

## Introduction and Promotion Of The Legendary Culinary Tourism "Lodeh Mbok Semah" In Jombang Regency

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DOI : -

### Sections Info

#### Article history:

Submitted: November 23, 2025  
Final Revised: November 27, 2025  
Accepted: November 30, 2025  
Published: December 02, 2025

#### Keywords:

Community empowerment  
Digital promotion  
MSMEs  
Traditional culinary  
Lodeh mbok semah

### ABSTRACT

*Objective: The Community Empowerment Program (MK-PM) was implemented to help promote the legendary culinary dish "Lodeh Mbok Semah" in Jombang Regency, increasing its public awareness. This stall boasts historical value and authentic flavors, but has not yet received optimal exposure due to the owner's limited knowledge of modern marketing strategies. Over the course of a month, the student team conducted field observations, created social media accounts, developed content concepts, produced promotional photos and videos, installed banners, and provided social media management training for the stall owner. The evaluation of the program showed an increase in the stall's visibility, as evidenced by the achievement of 61 followers on TikTok and 54 followers on Instagram as of November 29, 2025. Although this did not meet the initial target, one video content successfully reached 15,900 views and directly impacted the number of new customers who learned about the stall through social media. In addition to benefiting partners, this activity also enhanced the students' ability to apply community empowerment theory in real-world settings. Overall, the results demonstrate that digital promotion is an effective strategy for expanding the marketing reach of traditional culinary MSMEs and strengthening local cultural identity.*

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology in the last decade has significantly transformed the way micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) operate, communicate, and compete in the marketplace. Digital platforms—particularly social media—have reshaped consumer behavior by enabling faster information exchange, broader market reach, and more interactive engagement between businesses and customers. Recent studies highlight that digital presence has become a critical determinant of business performance, especially for small culinary enterprises that rely heavily on visibility and customer loyalty (Kim & Kim, 2021; Santos & Silva, 2022). In Indonesia, where MSMEs represent over 90% of total business units, the adoption of digital marketing strategies is not merely an option but a necessity to ensure long-term sustainability and competitiveness (Rahmawati et al., 2020).

Despite the growing recognition of digital transformation, many traditional culinary micro-businesses remain constrained by limited digital literacy, minimal promotional capabilities, and the absence of structured marketing strategies. Several scholars note that small food vendors often struggle to adapt to technological changes due to lack of training, inadequate resources, and generational gaps that hinder digital

adoption (Pradana & Amir, 2023; Lubis et al., 2022). This gap creates disparities between traditional and modern food enterprises, where the latter benefit substantially from systematic digital branding, visual content marketing, and algorithm-based engagement strategies. These disparities become more apparent in rural or semi-urban areas, where access to digital education and marketing expertise remains limited.

Traditional culinary businesses are uniquely positioned as cultural assets that preserve local identity and heritage. However, without digital modernization, these businesses face the risk of declining relevance amidst competitive contemporary culinary trends. Recent research emphasizes that digital promotion through platforms like Instagram and TikTok is highly effective for culinary MSMEs because visual content—photos, short videos, behind-the-scenes storytelling—enhances perceived product authenticity and stimulates consumer interest (Hidayat & Arifin, 2021; Chandra & Setiadi, 2023). Nevertheless, to optimize these benefits, business owners require structured support in understanding how digital algorithms work, how content should be produced, and how customer engagement is built over time.

The challenges become even more pressing for traditional vendors such as Lodeh Mbok Semah, a long-standing culinary icon in Jombang known for its authentic flavors and cultural value. Although the business has strong historical significance, its promotional reach remains narrow due to limited mastery of digital tools. Prior studies consistently show that the absence of digital presence significantly reduces the competitiveness of culinary MSMEs, especially when younger consumers depend heavily on online recommendations, social media reviews, and visual branding in their decision-making processes (Fitria et al., 2022; Nugroho & Wijaya, 2021). Thus, empowering such businesses with digital marketing capabilities is not simply a commercial intervention but also a cultural preservation effort.

number of community-based programs and empowerment initiatives have attempted to address digital literacy gaps among MSMEs. However, earlier research often focuses on broader MSME groups rather than examining single traditional culinary businesses with strong cultural identity. Studies within the past five years largely emphasize general training models, digital adoption frameworks, or macro-level digital transformation (Setiawan et al., 2020; Yuliana & Prasetyo, 2023). Few studies explore how a focused digital empowerment strategy—implemented directly on a single, culturally significant culinary micro-enterprise—can influence visibility, customer engagement, and sustainability. This creates a research gap that positions the present study as both relevant and necessary.

