

## Integrated Marketplace Optimization to Enhance the Economic Potential of Agricultural Products in Farmers' Groups in Cikurubuk Village, Sumedang Regency

Fansuri Munawar<sup>a)</sup>, Keni Kaniawati, Rini Handayani, Andhi Sukma, Aditya Yudanegara, Sri Wiludjeng SP

Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Widyatama, Bandung, Indonesia

<sup>a)</sup>Corresponding author: fansuri.munawar@widyatama.ac.id

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### ABSTRACT

This Community Service Program aimed to address the challenges faced by farmers in Cikurubuk Village, Sumedang Regency, in marketing their organic rice products. The farmers' limited knowledge of digital marketing and their reliance on traditional methods restricted their market reach and competitiveness. The program aims to enhance farmers' digital skills by teaching them how to effectively use e-commerce platforms and optimize their branding strategies. The method included three stages: a survey to identify the needs and challenges of the community, training sessions on digital marketing, visual content creation, and branding, followed by mentoring to support participants in implementing these skills. The survey highlighted a significant gap in digital literacy, while the training provided practical knowledge on managing online stores, creating visually appealing product content, and developing strong product branding. Ongoing mentoring helped participants apply these skills effectively in their businesses. The results show that participants demonstrated significant improvements in utilizing digital platforms, enhancing their brand visibility, and attracting more consumers, both locally and nationally. The program led to a notable increase in product visibility and sales, boosting the economic potential of the farmers' businesses. In conclusion, this program successfully empowered local farmers by expanding their knowledge of digital technology and e-commerce, thereby improving their market reach and product competitiveness. This initiative has positively impacted the economic development of Cikurubuk Village and could serve as a model for similar community empowerment programs. It is hoped that this program will inspire other villages to develop by optimizing digital technology to market their regional products

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### **Article History:**

*Submitted/Received 20 Sep 2024*

*First Revised 7 Oct 2024*

*Accepted 8 Oct 2024*

*First Available online 21 Oct 2024*

*Publication Date 21 Oct 2024*

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#### **Keyword:**

*Community service*

*Digital technology*

*Marketing*

*Community empowerment*

*Organic rice.*

## INTRODUCTION

Community service is one of the key components of the *Tri Dharma* of Higher Education in Indonesia, which includes three main pillars: education, research, and community service (Dian Pertiwi, 2022). The goal of community service is to create tangible impacts on improving the social and economic well-being of communities. A significant focus of these activities is empowering rural communities, particularly in the agricultural sector, by introducing digital technology. According to Tambunan & Rahmat (2024), community service significantly contributes to enhancing community welfare, particularly in areas with limited access to technology and information. In this regard, Cikurubuk Village, located in the Buahdua District of Sumedang Regency and known for its organic rice production, presents an ideal location for implementing a digital technology-based empowerment program.

Cikurubuk Village, with its organic rice production, holds substantial development potential; however, local farmers encounter various challenges in expanding their markets and increasing the competitiveness of their products. Organic farming, which eschews the use of chemicals, has been shown to improve the quality and value of agricultural products. Sari et al. (2024) highlight that organic farming enhances farmers' welfare by offering higher-value and environmentally friendly products. Despite their high-quality products, farmers in Cikurubuk Village continue to rely on conventional marketing methods, limiting their reach to the local market. Without adopting digital technology, farmers struggle to connect with consumers on a national and international scale (Gumbi, Gumbi, & Twinomurizi, 2023). Therefore, there is a pressing need for solutions that can enhance farmers' knowledge and skills in digital marketing.

Digital marketing, especially via e-commerce platforms, has emerged as a major trend in modern agricultural product marketing (Koberniuk, 2023). E-commerce enables farmers to market their products more widely and efficiently, shorten the distribution chain, and increase profit margins. According to Kurniawan et al. (2016), adopting e-commerce in the agricultural sector reduces marketing costs, accelerates distribution, and expands market reach. However, many farmers lack the skills necessary to fully utilize e-commerce platforms. In Cikurubuk Village, a significant number of farmers are unfamiliar with using digital technology for marketing purposes, posing one of the main obstacles to business development.

