

## Optimizing Branding and Sales through Digital Influencer Collaboration at Mie Omahan Wangkal MSMEs

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**Abstract**— *Mie Omahan Wangkal MSMEs are one of the micro business actors that face obstacles in expanding market reach, mainly due to weak branding and digital promotion strategies. The main problem lies in the lack of optimal use of social media, the absence of a consistent visual identity, and the lack of cooperation with local influencers. To answer these challenges, the implementation team initiated a community service program through the Community Partnership Program (PKM) scheme which prioritizes a collaborative and participatory approach. Service activities are carried out through observation stages, branding and promotion strategy planning, training and direct practice that actively involves partners. The solutions offered include market segmentation mapping, social media management training, creative visual content production, and facilitation of collaboration with local micro-influencers. The results of the program implementation showed a significant increase in digital engagement through social media, the formation of a more professional visual identity, and an increase in the understanding of partners in managing promotions independently. The short-term impact that can be seen is the increase in consumer interaction with MSME products, while in the long term it is expected to expand market reach and increase sales volume. This program proves that training-based and mentoring-based interventions are able to strengthen the competitiveness of MSMEs through optimizing digital branding strategies that are adaptive and relevant to market needs.*

**Keywords**— *branding; influencers; MSMEs*

### 1 Introduction

UMKM *Stubborn House Noodles* is a micro business engaged in the culinary sector, especially in the processing of noodle-based foods. This business is located in Wangkal Village, Gading District, Probolinggo Regency, East Java, and is managed independently by local business actors. Omahan Wangkal Noodle products are known by the surrounding community because they serve processed noodles with a typical home-made taste, combined with

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fresh and natural local ingredients. Small businesses like this have an important role in the local economy and strengthening the economic resilience of the community (Prasetyo & Kistanti, 2020).

Although it is still small-scale, these MSMEs already have regular customers from the villagers and surrounding sub-districts. The main sales are carried out offline, either through dine-in services and delivery with limited reach. Established in early 2020 as a home-based business, Mie Omahan Wangkal was able to survive and continue to grow despite being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Purwana et al., 2021).

The main advantage of this product lies in the savory taste of the noodles and is made manually without preservatives, so it is safe to be consumed by various groups. In addition, the variety of menus offered is quite attractive, such as the prices offered are also very affordable, making these MSMEs have the potential to reach a wider market if accompanied by the right marketing strategy (Sutrisno et al., 2023).

However, this potential has not been optimally exploited due to limitations in branding and promotion management. Daily production and operational activities are still carried out simply in the kitchen of the owner's house, with the help of some informal workers from family or relatives. The production equipment used is also still traditional, although it is enough to support daily operations.

From the managerial side, recording sales and expenditure transactions is still done manually, making it difficult to evaluate and plan long-term business. Marketing strategies are still limited to word-of-mouth promotions and makeshift uploads on personal social media. In fact, good managerial skills are needed to encourage the sustainability of MSMEs (Prasetyo & Kistanti, 2020).

The digital presence of Mie Omahan Wangkal is also still very minimal. Your social media accounts are not professionally managed, and there is no attractive visual content such as short videos, customer testimonials, or discount campaigns. The lack of collaboration with influencers or a systematic digital marketing strategy is also a factor in low product exposure, especially among the younger generation (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In fact, culinary content is one of the most searched types of content on social media (Jin et al., 2019).

In the midst of the rapid growth of the culinary industry, Mie Omahan Wangkal faces a big challenge in increasing competitiveness and expanding its market reach. One of the main problems faced is the weak brand identity. The lack of branding consistency, the lack of attractive logo design, and the lack of visual elements that characterize the product make it difficult for new consumers to recognize. In a study conducted by the University of Technology Palembang (2022), it was stated that proper rebranding, including logo and packaging updates, can significantly increase sales figures (Sutrisno et al., 2023).

Another problem is the lack of use of social media as a means of marketing. Although business owners have accounts on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, their use is not optimal. There is no consistent upload schedule, content is created without a strategy, and engagement with audiences is still very low (Hutter et al., 2013). This is unfortunate considering that social media is now the main channel in marketing culinary products, especially in the young market segment (Dwivedi et al., 2015).

Increasingly fierce competition, both from conventional and online business actors, requires Mie Omahan Wangkal to develop a more adaptive and creative marketing strategy. Currently, these MSMEs have not been able to match the more aggressive and strategic digital campaigns of competitors, so it is feared that they may experience stagnation or even a decline in sales (Dhanesh, 2017).