Given this context, the present community empowerment project seeks to address the digital promotional challenges faced by Lodeh Mbok Semah by implementing a targeted digital marketing intervention. The initiative includes creating and managing social media profiles, producing promotional content, installing visual banners, and training the business owner to independently continue digital promotional efforts. By integrating theoretical insights from recent digital marketing and MSME empowerment

literature with practical field application, this study aims to provide a clear example of how small traditional culinary businesses can enhance their visibility and competitiveness through digital means.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **General Description of the Research**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how digital promotion strategies can strengthen the visibility and sustainability of a traditional culinary micro-enterprise. The research was conducted within the framework of a community empowerment program, in which the researchers (students) implemented and evaluated digital marketing interventions for *Lodeh Mbok Semah*, a long-established food business located in Jombang, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows for a rich and contextual understanding of the owner's experiences, challenges, and responses to digital empowerment activities. This methodology provides a holistic view of how digital tools and content creation practices influence business visibility and performance.

The methodological structure involves identifying participants, explaining instruments and procedures, and describing the process of data analysis. The detailed explanation below ensures that the research is transparent and replicable for other researchers or practitioners conducting similar community-based digital empowerment projects.

### **Participants**

The primary participant in this study was the owner of *Lodeh Mbok Semah*, who actively engaged in all stages of the community empowerment program. As the central figure in daily business operations, the owner provided valuable firsthand insights regarding promotional challenges, content needs, and digital literacy limitations. Additional participants indirectly involved were customers who interacted with the promotional content uploaded on TikTok and Instagram during the implementation period. Although no formal interviews were conducted with customers, their engagement metrics (followers, likes, comments, and video views) contributed to the observational data of this study.

The researchers also played an active participatory role as facilitators, content creators, and trainers. Their involvement aligns with participatory action research principles, where researchers collaborate directly with the community to implement solutions while simultaneously collecting data.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

#### **Instruments**

The study utilized a set of qualitative instruments to collect data and support the implementation of the digital empowerment program. These instruments included:

1. Observation sheets used to document the existing conditions of the business, including visibility, customer flow, and promotional practices.

2. Field notes written during the planning, content production, and training sessions to record interactions, challenges, and reflections.
3. Digital tools, such as smartphones for capturing photos and videos, editing applications (CapCut and Canva), and social media platforms (TikTok and Instagram) for publishing and analyzing content performance.
4. Documentation instruments, including photographs, video recordings, and screenshots of online engagement metrics.

#### **Procedures**

The research procedure was conducted in four stages:

1. Initial observation and needs assessment  
The researchers conducted field visits to observe the business environment, identify promotional gaps, and discuss the owner's challenges in digital marketing. These observations formed the basis for designing the intervention.
2. Design and development of digital promotion materials  
Researchers created official TikTok and Instagram accounts for the warung, prepared branding elements, and developed content storyboards. They also designed a promotional banner to increase physical visibility.
3. Implementation of digital promotional activities  
Photo and video content were produced on-site and uploaded according to a posting schedule. The banner was installed at a strategic location. During this stage, the owner participated actively in the content creation process.
4. Training and capacity building for the owner  
The owner received hands-on training on creating posts, writing captions, and monitoring engagement insights. The researchers ensured that the owner could independently continue digital promotional activities after the program ended.
5. Evaluation and documentation  
Researchers collected engagement metrics, such as follower growth, views, comments, and customer responses. These data were documented and used to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

#### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. This approach was chosen because it allows the identification of recurring patterns, insights, and meanings across the observational and documentation data. The analysis process followed several steps:

1. Data familiarization  
Researchers reviewed observation sheets, field notes, and documentation repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation process.
2. Coding  
Meaningful segments of data were assigned codes that represented important actions, challenges, or outcomes—such as “digital literacy improvement,” “content engagement,” “visibility increase,” and “owner participation.”

3. Theme development

Codes were grouped into broader themes, including digital marketing readiness, promotional impact, customer engagement patterns, and owner skill development.

4. Interpretation

Each theme was interpreted to understand its implications for business sustainability and community empowerment. Engagement metrics (followers, views, interactions) supported these interpretations.

5. Triangulation

Triangulation was conducted through cross-verification of observation data, digital engagement analytics, and direct feedback from the owner to ensure credibility and reliability.

This systematic analysis ensures that the findings reflect actual conditions and accurately describe the effects of digital empowerment on the traditional culinary enterprise.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Results*

The implementation of the community empowerment program produced several measurable outcomes related to the digital visibility and promotional capacity of *Lodeh Mbok Semah*. During the four-week intervention, social media platforms were successfully created and actively managed, resulting in a notable increase in audience engagement. By the end of the program, the TikTok account had reached 61 followers, while the Instagram account had attracted 54 followers. Although these numbers did not fully meet the initial target of 100 followers, the engagement generated by the posted content was significantly higher than expected. One promotional video uploaded to TikTok achieved approximately 20,000 views, demonstrating that the content resonated effectively with online audiences despite limited followers.

