

Empowering Rural Youth and Women Through Affiliate Marketing Training: A Community-Based Digital Entrepreneurship Strategy in Centini Village

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Abstract:

This community service program aimed to empower rural youth and housewives in Centini Village through affiliate marketing training as a digital entrepreneurship strategy. Limited employment opportunities and low digital literacy were identified as major socio-economic challenges. The program introduced affiliate marketing as a low-capital online business model that can be operated via smartphones and internet access. The methods included participatory training, workshops, mentoring sessions, and practical simulations. Participants were guided to register on affiliate platforms, create promotional content, and understand commission systems. The results showed increased digital literacy, improved entrepreneurial motivation, and participants' ability to independently promote products online. The program contributed to economic empowerment by providing alternative income opportunities and strengthening community digital capacity.

Introduction

Digital transformation has changed the way people live and work across the world. Today, many business opportunities no longer require physical stores, large capital, or complex infrastructure. Through internet-based technologies, individuals can create value, start ventures, and reach customers beyond geographical boundaries (Autio et al., 2018). This shift has given rise to digital entrepreneurship, where people use digital platforms to identify opportunities and generate income (Sussan & Acs, 2017).

However, these opportunities are not equally accessible to everyone. Rural communities still face significant challenges, such as limited employment options, low digital literacy, and restricted access to financial and technological resources. Digital exclusion refers to a condition in which certain segments of the population experience prolonged and significant delays in adopting Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) due to circumstances beyond their control (Mwansa et al., 2025). This concept is particularly relevant to rural communities, where structural barriers such as limited infrastructure, geographical isolation, and socio-economic constraints hinder access to and effective use of digital technologies. Similar patterns can be observed in many developing regions, including rural areas in Indonesia, where limited digital literacy and restricted technological resources contribute to unequal participation in the digital economy.

Mwansa et al. (2025) further illustrate how rural communities in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, such as Mkatazo village, face persistent obstacles to digital inclusion. These findings resonate with conditions found in Centini Village, where access to smartphones does not necessarily translate into productive digital engagement. Addressing digital exclusion, therefore, requires not only improving infrastructure but also strengthening digital competencies and providing community-based training initiatives that promote meaningful digital participation.

While smartphones are increasingly common in rural Indonesia, they are often used mainly for communication and entertainment rather than for productive economic activities. This situation reflects what researchers describe as the “second-level digital divide,” meaning that access to technology alone does not guarantee meaningful or economically beneficial use (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2014). Without guidance and skill development, digital tools remain underutilized. Therefore, targeted interventions are needed to transform digital access into digital opportunity.

One promising pathway is affiliate marketing. This model allows individuals to promote products or services and earn commissions through personalized referral links (Duffy, 2017). Unlike traditional businesses, affiliate marketing does not require inventory, large capital, or complicated operational systems. With only a smartphone and internet connection, individuals can participate in the digital marketplace. For rural youth and women, who may face limitations in mobility, capital, or employment access this model offers a flexible and low-risk alternative source of income.

Research shows that digital entrepreneurship initiatives can improve economic outcomes and strengthen financial independence in underserved communities (Kraus et al., 2019). By developing skills in digital marketing, content creation, and online engagement, individuals gain the capacity to expand household income sources and improve their economic resilience. Supporting this perspective, (Shoimah, 2019) found

that self-efficacy and entrepreneurship education significantly influence entrepreneurial intentions among university students. This finding highlights that confidence and knowledge are equally important in shaping entrepreneurial behavior. In other words, people are more likely to start and sustain business activities when they believe in their abilities and receive proper training. Additional studies related to digital financial literacy by (Anjelika et al., 2025) also emphasize the importance of digital competence as a foundation for participation in the modern economy.

Based on these theoretical and empirical considerations, this community service program introduced affiliate marketing training as a strategy to enhance digital literacy, strengthen entrepreneurial readiness, and stimulate economic initiative among rural youth and women in Centini Village. The program was designed not only to teach technical skills but also to inspire confidence, encourage creativity, and open new pathways for income generation.

