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Strengthening Indonesian Culinary UMKM for the PARI Community in Malaysia to Improve Economic Income

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Abstract: *This community service program aims to strengthen Indonesian culinary UMKM within the PARI community in Malaysia through digital marketing training, branding enhancement, business management assistance, and entrepreneurial mentoring. The program employed a participatory approach involving observations, interviews, training sessions, direct mentoring, and program evaluation involving Indonesian diaspora culinary entrepreneurs in Malaysia. The results demonstrate that participants experienced significant improvements in digital literacy, product branding, financial management, and entrepreneurial capacity. Participants began utilizing digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp Business to expand market reach and improve customer engagement. In addition, improvements in packaging design, branding strategies, and financial recordkeeping contributed to increasing product competitiveness and business sustainability. The program also generated positive economic impacts through increased sales and customer numbers among participants. This study confirms that integrative and participatory empowerment models are effective strategies for strengthening diaspora-based culinary UMKM and improving the economic welfare of Indonesian migrant communities in Malaysia*.

Keywords: *Culinary UMKM, Community Service, Digital Marketing, Indonesian Diaspora, Malaysia, Economic Empowerment*.

Abstrak: *Program pengabdian masyarakat ini bertujuan memperkuat UMKM kuliner Indonesia pada komunitas PARI di Malaysia melalui pelatihan digital marketing, penguatan branding produk, pendampingan manajemen usaha, dan mentoring kewirausahaan. Program dilaksanakan menggunakan pendekatan partisipatif melalui observasi, wawancara, pelatihan, pendampingan langsung, dan evaluasi program yang melibatkan pelaku usaha kuliner diaspora Indonesia di Malaysia. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan adanya peningkatan signifikan pada literasi digital, branding produk, pengelolaan keuangan, dan kapasitas kewirausahaan peserta. Peserta mulai memanfaatkan platform digital seperti Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, dan WhatsApp Business untuk memperluas pemasaran dan meningkatkan interaksi dengan konsumen. Selain itu, peningkatan desain kemasan, strategi branding, dan pencatatan keuangan turut meningkatkan daya saing produk dan keberlanjutan usaha.*

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Program ini juga memberikan dampak ekonomi positif melalui peningkatan penjualan dan jumlah pelanggan peserta. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa model pemberdayaan yang integratif dan partisipatif efektif dalam memperkuat UMKM kuliner berbasis diaspora serta meningkatkan kesejahteraan ekonomi masyarakat migran Indonesia di Malaysia.

Kata Kunci: *UMKM Kuliner, Pengabdian Masyarakat, Digital Marketing, Diaspora Indonesia, Malaysia, Pemberdayaan Ekonomi*.

INTRODUCTION

UMKM have long been recognized as a strategic sector contributing significantly to economic growth, employment generation, poverty reduction, and community economic resilience in developing countries, including Indonesia (Novitasari, 2022). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank, small business enterprises play a central role in strengthening inclusive economic development, particularly among vulnerable and migrant communities (OECD, 2021; World Bank, 2022). In Indonesia, UMKM contribute substantially to national economic productivity and absorb a large portion of the workforce, making them one of the pillars of economic stability. Within the context of globalization and labor migration, diaspora-based entrepreneurship has increasingly emerged as an important strategy for migrant communities seeking financial sustainability and social mobility abroad.

One of the most promising sectors among diaspora entrepreneurs is the culinary industry. Culinary businesses possess strong market potential because food products are closely connected to cultural identity, consumer familiarity, and cross-cultural acceptance. Malaysia, as a neighboring country with historical, cultural, and linguistic similarities to Indonesia, provides a highly favorable market environment for Indonesian culinary products. Indonesian food products such as traditional snacks, beverages, and regional dishes are increasingly popular among Malaysian consumers due to their cultural proximity and distinctive taste characteristics. This condition creates strategic opportunities for Indonesian culinary UMKM to expand their market reach and strengthen their economic contribution within diaspora communities.