Another challenge faced by the farmers in Cikurubuk Village is the lack of expertise in branding and product promotion. Branding is crucial for creating a strong product image in the minds of consumers, which finally enhances consumer loyalty and boosts sales (Safeer et al., 2021). However, most farmers lack the knowledge to build an effective brand and attract customers. Research by Lim (2016) emphasizes that successful branding requires an understanding of the market and consumer preferences, along with the creation of relevant promotional materials such as high-quality product photos and compelling descriptions. Without strong branding, agricultural products face significant difficulty competing in the increasingly competitive digital marketplace, where product image is paramount.

In addition to challenges in digital marketing and branding, farmers in Cikurubuk Village also struggle with time and resource management. Farmers often find it difficult to balance farming activities with managing their businesses, including running online stores and efficiently serving customers. This issue is further compounded by limited financial resources, as farmers often lack sufficient capital to invest in digital technology and optimize marketplace services. Kaniawati, Sukma, & Oktaviani (2024) highlight that one of the primary barriers to digital technology adoption among small business owners is limited access to capital and skilled human resources. These constraints inhibit farmers' ability to grow their businesses in a more professional and efficient manner.

As a solution to these challenges, the Community Service program offers Integrated Marketplace Optimization training, designed to enhance the digital skills of farmers in Cikurubuk Village. This training will cover several key topics, including identifying market opportunities, utilizing e-commerce features, and creating visually appealing content. Kurniawan et al. (2016) suggest that training focused on digital

technology and marketing strategies can significantly improve farmers' ability to market their products on a broader scale. By gaining a deeper understanding of e-commerce, farmers will be better equipped to use digital platforms to expand their market reach and enhance the competitiveness of their products.

The training will also emphasize product branding and promotion strategies, which are critical for increasing product visibility and capturing consumer attention. Elbedweihi et al. (2016) argue that strong branding is a key factor in attracting consumers and fostering brand loyalty, particularly in competitive markets. Farmers will learn how to develop a consistent brand, design attractive packaging, and use social media as a promotional tool. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp offer cost-effective means for farmers to reach a broader consumer base (Saedudin et al., 2021).

In addition to the training, the program will provide ongoing mentoring to ensure that farmers continue to refine their digital skills and manage their businesses effectively. This mentoring is crucial for helping farmers apply the knowledge gained during training to their daily operations. Saedudin et al. (2021) emphasize that ongoing mentoring ensures that the skills learned are not temporary but become a permanent part of the farmers' business management practices.

The primary goal of this program is to empower farmers in Cikurubuk Village by enabling them to leverage digital technology to optimize the marketing of their products. Additionally, the program aims to improve the welfare of the village community by increasing income through expanded product sales. Utama et al. (2017) assert that expanding market access via digital technology can directly enhance the welfare of farmers by reducing their reliance on intermediaries, allowing them to sell their products at more competitive prices.

In the long term, this program is expected to deliver a sustainable positive impact on the people of Cikurubuk Village. Developing digital capabilities will not only increase the competitiveness of the village's organic rice products in national and international markets but also create new opportunities for farmers to innovate and grow their businesses independently. Kurniawan et al. (2016) highlight that innovation and the adoption of digital technology in the agricultural sector are key drivers for increasing productivity and product competitiveness in the global market.

## METHOD

The implementation method of the Community Service program consists of three main stages: Survey, Implementation, and Monitoring and Evaluation. Each stage is carried out systematically to ensure that the program runs effectively and delivers tangible impacts for the community, particularly for farmers and small business owners in the targeted villages. Nineteen individuals are involved in this activity, including seven lecturers and five students from the Faculty of Economics and Business at Widyatama University. Their collaboration spans the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of the program. The participation of students aims to provide them with practical experience in applying the knowledge they have acquired, while also raising their awareness of the importance of community empowerment.

