

& Community Services & Social Work Bulletin

Community Services and
Social Work Bulletin

Volume 5

Nomor 2

Page 41-106

Tahun 2025

e-ISSN 2828-027X



Community Services & Social Work Bulletin

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WHATSAPP BUSINESS WORKSHOP AS A DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICE TOOL FOR MARKETING STUDENTS OF SMK IQRO PASAR KEMIS

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WhatsApp Business Workshop as a Digital Marketing Practice Tool for Marketing Students of SMK Iqro Pasar Kemis

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Received: 15 August 2025; Accepted: 22 November 2025; Published: 30 November 2025
doi: 10.31000/cswb.v5i2.14743

Abstract: Amid limited digital-marketing practice in vocational curricula, 80 grade-XI marketing students of SMK Iqro, Pasar Kemis, completed a four-day WhatsApp Business (WAB) workshop. Grounded in experiential-learning theory, the intervention blended classroom tutorials, hands-on catalogue creation, and field mentoring for five nearby MSMEs. Pre-test/post-test results showed a significant knowledge leap (51.9 ± 9.7 to 87.2 ± 6.4 ; Cohen's $d = 3.3$, $p < 0.001$). Ninety-five percent of students produced full WAB catalogues and 89 % activated automated replies. Partner MSMEs recorded a 2.1-fold rise in customer inquiries after implementing student-designed broadcast campaigns. The study confirms that a brief, low-cost workshop can simultaneously elevate student competencies and deliver tangible benefits to local enterprises.

Keyword: WhatsApp Business, digital marketing, vocational students, SMK Iqro, community engagement

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way economic activities are conducted across the globe. Internet penetration has become a key driver of innovation, productivity, and market access, particularly for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which constitute the backbone of many developing economies (OECD, 2023). Indonesia represents a compelling case in this regard. As the fourth-largest internet market worldwide, the country recorded approximately 212 million internet users in 2025, accounting for more than three-quarters of its population (APJII, 2025). Notably, WhatsApp has emerged as the most dominant digital communication platform in Indonesia, with 98.9% of internet users actively utilizing the application for daily communication, information exchange, and increasingly, commercial transactions (APJII, 2025).

Despite this high level of digital connectivity, the adoption of digital marketing among Indonesian MSMEs remains uneven and fragmented. While



large urban enterprises have increasingly integrated e-commerce platforms, social media marketing, and customer relationship management tools, MSMEs located in peri-urban and semi-rural areas continue to rely predominantly on traditional, offline marketing practices (Tambunan et al., 2022). Empirical evidence from Kabupaten Tangerang illustrates this disparity clearly: only 22% of MSMEs in peri-urban districts such as Pasar Kemis have adopted any form of digital marketing, and most of these initiatives remain limited to basic social media usage without structured customer engagement strategies. This digital divide constrains MSMEs' market reach, operational efficiency, and long-term competitiveness, particularly in an increasingly platform-driven economy.

Digital marketing is widely recognized as a low-cost, high-impact strategy capable of enhancing MSME resilience and inclusivity. Prior studies have shown that digital platforms enable MSMEs to reduce transaction costs, access broader consumer markets, and build more sustainable customer relationships (Kraus et al., 2022; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). However, the effectiveness of digital marketing adoption depends not only on access to technology but also on digital literacy, practical skills, and contextualized learning opportunities. In many developing countries, including Indonesia, MSME owners often face barriers such as limited digital competence, lack of mentoring, and low confidence in using digital tools for business purposes (Rahayu & Day, 2017). These constraints highlight the need for community-based capacity-building initiatives that simultaneously address technological skills and local socio-economic contexts.

Within this landscape, vocational education institutions occupy a strategic position. Vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan, SMK) are explicitly designed to prepare students for immediate entry into the labor market by emphasizing applied skills, industry relevance, and work-based learning (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2020). In Indonesia, SMKs play a critical role in developing human capital for sectors such as marketing, entrepreneurship, and small business management. However, several studies have identified persistent gaps between vocational curricula and industry demands, particularly in relation to digital competencies (Wibowo et al., 2024). Marketing programs in many SMKs continue to prioritize theoretical knowledge and conventional sales techniques, while providing limited exposure to real-world digital marketing platforms and practices (Kusuma & Prabowo, 2023).