From a theoretical perspective, the competitiveness of small enterprises is strongly influenced by entrepreneurial capability, innovation, digital adaptation, and branding strategies. Porter's theory of competitive advantage explains that business competitiveness depends not only on product quality but also on innovation capacity, market positioning, and the ability to adapt to changing market dynamics (Porter, 1990). In line with this perspective, Kotler and Keller emphasize that branding and marketing communication are essential components in building customer trust, creating product differentiation, and increasing product value in competitive markets (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Furthermore, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick argue that digital marketing enables small enterprises to expand market access, strengthen customer engagement, and improve business sustainability through more efficient and interactive promotional strategies (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). The rapid growth of digital technology has transformed consumer behavior and marketing systems, making digital literacy an increasingly important capability for small business actors in the modern economy (UNCTAD, 2021).

However, empirical realities indicate that many Indonesian culinary UMKM operating in Malaysia still experience substantial limitations in adapting to these developments. Most businesses remain informal, small-scale, and heavily dependent on conventional marketing methods such as personal networks and word-of-mouth promotion. Field observations within the PARI community in Malaysia demonstrate that many culinary business actors still face structural and managerial problems, including limited digital marketing skills, weak financial management practices, low-quality product branding, inadequate packaging innovation, and limited understanding of business legality and halal certification procedures. These limitations reduce business competitiveness and hinder the sustainable growth of Indonesian culinary UMKM in Malaysia.

Several previous studies have attempted to discuss the role of digitalization and business strengthening among UMKM. Azis et al. found that Indonesian diaspora entrepreneurs in Kuala Lumpur still face significant obstacles in utilizing e-commerce platforms and digital media as marketing tools (Azis et al., 2026). Susanti et al. also explained that digital marketing strategies can help small enterprises expand market access and improve interaction with consumers more effectively (Susanti et al., 2024). In addition, Dewi et al. revealed that strengthening managerial capacity and product branding significantly improves the competitiveness of culinary UMKM (Dewi et al., 2026). Wilson and Liu further emphasized that halal branding and product identity play an important role in strengthening consumer trust in Muslim-majority markets (Wilson and Liu, 2011). Nevertheless, most previous studies focused separately on digital literacy, branding, or managerial assistance and primarily examined domestic UMKM contexts rather than diaspora-based enterprises operating abroad.

This condition reveals a significant research and implementation gap. Existing community empowerment programs have not comprehensively integrated digital marketing training, business management strengthening, branding development, and business legality assistance within a diaspora-based community empowerment framework. In fact, diaspora communities require a more adaptive and participatory empowerment model due to their unique socio-economic conditions as migrant communities operating in transnational market environments.

Therefore, this community service program offers a more integrative empowerment approach focusing on strengthening Indonesian culinary UMKM among the PARI community in Malaysia. The novelty of this program lies in the integration of digital marketing training, branding development, business management strengthening, entrepreneurial mentoring, and business legality assistance within a community-based diaspora empowerment model. Unlike previous programs that addressed only one aspect of business development, this program combines capacity building and direct mentoring comprehensively to improve entrepreneurial sustainability and economic resilience among Indonesian diaspora communities.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to describe and analyze the implementation of a community service program designed to strengthen Indonesian culinary UMKM within the PARI community in Malaysia through digital marketing training, branding enhancement, business management assistance, and

entrepreneurial mentoring. Furthermore, this study seeks to examine the impact of the program on improving business competitiveness, entrepreneurial capacity, and the economic income of Indonesian diaspora communities in Malaysia.

METHOD

This community service activity employed a participatory approach combined with direct mentoring for members of the PARI community in Malaysia. The subjects of this program consisted of Indonesian diaspora members who operate culinary UMKM businesses in several areas of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, Malaysia. The participants included migrant workers, home-based culinary entrepreneurs, and small-scale food business owners who actively sell Indonesian culinary products. The selection of participants was based on their active involvement in culinary business activities and their willingness to participate in the empowerment program. Participatory approaches are widely recognized as effective methods in community empowerment because they actively involve participants in identifying problems and developing solutions according to their needs (Hisrich & Peters, 2020).

