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Strengthening Human Resources in Jenang Blitar MSME through Product *Storytelling* Based on Local Wisdom

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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ABSTRACT

This community service activity aims to improve the capacity of Jenang SMEs in Blitar Regency in developing product narratives and promotional content based on local wisdom as a digital marketing strategy. The partners' problems include limited storytelling skills and the production of content that is consistent with the brand identity. The activity was carried out using a participatory and practice-based approach through four stages, namely product storytelling training, creative mentoring, creative content creation, and evaluation and reporting. The methods used included face-to-face training, interactive discussions, coaching, communication simulations, and practical photography, simple videography, and narrative caption writing. The results of the activity showed an increase in participants' ability to develop authentic narratives based on local values, produce more attractive visual and text content, and increased confidence in promoting products through social media.

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INTRODUCTION

MSMEs play an important role in driving the national economy. According to data *from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (2022),* this sector is not only a major contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but also provides employment for millions of people. Despite its significant contribution, MSMEs still face various challenges, especially in terms of human resource development. One of the main obstacles often encountered is a lack of marketing skills, particularly in terms of adapting to developments in digital technology. This is in line with the findings of Choidah et al. (2024), which show that many MSME players still run their businesses conventionally and have not made optimal use of digital media. Through structured digital marketing training, the study proves that improving human resource capacity in information technology can help MSMEs expand their market reach and increase competitiveness in the digital era.

One innovative approach that MSMEs can utilise in their marketing strategy is the use of storytelling techniques. This method not only conveys product information but also builds an emotional connection between the brand and consumers. When the story told touches on the personal values or beliefs of the audience, the opportunity to create loyalty and interest in the product will increase. This is reinforced by the findings of Maharani and Setiawati (2024), which show that female SME entrepreneurs who adopt *storytelling* strategies have successfully differentiated their brands from competitors, created brand awareness, and strengthened brand identity in competitive business environments. Furthermore, this approach is highly relevant for SMEs that promote local culture, as *storytelling* can serve as a means to introduce and preserve traditional values and community identity to a wider market.

The Jenang Blitar MSME can be considered one example of a business that strongly promotes local cultural values. This business produces traditional jenang, a sweet rice cake, using recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. Unfortunately, the rich cultural values inherent in its products have not been fully utilised in its marketing strategy. To date, the marketing approach remains conventional and has not maximised the use of social media or other digital platforms. Sales are generally conducted through participation in bazaars or through a consignment system in souvenir shops, without the support of a strong narrative to attract the attention of a wider consumer base. In fact, by highlighting the story behind the product, Jenang MSMEs has a great opportunity to build an emotional connection with buyers and expand its market reach.

This situation shows that although Jenang MSMEs has advantages in terms of taste and strong historical value, without the right communication strategy, it is difficult to reach younger consumers who are more sensitive to digital content and the stories behind products. Therefore, developing human resource capabilities, especially in creating and delivering product narratives, is very important to increase competitiveness and ensure business sustainability.This aligns with the findings of Fauziah & Fachira (2021), which show that *storytelling* has proven effective in building the image of local products in the digital realm.

They emphasise that the implementation of an appropriate brand storytelling strategy can increase consumer engagement and strengthen brand identity in a competitive business environment.

Storytelling can be an effective way to differentiate traditional products such as jenang from similar products on the market. According to Escalas (2004), consumers usually find it easier to remember and feel emotionally connected to products that are presented through stories, rather than just receiving technical information. Therefore, it is important for MSMEs to develop human resource capabilities in creating product narratives based on local wisdom. This type of training will greatly help in increasing product competitiveness in the market.

This approach is also in line with the concept *of nation branding*, which emphasises the importance of promoting local culture as an economic attraction. When a product is seen not only as a consumer good, but also as a cultural symbol, its selling value automatically increases (Anholt, 2007). Therefore, *storytelling* training is not only beneficial from a business perspective, but also plays a role in preserving and sustaining culture through entrepreneurial activities.

Based on the analysis of the situation and challenges, this community service activity was specifically designed to improve the human resource capabilities of the Jenang Blitar MSME in developing *storytelling* that highlights local wisdom. The main objective of this programme is to equip MSME players with the skills to compile and convey product narratives effectively, so that their products become more attractive, have high selling value, and their businesses can continue to grow amid an increasingly competitive digital era.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

This community service activity uses a participatory and training-based approach (participatory action training) that combines training methods, coaching, hands-on practice, and evaluation. This approach was chosen so that participants not only gain conceptual understanding but are also able to directly apply product storytelling skills in the context of MSME businesses. The activity was conducted at the Jenang SME in Rejowinangun Village, Kademangan District, Blitar Regency, East Java. The subjects of the community service were the owners and employees of the Jenang SME, who are directly involved in production, marketing, and brand communication. The implementation of the activity was carried out through three main stages:

1. **Preparation Stage**
   This included developing the training curriculum, local wisdom-based storytelling modules, examples of SME product narratives, and technical coordination with partners. This stage aimed to ensure the readiness of materials, methods, and participants.
2. **Implementation Stage**
   The implementation will take place over **five days (11–15 August 2025)**, each lasting approximately four hours per day, through three main activities:

a) **Product storytelling training**, covering the basic concepts of storytelling, narrative structure, and exploration of local wisdom as product identity.
b) **Creative coaching**, involving narrative review and refinement, verbal and non-verbal communication exercises, and storytelling simulations.
c) **Digital content production**, including simple photography and videography using mobile devices, as well as narrative-based caption writing.

