



Increasing the Competitiveness of Pandai Sikek Songket Weaving MSMEs through Digital Marketing and Branding Training Based on Local Wisdom

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ABSTRACT

This community service activity aims to analyze and evaluate efforts to improve the competitiveness of Songket weaving UMKM in Nagari Pandai Sikek (Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra) through digital marketing training and branding development based on local wisdom. The background of this community service activity is the various challenges faced by Songket Pandai Sikek weaving UMKM, including limited access to digital markets, competition with cheaper substitute products, and limited regeneration of craftsmen. The method used is a Participatory Action Research (PAR)-based community service method, which places UMKM as active subjects in all stages of the activity. The PAR approach was implemented through a participatory and sustainable cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data collection techniques included evaluative questionnaires, in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation of training and mentoring activities. The results of the community service activities show that digital marketing training and branding development based on local wisdom significantly improve the digital literacy of UMKM actors, the use of social media and marketplaces, and strengthen the identity of Songket Pandai Sikek products as cultural heritage with economic and symbolic value. Recommendations were made for local stakeholders to provide ongoing support through facilitating access to capital, continued mentoring, and strengthening regulations on intellectual property rights and geographical indications for Songket Pandai Sikek.

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Introduction

Nagari Pandai Sikek is one of the villages in Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra, known as a center for traditional songket weaving with high cultural and aesthetic value. Pandai Sikek Songket fabric has distinctive motifs that have been passed down from generation to generation and have become a symbol of pride for the Minangkabau people. As recorded, this songket has been designated as a cultural heritage with its distinctive use of gold/silver thread and “cukie” and “sungayang” motifs. This uniqueness is not merely aesthetic: motifs such as pucuak rabuang (bamboo shoots) and kaluak paku (fern rolls) reflect the values of life and human relations with nature in Minangkabau culture.



Furthermore, the production of Pandai Sikek songket involves manual work and a long time, making it part of the heritage of local craftsmanship that also has economic value for the nagari community.

However, amid technological developments, changes in consumer behavior, and global competition, songket craftsmen face quite serious challenges. Research shows that despite its cultural uniqueness and long history, Pandai Sikek songket is beginning to experience pressure, partly due to a decline in the number of young people involved, a lack of brand strengthening, and competition from modern textile products or songket from regions that have been quicker to adopt digital marketing strategies. In terms of market reach, Pandai Sikek songket has penetrated several countries, including the United States, Australia, and Japan. (Antara News Sumbar) However, most of the interest still comes from local tourists, and systematic international market penetration is still limited. In addition, in terms of branding and digital marketing, a community service study on weaving cooperatives in Pandai Sikek shows that, at the time of the study, the product did not yet have a strong brand identity, and digital marketing was still not optimal.

In terms of regulations and intellectual property rights protection, Pandai Sikek songket is in the process of obtaining a Geographical Indication (GI) certificate to strengthen the product's position in the market. These conditions have resulted in Pandai Sikek songket products having relatively low competitiveness when compared to modern textile products or songket from regions that have been quicker to adapt to digital marketing trends and the use of e-commerce platforms. Not only that, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges: tourist visits, which are usually an important channel for craft product sales, have declined dramatically, thereby impacting the income of craftsmen. Therefore, strategic efforts in the form of mentoring and digital marketing training programs as well as branding development based on local wisdom are urgently needed so that Pandai Sikek songket products can increase their selling value, expand their market, and strengthen their existence in the digital era. By leveraging cultural uniqueness (motifs, philosophy, Minangkabau identity) as a point of differentiation, while strengthening digital channels (social media, e-commerce, branding, and registered IG), artisans can strengthen their position. This kind of assistance is highly relevant because research shows that digital marketing and branding have proven to be important elements in the development of traditional handicraft businesses today.



