

Empowering Spice-Based MSMEs through Branding, Packaging, and Digital Distribution: Community Service with KTH Majojo

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ABSTRACT

This participatory action research program aimed to empower the Majojo Forest Farmers Group (KTH Majojo) in Tidore Islands by strengthening branding, packaging, and digital distribution capacities. The intervention was implemented from June to August 2025 and involved 7 active members of KTH Majojo through 8 hands-on training and mentoring sessions, equipment provision, and distribution facilitation. Evaluation combined production and sales records with qualitative interviews and direct observation. After three months of intervention, measurable improvements were observed: average monthly sales increased by $\approx 50\%$, product packaging became more standardized, and the number of regular distribution outlets expanded from 0 to 3. Participants, particularly the group leader, reported higher confidence in using social media and marketplaces, and a digital product catalog was created for online channels. These results indicate that short-term, targeted capacity building combined with simple production tools can produce tangible gains in market access and product quality for spice-based MSMEs. The paper discusses implementation challenges, sustainability strategies, and recommendations for scaling the model to similar island communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are widely recognized as the backbone of Indonesia's economy, contributing significantly to employment creation and local economic development (Junaidi et al., 2023). Spice-based MSMEs, in particular, hold strategic potential because Indonesia is one of the world's largest spice producers; however, this potential remains underutilized, especially among small-scale business groups in remote and island regions (Rozinah & Meiriki, 2020).

The Majojo Forest Farmers Group (KTH Majojo) in Tidore Islands produces a variety of local spice-based products such as sarabati, spice coffee, chocolate with spices, kua rujak, air guraka, spice tea, and flavored peanuts. These products reflect cultural heritage and local wisdom, yet their market penetration has remained limited due to weak branding, inadequate packaging, and the absence of digital distribution strategies (Mulyadi et al., 2024; Rudianto, 2023).

Previous community service studies have demonstrated that empowerment through branding, packaging innovation, and digital marketing can significantly improve MSME competitiveness (Rozinah & Meiriki, 2020). For example, branding and packaging training in Sidapurna Village successfully enhanced product quality and consumer acceptance, while digital marketing assistance in Sukabumi expanded market access for local herbal powder MSMEs through online platforms (Wati et al., 2025). In this context, the PKM program with KTH Majojo is crucial. The mentoring activities focus on branding, packaging, and digital distribution to strengthen competitiveness, expand market reach, and improve members' welfare. Furthermore, this initiative is aligned with the local government's program to develop economic potential based on local resources, particularly spices, as a regional identity and economic strength in North Maluku (Saati et al., 2022).

Despite these encouraging findings, a research gap remains in understanding how integrated empowerment programs that combine branding, packaging, and digital distribution can be effectively applied in island-based communities such as Tidore. Existing studies often focus on single aspects—either branding (Nursansiwi et al., 2024), digital marketing (Syahputra et al., 2023), or packaging (Saati et al., 2022), without addressing their synergy within a broader framework of capacity building.

To address this gap, the present study draws on more recent models of MSME empowerment. Anzules-Falcones & Novillo-Villegas (2023) emphasize that empowerment should be understood through the lens of innovation, entrepreneurial orientation, and organizational flexibility, while Purnomo & Purwandari (2025) propose a comprehensive model that integrates leadership, governance, and capacity building for sustainable community development. In addition, the concept of capacity building is employed, which highlights the importance of skills development, organizational strengthening, and sustainability of community initiatives (Kunkel et al., 2022). By applying these approaches, the community service program (PKM) aims to enhance the competitiveness of KTH Majojo through systematic interventions in branding, packaging, and digital distribution, while also contributing to sustainable local economic development in Tidore.

METHOD

This community service program adopted a participatory action research (PAR) design, which emphasizes collaboration between researchers and community members in problem identification, action, and reflection (Anzules-Falcones & Novillo-Villegas, 2023). Such an approach is particularly

relevant for rural empowerment programs in Indonesia, where participatory methods have been proven effective (Soedarwo et al., 2022).

Participants and Context

The program involved all 7 active members of KTH Majoojo. Because the total population of KTH Majoojo consisted of only 7 members, a census sampling technique was applied, meaning all members were included in the program (Taherdoost, 2016). Participants were men and women aged between 35 and 55 years.

