

Enhancing Promotional Strategies and Customer Profiling for Rural-Based Enterprises in Central Sulawesi and North Maluku

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Abstract This community service program was implemented to enhance the marketing capabilities of rural economic actors across several regions in Central Sulawesi and North Maluku, specifically Poso, North Morowali, Banggai, Sigi, Tolitoli, West Halmahera, and South Halmahera. Participants included Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), Toko Tani (Farmer Shop), farmers, and micro-entrepreneurs. Many participants experienced difficulties in identifying their customer segments and implementing effective promotional strategies, and they often relied on conventional marketing methods with limited reach and poorly defined targeting. To address these challenges, selected participants from the regions were brought together for centralized training in Palu using a participatory learning-and-action approach that emphasized customer profiling and promotional strategy development. The results showed measurable improvements in participants' understanding of promotional concepts, as indicated by an increase in correct post-test responses on promotional tools from 82% to 91%. In addition, early uptake of digital promotion practices was observed, with several participants initiating online product promotion through social media platforms. Overall, the program demonstrates that participatory marketing training can strengthen the customer-oriented capabilities of rural enterprises and support scalable and sustainable community empowerment models in rural areas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Local business actors in rural Indonesia often face challenges in identifying their target customers and implementing effective promotional strategies, which can undermine the competitiveness and sustainability of rural enterprises. Although many community development programs have focused on improving production processes and financial literacy, marketing education and customer-oriented business development have remained underemphasized. Recent studies highlight the importance of marketing strategies tailored to rural contexts, including the use of local resources and community-based approaches to build consumer trust (Haris., 2024). In addition, the adoption of digital platforms such as social media, e-commerce, and online advertising has been shown to expand market access for rural SMEs, particularly when

combined with conventional promotional methods (Haris., 2024; Nurkariani et al., 2024). However, many rural enterprises continue to face constraints related to limited digital literacy and inadequate access to technology, which hinder the effective implementation of integrated marketing strategies (Aminuddin & Choiri, 2025). Empirical evidence suggests that digital literacy plays a strategic role in enabling MSMEs to use digital technologies effectively, innovate business models, and improve operational efficiency, as well as market reach (Hermansyah et al., 2025; Umboh & Aryanto., 2023). Without comprehensive digital-literacy capacity building, rural MSMEs may struggle to leverage digital platforms for sustainable growth and competitive advantage. Therefore, targeted training initiatives and supportive policy frameworks are needed to

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accelerate MSME digitalization and promote inclusive and resilient rural economic development.

Therefore, targeted training initiatives and supportive policy frameworks are needed to accelerate MSME digitalization and promote inclusive and resilient rural economic development. Improving digital literacy and marketing effectiveness requires more than technological access. It must also be grounded in a foundational understanding of customer behavior and the development of targeted promotional strategies. This challenge is particularly evident in remote regions such as Poso, North Morowali, Banggai, Sigi, and Tolitoli in Central Sulawesi, as well as West Halmahera and South Halmahera in North Maluku. Despite being rich in agricultural resources such as corn, coconut, cocoa, and processed products such as fried shallots, many enterprises in these areas still rely heavily on informal marketing practices, including word-of-mouth promotion or sales through intermediaries. These practices constrain profit margins and market access, while limited capacity in customer profiling and strategic promotion planning further restricts business growth.

To address these constraints, a centralized training program was conducted in Palu, focusing on strengthening two core competencies, namely customer profiling and promotional strategy development. The program adopted a participatory learning approach through interactive workshops, group discussions, and hands-on exercises, enabling participants to analyze customer segments, develop targeted promotional messages, and select appropriate marketing channels based on their business contexts.

Despite the growing number of community empowerment programs focusing on rural MSMEs, most initiatives still emphasize production capacity and financial management, whereas structured training on customer profiling and promotional strategy remains limited. Previous studies mainly discuss digital adoption outcomes without describing participatory learning processes and behavioral changes among rural actors in sufficient detail. Therefore, this community engagement program addresses this gap by implementing a participatory-based intervention that integrates customer analysis and promotional strategy development in a rural context. The program not only aimed to improve participants' technical skills, but it also contributed to the development of practical empowerment models for marketing capacity building in rural enterprises.

2. METHODS

To address the problems identified in the background and to achieve the objectives of this community engagement activity, the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) method was employed. PLA is a widely recognized community empowerment approach that emphasizes the active involvement of participants in identifying challenges, analyzing root causes, and collaboratively formulating practical solutions. The approach not only focuses on knowledge transfer, but it also strengthens participants' critical thinking, self-reliance, and collective decision

making (Darmawan et al., 2020). This approach was selected because it has demonstrated effectiveness in facilitating behavioral change and improving capacity in communities with limited access to formal education or institutional support. By integrating discussion, reflection, and hands-on practice, PLA enabled participants to develop knowledge grounded in their local contexts and lived experiences.