The objectives of this community service were:

1. To improve participants' digital literacy and understanding of online business models.
2. To provide practical affiliate marketing skills, including platform registration, content creation, and promotional strategies.
3. To encourage economic independence through sustainable digital entrepreneurship practices.

The expected socio-economic impacts include improved digital competence, stronger entrepreneurial awareness, diversified household income sources, and the emergence of local digital ambassadors who can share knowledge and motivate others within the village community.

Method

This community service program was conducted in Centini Village, Lamongan Regency, on July 18, 2025, as part of the Community Service Program (KKN). The primary participants were rural youth and housewives who were identified as having access to smartphones but limited experience in utilizing digital platforms for income-generating activities.

Community Organizing Approach

The program adopted a participatory community empowerment approach, emphasizing collaboration, experiential learning, and active engagement of participants throughout the process. Rather than delivering one-way lectures, the intervention was structured to encourage discussion, practice, and reflection. The method consisted of five

systematic stages:

1. Needs Assessment

The initial stage involved informal interviews and group discussions with community members to identify:

- a. Levels of digital literacy
- b. Patterns of smartphone usage
- c. Awareness of online business models
- d. Economic challenges faced by households

The assessment revealed that although most participants actively used social media platforms, they lacked knowledge of digital entrepreneurship opportunities, particularly affiliate marketing.

2. Program Planning

Based on the findings, training materials were designed to match participants' literacy levels. The modules included:

- a. Introduction to digital entrepreneurship
- b. Basic concepts of affiliate marketing
- c. Platform registration procedures
- d. Content creation techniques
- e. Ethical online promotion practices

The planning phase also determined training duration, learning methods, mentoring strategies, and evaluation tools.

3. Implementation (Training & Workshop)

The implementation stage was conducted through interactive workshops combining:

- a. Short lectures (conceptual understanding)
- b. Live demonstrations (step-by-step registration)
- c. Practical simulations (creating affiliate links)
- d. Small group discussions

Participants were guided to explore affiliate platforms, understand commission mechanisms, and identify potential product niches suitable for their social networks.

4. Practical Simulation and Mentoring

After the workshop session, participants engaged in hands-on practice, including:

- a. Creating affiliate accounts
- b. Generating referral links
- c. Designing simple promotional captions
- d. Practicing product promotion through social media

Facilitators provided direct mentoring and technical assistance. This stage aimed to strengthen participants' confidence and ensure skill acquisition through experiential learning.

5. Evaluation

Evaluation was conducted using:

- a. Pre- and post-training discussions
- b. Observation of participants' ability to register and create content
- c. Participant feedback on training clarity and usefulness

The evaluation focused on measuring improvements in digital literacy, understanding of affiliate marketing concepts, and readiness to independently practice digital promotion.



Figure 1. Affiliate Marketing Workshop Session

Overall, the strategy emphasized experiential learning, collaborative mentoring, and sustainable capacity building. This structured intervention sought not only to increase participants' theoretical understanding but also to ensure their ability to independently apply affiliate marketing practices. Through active participation at every stage, from needs assessment to mentoring the program aimed to transform passive digital users into confident actors in the digital economy.

As shown in Figure 1, the facilitator delivered the training in a face-to-face setting supported by visual presentation materials, enabling participants to follow step-by-step explanations of affiliate platform registration and promotion strategies. The

interactive setting allowed participants to ask questions, engage in discussion, and directly observe practical demonstrations. This environment reflects the participatory approach described earlier, where learning was not limited to lectures but integrated with demonstration and active engagement. The visual presentation tools and group setting supported collaborative learning and enhanced participants' comprehension of digital entrepreneurship concepts.

Result

The implementation of the affiliate marketing training in Centini Village generated measurable improvements in participants' knowledge, skills, and behavioral orientation toward digital entrepreneurship. The outcomes were observed through direct observation, practical performance during simulation sessions, and participant reflections during evaluation discussions.