Procedure and Timeline

The program was conducted over three months (June-August 2025) and included the following stages:

- Needs assessment through discussions with members (June, Weeks 1–2)
- Training and mentoring sessions (June-July)
- Provision of production equipment and standardization support (July)
- Digital marketing assistance and market linkage (July-August)
- Monitoring and evaluation (August, final week).

TABLE 1. Stages of PKM Implementation

Stage	Activity	Timeline
1	Needs assessment	June (Weeks 1–2)
2	Training & mentoring	June-July
3	Equipment provision & standardization	July
4	Digital marketing & market linkage	July-August
5	Monitoring & evaluation	August (final week)

Instruments and Data Collection

Outcomes were assessed using qualitative methods. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and direct observation, complemented by members' sales records to track income changes. These approaches are widely applied in community empowerment programs because they allow for both process and outcome evaluation (Nowell et al., 2017) . The evaluation framework covered three aspects: (1) production capacity through equipment support, (2) digital marketing skills, and (3) market access expansion.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were applied throughout the program, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. These align with the standards of community-based participatory research (Saunders et al., 2023). The program also received formal approval and support from the Tidore Islands City Government and Universitas Nuku's Directorate of Research and Community Service.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Impact

The program produced measurable outcomes. Average monthly sales increased by 50%, from 100 packs before the program to 150 packs afterward. The number of regular distribution outlets expanded from 0 to 3, consisting of two local grocery stores and one online reseller. In terms of participation, all seven members attended at least 80% of the training sessions. These results demonstrate the tangible impact of combining training with equipment provision.



FIGURE 1. Digital marketing training session with KTH Majajo members

The session introduced the basics of digital marketing using platforms such as Instagram Business, WhatsApp Business, and Shopee (Prasetyo & Utomo, 2023; Rosdiana & Husaen, 2022). The training also emphasized the long-term benefits of having a “soft product” in the form of promotional guidelines, which remain useful even with group member regeneration.

Before-and-After Comparison

Before the intervention, KTH Majajo members already had attractive packaging but faced limited tools and inefficient processes. Based on the identified needs, several production support tools were procured, including the Epson L1251 printer for label printing, the Promaxi LM333N laminating machine for waterproof label coating, as well as the Laminating Pouch F4 and Glossy Sticker A4-E-Print paper for packaging improvements. These tools enabled the products to be marketed more competitively, both in souvenir shops and through digital platforms. Previously, the group relied on third parties for packaging, which was neither effective nor efficient.



FIGURE 2. Handover of production equipment to KTH Majajo members

After receiving production equipment, members reported improved efficiency and more consistent

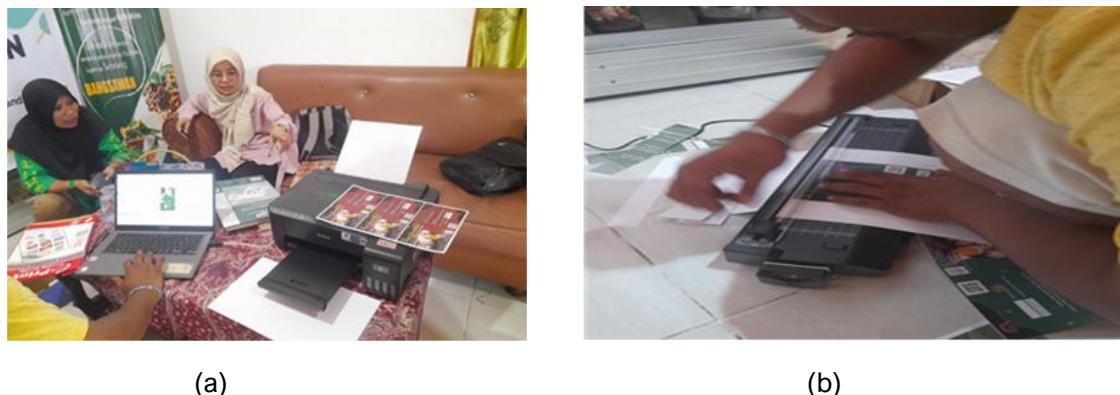
product quality.

