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Empowering Local Tailors with E-Catalog Creation and Digital Marketing: a Case Study from SMEs at Demak

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A B S T R A C T

This program is designed to boost the digital prowess of tailors in the Semarang-Demak toll area, mentored by PT PPSD. Focused on e-catalog creation and digital marketing, it aims to sharpen their online marketing and cataloging skills. The goal is to widen their market presence, increase sales, and adapt to evolving digital trends. The initiative includes foundational training in e-catalog tools and digital marketing tactics, along with practical social media promotion strategies. Interactive workshops and mentorship sessions further reinforce this learning. By fostering collaboration between PT PPSD, the tailors, and our support team, we are not just driving immediate sales growth; we are equipping these artisans with enduring skills to thrive in today's competitive marketplace.

INTRODUCTION

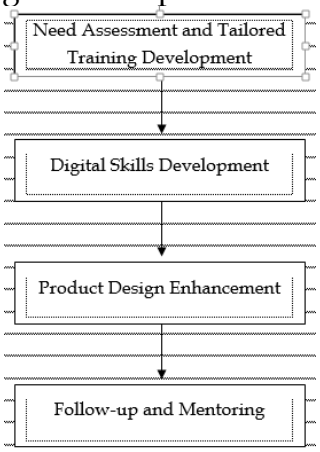
The textile industry introduces over a hundred new products yearly, reflecting the ever-evolving consumer trends included in Indonesia. Regarding the confection sector, according to Statista.com (2023), the most popular product categories in e-commerce in Indonesia are clothing at 68%, followed by shoes (51%) and cosmetics and body care (42%). It indicates that the garment industry dominates the most purchased products in e-commerce. Besides, Indonesia's garment industry plays a significant economic role, contributing to employment, export, and industrial development. However, this condition comes at a cost. As consumer spending increases, so does the volume of textiles discarded at the end of their life cycle, exacerbating the already critical issue of landfill pollution. This growing accumulation in landfills is a significant environmental and health hazard. The disposal process sees some materials decompose while others linger as persistent, non-degradable pollutants. The breakdown of these materials releases toxic greenhouse gases and contributes to water pollution, both directly and indirectly. In an age where land is becoming increasingly scarce and valuable, the textile industry must adopt more effective waste management practices to reduce reliance on landfills (Aishwariya, 2018). According to Aprayon.com (2022), over 92 million tons of textile waste find their way into landfills and rivers each year, despite the potential for recycling up to 95%. As consumer demand for clothing keeps increasing, tackling this problem becomes crucial. One avenue for resolving this lies in reclaiming and reusing this waste. However, to address this challenge, the textile industry must cultivate new knowledge in waste collection systems, return logistics, and sorting infrastructure.

In parallel, constructing the 27-kilometre Semarang-Demak Toll Road in Northern Java is a testament to strategic infrastructure development aimed at improving accessibility and addressing the region's high traffic density. This project, which includes the integration with the sea dike along the North Coast of Semarang, from Kaligawe to Kali Sayung in Demak District, is primarily designed to combat flood risks, tidal waves, and land subsidence in the eastern part of North Semarang (Mufti, 2019). However, infrastructure development often brings unintended consequences, such as air and noise pollution, which adversely affect residents and small businesses (Welde & Tveter, 2022). In response to these challenges, PT Pembangunan Perumahan Semarang Demak (PT PPSD), in collaboration with various universities, has initiated a program to support local SMEs affected by the toll road construction. This initiative focuses on artisans creating pillows and souvenirs from fabric waste, commonly known as “scrap fabric”. This material, a byproduct of garment and textile production, is characterised by its diverse shapes, sizes, colours, patterns, and fabric types, offering a unique aesthetic to the products crafted by these artisans. A study from Asia Pacific Rayons shows that Indonesia is one of the excellent sources of recyclable textiles, followed by Bangladesh. These two countries can produce around 340 kilotons of cotton and 286 kilotons of polycotton per year (Aprayon.com, 2022).