SMK Iqro Pasar Kemis exemplifies this broader challenge. The school hosts a Marketing major with 128 enrolled students, yet until recently, opportunities for structured digital marketing practice were minimal. A baseline survey conducted among Grade XI marketing students ($n = 80$) revealed that only 25% had ever created a WhatsApp Business (WAB) account, 18% had uploaded a digital product catalogue, and a mere 8% had utilized automated messaging features such as greeting or quick replies. These findings indicate a significant gap between students' curricular learning and the practical digital skills required by contemporary labor markets and entrepreneurial ecosystems. As a result, students' readiness for internships, employment, or self-employment after graduation remains suboptimal.

From a pedagogical perspective, this gap underscores the limitations of conventional classroom-based instruction in fostering applied digital competencies. Experiential learning theory posits that knowledge is most effectively constructed through direct experience, reflection, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2014). Similarly, situated learning theory emphasizes that learning is inherently social and context-dependent, occurring most effectively when learners engage in authentic activities within real communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These theoretical frameworks suggest that vocational digital marketing education should move beyond simulations and hypothetical case studies toward direct engagement with real platforms, real customers, and real business challenges.

WhatsApp Business presents a particularly promising pedagogical and empowerment tool in this context. As a free and widely accessible application, WAB offers features that align closely with core digital marketing competencies, including product catalog management, customer segmentation through labels, automated communication, broadcast messaging, and basic analytics. Prior research conducted in higher education settings has demonstrated that short-term WhatsApp Business training can significantly improve students' digital marketing knowledge, self-efficacy, and practical skills (Permata et al., 2023). However, empirical studies examining the use of WhatsApp Business as a learning and empowerment tool within vocational secondary education, particularly in community, engaged or service, learning contexts remain scarce.

Integrating vocational education with community engagement offers a dual-benefit model that aligns with social work and community development principles. Service-learning and community-based education models emphasize reciprocal relationships between learners and communities, where educational activities simultaneously enhance student competencies and address local socio-economic needs (Bingle & Hatcher, 2011). In the context of peri-urban MSMEs, such models can transform students from passive learners into active contributors to local economic development, while enabling MSME owners to access digital support that might otherwise be unavailable or unaffordable.

Against this backdrop, the present study reports on a community-based WhatsApp Business workshop conducted at SMK Iqro Pasar Kemis. The intervention was designed to address two interrelated challenges: the limited digital marketing competence of vocational marketing students and the low level of digital adoption among local MSMEs. Grounded in experiential and situated learning theories, the workshop combined classroom instruction, guided hands-on practice, and direct field engagement with MSMEs in the surrounding community. Rather than positioning students as mere trainees, the program framed them as emerging digital facilitators capable of supporting micro-enterprises while developing their own professional portfolios.

Accordingly, this study aimed to: (1) increase students' knowledge and understanding of WhatsApp Business features and digital marketing principles; (2) provide hands-on experience in creating, managing, and optimizing WhatsApp Business accounts through real-world application; and

(3) generate tangible digital marketing portfolios that students can leverage for internships, employment, or entrepreneurial activities, while simultaneously delivering measurable benefits to local MSMEs. By empirically examining the outcomes of this intervention, the study seeks to contribute to the growing literature on community-engaged vocational education, digital empowerment, and practice-based learning in developing-country contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Digital Marketing in Vocational Education

Digital marketing competencies have become essential attributes for vocational marketing graduates to meet the demands of a digitalised labour market (Kusuma & Prabowo, 2023). Recent research reveals that the integration of digital skills into vocational curricula not only enhances technical proficiency but also improves graduates' employability and adaptability in dynamic work environments (Zervas & Stiakakis, 2024). However, a persistent gap exists between the digital skills required by employers and those provided through traditional vocational education, which tends to prioritise theoretical knowledge over practical application of digital tools (Setiawan et al., 2020; Widana, 2025). This gap is particularly evident in areas such as digital marketing platform usage, analytics, and automated communication tools, skills increasingly demanded in modern business contexts.

Studies on vocational education have emphasised the need for curriculum innovation that leverages technology-based learning strategies such as project-based learning, blended learning, and integration of real-world digital platforms into classroom instruction (Song & Lai, 2025). These pedagogical approaches align with experiential learning principles, facilitating the contextual application of digital marketing skills in authentic settings. Empirical evidence suggests that when vocational learners engage with live digital tools, such as social media platforms and messaging-based marketing systems, they exhibit higher levels of engagement, motivation, and competence compared to traditional instruction alone (Song & Lai, 2025; Zervas & Stiakakis, 2024).

Furthermore, the literature underscores that digital literacy development within vocational education must be holistic, involving not only students but also educators and institutional leadership to ensure sustainable integration of digital practices (Wu et al., 2025; Zhong & Juwaheer, 2024). In this context, platforms like WhatsApp Business, which are widely accessible and familiar to students, offer promising opportunities for experiential digital marketing training that bridges vocational learning with local entrepreneurship and community engagement (Dlamini, 2024).

