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Adaptive government communication and mentoring across MSME digital readiness levels: a qualitative case study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the communication strategies employed by the Department of Industry, Trade, Cooperatives, and MSMEs of North Muli Rawas Regency in supporting the development of digitally based micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four informants, consisting of a digitally active MSME owner, a partner or community representative, a non-digitalized MSME owner, and a representative of the MSME Division of the local government, and were supported by observation and documentation. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Four main themes emerged: multichannel communication strategies in MSME digitalization, the process and gap of digital adoption, the role of mentoring and collaboration, and barriers and needs for strengthening communication strategies. The findings indicate that the most effective communication strategy is hybrid, combining socialization, face-to-face training, direct mentoring, WhatsApp, and social media. The study also identifies a digital readiness gap between MSMEs that have adopted social media and QRIS and those that remain at the pre-adoption stage due to limitations in digital literacy, devices, internet access, time, and technological experience. Continuous mentoring and stakeholder collaboration were found to be critical in bridging information delivery and actual technology adoption in business activities. The study concludes that successful MSME digitalization depends more on the alignment of communication strategies with the digital readiness of business actors than on the number of digital platforms introduced. The findings imply the need for adaptive communication strategies and differentiated mentoring to support a more inclusive and sustainable digital transformation of MSMEs.



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Introduction

Digitalization has opened up opportunities for MSMEs to expand the market, strengthen relationships with customers, and improve business performance, but the level of utilization is still uneven because the ability of business actors to adopt technology varies and is greatly influenced by the support of the available digital environment (Islam, Trinugroho, and Suryanto 2023; Jeza and Lekhanya 2022). This problem is increasingly complex because the digital transformation of MSMEs is not only determined by the availability of platforms, but also by technical readiness, digital strategies, organizational capacity, government support, and the ability of business actors to adapt to changes in the business environment (Ammeran and Abdul Latip 2024; Strilets

et al. 2022). In this context, the low use of digital media by some MSMEs shows that there is a gap between the potential of technology and the actual ability of business actors to use it, so a government communication strategy is needed that is able to adjust the delivery of information, mentoring, and media selection with different levels of digital readiness of MSMEs (van Deventer and Makhubela 2025; Prihandono et al. 2024).

Several previous studies have shown that the digitalization of MSMEs has been studied a lot from the aspect of the use of social media and its impact on marketing performance, where the adoption of digital marketing is influenced by the internal capabilities of the business, management support, market pressure, and the capacity of MSME actors in managing digital channels strategically (Fu et al. 2024; Lestari et al. 2024). Another study emphasizes that the success of digital transformation is not sufficiently determined by the use of platforms, but also depends on digital literacy, human resource capabilities, and innovation capabilities that allow technology to be integrated into business activities in a sustainable manner (Budiarti and Firmansyah 2024; Wulandari et al. 2024). In addition to internal factors, the supporting environment, infrastructure, and the ability to use social media effectively also play a role in strengthening the digitalization process and improving the marketing performance of MSMEs (Hartiani, Zainuddin, and Rahadi 2025; Ozturk, Alqassimi, and Ullah 2024). More recent research also shows that digital transformation, marketing intensity, and digital literacy contribute to the productivity and performance of MSMEs, but limited resources and strategic direction are still obstacles that require more targeted training and mentoring support (Amin, Gohar, and Ali 2025; Sakti et al. 2025; Yajid Latif, Uswatun Hasanah, and Nyimas Umi Kalsum 2026).

The research gap lies in the limited studies that specifically explain how local government communication strategies are adjusted to the difference in the level of digital readiness of MSME actors. Previous research has focused more on technology adoption factors, digital literacy, internal capabilities, social media use, and its impact on business performance, while aspects of government communication through a combination of face-to-face, WhatsApp, social media, direct practice, mentoring, and collaboration have not been widely analyzed as an integrated mechanism in the MSME digitalization process. Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the communication strategy of the North Musi Rawas Regency Disperindagkop in supporting the development of digital-based MSMEs, by examining the forms and media of communication used, the process and gaps in digital adoption of MSME actors, the role of mentoring and collaboration, as well as the obstacles and needs to strengthen communication strategies so that digitalization can be applied more adaptively, equitably, and sustainably.