The need for sustainable practices in textile manufacturing is more pressing than ever, focusing on creating zero waste by recycling and repurposing textile waste into new, usable products such as building materials. Such recycling practices would reduce dependency on primary resources, paving the way for a more sustainable lifestyle (Ahmad et al., 2016). The versatility and uniqueness of fabric scraps make them ideal for various creative and craft projects. Artisans can harness their creativity to produce multiple unique and functional items, from patchwork blankets and decorative pillows to DIY bags, coasters, tablecloths, table runners, and dolls. However, moving towards a circular economy in textiles, mainly through fabric waste recycling, presents several challenges. The quality of scrap fabric varies, affecting the durability of the recycled products. Designing appealing products from limited and varied scrap pieces requires constant creativity. The availability of fabric scraps for complete products could be more consistent, posing challenges for fulfilling large orders. The perceived value and pricing of recycled products are often lower than those made from new materials, impacting consumer acceptance and sales. Furthermore, the construction of the Semarang-Demak toll road has created marketing challenges for these artisans, who now struggle to display their products in local stores, highlighting the need for a robust network to reach a broader consumer base (Dissanayake & Weerasinghe, 2021; Harmsen et al., 2021). The primary objective of our community service project, especially for the tailoring SMEs mentored by PT PPSD, is to inspire and expand their perspectives in enhancing the quality and marketing of their scrap fabric products through digitalisation, such as e-catalogue creation and digital marketing platforms. We also aim to strengthen their product branding, increasing brand awareness and sales.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

This community service initiative, launched in the Semarang-Demak region, was explicitly designed to support local communities impacted by the construction of the Sayung-Demak Toll Road. From October to December 2023, the project engaged a diverse group of 20 local tailors and artisans for three months. These participants, a mix of seasoned and emerging talents, shared a standard expertise in working with scrap fabric.



Picture 1. Flow of Problem Solving

Phase 1: Needs Assessment and Tailored Training Development

The project started with an in-depth needs assessment to pinpoint these artisans' unique challenges and requirements. This crucial step informed the customisation of our training modules, ensuring they were precisely aligned with the artisans' needs. The insights gained from this assessment were instrumental in shaping a responsive and effective training program.

Phase 2: Digital Skills Development

The training was bifurcated into two core components: digital skills development. This segment was dedicated to enhancing the artisans' proficiency in digital realms, crucial for their business growth in an increasingly online marketplace. It encompassed comprehensive training in e-catalogue creation and digital marketing strategies, strongly emphasising leveraging social media platforms for business promotion. Participants were immersed in practical, hands-on sessions, utilising various software tools for e-catalogue design and engaging in interactive online marketing workshops. This phase was pivotal in equipping the artisans with the digital tools and knowledge necessary to navigate and succeed in the digital marketplace.

Phase 3: Product Design Enhancement

Parallel to digital training, the program also focused on product design enhancement. Workshops were organised to explore innovative ways of utilising scrap fabric and transforming it into unique and marketable products. These creative sessions, led by experts in textile design and upcycling practices, provided a platform for the artisans to explore and experiment with diverse design possibilities. The outcome was an impressive array of products, ranging from intricately designed patchwork blankets and decorative pillows to environmentally friendly bags, each reflecting the unique creativity and skill of the artisans.

Phase 4: Ensuring Sustainability through Follow-Up and Mentoring

To cement the sustainability of the newly acquired skills, the program included follow-up sessions and ongoing mentoring. This continuous support system was crucial in reinforcing the learning outcomes and assisting the artisans in effectively applying their new skills to their business practices. The mentoring sessions, in particular, offered personalised guidance, addressing individual challenges and fostering a supportive environment for growth and development. The project emphasised creating a collaborative ecosystem, bringing together PT PPSD, the local artisans, and our support team. This collaborative approach facilitated immediate improvements in sales and laid the foundation for the artisans to develop sustainable competencies, enabling them to thrive in the modern, digital-centric market.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service initiative, focused on elevating the digital skills of Demak's tailors, spanned from October to December 2023. Tailored to meet the unique needs of the tailoring community, the program aimed to facilitate their transition into the digital marketing realm. The participation process unfolded in several key stages:

Training on Digital Catalog Creation

Over the first two weeks, we focused on training ten local tailors in creating digital catalogues. The training utilised essential digital tools such as smartphones. The participants, primarily traditional tailors, initially had limited exposure to digital cataloguing. The training emphasised user-friendly design tools and techniques for showcasing their products effectively online. The main challenge was simplifying the technical aspects of digital catalogue creation for easy adoption.