In addition to limitations in the marketing aspect, these MSMEs also face obstacles in terms of resources, both financial and labor. Conventional promotional strategies such as banners and flyers are not enough to reach a wider and more diverse digital consumer. In this case, collaboration with digital influencers has great potential to increase awareness and sales (Jin et al., 2019). Influencers are not only able to create engaging content, but also convey experiences authentically, which is effective in building consumer trust (Sasmoko et al., 2020).

Furthermore, MSME owners do not have an adequate understanding of digital marketing. No formal training has ever been taken on social media algorithms, trending content creation, or data-driven promotion strategies. The designed PKM program will be here to address this challenge, by providing

technical training and strategies to partners to enable them to manage digital marketing independently in the long term (Sasmoko et al., 2020).

Finally, the lack of evaluation of the strategy that has been implemented is also a weakness that needs to be addressed. These MSMEs have not utilized analytics tools such as Instagram Insight or TikTok Analytics to measure the effectiveness of content. In fact, this evaluation is important to develop a more targeted and sustainable promotion strategy (Martínez-López et al., 2020).

## 2 Method

### a. Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. PAR was chosen because it places service partners as active subjects in the process of research and social change, not just the object of intervention. This approach emphasizes collaboration, critical reflection, and concrete action to solve problems faced by society in a sustainable manner (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2014).

PAR is particularly relevant for the context of MSMEs because it allows the process of: identification of problems based on the real needs of partners, implementation of empowerment actions, joint evaluation and reflection, and continuous improvement.

### b. Location and Research Subject

The location of the research was carried out at *Mie Omahan Wangkal* MSMEs located in Wangkal Village, Gading District, Probolinggo Regency, East Java.

Research subjects include:

- 1) owner of Mie Omahan Wangkal MSMEs,
- 2) family members/workers involved in business operations,
- 3) The service team as facilitators and companions.

The selection of subjects is carried out purposively, namely based on direct involvement in business activities and marketing decision-making.

### c. Tahapan Participatory Action Research (PAR)

This research is carried out through four main stages of PAR, namely *diagnosing, planning, action, and reflection*, which are carried out cyclically.

### 1) Diagnosing Stage (Problem Identification)

At this stage, the process is carried out:

- a) initial observation of MSME production and marketing activities,
- b) in-depth interviews with business owners related to branding and digital marketing constraints,
- c) Participatory discussions to explore partners' perceptions of business challenges.

This stage aims to:

- a) identify gaps between product potential and marketing practices,
- b) To meet the needs of the client,
- c) Agree on the focus of the problem collaboratively.

The diagnosing stage is a key foundation in PAR because it ensures that the problem being addressed really comes from the reality of the partner (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

### 2) Planning Stage

Based on the results of problem identification, participatory action planning is carried out which includes:

- a) the preparation of MSME branding strategies,
- b) digital marketing training planning,
- c) the preparation of social media content (Instagram and TikTok),
- d) Scheduling of Promotional Content Uploads.

Planning is carried out through deliberation between the service team and MSME partners so that the strategy designed is in accordance with the capacity, resources, and local context of the business.

### 3) Action Stage

The action stage is the implementation of the agreed plan, including:

- a) Branding and visual identity training, including understanding of logos, brand colors, and product imagery.
- b) Digital marketing training, including:
  - (1) use of social media,
  - (2) creation of visual content (photos and short videos),
  - (3) the use of Instagram and TikTok features.
- c) Direct practice assistance, namely:
  - (1) creation of promotional content,

- (2) management of MSME social media accounts,
- (3) Simple promotional campaign simulation.

This stage is participatory, where partners are directly involved in each activity, so that there is real transfer of knowledge and skills (McIntyre, 2008).

#### 4) Reflection Stage (Reflection and Evaluation)

The reflection stage is carried out to:

- a) evaluate the effectiveness of the digital marketing strategy implemented,
- b) assess changes in the knowledge and skills of partners,
- c) identify obstacles and opportunities for improvement.

Reflection is carried out through:

- a) evaluative discussions with partners,
- b) simple analysis of social media data (number of followers, interactions, reach),
- c) comparison of conditions before and after the intervention.

The results of the reflection are used as a basis for:

- a) refinement of marketing strategies,
- b) Independent program sustainability planning by partners.