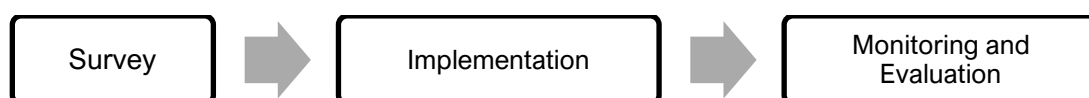


FIGURE 1. Stages of activity implementation

The first stage, the survey, aims to identify the primary problems and needs of the local community. This survey is conducted through field observation, interviews with farmers and business actors, and the distribution of questionnaires to gather data. The survey focuses on understanding the community's level of knowledge regarding digital marketing, the barriers they face in accessing technology, and the potential local products that could be marketed through e-commerce. The results of this survey are used to design

training and mentoring programs tailored to the specific needs of the community, ensuring that the initiatives are well-targeted and relevant.

The implementation phase forms the core of the program, during which various capacity-building activities are conducted. A major component of this phase is digital marketing and e-commerce training. This training includes instruction on how to effectively use marketplaces such as Tokopedia and Shopee, as well as social media, to promote local products. Participants are taught how to create accounts, upload products, write compelling descriptions, and manage their online stores. In addition, they gain knowledge about creating visual content, such as attractive product photos, and employing proper branding techniques to enhance product competitiveness.

The implementation phase also includes practical mentoring sessions following the completion of the training. During these sessions, participants receive direct guidance from facilitators as they apply the knowledge they have acquired. This mentoring is crucial in helping participants address specific challenges they encounter while starting or expanding their online stores. Furthermore, the program promotes the development of marketing networks by fostering collaboration with major e-commerce platforms and related organizations.

After the program is implemented, the monitoring and evaluation stage is conducted to assess the effectiveness of the activities. This process is carried out periodically to track the participants' application of the skills they have learned. Tools such as sales data collection from the marketplace, follow-up interviews, and questionnaires are used to evaluate the impact of the training on the growth of participants' businesses.

The evaluation goes beyond short-term results, also identifying areas that need improvement to ensure the sustainability of the program in the future. Feedback from participants is essential for understanding the program's strengths and weaknesses, allowing for continuous improvement in future community service efforts. The findings from this evaluation will be documented and used as a foundation for developing a more comprehensive and sustainable follow-up program.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The activity was held on Saturday, June 15, 2024. The event aimed to enhance the ability of farmer group members to market and optimize their superior products, such as organic rice, through marketplace integration and attractive packaging design. The event began at 10:00 AM with participant registration, which was managed by the organizing committee.



**FIGURE 2.** Implementation of Activities by Cluster Teams in Cikurubuk Village, Sumedang Regency

At 11:00 AM, the event was officially opened by the master of ceremonies, Sri Wilujeung, SP, SE., MP, who introduced the program and provided an overview of the training objectives. This was followed by remarks from Dr. Fansuri Munawar, SE., MM, the Head of the Community Service Implementation

Committee at Widyatama University, who emphasized the importance of the activity as part of the university's efforts to support community economic empowerment through practical training that could be directly applied by farmers and business actors in Cikurubuk Village.



**FIGURE 3.** Implementation of Activities by the Cluster Team in Cikurubuk Village, Sumedang Regency.

After the remarks from the head of community service team, the Head of Cikurubuk Village, M. Fadar Junawar, ST, delivered a presentation on the economic conditions of the village, where most residents work as farmers and small entrepreneurs. He highlighted that one of the village's leading products is organic rice, which is recognized as a successful example in West Java. However, he also pointed out several challenges, particularly in product offerings in the marketplace and packaging design, which have affected consumer appeal.



**FIGURE 4.** Implementation of Activities by the Cluster Team in Cikurubuk Village, Sumedang Regency.

Following the opening and welcoming session, participants were given time for rest, worship, and lunch (Ishoma) from 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM, coordinated by the committee. This break provided an important pause for participants before they entered the core training material. The event resumed at 1:00 PM with the main training session led by Dr. Maman Wijaya, an expert in product marketing and packaging design. In this session, Dr. Maman provided a comprehensive briefing on online product marketing strategies, particularly through integrated marketplace platforms, and offered practical guidance on creating attractive packaging designs that meet market standards. This material aimed to equip participants with practical skills that could be immediately applied to their businesses, enhancing the marketability of superior agricultural products from the village.