Picture 2. Digital Catalog Creation Workshop

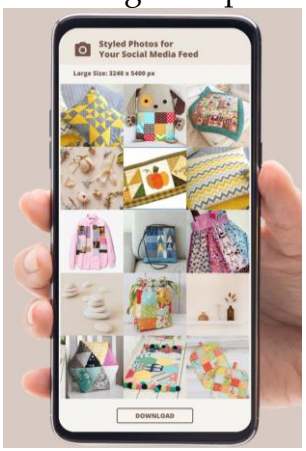
Introduction to Online Marketing

The subsequent phase involved introducing the tailors to online marketing. This included leveraging social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram to promote their products. The training sessions were interactive, with practical exercises on creating engaging posts and digital advertisements. The enthusiasm was palpable, as many tailors were excited about the potential reach of their products through these new channels.

Picture 3. Online Marketing Training Session

Setting Up Online Business Profiles

Post-training, the tailors were assisted in setting up their business profiles on various e-commerce platforms. This step was crucial in transitioning from traditional to digital sales channels. The initial challenge here was familiarising the tailors with the functionalities of these platforms. However, with hands-on guidance, they were able to start listing their products online.



Picture 4. Tailors Creating Online Business Profiles

Feedback and Progress Tracking

A follow-up session was held in late December to assess the progress and gather feedback. The tailors reported increased inquiries and interest in their products since going digital. Some challenges noted were maintaining regular online activity and effectively engaging with the online customer base.

Picture 4. Feedback Session with Participating Tailors

Evaluation of Digital Integration

The program concluded with an evaluation of the digital integration process. The results indicated a positive trend in adopting digital tools among the tailors. There was a noticeable improvement in their online presence and customer interactions. The program's success was evident in the immediate sales boost and the potential for sustainable business growth in the digital marketplace. In summary, the project successfully initiated a significant shift in how local tailors in Demak approach the market, equipping them with essential digital skills to expand their businesses in the evolving digital landscape.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The community service project in the Semarang-Demak region, aimed at enhancing the digital capabilities of local tailors, has yielded significant results. Numerous small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need help to expand and often face bankruptcy due to market saturation. This prompts these businesses to adopt digitalisation measures (Cahyani et al., 2023). Utilising online marketplaces and social media as marketing tools represents their approach to digitisation. Moreover, digital SMEs must engage with internet users to effectively promote their products and services. Over three months, the program successfully:

1. It enhanced the digital literacy of traditional tailors, enabling them to create digital catalogues and utilise online marketing tools effectively.
2. They facilitated the transition of these artisans from conventional sales methods to digital platforms, broadening their market reach.
3. We have positively impacted the tailors' ability to attract and engage with a broader customer base through digital channels.
4. We highlight the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in the rapidly evolving digital marketplace.

The project improved immediate sales and laid a foundation for sustainable business growth, indicating a promising future for these artisans in the digital economy. Based on the outcomes of this project, the following recommendations are proposed further to support the tailoring community in Demak and similar regions:

1. Ongoing Digital Skills Training: Continuous training programs should be implemented to keep the artisans updated with digital marketing trends and tools.
2. Mentorship and Support Networks: Establishing mentorship programs and support networks can provide tailors with ongoing guidance and assistance in navigating digital challenges.
3. Collaboration with E-commerce Platforms: Building partnerships with e-commerce platforms can offer more opportunities for these artisans to showcase and sell their products to a broader audience.
4. Community Engagement Initiatives: Engaging the local community through workshops and events can raise awareness about the unique products offered by these tailors, fostering a supportive local customer base.
5. Sustainability Practices: Encouraging and training artisans in sustainable practices, such as recycling and upcycling, can enhance the environmental value of their products and appeal to eco-conscious consumers.

In conclusion, the project underscores the transformative power of digital integration in traditional businesses and the need for ongoing support and adaptation to ensure long-term success in the digital marketplace.

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