#### d. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques used in this study include:

1. Participatory observation, to understand business practices and marketing directly.
2. Semi-structured interviews, to explore the experiences and perceptions of the partners.
3. Documentation, in the form of photos, videos, and archives of social media content.
4. Reflective notes, which are compiled with partners during the PAR process.

#### e. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis, with the following stages:

- 1) data reduction,

- 2) categorization of findings,
- 3) Interpretation of results based on service objectives.

The analysis is focused on:

- 1) Changes in the capacity of partners,
- 2) improvement of digital marketing practices,
- 3) sustainability of MSME social media management.

Table 1. Stages of Service

Tahap PAR	Activity Dates	Activity Steps	Activity Description	Perpetrators	Exterior
<b>Initial Preparation</b>	March 5–7, 2025	Internal meeting of the PKM team	Team coordination, division of tasks, preparation of initial work plans	PKM Team	Work plan
	March 10, 2025	Initial meeting with MSME partners	Program introduction, perception equalization, cooperation agreement	PKM Team & Partners	Partner agreements
<b>Diagnosing</b>	March 12–15, 2025	Field observation	Observation of the production, marketing, and branding process of MSMEs	PKM Team	Observation notes
	March 17–20, 2025	Participatory interviews	Digging into branding and digital marketing issues	PKM Team & Partners	Problem map
	March 22, 2025	Initial reflective discussion	Participatory prioritization of issues	PKM Team & Partners	Problem formulation
<b>Planning</b>	March 25–27, 2025	Preparation of branding strategies	Planning of logos, colors, MSME brand image	PKM Team & Partners	Branding concept
	April 1–5, 2025	Digital marketing planning	Determination of platform, content type, and upload schedule	PKM Team & Partners	Content calendar
	April 8–10, 2025	Determining the criteria for influencers	Determine local influencers based on relevance & engagement	PKM Team & Partners	Influencer criteria
	April 12–15, 2025	Influencer selection & approach	Early identification and communication with selected influencers	PKM Team & Partners	Selected influencers
<b>Action</b>	April 18–20, 2025	MSME branding training	Brand identity training and product storytelling	PKM Team	Capacity building
	April 22–25, 2025	Digital content training	Promotional photo & video making practices	PKM Team & Partners	Promotional content
	May 1–15, 2025	Collaboration with influencers	Collaborative content production and uploads	PKM Team, Partners, Influencers	Collaboration content
	May 16–31, 2025	Regular content mentoring	Assistance with content uploads and audience interaction	PKM Team & Partners	Active accounts

<b>Monitoring</b>	June 1–15, 2025	Social Media Monitoring	Insight, engagement, and outreach monitoring	PKM Team & Partners	Data analytics
	18–22 June 2025	Evaluate content performance	Effective content analysis and strategy improvement	PKM Team & Partners	Evaluation report
<b>Reflection</b>	25–28 June 2025	Reflection with partners	Discussion of achievements, constraints, and learning	PKM Team & Partners	Reflection notes
<b>Sustainability</b>	July 1–5, 2025	Preparation of self-guided guides	Preparation of guidelines for managing MSME digital marketing	PKM Team	Guide module
	July 8–10, 2025	External submissions & recommendations	Handover of sustainability results and recommendations	PKM Team & Partners	Final document
	July 15, 2025	Final reporting of PKM	Preparation of final PKM report and articles	PKM Team	Reports & articles

### 3 Findings And Discussion

#### 3.1 Finding

##### 1. Increasing Awareness and Understanding of MSME Branding

One of the main findings in this service activity is the increasing awareness of Mie Omahan Wangkal MSME partners on the importance of branding as a business identity. In the early stages of service, partners view branding as only limited to logos and business names, without understanding its strategic function in building product image and competitiveness. Through the process of participatory discussion and branding training, partners begin to understand that branding includes visual identity, message consistency, and product storytelling that can differentiate their business from competitors.

These findings show a shift in the partner paradigm from a mere production orientation to a market orientation, which is an important prerequisite for the development of sustainable MSMEs.

##### 2. Increasing the Capacity of Partners in Social Media Management

The next finding is the increasing capacity of partners in managing social media in a more structured and strategic manner. Before the service program was implemented, the Mie Omahan Wangkal MSME social media account was managed sporadically, without content planning, upload

schedules, or performance evaluations. After training and mentoring, partners are able to compile a content calendar, create more engaging visual content, and understand the basics of using social media features such as *insights* and *analytics*.

This shows that the PAR approach is effective in transferring practical skills because partners are directly involved in the practice-based learning process.