2.2 WhatsApp Business as a Pedagogical Tool

Digital platforms have become integral to modern marketing practices, and their pedagogical value for vocational education has been increasingly recognised in the literature. WhatsApp Business (WAB), in particular, offers an accessible, no-cost environment for students to engage with fundamental digital marketing constructs such as product cataloguing, customer

segmentation through labels, automated communication features, and basic analytics (Ab Halim et al., 2024; Oladokun et al., 2025). These platform features align well with core vocational competencies in marketing, which emphasize applied skills and real-world problem solving (OECD, 2023).

Empirical studies among higher education students demonstrate the educational benefits of live-platform engagement. For example, research by Permata et al. (2023) reported substantial increases in digital marketing knowledge (Cohen's $d = 1.12$) following a two-day WAB workshop with university students. Similarly, studies on digital competencies in technical education have shown that hands-on interactions with real digital tools enhance both student confidence and skill retention compared to purely theoretical instruction (Zervas & Stiakakis, 2024; Wu et al., 2025).

Despite this growing body of evidence, few studies have examined the integration of WhatsApp Business into vocational secondary education, particularly within Indonesian contexts (Setiyawan et al., 2023). Recent literature emphasises that vocational learners benefit most from situated and experiential learning approaches that embed digital tool usage within community-relevant tasks (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Furthermore, the development of digital marketing competencies in vocational settings requires institutional support, curriculum alignment, and educator readiness to facilitate authentic platform-based learning (Zhong & Juwaheer, 2024; Widana, 2025). This indicates a gap in both research and practice that the current study aims to address by exploring WAB training within a community-engaged vocational workshop.

2.3 Situated Learning and Community Engagement

The integration of digital marketing practice into vocational education is increasingly grounded in socially situated and experiential pedagogical models. Central to this is Lave and Wenger's (1991) *communities-of-practice* framework, which posits that learning emerges through active participation in shared practices within a community. This theoretical lens has been influential in vocational education research that situates students directly in real-world contexts to foster authentic skill acquisition and identity formation as competent practitioners (Eraut, 2018; Wenger, 2010). Embedding digital marketing interventions within local micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) ecosystems aligns with this approach by facilitating meaningful engagement with actual business activities rather than artificial simulations.

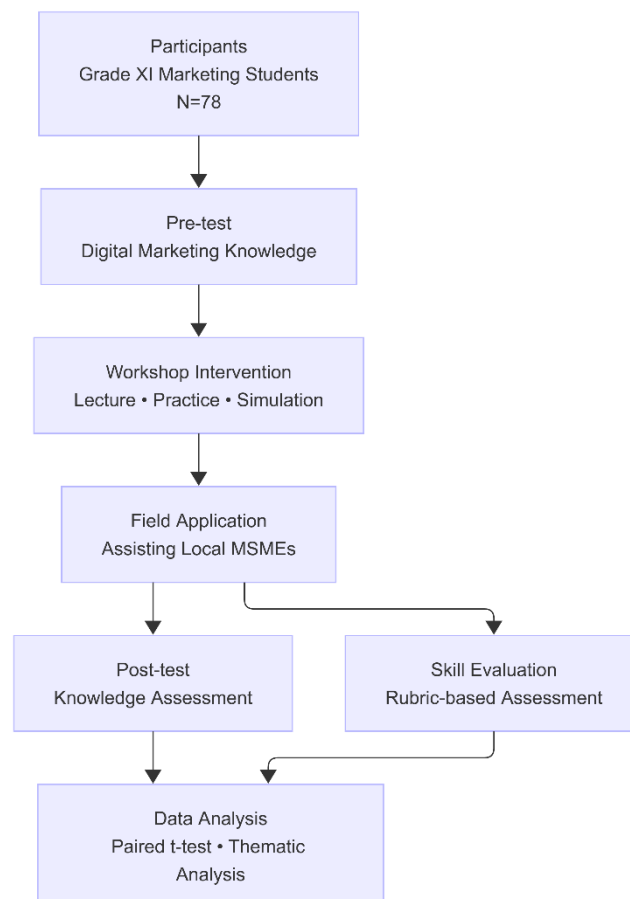
Empirical studies have confirmed that vocational learners demonstrate higher levels of competence development and professional agency when digital marketing tasks are embedded within community practice settings (Zervas & Stiakakis, 2024). For instance, live interactions with local producers, such as creating WhatsApp Business profiles for village snack and garment products, enable students to apply theoretical concepts like audience segmentation, message automation, and catalogue design in contextually rich scenarios. This approach also reflects broader calls for vocational curricula to bridge school-community boundaries through service-learning and work-integrated learning models (Smith et al., 2023).