The event concluded at 3:00 PM with the presentation of certificates to participants in recognition of their involvement. The closing session also featured a group photo, led by the MC and the organizing

committee, ending the event on a note of camaraderie and with the hope that the knowledge gained would contribute to improving the village's economy through the development of more competitive products.



**FIGURE 5.** Cluster Team with Village Head, Mr. Muhammad Fadar Junawar

Regarding the material on packaging, it was emphasized that effective packaging not only serves functional purposes, such as protecting products from damage, but also plays an important aesthetic role in marketing organic rice products. Packaging is a key factor influencing consumer purchasing decisions. When selecting packaging materials, it is important to consider environmental and practical aspects. For instance, kraft paper is often used due to its strength, eco-friendliness, and natural appearance, which aligns with organic products. Other alternatives, such as biodegradable plastic, can be considered because they decompose more rapidly in soil while remaining moisture-resistant. Reusable fabric materials, such as cotton or linen, also provide added value for consumers. Packaging designs should reflect organic values, incorporating natural colors and clear information, such as logos, product descriptions, and organic certification. The process of creating such packaging can be carried out independently with simple tools or in collaboration with partners. With attractive and functional packaging, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Cikurubuk Village can increase the competitiveness of their organic rice products in the marketplace, while strengthening their brand image as eco-friendly and high-quality.



**FIGURE 6.** Implementation of Activities by the Cluster Team in Cikurubuk Village, Sumedang Regency.

Furthermore, selling well-packaged organic rice products requires an effective marketing strategy to attract consumers and boost sales. One approach is to design packaging that is both appealing and eco-friendly while maintaining the rice's freshness. This strategy can be enhanced through storytelling,

highlighting the process of producing organic rice and the philosophy behind the choice of packaging, which helps build an emotional connection with consumers. In digital marketing, platforms like Instagram and Facebook can be utilized to promote products through visually appealing photos and engaging descriptions. Additionally, registering products on e-commerce platforms such as Tokopedia and Shopee is essential, as it facilitates online purchasing. Direct sales methods should also be considered, particularly in traditional markets or at organic product exhibitions, where attractive packaging can differentiate products and draw immediate consumer interest. With the right approach, packaged organic rice products can be marketed effectively, increasing visibility and sales across various distribution channels.

Based on the recapitulation of the questionnaire results from the community service activities, the participants' responses were overwhelmingly positive. A majority of participants (73.33%) felt that the activity met their expectations, while 66.67% stated that the committee provided services that catered to their needs. The speakers were considered engaging by 73.33% of participants, who also stated that the material presented was relevant to their needs. The participants' responses regarding how their questions were handled were also favorable, with 50% feeling that their questions were adequately addressed. Additionally, more than half of the participants (53.33%) expressed their willingness to participate in similar activities in the future. Motivation to engage in digital marketing training increased, with 53.33% of participants feeling the urge to implement digital marketing strategies following the workshop.

Several suggestions and feedback from participants indicated that the training had a significant impact on improving product marketing, especially for superior agricultural products such as organic rice. There was also a request for more in-depth and intensive training in the future, particularly in marketing management and local MSME development. The respondents' opinions, as listed in the questionnaire recapitulation, provide deeper insight into how they perceived the training and its impact. Overall, the respondents gave positive feedback regarding this community service activity. Many participants stated that the training was very helpful in enhancing their knowledge and skills, particularly in improving the marketing of superior agricultural products. One participant remarked that the activity was excellent because it expanded their understanding of how to market products more effectively. Another respondent praised the delivery of the material by the resource person, stating that it was highly beneficial, especially for the residents of Cikurubuk Village, who are deeply involved in agricultural production.