The training sessions were delivered through a combination of lectures and group-based case workshops. These sessions focused on identifying current and potential target markets and designing relevant promotional messages. The sessions were structured to provide practical marketing knowledge while encouraging active involvement, peer learning, and contextual skill application. Learning media included group worksheets and simulation tools, including smartphones, to support practice in designing various promotional strategies. Discussions were intentionally structured to be participatory and reflective, facilitating the exchange of local business experiences, marketing challenges, and innovative ideas.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation from strategic rural enterprises. A total of 45 participants were involved, including members of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), smallholder farmers, Toko Tani [Farmer Shops], and micro-business actors. All participants were members of the INKLUSI Program [Inclusive and Empowered Community Program] facilitated by Wahana Visi Indonesia. They originated from six districts in Central Sulawesi (Poso, North Morowali, Banggai, Sigi, and Tolitoli) and two districts in North Maluku (West Halmahera and South Halmahera).

Data were collected using pre-test and post-test questionnaires to assess improvements in participants' knowledge and skills, particularly in customer profiling and strategic promotion. The pre-test and post-test instruments consisted of yes-or-no questions designed to measure participants' understanding of key marketing concepts, including customer orientation, promotional tools, market targeting, and digital platform use. Although the evaluation primarily assessed basic conceptual knowledge, it provided an initial measure of learning outcomes associated with the training intervention. One limitation of this evaluation approach was the absence of long-term behavioral measurement, which was planned to be addressed through follow-up monitoring and future program implementation. In addition, direct observation was conducted during the training sessions to capture participant engagement and behavioral indicators of learning. Data from the pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics to quantify knowledge gains, whereas observational data and participant feedback were analyzed thematically to evaluate engagement levels and qualitative improvements in understanding.

The training was conducted over two days in Palu, Central Sulawesi, from 18 to 19 June 2025. One core session specifically addressed customer profiling and promotional message development, which had been

identified as a key gap in participants' prior marketing practices. Before the intervention, most participants relied on informal marketing practices, such as word-of-mouth promotion and interpersonal networks, with limited understanding of market segmentation or persuasive messaging. Through the PLA approach, participants were guided to reflect critically on their existing practices, identify limitations, and collaboratively develop more structured and effective promotional strategies aligned with local market dynamics and business goals.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before the program was implemented, most participants, including Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), Toko Tani [Farmer Shops], farmer groups, and food-processing micro-enterprises, demonstrated limited understanding of customer behavior and structured promotional techniques. Their marketing efforts were largely confined to informal channels, including direct selling in traditional markets or sales through local intermediaries, without customer segmentation, a clear messaging framework, or the use of digital platforms. They also had limited exposure to promotional planning grounded in customer needs. This situation reflects a broader gap in marketing capability that is commonly observed among rural MSMEs.

The training was delivered through two structured sessions to ensure both knowledge transfer and practical application. In Session 1, Customer Analysis, participants were introduced to basic customer segmentation and market mapping. Using structured worksheets and customer-persona templates, participants identified current and potential markets and developed representative customer profiles. A customer persona is a semi-fictional representation of an ideal customer that captures demographic characteristics, behavioral patterns, motivations, and goals (Sinansari et al., 2023). This activity encouraged participants to adopt a more customer-oriented perspective in business decision making. Figure 1 presents group discussion using the customer analysis worksheet.



Figure 1 . Group discussion on customer analysis worksheet

In Session 2, Introduction to Marketing and Promotional Strategy, participants were introduced to

promotional concepts through short lectures followed by hands-on group activities. Figure 2 illustrates the delivery of AIDA-based promotional material. Using the AIDA model, Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action, participants developed promotional messages based on their customer analysis. The AIDA framework provides a systematic structure for persuasive communication by guiding message development from awareness building to action-oriented communication (Apriandi et al., 2025). Previous studies have also indicated that emotionally engaging and audience-centered promotional messages can improve communication effectiveness and consumer response (Mirawati., 2021; Hidayat et al., 2025).



Figure 2 . AIDA copywriting material session

After developing promotional content using the AIDA framework, selected groups participated in promotional simulations using two approaches, namely direct face-to-face promotion and live streaming via mobile devices Figure 3.