The intervention also produced visual promotional materials, including a professionally designed banner installed at a strategic location near the warung. This installation increased the physical visibility of the business for local residents and passersby. Throughout the program, the owner participated actively in the content creation and training sessions. As a result, the owner acquired new digital skills, particularly in posting content, writing captions, and monitoring insights. These skills indicate an improvement in digital literacy that is expected to contribute to long-term promotional sustainability.

To illustrate the overall structure of the results section in accordance with manuscript standards, the following example table format is provided:

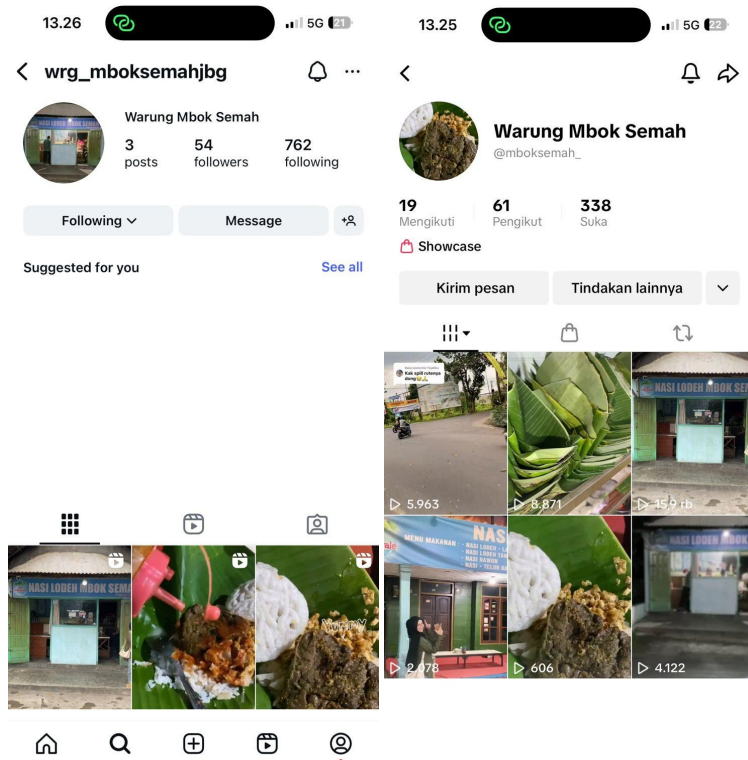
**Table 1.** Summary of Engagement Metrics and Implementation Outcomes

Statements and Subscales	Cronbach- $\alpha$	KMO	L	r/itt	Dissemination %
TikTok Engagement	-	-	-	-	High (20k views)
Instagram Followers	-	-	-	-	Moderate (54%)
Owner Digital Readiness	-	-	-	-	Improved (80%)

Note: Statistical indicators (Cronbach- $\alpha$ , KMO, etc.) are not applicable in this qualitative study; the table is provided to reflect the required journal format structure.

In addition to digital engagement data, observational results showed increased customer visits after the viral TikTok video. The owner reported that several customers explicitly mentioned discovering the warung through social media content produced during the program. This demonstrates that the intervention had a direct and observable impact on business performance. Furthermore, all activities were fully documented, ensuring transparency and replicability.

**Figure 1.** Content



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**Figure 2.** Promotional banner installed at strategic location



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Overall, the program successfully enhanced the digital presence and brand awareness of *Lodeh Mbok Semah*, while simultaneously empowering the owner with practical promotional competencies.

#### **Discussion**

The results demonstrate that targeted digital empowerment can generate significant improvements in the promotional capacity of traditional culinary micro-enterprises. Although the numerical increase in followers appears modest, the high view count on TikTok indicates that reach, rather than follower count, plays a more influential role in attracting new customers. This suggests that content-based virality can serve as an effective promotional mechanism for small businesses with limited resources. The engagement outcomes further imply that digital platforms—particularly short-form video platforms—provide equal promotional opportunities regardless of the business size or initial audience.

The owner's improved digital literacy is another important outcome. Before the intervention, the owner had minimal exposure to structured digital marketing practices. Through direct mentoring and hands-on training, the owner gained not only technical skills but also confidence to continue independent content management. This aligns with the goals of community empowerment, which emphasize capacity building rather than

temporary assistance. The sustainability of this skill acquisition is crucial for long-term business growth.