The contribution of this research lies in the development of understanding that the digitalization of MSMEs is not only a problem of technology adoption, but also a problem of communication design that must be adjusted to the level of digital readiness of business actors. Conceptually, this study introduces the idea of adaptive communication strategies based on digital readiness, namely the integration of multichannel communication, mapping the level of readiness, continuous mentoring, and collaboration between stakeholders in one empowerment process. Practically, the findings of the study provide a basis for the Disperindagkop to distinguish intervention patterns between pre-adoption MSMEs, MSMEs in the early adoption stage, and MSMEs that have matured digitally. Thus, the main contribution of this research is to provide a more contextual framework to bridge the government's digitalization program with the actual ability of MSME actors to adopt and utilize technology in a sustainable manner.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the communication strategy of the Disperindagkop in supporting the development of digital-based Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in North Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research is directed to deeply understand the experiences, perceptions, communication practices, and responses of actors involved in the MSME digitization process in certain social and institutional contexts (Fischer and Guzel 2023). The case study design was used because the research focused on one *bounded case*, namely the communication strategy and assistance for the digitalization of MSMEs carried out in North Musi Rawas Regency. Case studies allow a contemporary phenomenon to be analyzed in depth by considering the relationships between actors, processes, policies, and the real context in which the phenomenon takes place (Greenhalgh 2025).

The research was carried out in North Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra Province, with interviews on July 8, 2026. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement, experience, and relevance

to the focus of the research, because the adequacy of participants in qualitative research was determined more by the quality and depth of information than the number of people alone (Staller 2021). The research involved four informants, namely I1 culinary MSME actors who have used digital media, I2 representatives of MSME companion partners, I3 bamboo woven MSME actors who have not used digital media for marketing, and I4 representatives of the MSME Division of the North Musi Rawas Regency Disperindagkop; The diversity of positions allows for rich perspectives from different actors in the process of digitizing MSMEs (Knott et al. 2022). The selection of informants from elements of government, partners, and business actors at different levels of digital adoption also helps to produce a more contextual and in-depth understanding of the case (Fischer and Guzel 2023).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews are conducted using guidelines based on research focus and allow *probing* to dig deeper into the informant's experience (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik 2021). Observations are directed at socialization, training, mentoring, business activities, and the use of digital media, while documentation includes the Disperindagkop program, fostered MSME data, photos of activities, screenshots of WhatsApp and social media, and evidence of cooperation with partners. The use of several data collection techniques helps to gain a more contextual understanding of the experience and practice of digitizing MSMEs (Knott et al. 2022). The results of the interviews are then transcribed and coded I1-I4 to support the analysis and maintain the confidentiality of the informant.

Table 1. Research Instrument Grid

Research Focus	Indicators / Aspects Explored	Main Informants	Data Collection
Multichannel communication strategy	Communication forms, media used, message delivery, face-to-face and digital communication	I2, I4	Interview, observation, documentation
Digital adoption and readiness gap	Digital platforms used, level of adoption, perceived benefits, digital readiness	I1, I3	Interview, observation, documentation
Mentoring and collaboration	Training, assistance, stakeholder roles, follow-up support, collaboration	I1, I2, I4	Interview, observation, documentation
Barriers and strengthening needs	Digital literacy, devices, internet access, time, content skills, confidence, assistance needs	I1, I2, I3, I4	Interview, observation, documentation

Data are analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify and interpret patterns of meaning in the data systematically by placing the researcher as an active part of the analysis process (Braun and Clarke 2023). Analysis is carried out iteratively through data familiarization, coding, theme development and review, theme definition, and the preparation of an analytical narrative supported by empirical evidence (Braun and Clarke 2024b). The process resulted in four main themes, namely multichannel communication strategies, digital adoption processes and gaps, the role of mentoring and collaboration, as well as the obstacles and needs to strengthen MSME digitalization communication strategies.

The validity of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing information from the Disperindagkop, accompanying partners, MSME actors who have used digital technology, and MSME actors who have not been digitized to assess the suitability and differences in perspectives (Noble and Smith 2025). The accuracy of the analysis is maintained through repeated reading of data, tracing of the relationship between codes, themes, empirical citations, and research questions, as well as the researcher's reflexivity in the interpretation process (Olmos-Vega et al. 2023). The process is adjusted to the principles of reflexive thematic analysis which emphasizes methodological coherence, interpretation transparency, and reflexive openness (Braun and Clarke 2024a). The identity of the informant is presented with codes I1–I4, while each citation is accompanied by an interview date, which is July 8, 2026, to maintain confidentiality while maintaining the empirical traces of the research.