1. Increased Digital Literacy

Before the training, most participants were familiar with social media platforms but lacked understanding of digital business models. Their knowledge was largely limited to personal communication and entertainment purposes. After the intervention, participants demonstrated a clearer understanding of:

- a. The concept and mechanism of affiliate marketing
- b. Commission-based income systems
- c. The role of digital platforms in online business ecosystems
- d. Ethical considerations in online promotion

Participants were able to explain how affiliate links function, how commissions are generated, and how digital engagement can be converted into economic value. This shift indicates a transition from passive digital consumption to strategic digital utilization.

2. Improvement in Technical Skills

The training significantly enhanced participants' practical competencies. During the practical simulation stage:

- a. The majority of participants successfully created affiliate accounts independently.
- b. Participants generated personalized referral links.
- c. Several participants produced basic promotional captions and product descriptions suitable for social media platforms.

Although some required guidance during the registration process, by the end

of the session most participants were able to complete the steps with minimal assistance. This indicates successful skill transfer and procedural understanding.

3. Behavioral and Mindset Change

One of the most notable outcomes was the change in participants' attitudes toward smartphone usage. Initially, smartphones were primarily used for messaging and entertainment. After the training, participants expressed greater confidence in using digital tools for income-generating activities. Indicators of behavioral change included:

- a. Increased willingness to experiment with digital promotion
- b. Active participation during simulations
- c. Sharing ideas about potential product niches relevant to their community
- d. Expressed interest in continuing affiliate activities after the program

This shift reflects not only skill acquisition but also improved entrepreneurial self-confidence and digital awareness.

4. Emergence of Local Digital Promoters

Several participants showed strong initiative and expressed commitment to consistently promote affiliate products. These individuals began identifying specific market segments, such as household products, fashion items, or educational materials. The emergence of motivated participants indicates the early formation of local digital actors who may serve as peer motivators and informal knowledge disseminators within the village. This is an important indicator of sustainable community impact beyond the initial training session.

Table 1. Participant Skill Improvement

Indicator	Before Training	After Training
Understanding of Affiliate Concept	Low	High
Ability to Register Affiliate Platform	Very Low	Moderate-High
Content Creation Skill	Low	Moderate
Entrepreneurial Motivation	Moderate	High

The descriptive comparison demonstrates clear improvements across all measured indicators. The most significant progress occurred in conceptual understanding and entrepreneurial motivation, suggesting that the program effectively enhanced both cognitive and affective dimensions of digital

entrepreneurship. Overall, these findings indicate a positive social transformation characterized by improved digital competence, increased economic awareness, and the initial development of community-based digital entrepreneurship. While the program was implemented within a limited timeframe, the outcomes suggest strong potential for long-term economic empowerment if continuous mentoring and follow-up activities are provided.

Discussion

The findings of this community service program demonstrate that affiliate marketing training can serve as a practical strategy to translate global digital transformation into local community empowerment. As noted in the introduction, digital transformation has redefined economic participation by removing traditional barriers such as physical infrastructure and high capital requirements (Autio et al., 2018). However, these opportunities are not automatically accessible to rural communities due to digital exclusion and structural constraints (Mwansa et al., 2025). The results in Centini Village confirm that while access to smartphones exists, productive digital utilization requires targeted intervention.

The improvements in digital literacy and technical competence observed among participants directly address the issue of digital exclusion. (Mwansa et al., 2025) emphasize that digital exclusion is not merely about infrastructure limitations but also about delayed adoption and limited capability in using ICT effectively. In Centini Village, participants initially used smartphones primarily for communication and entertainment, reflecting the second-level digital divide described by (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2014). After the intervention, participants demonstrated the ability to transform digital tools into economic instruments, indicating progress from access-based digital inclusion toward capability-based digital empowerment.

The program's participatory approach also played a crucial role in facilitating behavioral change. Consistent with community-based empowerment principles (Hanafi et al., 2015), the structured involvement of participants in discussions, simulations, and mentoring created a learning environment that encouraged ownership and active engagement. Similar to findings by (Muhid et al., 2018), sustainable transformation occurs when communities are actively involved in identifying challenges and implementing practical solutions. The emergence of motivated local digital promoters suggests that participatory strategies not only transfer knowledge but also stimulate initiative and leadership within the community.

From an entrepreneurial perspective, the increase in participants' confidence and motivation aligns with (Shoimah, 2019) findings that self-efficacy and entrepreneurship

education significantly influence entrepreneurial intention. The training did not merely focus on technical procedures such as account registration and link generation; it also strengthened participants' belief in their ability to participate in digital economic activities. This psychological empowerment is a critical factor in sustaining entrepreneurial engagement beyond short-term training.

Moreover, the findings resonate with research by (Anjelika et al., 2025), which highlights the importance of financial literacy and digital competence in shaping economic behavior among younger generations. By introducing affiliate marketing as a structured digital income model, the program contributed to enhancing participants' awareness of responsible digital engagement and income management. This suggests that digital entrepreneurship initiatives can simultaneously strengthen economic literacy and digital capability.

The simplicity and flexibility of affiliate marketing further explain its adaptability in rural contexts. As a performance-based model that requires minimal capital and no inventory management (Duffy, 2017), affiliate marketing reduces structural barriers such as geographic isolation and limited financial resources. For rural youth and women who may face restricted employment mobility, this model provides an accessible entry point into the digital economy. The positive response and practical success of participants in Centini Village indicate that affiliate marketing is not only conceptually understandable but also operationally feasible in rural settings.

Despite these positive outcomes, sustainability remains a critical consideration. While the program successfully initiated knowledge transfer and behavioral change, long-term economic impact depends on continued mentoring, access to updated digital knowledge, and community networking support. Without structured follow-up mechanisms, there is a risk that newly acquired skills may not be consistently applied. Therefore, future initiatives should incorporate periodic mentoring sessions, peer support groups, and collaboration with local stakeholders to maintain momentum.

Overall, the discussion suggests that affiliate marketing training can function as a community-based digital entrepreneurship strategy that bridges digital exclusion, addresses the second-level digital divide, and strengthens entrepreneurial self-efficacy. By combining participatory learning methods with practical digital skill development, the program contributes to inclusive digital development and rural socio-economic empowerment.

Conclusion

This community service program demonstrates that affiliate marketing training can serve as an effective community-based digital entrepreneurship strategy to empower

rural youth and women in Centini Village. The intervention successfully improved participants' digital literacy, enhanced practical skills in affiliate marketing, and strengthened entrepreneurial motivation. These outcomes indicate that structured and participatory digital training can help bridge digital exclusion and address the second-level digital divide by transforming technology access into meaningful economic participation. The findings also highlight the importance of integrating technical skill development with psychological empowerment. Increased self-confidence and entrepreneurial readiness among participants suggest that capacity-building initiatives must address both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. By combining experiential learning, mentoring, and collaborative engagement, the program fostered not only knowledge acquisition but also behavioral change toward productive digital utilization.

From a broader perspective, this initiative contributes to inclusive digital development by demonstrating how global digital transformation can be localized through community empowerment strategies. Affiliate marketing, as a low-capital and flexible business model, proves to be adaptable and feasible in rural contexts where structural economic limitations exist. However, sustainability remains a key challenge. Future programs should incorporate continuous mentoring, digital networking support, and partnerships with local institutions to ensure long-term impact. Expanding training modules to include advanced digital marketing strategies, financial management skills, and monitoring mechanisms would further strengthen economic resilience within the community. In conclusion, affiliate marketing training can function not only as a digital skill development initiative but also as a catalyst for rural socio-economic empowerment when implemented through participatory and sustainable approaches.

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