In addition, IG's recognition of Pandai Sikek songket can be a strategic asset to strengthen product reputation, guarantee quality, and provide protection against product duplication that claims to be "Pandai Sikek songket" when it is not. The proposed training and mentoring program will also contribute to local economic empowerment by increasing artisans' income, creating jobs, and preserving the sustainability of Minangkabau textile cultural heritage. Thus, the development of digital marketing and branding based on local wisdom is not just an additional aspect, but a very important strategic step so that Pandai Sikek songket products not only survive but also thrive in the ever-changing creative economy ecosystem in the digital era. Research on the preservation or conservation of a culture has been conducted by previous researchers. The first study by Iju (2020) sought to determine the role of traditional leaders in preserving the Mbaru Niang traditional houses in Wae Rebo and how to preserve these traditional houses so that their original integrity is maintained. The next study by Rukmana (2014) examined songket fabric in efforts to preserve the culture of the Palembang region in Muara Penimbung Ulu. This study discusses the perception of songket weaving in the preservation of Palembang's regional culture by craftsmen, community leaders, and the community.

In addition to preservation and conservation, there is also previous research discussing songket weaving in its research, Devi's (2015) research on the history and value of Pandai Sikek Songket. This research discusses the history of the birth of Pandai Sikek songket weaving, the process and techniques of its production, and the values contained in the motifs produced in the songket weaving, as well as Tahrir's (2017) research entitled *The Symbolic Meaning and Function of Dragon-Motif Songket Weaving in the Malay Community in Palembang, South Sumatra*. The results of this study show that the symbolic meaning of dragon-patterned songket weaving is an element of the beliefs of the people of South Sumatra, which contains an understanding of life seen from the meaning of unity and refers to the order of life that contains an understanding of the concepts of hope, purity, protection, prosperity, identity, and teachings in the sphere of social life. In terms of its function, the people of Palembang use dragon-patterned songket weaving in their wedding traditions.

Further research by Izzati & Dahlia (2021) examined songket woven fabrics and their cultural function for the community in Nagari Pandai Sikek. This study aimed to discuss songket woven fabrics in Nagari Pandai Sikek, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra. The



results of this study show that songket woven fabrics in Nagari Pandai Sikek have historical value and are characterized by Minangkabau motifs. The motifs found on Pandai Sikek songket fabrics are: pucuak rabuang, biteh, tampuak manggih, saluak laka, bayam, batang pinang, sirangkak, ula gerang, gobah, pucuak sikaka, and ulek tantadu barantai putiah. The decorative patterns on Pandai Sikek songket fabrics are also inspired by the Minangkabau philosophy of “*Alam Takambang jadi Guru*” (Nature is our Teacher). Referring to several relevant studies above, research on songket weaving and conservation is interesting to study. However, researchers are more interested in studying the conservation efforts of songket weaving by the Pandai Sikek community. This research is important as a reference for preserving one of the local skills of the Minangkabau people, particularly the conservation of songket weaving by the Pandai Sikek community.

Methods

This activity uses a Community Service method based on Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR was chosen because it emphasizes the active involvement of the target community as the main subject in the process of social change, rather than merely as the object of intervention, and integrates action and reflection activities on an ongoing basis to solve real problems faced by the community (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McIntyre, 2008). The PAR approach in this activity was implemented through a recurring cycle that included planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the planning stage, the community service team and the Songket Pandai Sikek UMKM actors conducted participatory problem identification, particularly related to limited access to digital marketing, weak product branding, and the challenges of artisan regeneration. This stage also included the formulation of training needs and assistance strategies relevant to the local context.

The action stage was realized through the implementation of digital marketing training and branding development based on local wisdom, which included the use of social media, marketplaces, and the strengthening of the cultural narrative of Songket Pandai Sikek as a Minangkabau cultural heritage. All activities were designed collaboratively and involved the active participation of UMKM actors in hands-on practice (learning by doing). The observation stage is carried out to monitor the process and impact of community service activities, both in terms of increasing digital literacy, changing attitudes towards online marketing, and strengthening product identity. Data collection techniques at this stage



include evaluative questionnaires, in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and activity documentation.