The implementation of the program began with the problem identification stage through direct observations and semi-structured interviews with participants. This stage aimed to identify the primary challenges faced by Indonesian culinary UMKM actors in Malaysia, particularly regarding digital marketing, business management, branding, and business legality (OECD, 2021). The observations revealed that most participants still relied on conventional marketing methods, had limited financial recordkeeping skills, and lacked knowledge regarding digital promotion and halal certification procedures (World Bank, 2022). Previous studies have shown that small business actors commonly encounter obstacles related to digital literacy, market access, financial management, and business competitiveness in the digital economy era (UNCTAD, 2021).

Following the identification stage, the community service team conducted a program socialization session to improve participants' understanding of the importance of strengthening UMKM through digital-based business development, effective business management, and product branding enhancement. This activity involved interactive discussions and educational sessions concerning entrepreneurial sustainability, digital business opportunities, and the competitiveness of culinary products in international markets. Digital transformation has become an essential strategy for improving the sustainability and competitiveness of small businesses, particularly in the culinary sector (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Furthermore, effective branding and innovation strategies are recognized as important factors in increasing consumer trust and expanding market reach (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The next stage involved training and mentoring activities. The training was delivered to all participants through workshops and practical sessions covering several important topics, including business management and simple financial recordkeeping, digital marketing strategies through social media platforms, strengthening product branding and packaging, creating digital promotional content, and assistance related to business legality and halal certification. Previous international studies have demonstrated that digital marketing training and entrepreneurial mentoring significantly improve business performance, productivity,

and market competitiveness among small enterprises (Tuten & Solomon, 2018; Dewi et al., 2026). In addition, halal certification and attractive packaging have become strategic elements in increasing the competitiveness of culinary products in international markets, especially in Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia (Wilson & Liu, 2011).

The mentoring process was conducted both directly and online to ensure that participants could effectively apply the training materials to their respective businesses. Direct mentoring activities were carried out during workshops and business consultations, while online mentoring was conducted through WhatsApp groups and virtual discussions to monitor participants' business development after the training sessions. Hybrid mentoring methods combining offline and online approaches have been widely recognized as effective models for enhancing entrepreneurial capacity, innovation, and digital adaptability among small business actors (Hisrich & Peters, 2020; Susanti et al., 2024).

The final stage of the program was evaluation. This stage was conducted by observing changes in participants' abilities to manage their businesses, utilize digital media as marketing tools, improve product branding, and implement financial recordkeeping practices after participating in the program. Evaluation data were obtained through interviews, direct observations, and participant feedback regarding the effectiveness of the training and mentoring activities. The evaluation results were used to assess the effectiveness of the program and the extent to which participants' entrepreneurial capacities had improved after participating in the community service activities. Previous research has shown that continuous mentoring and evaluation contribute significantly to strengthening business sustainability and improving the long-term competitiveness of small enterprises in the digital economy era (Porter, 1990; Schumpeter, 1934).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Improvement of UMKM Digital Literacy

The implementation of digital marketing training and entrepreneurial mentoring within the PARI community demonstrated significant changes in the digital capabilities of Indonesian culinary UMKM actors in Malaysia. Before participating in the program, most participants relied on conventional marketing methods, particularly personal networks and word-of-mouth promotion, which limited their ability to expand market reach and compete within the increasingly digitalized culinary market in Malaysia. The training results revealed that participants gradually shifted toward utilizing digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp Business as strategic tools for promotion, communication, and customer engagement.

This transformation indicates that digital literacy is not merely a technical capability but also a strategic economic resource for diaspora-based UMKM. From the perspective of digital marketing theory, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick explain that digital platforms allow small enterprises to create interactive communication with consumers, reduce promotional costs, and expand market segmentation beyond geographical limitations. These theoretical assumptions were reflected in the findings of this program, where participants reported that social media utilization

enabled them to attract new consumers outside their immediate social circles and increase product visibility among Malaysian consumers (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

The findings also demonstrate that the effectiveness of digital literacy strengthening depends not only on technology adoption but also on the participants' ability to integrate digital communication strategies into their business practices. Participants who actively applied visual content strategies, such as short promotional videos and attractive product photography, experienced higher levels of customer interaction and product inquiries compared to those who only uploaded static product images. This supports the argument proposed by Tuten and Solomon that digital marketing effectiveness is closely associated with content engagement and consumer interaction rather than merely platform usage (Tuten & Solomon, 2018).