Results and Discussions

The results of the study show that the digitalization of MSMEs in North Musi Rawas Regency takes place through a process of communication, coaching, and mentoring involving the Disperindagkop, partners or accompanying communities, and MSME actors with different levels of digital readiness. The data was obtained through interviews with four informants on July 8, 2026 and was strengthened by the results of observation and documentation of the MSME development and digitization program.

The four informants in this study consist of I1, a culinary MSME actor who has used digital media; I2, representatives of MSME partners or companion communities; I3, a bamboo woven MSME actor who has not used digital media for marketing activities; and I4, a representative of the MSME Division of the North Musi Rawas Regency Disperindagkop.

The thematic analysis produced four main themes, namely: (1) multichannel communication strategies in the digitalization of MSMEs; (2) the process and gap of digital adoption in MSME actors; (3) the role of mentoring and collaboration in encouraging digitalization; and (4) obstacles and the need to strengthen the communication strategy for the digitalization of MSMEs.

Multimedia Communication Strategy in Digitalization of MSMEs

The results of the study show that the North Musi Rawas Regency Disperindagkop uses a combination of direct communication and digital-based communication in delivering digitalization programs to MSME actors. Information is conveyed through socialization activities, face-to-face training, direct mentoring, WhatsApp groups, and social media. The use of these channels allows the delivery of information to be adjusted to the communication habits and digital capabilities of business actors.

The representative of the MSME Division of the Disperindagkop explained:

“We from the Muratara Regional Government Office, to convey information usually through socialization, face-to-face training, direct assistance, and even WhatsApp groups or other social media. We also provide examples of practices in using digital platforms so that MSME actors can more easily understand and apply them.” (I4, interview, July 8, 2026)

Communication and training materials are directed at the practical needs of MSME actors, especially digital marketing, the use of social media and *marketplaces*, the creation of promotional content, and payments through QRIS.

“The materials that are most often provided include digital marketing through social media or marketplaces, creation of promotional content, and the use of payments through QRIS.” (I4, interview, July 8, 2026)

Among the various communication media used, WhatsApp is considered the most acceptable channel. This is because most MSME actors are used to using it in daily communication. Nevertheless, face-to-face meetings are still considered important when business actors need explanations, demonstrations, and hands-on practice.

“Media such as WhatsApp is more effective because almost all MSME actors use WhatsApp. In addition, face-to-face meetings are also still very important, especially the hands-on practice and the question and answer sessions.” (I4, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

The results of the MSME Sector document review show that digitalization is placed as part of the MSME empowerment and development program. In the field profile document, tasks related to digitalization include business development, human resource capacity building, marketing development, promotion facilitation, and digitization of MSME products. Digitalization is also listed as one of the goals of the program in an effort to increase competitiveness and expand market access for business actors.

The digitization program document shows that the material prepared is not only related to social media, but also includes the introduction of digital transformation, Google Business Profile, *marketplace*, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, product photography using mobile phones, digital marketing strategies, QRIS, and digital financial record-keeping. Activity documentation also includes invitations, schedules, attendance lists, training materials, socialization photos, mentoring photos, screenshots of WhatsApp groups, social media, and activity publications.

The compatibility between the interview results and the documentation shows that the communication strategy for the digitization of MSMEs does not depend on one media. WhatsApp and social media are used to expand and maintain communication, while face-to-face meetings provide space for direct delivery of materials, practices, consultations, and problem solving. The documentation of the activity shows the implementation of socialization and training involving MSME actors and accompanying parties. These activities are visual evidence that the digitalization communication process also takes place through direct interaction, as shown in Figure 1.



Source: Research documentation, 2026.

Figure 1. Implementation of MSME Digitalization Socialization and Training

The findings show that the communication strategy for MSME digitalization is carried out through a combination of face-to-face, WhatsApp, social media, and direct practice. A summary of the form and function of the communication media is presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Multimedia Communication Strategy in Digitalization of MSMEs

Subtopic	Interview Findings	Observation/Documentation Evidence	Interpretasi
Direct socialization	Information is provided through socialization and training	Activity documents, materials, schedules, and documentation of socialization are available	Interpersonal communication remains an important part of digitalization
WhatsApp	Considered the easiest for MSME actors to accept	There is documentation on the use of WhatsApp groups as a medium of communication	Familiar media facilitates communication continuity
Social Media	Used in communication and promotion	There is social media documentation and publication of activities	The program begins to integrate digital communication channels
Digitization materials	Social media, marketplaces, QRIS, and promotional content	Materials include Google Business Profile, <i>marketplace</i> , social media, QRIS, and digital recording	Communication messages are geared towards practical skills
Direct practice	MSME actors need demonstrations and questions and answers	The program includes training and practical mentoring	Digital transformation requires practice-based learning

Source: Research interview, observation, and documentation data, 2026.