The reflection stage was carried out through joint discussions between the community service team and UMKM actors to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities, identify achievements and obstacles, and formulate improvements and follow-up programs. The results of this reflection form the basis for refining the next PAR cycle and recommendations for program sustainability. With this approach, community service activities are not only oriented towards increasing technical capacity, but also towards the sustainable empowerment and independence of UMKM actors (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Results And Discussion

Results

The results of community service activities based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) began with a participatory identification process of the social, economic, and cultural conditions of songket UMKM in Nagari Pandai Sikek, Tanah Datar Regency. Through focus group discussions and field observations, UMKM actors actively raised the main challenges they faced, particularly limited access to digital markets, weak product brand identity, and minimal involvement of the younger generation in the songket weaving production process. Nagari Pandai Sikek was geographically and culturally identified as a songket production center with high historical and symbolic value. The existence of four jorong with a relatively even concentration of craftsmen shows that weaving is an integral part of the community's social life. The initial mapping results show that songket is not only understood as an economic product but also as a cultural identity that has been passed down from generation to generation.

In the PAR planning stage, UMKM actors and the community service team successfully formulated the most relevant training needs, namely digital marketing and strengthening branding based on local wisdom. The results of this participatory agreement show a collective awareness that the competitiveness of songket products can no longer rely solely on technical quality but must also be strengthened through marketing strategies that are adaptive to technological developments. The implementation of digital marketing training showed an increase in the technical capabilities of UMKM actors in using social



media and marketplaces. The post-training evaluation results showed that most participants were able to upload products independently, compile product descriptions, and utilize photos and videos as promotional tools. Previously, these capabilities were relatively limited and not optimally utilized by most UMKM actors.

In addition to improving technical skills, the results of the activity show a change in the way UMKM players view digital marketing. Social media is no longer understood solely as a promotional space, but as a means of conveying the cultural narrative of Pandai Sikek songket. UMKM players have begun to associate products with stories of their origins, manual production processes, and the Minangkabau cultural values inherent in each piece of songket. The results of strengthening branding based on local wisdom are evident in the emergence of a more consistent product identity. UMKM players have begun to use product names, slogans, and narratives that emphasize the authenticity of Pandai Sikek songket as a cultural heritage. This identity is the main distinguishing factor compared to mass-produced textiles or imitation songket circulating in the market at lower prices. In terms of market reach, the results of the activities show an expansion of marketing access beyond the local and national regions. Several UMKM players reported transactions with consumers from abroad, such as Malaysia, Singapore, and European countries. Although not yet evenly distributed among all participants, this achievement shows the potential of digital marketing as an effective market penetration channel for songket crafts.

The follow-up assistance provided after the training had a positive impact on the level of implementation of digital marketing strategies. UMKM players who received continuous assistance showed consistency in managing marketing accounts, updating content, and responding to potential buyers. Conversely, participants who were not actively involved in the assistance tended to experience a decline in the intensity of their use of digital media. Observations during the activity also revealed that increased market demand has not been fully matched by production capacity. The songket production process, which takes between one and three months per piece, is a major limiting factor. This condition indicates a gap between marketing success and production readiness that needs to be managed strategically. In addition to production limitations, the results of the activity show that the issue of artisan regeneration remains a serious challenge. The majority of active weavers are elderly, while the involvement of the younger generation is still relatively low. These findings emphasize that the success of marketing and branding efforts needs to be



followed by continuous efforts to attract the younger generation in order to maintain the sustainability of production and preservation of Pandai Sikek songket.

Discussion

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach in this community service activity is in line with the goal of increasing the competitiveness of Songket Pandai Sikek weaving UMKM, because PAR places UMKM actors as the main agents of change. The active involvement of craftsmen from the planning stage to reflection allows digital marketing and branding training programs based on local wisdom to be designed according to the real needs of the community. This reinforces the view that local economic empowerment will be more effective if carried out through a participatory and contextual approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The results of the activity show that the competitiveness of Songket UMKM is not only determined by product quality, but also by the ability of business actors to build added value through marketing and branding. The theory of competitive advantage asserts that differentiation based on product uniqueness is a more sustainable strategy than price competition, especially for traditional handicraft products (Porter, 1985). In the context of Pandai Sikek Songket, this differentiation lies in cultural value, authenticity of the production process, and symbols of Minangkabau identity.

