdisciplinary approach in the development of MSMEs in rural areas because of the integration between technological, social, and religious aspects.

In addition, these findings add to the international literature on community-based digital empowerment by providing a new perspective that places Islamic values such as help-help (ta'awun), justice ('adl), and social usefulness (maslahah) as epistemological foundations in the humanistic digitalization process.

As Allah says in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13:

*"O people, verily We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another."*

This fact reflects the importance of community-based empowerment: that diversity and cooperation are the basis of shared progress. Therefore, this research encourages the development of a new paradigm that balances technological innovation, social solidarity, and spiritual values, in addition to emphasizing the importance of women's empowerment in the context of digitalization.

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