Figure 3 . (a) Interactive face-to-face promotional sessions; (b) Live streaming simulations

These activities enabled participants to practice adapting promotional strategies across conventional and digital channels. Participants reported increased confidence in message delivery and greater awareness of how tone, storytelling, and platform selection shape communication

Table 1 . Pre-test and post-test results

Statement	Answer Key	Correct Answer (Pre-test)	Correct Answer (Post-test)
It is not necessary to consider who the customer is and what they need	No	40	40
Offering discounts and advertising are part of promotion	Yes	37	41
Choosing who will buy our product is part of marketing	Yes	27	29
E-commerce is a platform for buying and selling products online	Yes	41	41

effectiveness. By practicing both conventional and digital approaches, participants gained hands-on experience in adapting promotional strategies to available resources and customer behavior. This experiential learning process strengthened participants' ability to contextualize promotional strategies within their local business environments.

Overall, the session emphasized the importance of developing clear, structured, and emotionally engaging promotional messages that align with customer needs and the communication context. The integration of theory and practice enabled participants to internalize core principles of promotional strategy and apply them in practical and contextually relevant ways.

To assess learning outcomes, pre-test and post-test evaluations were conducted. The results indicated varying degrees of knowledge improvement across marketing concepts [Figure .](#)

The test results indicate both retention and improvement in participants' marketing knowledge. The consistently high score on customer orientation, with 40 out of 45 participants responding correctly, suggests that basic awareness of the importance of customers already existed before the intervention. A notable improvement was observed in participants' recognition of promotional tools, which increased from 37 to 41 correct responses, indicating stronger conceptual understanding after the training. However, the relatively small gain in comprehension of market targeting, which rose from 27 to 29 correct responses, suggests that segmentation concepts require further reinforcement through extended mentoring and repeated practice. Knowledge of digital platforms remained stable, which likely reflects participants' prior familiarity with basic digital tools. The improvement in participants' understanding of promotional concepts supports findings by [Haris. \(2024\)](#), who emphasized that community-based marketing education can strengthen trust building and communication effectiveness among rural enterprises. The increased recognition of promotional tools also aligns with [Nurkariani et al. \(2024\)](#), who reported that combining structured promotional strategies with practical training can expand market outreach. However, the modest improvement in market targeting comprehension indicates that segmentation concepts require more intensive mentoring and repeated practice, as also noted by [\(Aminuddin & Choiri, 2025\)](#) in rural MSME digital transformation programs. Beyond quantitative outcomes, early behavioral changes were observed during and after the training sessions. Several participants began

revising their promotional content to incorporate more structured messaging, and at least two initiated basic digital promotions via WhatsApp or Facebook Live to market their products. These immediate actions suggest that the materials and methods were practical and well aligned with local needs and business conditions. Participants also reported increased confidence in presenting their products, both in person and through online channels. The use of simple tools, including templates and mobile phones, supported accessibility and ease of practice. The high level of interaction, peer collaboration, and locally grounded content delivery played an important role in supporting the implementation of this community empowerment activity. The participatory model reinforced learning through direct experience, which helped make the outcomes more sustainable and more likely to translate into practice among rural-based economic actors. Overall, this integrated approach, which combined conceptual input with practical application, was effective in strengthening participants' understanding of customer-centered marketing and their readiness to apply it within the constraints of rural business environments.

4. CONCLUSION

This community engagement program successfully introduced foundational concepts of customer profiling and promotional strategies to rural business actors across seven districts in Central Sulawesi and North Maluku. Through a participatory and context-sensitive training approach, participants were able to identify current and potential markets, define customer profiles using customer-persona templates, and develop promotional messages aligned with their business objectives using the AIDA model.

Despite initial limitations in marketing understanding, particularly regarding customer orientation, participants demonstrated increased awareness and stronger application of promotional techniques. Interactive learning methods, including hands-on worksheets, group discussions, and practical exercises such as live product pitching and streaming simulations, produced more meaningful and practice-oriented learning outcomes. Several participants also demonstrated early uptake of digital promotional tools, indicating a positive shift toward more proactive and self-directed marketing behavior.

The program underscores the importance of practical, accessible, and locally relevant capacity-building models for strengthening rural enterprises. Follow-up support is recommended to deepen participants' understanding of

customer behavior and to encourage consistent application of the tools introduced. In addition, future initiatives could integrate digital literacy and business analytics modules to further strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of rural-based businesses.

Academically, this program contributes to the development of community engagement models by demonstrating that participatory marketing training can be implemented effectively in rural contexts to strengthen customer-oriented business practices. Practically, the findings provide empirical evidence that simple marketing frameworks, including customer personas and the AIDA model, can be introduced successfully to small-scale rural enterprises through contextual and interactive learning approaches. This evidence reinforces the role of community-based capacity building as a strategic instrument for sustainable rural economic empowerment.

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6. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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