Strengthening branding based on local wisdom is proven to be relevant to the concept of cultural branding, which states that culture-based products have strong emotional and symbolic appeal when their local identity is communicated consistently (Holt, 2004). Narratives about the history of songket, the use of gold thread, and the manual weaving process reinforce consumers' perceptions of the product's exclusive value. Thus, branding not only functions as a marketing strategy but also as an effort to preserve culture. Participatory digital marketing training supports the transformation of UMKM business practices towards a digital economy. Increased digital literacy enables UMKM players to utilize social media and marketplaces as a means of market penetration at a relatively low cost. These findings are in line with previous studies showing that digital marketing can increase market access, promotional efficiency, and the competitiveness of UMKM, especially in the creative economy sector (Kannan & Li, 2017; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). The integration of technical digital marketing skills and cultural storytelling is a key factor in increasing product visibility. The theory of value co-creation explains that product value is



not only created by producers, but also through interaction with consumers who understand and appreciate the meaning behind the product (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In the case of Songket Pandai Sikek, digital marketing serves as a space for narrative interaction between craftsmen and consumers.

The initial success in expanding the market reach to foreign countries shows the potential for the globalization of local cultural products. However, from a critical PAR perspective, this achievement needs to be balanced with production readiness and the protection of traditional values. The literature on the creative economy emphasizes that the commercialization of culture must be managed carefully so as not to lead to exploitation or a decline in the quality of the culture itself (UNESCO, 2013). Follow-up assistance after training has proven to be a determining factor in the successful implementation of digital marketing. This reinforces the finding that changing business behavior requires a continuous learning process, not a momentary intervention (Kolb, 1984). Within the PAR framework, assistance serves as a space for joint reflection to adjust strategies to market dynamics and the capabilities of UMKM actors.

The production challenges that arise, especially the length of time it takes to make songket, reflect the tension between economic efficiency and cultural authenticity. Cultural economic theory states that the value of traditional products lies precisely in their limited availability and non-mass production process (Throsby, 2001). Therefore, strategies to increase competitiveness need to consider the balance between market demand and the preservation of traditional quality. The issue of artisan regeneration is an important finding that has long-term implications for the sustainability of songket UMKM. The low interest among the younger generation can be attributed to changes in work orientation and perceptions of traditional professions. Several studies emphasize the need for integration between education, entrepreneurship, and technology to attract the younger generation to engage in culture-based creative industries (Howkins, 2001; Florida, 2014). This shows that improving the competitiveness of Pandai Sikek Songket weaving UMKM through digital marketing and branding training based on local wisdom requires a holistic approach. PAR enables the integration of individual capacity building, collective identity strengthening, and critical reflection on structural challenges. Thus, this community service not only contributes to improving economic competitiveness, but also to community empowerment and the sustainability of local cultural heritage.



Conclusion

Based on the results of analysis and observation conducted during the implementation of community service activities based on Participatory Action Research (PAR), it can be concluded that Songket Pandai Sikek weaving UMKM have enormous potential as high-value and competitive cultural handicraft products. However, this potential still faces various structural and technical obstacles, particularly in the aspects of digital marketing, branding strengthening, limited production capacity, and low regeneration of young craftsmen, which has implications for business sustainability and cultural preservation. Participatory digital marketing training and branding development based on local wisdom have proven to be effective in increasing UMKM actors' understanding and application of digital marketing strategies. Strengthening product identity by emphasizing local cultural values—such as distinctive motifs, manual production processes, and the status of songket as cultural heritage—is an effective differentiation strategy to increase product competitiveness amid competition with cheaper and mass-produced substitute products.

Although digital marketing opens up opportunities for broader and more efficient market access, both nationally and internationally, its successful implementation cannot be separated from the need for ongoing assistance and continuous technical support. The main challenges that still need to be overcome include limited production capacity and scale, the need for a program to regenerate young craftsmen, and access to capital to support business and marketing development. Therefore, continuous synergy between UMKM players, local governments, and other stakeholders is an important prerequisite for increasing the competitiveness and sustainability of Pandai Sikek Songket weaving UMKM.

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