One respondent noted that the training had a significant impact on their business and expressed confidence that the knowledge gained could be directly applied to boost sales. This demonstrates that the training was relevant to the practical needs of the participants in developing their businesses. Several respondents also appreciated the quality of the material and the manner in which it was delivered. They felt that the training not only increased their knowledge but also motivated them to innovate in marketing their products. For instance, some respondents highlighted the importance of digital marketing training, which was particularly useful in promoting organic rice, a leading product in the village.

In addition to the positive responses to the PkM activity, participants also offered suggestions for future training sessions. Several respondents hoped that future training would focus more on marketing management and MSME bookkeeping. One respondent suggested more thorough preparation for future training and requested that other MSMEs with development potential in the village, beyond just organic rice producers, be included. Some respondents also called for training on packaging and labeling, which remains a challenge in the village. There is also hope that future training sessions will be extended, starting earlier in the morning to allow for the inclusion of more theoretical content. Additional suggestions include requests for capital support, as many participants felt that a lack of capital is a major barrier to business development. They also proposed that future training cover more topics related to entrepreneurship and MSMEs, including marketing management and sales bookkeeping.

The discussion of the results from the Community Service Program held on June 15, 2024, in Cikurubuk Village indicates that it provided a comprehensive platform for enhancing the marketing capabilities of local

farmers, particularly in integrating their organic rice products into marketplaces and improving packaging designs. The program effectively addressed key challenges raised by village leaders, such as limitations in product presentation and marketplace reach. According to Rifai & Siswanto (2023), interventions focusing on digital marketing and branding can significantly improve rural economic prospects, and this program exemplified that by empowering small-scale producers with market-relevant skills. A key outcome was the emphasis on attractive and eco-friendly packaging, with recommendations for materials like kraft paper and biodegradable plastics, aligning with consumer preferences for sustainability (Koberniuk, 2023). This approach enhanced trust in the organic rice brand and strengthened its identity (Saedudin et al., 2021). Additionally, the integration of marketplace strategies through platforms e-commerce increased the farmers' ability to reach national markets, a critical step for connecting rural producers to broader audiences (Migel Alfanzah Harahap et al., 2024). Participants applied practical skills in product listings, online store management, and social media promotion, resulting in positive feedback, with many expressing increased confidence in marketing their products. The positive reception included 73% satisfaction, with nearly 67% supporting the committee's organization. Furthermore, requests for more in-depth future training on packaging, labeling, and marketing management underscore the need for continuous capacity building, as suggested by Kumar et al. (2023) and Elbedweihy et al. (2016), who emphasize that labeling and branding play decisive roles in consumer purchasing decisions.

## CONCLUSION

The Community Service Program (PkM) in Cikurubuk Village, Buahdua District, Sumedang Regency, has successfully provided a positive impact on improving the digital skills and marketing abilities of farmers and agricultural business actors. Through the Integrated Marketplace Optimization training, participants gained valuable knowledge in marketplace management, creating attractive visual content, and implementing effective promotional strategies. This program has opened opportunities for participants to expand the market for superior village products, such as organic rice, both nationally and internationally. Based on the evaluation results, participants demonstrated significant improvements in optimizing digital technology to market their products, which has enhanced product competitiveness in broader markets.

To ensure the sustainability of this program, several steps are necessary. First, ongoing mentoring is required to ensure that the skills acquired are consistently applied. This mentoring will also assist farmers in addressing new challenges that may arise in the future. Second, more advanced training on digital marketing strategies, the use of analytical data, and the optimization of paid advertising in marketplaces would be highly beneficial. Third, collaboration with external parties, such as e-commerce platforms and MSME support institutions, should be expanded to provide farmers with greater access to promotion and financing opportunities. Lastly, efforts to strengthen the branding and promotion of superior village products must continue, ensuring that Cikurubuk Village products gain wider recognition in broader markets. By taking these steps, the PkM program is expected to provide long-term benefits for the economic welfare of the Cikurubuk Village community and serve as a model of successful village economic empowerment through digital technology.

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