### 3. Creating More Attractive and Consistent Promotional Content

This service resulted in findings in the form of improving the quality and consistency of MSME promotional content. Partners have successfully produced various forms of digital content, such as product photos with better lighting, short storytelling-based videos, and more communicative promotional captions. The resulting content also began to display product characteristics, such as the concept of "homemade noodles with local ingredients", thus strengthening the brand identity.

The consistency of content uploads is one of the indicators of success, because partners begin to implement a regular upload schedule in accordance with the mutually agreed plan.

### 4. The Positive Impact of Collaboration with Local Influencers

Another important finding is the positive impact of collaboration with local influencers in increasing product visibility. Collaborative content published by influencers shows a higher level of engagement than regular uploads by MSMEs. Partners observed an increase in interaction in the form of comments, direct messages, and new consumer visits after influencer content was published.

Figure 1: Being with Influencers when reviewing products



## 5. Increasing Digital Literacy and Partner Confidence

In addition to improving technical skills, this service also found an increase in digital literacy and partner confidence in managing digital marketing independently. Partners who previously relied on word-of-mouth promotion are now actively designing and evaluating their own digital promotion strategies. The process of reflection in PAR contributes to the growth of a *sense of ownership* towards the changes that occur.

Picture 2: With the Owner of Omahan Noodles



### 3.2 Discussion

The results of the service show that the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach has proven to be effective in increasing the capacity of Mie Omahan Wangkal MSMEs, especially in the aspects of branding and digital marketing. The active involvement of partners at every stage—from problem identification, planning, implementation, to reflection—encourages a contextual and continuous learning process. These findings are in line with the views of Kemmis and McTaggart (2014) who affirm that PAR is not only oriented to solving practical problems, but also to transforming people's social consciousness and practices.

In the context of MSMEs, PAR allows for knowledge transfer that is dialogical, not instructive. Partners not only receive training materials, but are also involved in formulating marketing strategies that suit their business conditions and capacity. This strengthens the argument that a participatory

approach is more effective than a top-down approach in economic empowerment-based service activities.

Discussions of the findings show that partners' understanding of branding has increased significantly. Branding is no longer perceived as a cosmetic element, but rather as a strategic instrument to build product identity and differentiation. This supports the MSME branding theory which states that a consistent brand identity is able to increase the perception of product value and expand consumer loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

In the context of local culinary MSMEs, branding based on product uniqueness and local narrative is an important differentiating factor. The findings of this service reinforce the research results of Sutrisno et al. (2023) who stated that the right rebranding can have a direct impact on increasing market attractiveness and sales of MSMEs. Thus, strengthening branding is the initial foundation in the strategy to increase the competitiveness of Mie Omahan Wangkal MSMEs.

Findings related to collaborations with local influencers show that this approach is effective in increasing audience visibility and engagement. This discussion is in line with the research of Lou and Yuan (2019) which states that influencers act as mediators of trust between brands and consumers. In the context of local MSMEs, influencers with geographical and cultural proximity have a higher level of credibility than national-scale influencers.

This service shows that the right selection of influencers based on relevance, not popularity alone, can be an efficient and affordable marketing strategy for micro MSMEs. This strengthens the argument that digital marketing strategies should be tailored to the local context and business capacity.

#### **4 Conclusion**

Community service activities carried out at Mie Omahan Wangkal MSMEs with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach show that strengthening the capacity of branding and digital marketing can be an effective strategy in increasing the competitiveness of local culinary MSMEs. Through the active involvement of partners at every stage of service—from problem identification, planning, implementation of actions, to reflection—this program has succeeded in encouraging real changes in business management practices.

The results of the service show an increase in partners' understanding of the importance of branding as an identity and added value of products, as well as an increase in partners' ability to manage social media in a more structured and strategic manner. The production of more attractive and consistent promotional content, accompanied by collaboration with relevant local influencers, has been proven to increase the visibility and engagement of the audience for MSME products. In addition, partners are starting to show awareness of the importance of data-driven monitoring and evaluation as a basis for marketing decision-making.

More than just improving technical skills, this devotion also contributes to a change in mindset and increased confidence of partners in managing digital marketing independently. This indicates that the PAR approach not only produces short-term output, but also creates a sustainable impact in the form of empowerment and independence of MSMEs. Thus, this service emphasizes that the integration of participatory approaches and contextual digital marketing strategies is a relevant and applicable model in supporting the strengthening of the MSME-based local economy.

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