3. **Evaluation and Finalisation Stage**
   Includes refinement of photos, videos, and captions, alignment of narratives with the identity of SME brands, and evaluation of participants' skill improvement through observation of storytelling performance and the quality of the content produced.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This community service activity was carried out using a participatory and practice-based approach, which emphasised the active involvement of MSME partners in each stage of the process. The implementation method was designed in three main stages that were interrelated, namely: product *storytelling* training, creative mentoring, and creative content creation. The details of the implementation method are as follows:

First Stage: Product Storytelling Training

In the first stage, the activity focused on improving the understanding and basic skills of Jenang Blitar MSME actors in compiling strong, authentic, and interesting product narratives. The training was conducted face-to-face with a participatory approach, combining material presentation, interactive discussions, case studies, and practical exercises. The material covered the basic concepts *of storytelling* in MSME marketing, effective narrative structures (opening, conflict, solution, and product value), and strategies for exploring and utilising local wisdom as a product identity and differentiator. This approach refers to the views of Abeysekera et al. (2020), who emphasise the importance of building meaningful communication between products and consumers, and Escalas (2004), who explains that *storytelling* can form consumers' emotional attachment to a brand. Furthermore, the utilisation of local wisdom in product narratives is also believed to strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs in the era of globalisation (Susanto & Nugroho, 2019).

In this session, participants were encouraged to explore the history, cultural values, and production process of jenang as raw material for storytelling. To reinforce their understanding, examples of narratives from MSMEs that have successfully implemented *storytelling* strategies were provided as references and inspiration. As an initial output, participants were facilitated to draft product narratives that describe the uniqueness and value of their products, which will be further developed during the mentoring stage. This training not only equips participants with techniques for composing product narratives, but also instils an understanding that *storytelling* is an important brand communication strategy

in building emotional closeness with consumers and strengthening product *positioning* in the digital market (Budtz et al., 2010).

Second Stage: Creative Mentoring

After participants have gained a basic understanding of the concepts and techniques of product *storytelling*, the second stage focuses on a personalised and practical creative mentoring process. This activity aims to help SME actors develop the product narratives they created in the training stage to make them more mature, relevant, and ready for use in various promotional media. Mentoring is conducted intensively through individual and small group *coaching* sessions, with a mentoring approach that emphasises content personalisation. Participants are guided in refining the content of their stories, strengthening the integration of local wisdom values, and adjusting their delivery style to the character of the product and the preferences of the target market. This approach is in line with the view (Maharani & Setiawati, 2024a) that good *storytelling* must be in harmony with the brand identity and audience context so that the message can be received emotionally and functionally.

In addition to content aspects, the mentoring also focuses on improving verbal and non-verbal communication skills, especially in delivering narratives orally for direct promotional needs and social media content. *Storytelling* simulations are conducted in person to build confidence, clarity of message, and convincing facial expressions and body language. In this case, mentoring serves as a safe space for participants to practise, experiment, and receive constructive feedback from the facilitator team. This type of training is important considering that effective communication skills are one of the main indicators of successful narrative-based promotion (Maharani & Setiawati, 2024). Through this stage, MSME players not only have a strong product story, but also the mental preparedness and adequate communication skills to convey the story professionally in front of the public and in the digital realm (Salmon, 2017).

Third Stage: Creative Content Creation

The third stage is the implementation stage, which focuses on converting product narratives into attractive and relevant visual and digital content for promotion. Once participants have successfully compiled their product stories and are able to convey them verbally with confidence, the activity continues with technical assistance in content creation. This training covers basic product photography techniques, simple video shooting using available tools such as mobile phones, and the compilation of captions or narrative descriptions that are in line with the brand's character. This activity refers to the principle *of digital storytelling*, which emphasises the integration of text, visuals, and sound to create a compelling narrative (Robin, 2016). This training is also in line with the findings of Putri and Nugroho (2021), which show that digital content- s based on local stories can increase the appeal of MSME products and strengthen emotional connections with consumers.

During the content production process, MSME players are encouraged to showcase the uniqueness of their product stories, from the jenang-making

process and local values to differentiation from competitors. Content creation is carried out collaboratively with guidance from a team of facilitators to ensure that the final result reflects the identity of the MSME while complying with the aesthetic rules and algorithms of digital platforms. Participants are also introduced to the basic principles of visual branding and the selection of digital platforms that suit their target market, such as Instagram for a young, visually-oriented audience or WhatsApp for local customer networks. This approach is reinforced by research from Anggraini & Raharja (2022), which states that the success of MSME *digital branding* is greatly influenced by the ability to produce authentic, visual, and consistent content. With the completion of this phase, the Jenang Blitar SME is expected to have a creative content archive ready for sustained use in building brand image, increasing audience engagement, and expanding digital market reach.

Stage Four: Activity Reporting

The fourth stage is the reporting stage, where the results of the activity evaluation can be determined. During this stage, the activities were carried out in accordance with the previously established activity plan without any significant obstacles. These activities were participated in by the owners and employees of the Jenang SME and were deemed to have a positive impact on the SME.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The storytelling training, creative mentoring, and digital content creation activities for the Jenang Blitar MSME successfully improved the participants' knowledge and skills in building strong and authentic product narratives. Through participatory-based training, participants were able to understand the concept of storytelling, explore local values, and draft stories that reflect the identity and uniqueness of their products. The coaching process and verbal simulations also successfully improved participants' communication skills in conveying product stories with greater confidence and persuasiveness.

In addition, the creative content creation stage provided participants with hands-on experience in converting narratives into attractive visual content, ranging from photography, simple videography, to writing captions that are in line with the brand identity. The final results of the activity showed that participants were able to produce digital content packages that were ready to be used to strengthen branding and expand online marketing reach. Overall, this activity made a positive contribution to increasing the digital marketing capacity of Jenang Blitar MSMEs.

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