Furthermore, the results reveal that digital literacy training helped participants shift from survival-oriented entrepreneurship toward growth-oriented entrepreneurship. Prior to the program, many participants perceived social media only as a communication tool rather than a business development instrument. After the mentoring process, participants began to understand digital media as an integrated ecosystem for branding, promotion, customer retention, and market expansion. This change reflects the success of the program in strengthening entrepreneurial adaptability, which according to UNCTAD is a crucial factor for small business sustainability in the digital economy era (UNCTAD, 2021).

From a community empowerment perspective, the participatory mentoring model also contributed significantly to the effectiveness of the training. Participants were not positioned merely as recipients of information but as active actors involved in identifying their own marketing problems and developing digital solutions according to their business needs. This participatory process strengthened learning sustainability because participants directly practiced the use of digital platforms during the mentoring sessions. Therefore, the findings suggest that digital literacy strengthening among diaspora UMKM requires not only technical training but also continuous assistance that encourages practical adaptation and confidence in using digital technologies.

Strengthening the Branding of Culinary Products

The branding enhancement program also produced substantial impacts on the competitiveness of Indonesian culinary UMKM products in Malaysia. Prior to the training, most participants used simple and inconsistent packaging designs with limited product identity. Many products lacked logos, attractive visual designs, and standardized packaging concepts, reducing their competitiveness within the Malaysian culinary market. This condition reflects the theoretical argument proposed by Kotler and Keller, who emphasize that branding functions not only as product identification but also as a strategic mechanism for creating consumer trust and emotional attachment (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

After participating in the training and mentoring sessions, participants demonstrated increased awareness regarding the importance of branding strategies in building product differentiation. Participants began redesigning their packaging using more modern visual concepts, incorporating logos, color consistency, and

promotional labels that reflected Indonesian culinary identity while remaining attractive to Malaysian consumers. This transformation illustrates that branding development contributes not only to visual improvement but also to the repositioning of culinary products within a more competitive market structure.

The findings indicate that branding became a mechanism for strengthening both economic and cultural value. Indonesian culinary products were no longer viewed merely as homemade migrant products but gradually developed into marketable cultural commodities capable of competing within broader culinary markets. This aligns with Wilson and Liu's argument that branding in Muslim-majority markets involves not only commercial considerations but also cultural legitimacy, trust, and identity representation (Wilson and Liu, 2011). Participants who improved product packaging and halal-related information reported higher consumer confidence and repeat purchases compared to previous marketing practices.

Moreover, branding development contributed to changing participants' entrepreneurial mindset. Initially, many participants considered packaging as a secondary aspect unrelated to product quality. However, through the mentoring process, participants realized that consumers often associate packaging quality with product professionalism and hygiene standards. This finding confirms Porter's (1990) theory of competitive advantage, which explains that product differentiation and innovation are essential elements in increasing business competitiveness in saturated markets (Porter, 1990).

Another important finding is that branding strengthening encouraged participants to become more innovative in product development. Several participants began introducing menu variations, modern packaging sizes, and promotional bundles after understanding consumer preferences and visual marketing strategies. This indicates that branding training indirectly stimulated entrepreneurial creativity and innovation capacity among participants. Therefore, the program succeeded not only in improving product appearance but also in strengthening the strategic orientation of culinary UMKM businesses in Malaysia.

Improvement of Business Management Capabilities

The training and mentoring activities also generated significant improvements in participants' managerial capacities, particularly in financial management and business planning. Before the implementation of the program, most participants did not conduct systematic financial recordkeeping and tended to combine personal and business finances. As a result, many participants experienced difficulties in calculating profits, controlling operational costs, and evaluating business performance. These findings reflect common challenges faced by small enterprises in developing economies, where managerial limitations often hinder business sustainability and growth (Hisrich & Peters, 2020).

Through business management training, participants learned practical techniques for simple bookkeeping, profit calculation, operational budgeting, and capital management. The mentoring sessions emphasized the importance of separating personal and business finances to improve financial accountability and business decision-making. After the program, participants demonstrated improved

understanding regarding cost efficiency, pricing strategies, and business profit evaluation.