Moreover, situated digital engagement can generate dual benefits: enhancing student employability while simultaneously supporting MSME digital adoption. Increasing MSME digital capacity is critical in developing economies, where barriers to technology uptake often include limited digital literacy and lack of tailored support (Rahayu & Day, 2017). Integrating community-based digital marketing practice thus not only advances vocational learning outcomes but also contributes to local economic development—creating a symbiotic relationship between education and enterprise.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test–post-test design to examine the effectiveness of a community-based WhatsApp Business (WAB) workshop in improving digital marketing competencies among vocational marketing students. The intervention was implemented from 5 to 26 July 2025 at SMK Iqro Pasar Kemis, Kabupaten Tangerang, Indonesia. This design was selected to accommodate the practical constraints of school-based interventions while enabling the measurement of learning gains following structured experiential training.

Participants comprised all Grade XI students enrolled in the Marketing major at the school ($N = 80$). Using a total population approach, 78 students completed both pre- and post-intervention assessments, resulting in an attrition rate of 2.5%. The mean participant age was 16.8 years ($SD = 0.9$), with



females representing 55% of the sample. All activities were conducted as part of an approved educational program.

Figure 1. Operational Framework of the Community-Engaged Program

The intervention consisted of a four-stage experiential workshop integrating theory, practice, and community engagement. Students first attended an interactive lecture (2 × 45 minutes) introducing digital marketing concepts and WAB functionalities. This was followed by guided hands-on practice (4 × 45 minutes) focused on creating and optimising WAB accounts, including catalogue development, profile configuration, and short-link generation. A simulation phase (2 × 45 minutes) allowed students to practise customer service using automated messaging features. The program culminated in a field-based micro-project, during which students assisted five local MSMEs in establishing or improving their WAB stores.

Data were collected using multiple instruments. Digital marketing knowledge was measured using a 25-item multiple-choice test with good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$). Practical skills were assessed through a five-point Likert-scale rubric evaluating catalogue quality, automation, and analytics usage. Qualitative insights were obtained via focus group discussions with students and structured feedback forms completed by MSME partners.

Quantitative data were analysed using paired-sample t-tests with a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$, supplemented by effect size calculations. Qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify patterns related to learning experiences and perceived community impact.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the community-based WhatsApp Business (WAB) workshop produced substantial improvements in students' digital marketing knowledge, practical competencies, and confidence, while simultaneously generating measurable benefits for local micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). By situating the intervention within an authentic community context, the program succeeded in bridging the gap between vocational classroom learning and real-world digital marketing practice.

Quantitative analysis revealed a pronounced increase in students' digital marketing knowledge following the intervention. The mean test score rose from 51.9 ± 9.7 prior to the workshop to 87.2 ± 6.4 after completion. Statistical testing confirmed that this difference was highly significant, $t(77) = 24.4$, $p < 0.001$, with a Cohen's d of 3.3, indicating a very large effect size. Such a magnitude of improvement is rarely observed in short-term educational interventions and suggests that the combination of structured instruction, hands-on practice, and field application was particularly effective in accelerating learning. Notably, the most pronounced gains occurred in topics related to broadcast-list utilisation and label-based customer segmentation, which increased by 43% and 40%, respectively. These features are often underutilised by novice digital marketers due to their perceived complexity,

yet they are critical for systematic customer engagement. The observed improvement indicates that experiential exposure to these functions helped students move beyond surface-level platform use toward more strategic digital marketing practices.

Beyond cognitive gains, the workshop produced strong outcomes in terms of applied skills. Practical competence was assessed using a rubric-based evaluation across four key WhatsApp Business functionalities. As shown in Table 1, the majority of students were able to perform core digital marketing tasks at a high level following the intervention.

Table 1. Students' Skill Competence Results (n = 78) Following the WhatsApp Business Workshop

Competency Indicator	Number of Students	Percentage	Average Rubric Score (\pm SD)
Created complete catalogue (≥ 5 items)	76	97.4%	4.5 \pm 0.3
Activated ≥ 3 quick-reply templates	70	89.7%	4.4 \pm 0.4
Activated greeting & away messages	69	88.5%	4.3 \pm 0.5
Used labels & chat filters	72	92.3%	4.4 \pm 0.4
Overall average score	-	-	4.4 \pm 0.4

Nearly all participants (97.4%) successfully developed complete product catalogues containing at least five items with appropriate images, pricing, and descriptions. This outcome is particularly significant given that only a small proportion of students had prior experience with catalogue creation before the workshop. Similarly, close to 90% of students configured multiple quick-reply templates and activated automated greeting and away messages, demonstrating their ability to operationalise customer service automation—an essential competency in contemporary digital marketing environments. The overall average rubric score of 4.4 out of 5 indicates that students did not merely complete tasks procedurally, but did so with a high level of quality and consistency.