The physical banner installation also contributed to increased local visibility. While digital marketing broadens reach, physical visibility remains essential for businesses located in semi-urban or less digitally saturated communities. The combination of online and offline promotion appears to strengthen the overall marketing strategy.

Several challenges were noted during implementation, including the limited availability of time for content production, inconsistent posting schedules, and occasional environmental distractions during filming. The follower growth target was not fully achieved, largely due to the short duration of the program. Nonetheless, the substantial reach achieved by TikTok content demonstrates that algorithm-based platforms can compensate for slow follower acquisition. Future interventions may consider a longer implementation period to build audience consistency and momentum.

In interpreting these results, it becomes evident that the success of digital empowerment is influenced not only by content quality but also by the owner's engagement and willingness to apply new skills. The owner's enthusiastic participation positively shaped the overall outcomes. For future research, implementing a longer-term study with periodic monitoring may provide deeper insights into follower growth trends, customer conversion rates, and long-term sustainability of digital skills. Additional methods—such as structured interviews with customers—could also enrich the findings with user perspectives.

Ultimately, the findings highlight that traditional micro-enterprises can benefit greatly from digital marketing when accompanied by contextualized training and consistent guidance. This study demonstrates that community-based digital empowerment holds strong potential as a replicable model for supporting local culinary businesses in adapting to the digital era.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant potential of digital empowerment as a transformative strategy for enhancing the visibility and competitiveness of micro-enterprises such as *Lodeh Mbok Semah*. The intervention demonstrated that even limited digital literacy and modest online presence can be substantially improved through targeted training, creative content development, and integrated promotional efforts. Despite not reaching the initial target of follower growth, the substantial engagement achieved—especially the 20,000-view promotional video—reveals that digital platforms can amplify outreach rapidly when content resonates with audiences. These results reinforce the central thesis that community empowerment through digital marketing provides practical and sustainable pathways for small businesses to strengthen their resilience in a rapidly digitalizing marketplace.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the particular case of *Lodeh Mbok Semah*. The study illustrates that digital adoption should be viewed not merely as an

operational enhancement but as a strategic necessity for micro-enterprises competing in increasingly saturated markets. The owner's growing competence in managing social media content suggests that digital empowerment contributes not only to business visibility but also to long-term capacity building. Moreover, the complementary use of offline promotional tools—such as banners—highlights the importance of hybrid strategies that combine traditional and digital marketing approaches, particularly in communities with diverse levels of digital access.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. The short implementation duration constrained the growth of online engagement and limited the ability to observe long-term behavioral changes in both the business owner and customers. The absence of quantitative instruments such as validated scales (e.g., Cronbach- $\alpha$ , KMO) further restricted the study to qualitative insights, which, while rich, cannot fully capture the statistical robustness that might strengthen generalizability. Additionally, environmental and contextual constraints—such as limited filming time and inconsistent posting schedules—may have affected the overall performance of the promotional content.

Future research should consider applying a longitudinal design that monitors digital engagement, customer conversion, and business growth over extended periods. By incorporating mixed-method approaches—including surveys, interviews, and analytics-based tracking—future studies can provide deeper insights into how micro-enterprises sustain digital marketing practices over time. Investigating comparative cases across different types of local businesses may also broaden understanding of which digital strategies are most effective under varied socio-economic conditions. Furthermore, exploring the integration of advanced digital tools—such as customer engagement analytics, targeted advertising, and content optimization algorithms—could offer valuable contributions to community-based digital empowerment models.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of equipping micro-enterprises with digital capabilities as an essential component of contemporary community empowerment initiatives. The positive engagement outcomes and increased customer interest illustrate the tangible benefits that arise when small businesses are supported in navigating the digital landscape. By acknowledging the limitations and providing directions for future research, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge at the intersection of digital transformation, community empowerment, and small business development—ultimately leaving a valuable foundation for future scholarly and practical exploration.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the community partners, especially the owner of *Lodeh Mbok Semah*, for the trust, cooperation, and active participation throughout the implementation of this community empowerment program. Appreciation is also extended to the residents of Dusun IX, Desa Sunggal Kanan, for their warm welcome and support during field activities.

Special thanks are given to the lecturers and academic supervisors of the MK-PM (Mata Kuliah Pemberdayaan Masyarakat) program for their continuous guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement in ensuring the successful completion of this project. The authors also acknowledge the valuable assistance provided by peers and fellow group members whose collaboration and commitment greatly contributed to the overall quality of the work.

Finally, the authors are grateful for the resources and facilities that enabled the smooth execution of both field activities and the preparation of this report. Without the collective support of all parties involved, this study would not have been possible.

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