The findings of the first theme show that the communication strategy of the Disperindagkop is multichannel and hybrid, namely combining digital media with face-to-face communication. The use of technology does not eliminate the need for interpersonal communication, especially for MSME actors who still need technical assistance.

Digital Adoption Process and Gap in MSME Actors

The results of the study found that there is a clear difference in the level of use of digital technology between MSME actors. Some business actors have used technology for promotion, communication, ordering, and payment, while others are still using conventional marketing patterns.

I1, a culinary MSME player who has been running a business for about five years, has started to utilize digital media in the last two years.

“The digital media I use is WhatsApp to receive orders from customers, Instagram and Facebook for product promotion, and QRIS to facilitate payments. In the future, I also want to be more active in using the marketplace so that sales will increase.” (I1, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

The use of digital media provides benefits in the form of expanding promotional reach, making it easier for customers to place orders, accelerating communication, and increasing sales.

“The most tangible benefits are that products are more known by the wider community, customers are easier to find and order products, communication with customers becomes faster, and sales have increased compared to before using digital media.” (I1, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

Different conditions were found in I3, a bamboo weaving business actor. Marketing activities are still carried out conventionally and depend on buyers who come directly.

"Not yet. I am still manual and usually those who buy it come directly to the store or to the house." (I3, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

The lack of use of digital media is mainly due to the limited ability to use social media.

"Because they still don't understand how to use social media." (I3, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

These limitations are reinforced by network and device conditions.

"In my village, the signal is lacking. Because I have to use Wi-Fi, the cellphone must be good, while I haven't used a good cellphone." (I3, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

Although I have not yet taken advantage of digital technology, I3 shows interest in using it if it gains understanding and assistance.

"Maybe use social media like Facebook, because Facebook has a marketplace. Maybe it can help me." (I3, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

The results of the research documentation show that there is fostered MSME data and social media documentation of business actors that can be used to see variations in the use of digital technology. The program document also stipulates the use of digital platforms as one of the indicators of MSME development.

In the bamboo weaving business, the results of observations in the context of interviews show that the main products in the form of baskets and various other bamboo woven products are still marketed through direct sales patterns. This condition is consistent with I3's statement that marketing activities have not used digital media.

Meanwhile, MSME actors who have been digitized have found the use of social media as a means of introducing products and establishing communication with consumers. The documentation strengthens I1's statement on the use of digital media in business activities and at the same time shows that there are differences in the level of technology adoption among MSME actors. One form of social media utilization by MSME actors is shown in Figure 2.



Source: Research documentation, 2026.

Figure 2. Utilization of Social Media by MSME Actors in Product Marketing

The difference between the use of digital media in I1 and conventional marketing patterns in I3 shows that there is a gap between the available digitalization programs and the actual ability of some business actors to utilize them. The findings show that there is a difference in the level of digital technology utilization between MSME actors who have used digital media and those who still rely on conventional marketing. A comparison of the digital adoption rates is presented in Table 2.

Table 3. Comparison of Digital Adoption Rates of MSME Actors

Aspect	Culinary MSME	Bamboo-Weaving MSME	Cross-Case Interpretation
Current digital adoption	Has adopted several digital tools in business activities	Has not yet adopted digital tools for marketing and transactions	Digital adoption differs substantially between MSME actors
WhatsApp	Used to receive customer orders and communicate with customers	Not yet used as a business marketing channel	Adoption of basic communication platforms remains uneven