“Our group has long had good packaging, but we lacked the proper equipment. With this support, production has become faster and more consistent, and members feel more motivated.” (Chairperson of KTH Majoojo, interview).

The chairperson also noted that digital marketing skills are beginning to shift members’ business practices:

“We are now confident to promote our products online, something we never imagined before.” (Chairperson of KTH Majoojo, interview).

The PKM team also provided mentoring on the installation and usage of the equipment to ensure that the group could operate them independently. After adopting the new tools, significant improvements were observed in production speed and neatness. For example, the label printing process became faster and more practical, while the packaging appeared more attractive and durable, thereby enhancing product appeal in the eyes of consumers.



(a)

(b)

FIGURE 3. Practice Using Tools

Participant Insights

Before PKM, KTH Majoojo’s products were sold only conventionally in Tidore or during special events such as exhibitions. The geographical isolation of the islands limited distribution access and hindered market expansion. To address this, the PKM team facilitated distribution partnerships with external outlets (Marselina et al., 2024; Zafitri & Mulyati, 2023). This strategy was crucial for enabling MSMEs to expand their markets through existing distribution networks.



FIGURE 4. KTH Majoojo products displayed at a local grocery store in Tidore

Members also highlighted the benefits of digital training:

"I used to sell only through word of mouth. Now I know how to post our products on social media and join online marketplaces." (Chairperson of KTH Majojo, interview)

This indicates that the program not only enhanced technical capacity but also encouraged the adoption of digital marketing strategies.

The next stage was training in the preparation and implementation of production Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The training emphasized the importance of consistency in taste, portion, cooking time, and hygiene in the production process. Partners were guided to draft written manuals detailing the workflow for each product type, including the flavor standards for sarabati, roasting time for spice coffee, and spice proportions for kacang kribo and kua rujak. This aligns with recent SME studies demonstrating that SOP implementation significantly improves production efficiency and reduces product defects (Damanik, 2025).



FIGURE 5. SOP Development and Training

As a result, KTH Majojo members began to adopt written guidelines during production. The SOPs reduced production errors caused by differences in perception among members and facilitated knowledge transfer when new members joined the group.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite positive outcomes, the program encountered challenges. Limited internet connectivity disrupted online promotional efforts. Older members needed repeated mentoring to adapt to digital tools. Financial constraints also limited the immediate scaling of production, even after efficiency improved. Such challenges are consistent with findings (Soedarwo et al., 2022), who observed similar barriers in rural empowerment initiatives.

Integration with Literature

The observed 50% increase in sales aligns with Wati et al. (2025), who found that digital marketing significantly expanded SME market reach. Enhanced production efficiency echoes Mulyadi et al. (2024), who stressed the role of technology in product competitiveness. More broadly, the program reflects empowerment models emphasizing innovation and adaptability as resilience drivers in SMEs (Anzules-Falcones & Novillo-Villegas, 2023; Purnomo & Purwandari, 2025)

Sustainability Factors

Sustainability of the program is ensured through three factors:

- Production equipment as a long-term asset.
- Digital marketing skills that members can now apply independently.
- Alignment with local government policy, which prioritizes spice-based SMEs as part of Tidore's economic identity (Saati et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This community service program with KTH Majojo demonstrated measurable outcomes. Monthly sales increased by approximately 50% based on participant reports and observational records, and distribution outlets expanded from 0 to 3. Members also reported improved digital marketing skills and standardized production processes through SOP implementation. These achievements indicate that targeted training combined with equipment support can strengthen SME competitiveness.

For sustainability, the provided equipment serves as a long-term asset, while acquired digital marketing skills continue to be applied by members. However, limitations such as unstable internet connectivity, limited capital, and varying digital readiness among members must be addressed.

The program has potential for scalability, especially for other spice-based SMEs in Maluku Utara. Collaboration with local government and private distributors can further expand market access. Policy support should focus on sustained mentoring, financial assistance, and infrastructure improvements.

Future research should explore the long-term business growth of KTH Majojo, including sales trajectories, market diversification, and the role of digital ecosystems. Comparative studies with other community-based SMEs will also provide broader insights into effective empowerment models.

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