Analytically, these findings indicate that managerial strengthening functions as a foundation for entrepreneurial sustainability. Financial literacy enabled participants to make more rational business decisions rather than relying solely on intuition or informal experience. Participants who applied bookkeeping practices became more capable of identifying profitable products, controlling unnecessary expenditures, and planning future business expansion. This finding supports Schumpeter's theory that entrepreneurial development requires innovation not only in products but also in organizational and managerial processes (Schumpeter, 1934).

The mentoring process also strengthened participants' confidence in managing their businesses more professionally. Several participants began planning long-term business goals, including expanding product distribution, collaborating with online delivery platforms, and improving production capacity. This demonstrates that managerial empowerment contributes not only to technical competence but also to the formation of entrepreneurial vision and sustainability orientation.

Furthermore, the hybrid mentoring model combining direct and online assistance proved effective in maintaining participants' business adaptation process. Continuous mentoring through WhatsApp groups and online discussions allowed participants to consult regularly regarding financial and operational challenges. This finding reinforces the argument that sustainable mentoring is essential for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of community empowerment programs among small enterprises.

Economic Impact on the PARI Community

The strengthening of digital literacy, branding, and managerial capacity ultimately produced positive economic impacts on members of the PARI community in Malaysia. Participants reported increases in customer numbers, product orders, and business income after implementing digital marketing strategies and improving product branding. Several participants stated that social media promotion enabled them to reach consumers outside Indonesian migrant communities, including local Malaysian consumers and international customers.

From an economic empowerment perspective, these findings demonstrate that diaspora-based UMKM strengthening programs can function as instruments for improving migrant community welfare. The increase in sales and customer engagement reflects the successful integration of entrepreneurial capacity building with market adaptation strategies. This finding aligns with Porter's theory that competitiveness enhancement directly influences business productivity and economic sustainability (Porter, 1990).

In addition to economic improvement, the program also generated social and psychological impacts on participants. The mentoring activities increased participants' self-confidence, entrepreneurial motivation, and willingness to innovate. Many participants who previously operated their businesses informally became more confident in promoting their products publicly and expanding their market networks. This transformation indicates that community empowerment

programs contribute not only to economic outcomes but also to strengthening social resilience and entrepreneurial identity among diaspora communities.

The participatory nature of the program further strengthened solidarity within the PARI community. Participants actively exchanged experiences, marketing strategies, and business information during mentoring sessions, creating collaborative learning dynamics among diaspora entrepreneurs. This condition supports the argument that community-based empowerment programs are more sustainable because they encourage collective participation and social networking among participants.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that the objectives outlined in the introduction were successfully achieved. The program not only strengthened digital marketing capabilities, branding strategies, business management skills, and entrepreneurial mentoring among Indonesian culinary UMKM actors in Malaysia but also generated broader impacts on business competitiveness, entrepreneurial capacity, and economic welfare within the PARI community. Therefore, this study confirms that an integrative and participatory empowerment model can become an effective strategy for strengthening diaspora-based culinary UMKM in the digital economy era.

CONCLUSION

This community service program demonstrates that the strengthening of Indonesian culinary UMKM within the PARI community in Malaysia through integrated digital marketing training, branding enhancement, business management assistance, and entrepreneurial mentoring successfully improved participants' entrepreneurial capacity, business competitiveness, and economic resilience. The findings indicate that digital literacy, product branding, and managerial strengthening are interconnected factors that significantly influence the sustainability and market expansion of diaspora-based culinary businesses in the digital economy era. The program not only increased participants' ability to utilize digital platforms and manage businesses more professionally but also strengthened their entrepreneurial confidence and adaptive capacity in responding to market competition in Malaysia. The study contributes theoretically by confirming the relevance of digital transformation, competitive advantage, and entrepreneurial empowerment theories within the context of diaspora-based UMKM development. Practically, this program offers an integrative and participatory empowerment model that can be replicated by universities, government institutions, and diaspora organizations in supporting migrant community entrepreneurship. Therefore, strengthening diaspora-based culinary UMKM has strategic implications for improving migrant welfare, expanding Indonesia's creative economy, and reinforcing Indonesian cultural identity in international markets.

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