Aspect	Culinary MSME	Bamboo-Weaving MSME	Cross-Case Interpretation
Instagram	Used for product promotion	Not yet used	Social media utilization depends partly on digital skills and experience
Facebook	Used for product promotion	Not yet used, but interested in Facebook Marketplace	Non-adopters may still demonstrate willingness to adopt accessible platforms
QRIS	Used to facilitate digital payments	Not yet used	Digital payment adoption remains uneven
Marketplace	Not yet actively used, but planned for future expansion	Interested in using Facebook Marketplace	Both actors demonstrate potential for further digital development
Perceived benefits	Wider promotional reach, easier ordering, faster customer communication, and increased sales	Benefits have not yet been directly experienced because digital technology has not been adopted	Perceived benefits are more evident among actors with actual digital-use experience
Main barriers	Content creation and limited time to manage digital platforms	Limited digital knowledge, inadequate devices, and weak internet connectivity	Barriers vary according to the actor's level of digital readiness
Attitude toward digitalization	Positive and oriented toward further expansion	Positive and interested, but currently lacks the capacity to implement it	Low digital adoption should not automatically be interpreted as resistance to digitalization
Digital readiness	Relatively higher	Relatively lower	The findings indicate a digital-readiness gap among MSME actors

Source: Research interview, observation, and documentation data, 2026.

The Role of Mentoring and Collaboration in Encouraging the Digitalization of MSMEs

The digitalization of MSMEs does not only take place through the individual initiatives of business actors. The results of the study show that the government, partners or communities, and fellow MSME actors have a role in increasing digital knowledge and readiness.

I1 explained that knowledge about digitalization was obtained from government training, social media, and the experiences of other business actors.

"I first got information about business digitalization from MSME training held by the government or related agencies, as well as learning from social media and fellow business actors who have used digital technology first." (I1, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

The training and assistance of the Disperindagkop is considered to help improve practical knowledge.

"The program and assistance from the Disperindagkop are quite helpful, especially in providing knowledge on how to market products online, using social media for business, and understanding the importance of digital payments such as QRIS." (I1, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

In addition to the government, partners or communities have a function as companions and liaisons.

"Communities or partners play a role as companions for MSME actors through training, socialization, and information sharing regarding the use of digital technology. In addition, the community also helps MSMEs market their products through social media, marketplaces, and expand business networks." (I2, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

Cooperation between partners and the Disperindagkop is realized through *digital marketing* training, *marketplace assistance*, program socialization, exhibitions, and product promotions.

"Cooperation is carried out through digital marketing training activities, assistance in the use of marketplaces, socialization of government programs, and exhibition or promotion activities of digital-based MSME products." (I2, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

Although communication between parties is considered quite good, the dissemination of information still needs to be strengthened.

"Communication goes quite well through face-to-face meetings, WhatsApp groups, social media, and training activities. However, coordination still needs to be improved so that program information can be received by all MSME actors." (I2, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

Mentoring is also designed to continue after the training is completed.

“The assistance is carried out through periodic consultations or visits to business locations, the formation of communication groups for discussions, and assisting MSME actors when they experience problems in using marketplaces, social media, or other digital applications.” (I4, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

Examples of the success of other business actors are also used as a source of motivation.

“The success stories of MSME actors who have succeeded in increasing sales through digital marketing are a motivation for other business actors to follow the digitalization process because they see the benefits in real terms.” (I2, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

The MSME Sector document shows that the coaching pattern involves coordination with the government, the business world, financial institutions, village governments, communities, and other partners. The form of the program includes training, business consulting, mentoring, promotion facilitation, access to financing, and monitoring business development. The research documentation also shows that there are socialization, training, mentoring, and cooperation activities with communities, village governments, and other partners.

The digitalization program also includes follow-up in the form of participant assistance, monitoring the use of *marketplaces*, digital consultation clinics, and advanced training on marketing and content creation. The findings of the documentary reinforce the results of the interview that the digitalization of MSMEs is carried out through a collaborative network and not only through one-way communication from the government to business actors. The form of assistance and involvement of various parties in the development of MSMEs can be seen in Figure 3.



Source: Research documentation, 2026.

Figure 3. Practice and Assistance Activities for MSME Actors

The existence of these activities shows that the government plays a role as a program facilitator, while partners and other stakeholders help expand mentoring, access to information, and business development networks. The findings of interviews and documentation show that the digitalization of MSMEs involves the role of the government, partners, communities, and business actors in the process of training, mentoring, and expanding digital access. A summary of the roles of each actor is presented in Table 3.

Table 4. The Role of Actors in Mentoring and Collaborating on MSME Digitalization

Actor	Role Form	Evidence Empirical	Contribution to Digitalization
Disperindagkop	Socialization and training	Training, digital materials, socialization	Provide initial knowledge and skills
Disperindagkop	Advanced assistance	Consulting, visiting, monitoring	Assist in the resolution of practical constraints
Partners/communities	Training and socialization	Cooperation and mentoring activities	Expanding the reach of construction
Partners/communities	Promotion and networking	Social media, <i>marketplaces</i> , exhibitions	Expanding market access
Fellow MSMEs	Sharing experiences	Informal learning	Become a source of practical knowledge
Successful MSMEs	Success model	Digitalization success stories	Increase the motivation and confidence of other actors

Actor	Role Form	Evidence Empirical	Contribution to Digitalization
Village government/other institutions	Institutional support	Proof of cooperation	Expanding the MSME support ecosystem

Source: Research interview, observation, and documentation data, 2026.

The findings of the third theme show that digitalization takes place in a collaborative ecosystem. The government provides programs and facilitations, partners strengthen the mentoring process and network access, while fellow MSME actors become an experiential learning resource.

Obstacles and Needs to Strengthen MSME Digitalization Communication Strategies

The results of the study found that the digitalization of MSMEs still faces technical, infrastructural, managerial, and psychological obstacles. The type of constraints also differ between business actors who have used technology and business actors who have not been digitized.

I1 that has used digital media still faces difficulties in optimizing its use.

"The difficulties I still face are limited knowledge in creating interesting promotional content, keeping up with rapid technological developments, and limited time to manage social media because I have to focus on the production process." (I1, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

This information is in line with the findings of the Disperindagkop.

"Obstacles that are often encountered are for example digital literacy, limited devices or internet networks, or lack of time to manage digital accounts." (I4, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

Partners added that there is a factor of doubt in using digital platforms.

"The obstacles that are often faced include low digital literacy, limited access to the internet and devices, lack of time to learn technology, and there are still doubts in using digital platforms to sell." (I2, Interview, 8 Juli 2026)

The digitization program document identifies a number of obstacles that are consistent with the interview results, including the diverse digital capabilities of participants, limited internet networks, limited devices, and limited time to follow technology usage practices. This condition shows that the need to strengthen the digitalization of MSMEs is not only related to access to digital platforms, but also to the ability of business actors to develop products, strengthen business identities, and utilize digital media as a means of promotion and market expansion.

Documentation of local MSME products shows that business actors already have products that can be marketed, but still need to strengthen aspects of branding, presentation of product information, promotion, and integration with digital marketing channels. This condition shows that digital mentoring needs to be directed not only at technology introduction, but also at the ability to connect products with more effective digital communication and marketing strategies, as shown in Figure 4.



Source: Research documentation, 2026.

Figure 4. The Condition of MSMEs in the Digital Pre-Adoption Stage

The program follow-up document includes follow-up assistance, monitoring of *marketplace use*, digital consultation clinics, and advanced training on digital marketing and content creation. Thus, the follow-up of the program is directed at increasing the capacity of business actors so that they not only know digital technology, but also be able to utilize it more in accordance with their business needs and characteristics. The findings of interviews, observations, and documentation show that the obstacles to the digitalization of MSMEs include differences in digital literacy, limitations in devices and networks, time, and the ability to manage digital media. A summary of the constraints and their strengthening needs is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Obstacles and Needs to Strengthen MSME Digitalization

Dimensions	Findings	Strengthening Needs
Literasi digital	Difficulty using social media and technology	Basic training and hands-on practice
Konten digital	Difficulty creating engaging promotional content	Photography, design, and content assistance
Perangkat	Devices are not always adequate	Device access support
Jaringan internet	Limited signal and internet access	Infrastructure support and alternative access
Waktu	Production limits media management time	Simple and efficient digital strategy
Perkembangan teknologi	Perpetrators have difficulty keeping up with technological changes	Gradual and periodic training
Kepercayaan diri	Some perpetrators are still hesitant to use digital platforms	Mentoring and success stories
Pemerataan informasi	The program does not always reach all MSMEs	Strengthening coordination and communication networks
Keberlanjutan pendampingan	One-time training is not enough	Post-training mentoring and consultation

Source: Research interview, observation, and documentation data, 2026.

The need for continuous assistance is explicitly conveyed by MSME actors.

“My suggestion is that the MSME digitalization program continues to be carried out in a sustainable manner with direct practical assistance, not just theoretical training. In addition, there needs to be assistance in creating online marketing promotional content and mentoring for MSME actors who still do not understand digital technology.” (I1, interview, July 8, 2026)

Partners also emphasized the importance of using simple language and cross-stakeholder collaboration.

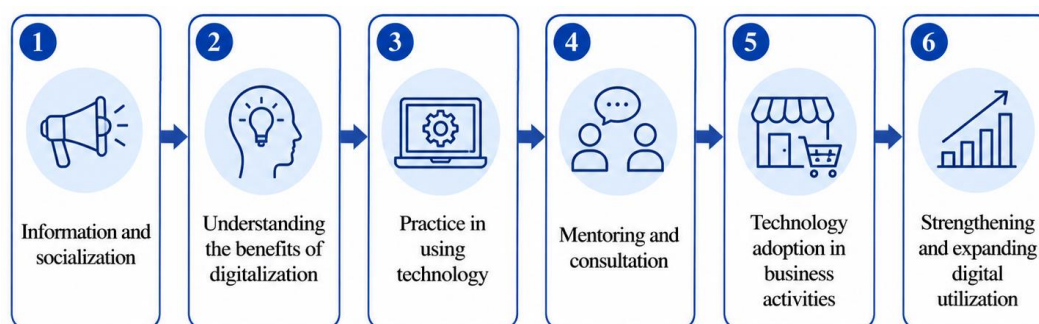
“Communication strategies should be carried out in a sustainable manner using simple and easy-to-understand language. In addition, there is a need for direct assistance, the use of social media and communication groups, as well as closer collaboration between the government, communities, academics, and business actors so that information and digitalization programs can reach all MSMEs effectively.” (I2, interview, July 8, 2026)

This view is consistent with the explanation of the Disperindagkop:

“The most effective strategy is to use simple language, provide hands-on practice, and showcase examples of the success of other MSME actors.” (I4, interview, July 8, 2026)

The findings show that the problem of digitalization cannot be solved by simply increasing information. The needs of each MSME actor differ according to their digital readiness stage. Actors who have not been digitized need basic literacy and skills, while actors who have used technology need improved content capabilities, marketing, and platform optimization.

Based on these four themes, the communication strategy for the digitalization of MSMEs in North Musi Rawas Regency can be understood as a gradual process that connects information delivery, understanding formation, technology use practices, mentoring, and digital adoption. Empirically, the process can be described as follows:


Figure 5. Stages of the MSME Digitalization Process

The main findings of the study lie in three aspects. First, the communication strategy used is hybrid and multichannel, by combining WhatsApp, social media, socialization, training, and direct mentoring. Second, there is a gap in digital readiness between MSME actors. I1 has used WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and

QRIS, while I3 is still using conventional marketing patterns despite showing interest in starting using Facebook Marketplace. Third, continuous mentoring is the link between program communication and technology adoption, especially for business actors who face limited literacy, devices, networks, or self-confidence.

The compatibility between interviews, observations, and documentation also shows that the digitization program has been directed at the practical use of technology, such as social media, marketplaces, QRIS, product photography, Google Business Profile, and digital financial record-keeping. However, the ability of MSME actors to adopt this technology is still different.

Thus, the effectiveness of the MSME digitalization communication strategy is not only determined by the number of media used or the amount of information conveyed, but also by the ability of the strategy to adjust messages, media, materials, and forms of assistance to the level of digital readiness of each business actor. The digitalization of MSMEs in North Musi Rawas Regency is therefore more appropriately understood as a communication and empowerment process that requires sustainability, differentiation, mentoring, and collaboration between stakeholders.

The first finding indicates that the North Musi Rawas Regency Disperindagkop uses a hybrid communication strategy that combines face-to-face socialization, training, direct mentoring, WhatsApp, and social media. This approach reflects the importance of matching communication channels with the digital capabilities and everyday practices of MSME actors rather than relying solely on technological availability (Nur, Andreas, and Liang 2025; Qalati et al. 2022). WhatsApp appears to function as an accessible communication medium, while face-to-face interaction remains important for explanation, assistance, and practical guidance, suggesting that digital channels are most useful when they complement interpersonal communication (Anam, Muntalim, and Mas'ud 2023; Borah, Iqbal, and Akhtar 2022). Training on digital marketing, marketplaces, content creation, and QRIS further shows that communication becomes more effective when information is directly connected to practical business skills (Maesaroh, Pratama, and Arif 2026; Sunarso et al. 2025; Tolstoy, Nordman, and Vu 2022). The combination of digital media and direct assistance therefore enables the program to broaden its reach without reducing the support needed by MSMEs with different levels of digital capability (Cao and Weerawardena 2023; Mushi 2024; Nurhidayah, Pujiastuti, and Ridhasyah 2025). In this context, a hybrid approach appears more appropriate than a digital-only strategy because it accommodates varying levels of readiness while gradually strengthening digital competence.

The second finding reveals a clear digital readiness gap between Informant 1, who already uses WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and QRIS, and Informant 3, who still depends on conventional marketing. This contrast suggests that the digital divide among MSMEs involves not only access to technology but also the capacity to incorporate digital tools into everyday business practices (Ballerini, Herhausen, and Ferraris 2023; Rachmawati, Sudarno, and Sabandi 2023). Technology adoption is shaped by digital literacy, business characteristics, infrastructure, and individual readiness, which helps explain why the availability of digital platforms does not necessarily lead to their effective use (Efendi and Waharini 2023; Ta and Lin 2023). Informant 3's interest in Facebook Marketplace, despite limited knowledge, devices, and internet access, illustrates the distance between willingness to adopt and actual capacity to do so (Mardiyani, Fatimah, and Komara 2026; Zahoor et al. 2023). Meanwhile, Informant 1's difficulties in producing content and managing social media indicate that digitalization remains an ongoing process even after initial adoption (Hariyanto and Safitri 2026; Radicic and Petković 2023). These differences support the need for differentiated mentoring based on the readiness, resources, and digital capabilities of each MSME (Clemente-Almendros, Nicoara-Popescu, and Pastor-Sanz 2024; Suyatna et al. 2026).

The third finding shows that mentoring and collaboration function as a link between program delivery and technology adoption, because the digital knowledge of MSME actors is not only obtained through the Disperindagkop, but also through partners or communities, social media, and the experiences of fellow business actors, so that the adoption process develops through simultaneous internal and external support (Faiz, Le, and Masli 2024; Sulistiowati et al. 2024). The information exchange pattern shows that the digital transformation of MSMEs takes place in a digital learning ecosystem, which is a learning environment formed through relationships between the government, partners, communities, business actors, and supporting institutions in the process of exchanging digital knowledge and experience (Dewi, Anggraeni, and Soetanto 2026; Škare, de las Mercedes de Obesso, and Ribeiro-Navarrete 2023). The existence of periodic consultations, visits to business sites, communication groups, and post-training assistance shows that digital capacity building requires a continuous process and is not enough to be done through one-time training, because the success of digital transformation is determined by the ability of business actors to

develop and use technology consistently in business activities (Kallmuenzer et al. 2025; Pamungkas, A'yun, and Supriatna 2026). The use of other MSME success stories also shows that persuasive communication based on real experience can increase business actors' confidence in the benefits of technology, while the quality of adoption is still influenced by technology, organizational, environmental, and network support factors (Religia, Ramawati, and Muafi 2026; Romero and Mammadov 2025). Thus, the digitalization of MSMEs requires social and institutional scaffolding in the form of mentoring, mentoring, knowledge exchange, and continuous collaboration so that the ability to use technology can develop into a more stable, adaptive, and sustainable business capability.

The fourth finding highlights the multidimensional nature of MSME digitalization barriers, ranging from limited digital literacy, devices, and internet access to difficulties in content creation, time management, technological adaptation, and confidence in using digital platforms. These constraints suggest that digital transformation requires more than simply introducing new applications or communication channels (Merín-Rodríguez, Dasí, and Alegre 2024; Rahmawati and Muharam 2026). The contrast between I3, who still needs basic digital skills, and I1, who has already adopted several technologies but requires further marketing optimization, illustrates how support needs vary across levels of digital maturity (Seppänen, Ukko, and Saunila 2025; Sujani, Panglipursari, and Arif 2026). A uniform intervention is therefore unlikely to address these differences, as technology adoption is shaped by business characteristics, technological readiness, human resource capacity, and the surrounding institutional environment (Kristiyanto, Anggraeni, and Sailah 2025; Sultan and Riyadh 2025). The use of QRIS by I1 also shows that transaction digitization is part of increasing the digital maturity of MSMEs, but the sustainability of its use still requires support in the form of convenience, perceived benefits, literacy, trust, and readiness for digital payment technology (Ismail, