



Strengthening Visual Identity and Digital Skills of MSMEs through Participatory Design Interventions

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Branding
Canva
Comunnity Service
Digital marketing
MSME

This community service project aimed to improve the promotional capacity and brand visibility of Percetakan, Kaos, dan Sablon Kontras, a local MSME in Madiun, Indonesia, which faced persistent challenges in digital marketing, visual branding, and customer engagement. The objective was to address these issues by implementing an integrated strategy that combined the development of digital media, printed promotional tools, and practical training in content creation using accessible platforms.

The study adopted a participatory action research approach, involving the business owner in each phase from problem identification to media production and skill-building workshops. Key outputs included a curated Instagram feed, promotional videos, banners, brochures, and packaging designs. In addition, workshops on Canva and CapCut were conducted to transfer digital skills to the partner. As a result, the business recorded a twofold increase in digital engagement, improved customer perception, and demonstrated the ability to independently manage promotional content. Feedback from the partner also indicated increased confidence and motivation to expand market reach.

The novelty of this project lies in its hybrid model: combining participatory design thinking, low-cost digital tools, and knowledge transfer within a short-term academic engagement. Unlike typical service-learning interventions that focus solely on output, this project emphasized sustainable impact through skill empowerment. The approach presents a scalable model for empowering MSMEs through university-led digital branding strategies, particularly in underserved regions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are a vital backbone of Indonesia's economy, contributing to over 60% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absorbing more than 90% of the country's workforce (Kamar Dagang Indonesia, 2023). However, many MSMEs face significant challenges in the areas of marketing, branding, and digital adaptation, especially in the face of rapid technological development and increasingly digital consumer behavior (Hendrawan et al., 2024). One such enterprise is *Percetakan, Kaos, dan Sablon Kontras*, a family owned business in Madiun, East Java, specializing in custom printing, screen printing, and merchandise production. Despite its long-standing presence and quality products, the business continues to face stagnation due to poor promotional strategy, underdeveloped digital media presence, and lack of professionally designed visual branding assets.

In today's digital transformation era, platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have become critical tools for consumer engagement and brand awareness, particularly for businesses in the creative industry (Kapoor et al., 2018). Studies show that MSMEs adopting content-based marketing and digital storytelling are more likely to capture consumer interest than those relying on traditional promotional approaches (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Yet,

one of the main barriers faced by MSMEs is their limited capacity and digital literacy in managing these platforms effectively (Athia et al., 2023).

Moreover, visual communication plays a key role in branding. Well-designed graphics not only enhance brand perception but also foster consumer trust and emotional connection (Landa, 2019). As such, strengthening visual branding through tailored graphic design becomes a critical strategy in helping MSMEs become more competitive and visible in saturated markets. In response to these challenges, a community service initiative was conducted by a university team to design and implement strategic promotional media for *Percetakan, Kaos, dan Sablon Kontras*. This initiative did not merely offer a practical solution for short-term marketing needs but also focused on capacity building through design training and content creation workshops. The collaborative and participatory approach aimed to ensure that the business could sustain its promotional efforts independently in the future.

This paper documents the methods, outcomes, and implications of the community engagement program, offering a model for university-driven MSME empowerment that bridges academic knowledge with real-world application in the field of communication and design.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This community service program employed a participatory action research (PAR) approach to empower *Percetakan, Kaos, dan Sablon Kontras*, a local MSME in Madiun, through the collaborative development of promotional media. PAR was chosen as the underlying methodology due to its emphasis on active community involvement, mutual learning, and context specific problem solving (Ishaq et al., 2025). The program was conducted over an eight month period, from April to November 2025, and consisted of three main phases: needs assessment, design and implementation, and monitoring with capacity building.

The first phase focused on problem identification through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the business owner and staff. This session allowed the academic team to map out the business's current promotional challenges, which included the lack of an organized digital marketing strategy, absence of consistent brand visuals, and limited knowledge of content creation. These insights were transcribed and thematically analyzed to establish a focused framework for intervention (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Following the assessment, the second phase involved the design and production of promotional materials tailored to the business's identity and target audience. The team produced a variety of digital assets such as Instagram feeds, reels, digital catalogues, and promotional videos. Offline media, including brochures, banners, and branded packaging, were also developed to complement the digital campaign. These materials were created using professional tools including Adobe Illustrator, Canva, and CapCut. All designs were reviewed collaboratively with the business owner to ensure aesthetic relevance and brand consistency.

The final phase emphasized sustainability through training and evaluation. A series of workshops were conducted to train the business owner and staff in content planning, visual editing, and basic social media optimization, including SEO practices and audience targeting techniques (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Post-implementation evaluation was carried out through interviews and observation of social media performance. Key indicators

included improved online engagement, autonomous use of design templates, and increased confidence in managing promotional content.

This structured and participatory method ensured that the intervention was not only responsive to the business's needs but also provided long-term value by enhancing their digital competence. The entire process was documented for academic publication and as a model for future MSME community empowerment programs.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This community service program initiative catalyzed substantial improvements in *Percetakan, Kaos, dan Sablon Kontras* through a structured strategy that integrated digital content production, printed promotional tools, and capacity building. These efforts directly addressed the initial problem formulation namely the lack of digital marketing strategy, weak visual identity, and limited promotional skills which were identified during the needs assessment stage.

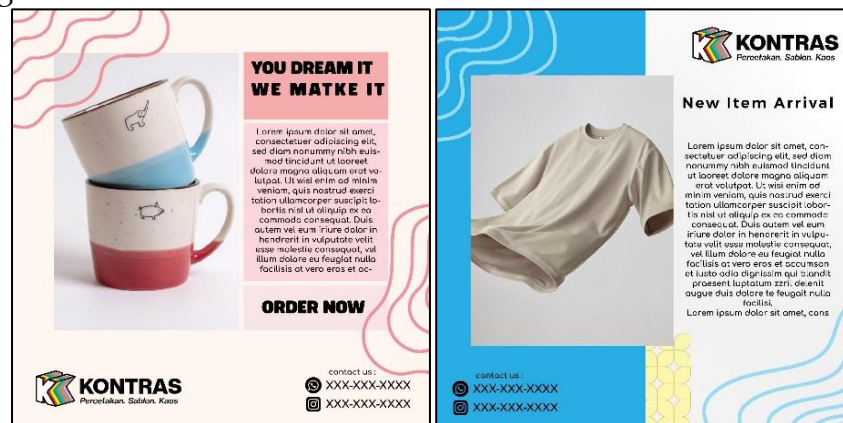


Figure 1. Instagram Feed Template

The digital media intervention delivered an integrated Instagram campaign that included feed designs and story templates, a digital product catalogue, and short promotional videos. These materials, when published strategically, led to a more than twofold increase in audience engagement, particularly in terms of comments, likes, and direct messages. These findings are consistent with recent studies demonstrating that social media marketing contributes significantly to SMEs' competitiveness and customer outreach (Xavier et al., 2024). Furthermore, the alignment between visual identity and storytelling on digital platforms strengthens brand trust and consumer loyalty (Dwivedi et al., 2021), both of which were reflected in partner feedback and improved digital presence.

Alongside digital efforts, printed promotional materials: banners, brochures, product labels, and tags were developed with a consistent visual identity. These tools supported offline interactions with walk-in customers and events, reinforcing the brand across both physical and digital touchpoints. Research confirms that consistent and professional branding elevates customer trust and purchase intent, especially in small business contexts (Shams et al., 2024).

A summary of the observed outcomes and their corresponding impact is presented in the table below:

Table 1. Summary of The Observed Outcomes

Domain	Outcome	Supporting Research
Visual Branding	Improved customer trust and brand consistency	Shams et al., 2024
Content Autonomy	Business independently created new design using Canva and Capcut	Prihandono et al., 2024
Capacity Development	Staff gained skills in post scheduling	Pambreni & Ayu Sudari, 2025

Capacity building formed a central component of this initiative. Through practical workshops on Canva and Capcut, the business owner and staff learned to produce content independently and understood basic principles of post scheduling, copywriting, and platform analytics. As a result, the business began creating and managing its digital content autonomously an achievement that reflects findings (Prihandono et al., 2024), who assert that improving digital skills among MSMEs leads to more sustainable digital transformation. Other studies emphasize that accessible tools combined with localized training can drive long-term resilience among small business operators (Pambreni & Ayu Sudari, 2025).

Moreover, qualitative feedback from the business partner indicated a strong motivational impact. The co-creation process and visible improvements in brand perception cultivated a sense of ownership and professional pride. These intangible outcomes, while often overlooked, are critical to the long-term success of university community collaborations (von Jacobi et al., 2024). They demonstrate that effective community service initiatives go beyond delivering content they empower local actors to manage and evolve their business practices independently.

In conclusion, this intervention successfully addressed the promotional and branding challenges identified at the outset. The project's integrative model combining design implementation, digital training, and partner participation aligned with the principles of participatory community development and has proven effective in strengthening the competitiveness of local MSMEs in the digital economy.

4. CONCLUSION

This project was grounded in a clear and urgent thesis: that micro and small enterprises, despite their creative potential and economic importance, often struggle with visibility and brand identity in an increasingly digital marketplace. By addressing this challenge through an integrated design and digital empowerment approach, this community service initiative demonstrated how academic expertise can generate real, measurable impact.

The intervention produced more than just aesthetic deliverables it strengthened the business's digital presence, improved customer engagement, and empowered the owner and staff with practical skills to continue building their brand independently. Through

strategic media design, co-creation, and training, the project delivered a solution that was not only relevant in the short term but also sustainable in the long run. The business partner evolved from a passive actor into an engaged brand communicator capable of adapting to the demands of digital entrepreneurship.

What makes this project unique is its commitment to transformation rather than transaction. It did not merely provide help, it built capacity. It did not stop at outcomes, it fostered ownership. This participatory and practical model can serve as a blueprint for similar university-driven programs aimed at empowering local businesses through design, technology, and collaboration.

As higher education institutions seek more meaningful ways to connect with communities, this project reminds us that true impact happens when knowledge is not only shared, but also transferred, applied, and sustained. That is where community service becomes community change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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