These findings align with experiential learning theory, which emphasises that competence develops most effectively through direct engagement, reflection, and iterative practice. Rather than learning WhatsApp Business features in isolation, students interacted with the platform as it is used in actual business contexts. This helped transform abstract knowledge into functional skills and reinforced learning through immediate feedback from both peers and MSME partners. Compared with previous studies conducted in higher education settings, which reported moderate to large learning gains after short-term WAB training, the present study suggests that vocational students are equally—if not more—responsive to platform-based experiential learning when instruction is carefully scaffolded and contextually grounded.

Importantly, the benefits of the intervention extended beyond the classroom to the surrounding MSME community. All five partner MSMEs adopted the catalogue templates designed by students, indicating that the outputs generated during the workshop were directly usable and met real

business needs. Four MSMEs activated automated greeting messages within one week of the intervention, suggesting a rapid transfer of knowledge from students to business owners. Moreover, three MSMEs reported a 2.1-fold increase in customer inquiries following the implementation of student-designed broadcast campaigns. Although these figures are based on a small sample, they provide preliminary evidence that student-led digital marketing support can contribute to tangible improvements in MSME customer engagement, even within a short time frame.

From a community development perspective, these outcomes illustrate the potential of vocational education to function as a catalyst for local economic empowerment. Rather than positioning MSMEs as passive beneficiaries, the intervention fostered a reciprocal learning relationship in which students acted as emerging digital facilitators while MSME owners provided authentic learning contexts. This dynamic reflects the principles of communities of practice, where learning occurs through legitimate participation in shared activities. By working with actual village products such as snacks and garments, students developed a sense of professional identity and responsibility, while MSMEs gained access to digital capabilities that might otherwise remain inaccessible due to cost or skill constraints.

Qualitative data from focus group discussions further illuminate the mechanisms underlying these outcomes. Students frequently described increased confidence and a sense of empowerment following the workshop. One participant noted that they now felt confident assisting a family member's home-based food business using WhatsApp, highlighting the spillover effects of the intervention beyond formal schooling. Such statements suggest that the workshop not only enhanced technical competence but also strengthened students' self-efficacy and perceived relevance of their vocational training. For MSME owners, feedback emphasised practical benefits such as improved catalogue organisation and more efficient order management through labels and automated replies. These perceptions reinforce the quantitative findings and underscore the value of simple, low-cost digital tools when paired with targeted capacity building.

The sustainability of the intervention represents another noteworthy outcome. The continued operation of the "Digital Squad Pasar Kemis" WhatsApp group, comprising students, teachers, and MSME mentors, indicates that the learning community established during the workshop persisted beyond the formal intervention period. This ongoing interaction supports knowledge reinforcement and peer learning, which are critical for sustaining skill development. Furthermore, the school's decision to institutionalise the workshop as a bi-annual module suggests organisational learning and curriculum adaptation—key indicators of sustainable educational innovation. The fact that four students secured part-time roles as digital assistants in local MSMEs further demonstrates the program's relevance to labour market outcomes and reinforces the argument that vocational digital marketing training can directly enhance employability.

Taken together, these results highlight the effectiveness of a short, community-engaged WhatsApp Business workshop in achieving multiple objectives: improving vocational students' digital marketing knowledge and

skills, supporting MSME digital adoption, and fostering sustainable learning communities. While the absence of a control group limits causal inference, the magnitude of observed learning gains, combined with consistent qualitative feedback and community-level outcomes, suggests that the intervention had a meaningful impact. Future research could build on these findings by employing comparative designs, longer follow-up periods, or larger MSME samples to further assess scalability and long-term effects. Nevertheless, the present study provides robust empirical support for integrating low-cost digital platforms into vocational education as a strategy for aligning skill development with community empowerment needs.

CONCLUSIONS

A four-day WAB workshop significantly improved the digital-marketing knowledge and applied skills of 78 SMK Iqro students while delivering immediate, measurable benefits to five village MSMEs. The situated-learning approach effectively bridged classroom theory and real-world practice. We recommend scaling the model to other vocational schools and integrating a longer internship component to sustain community impact.

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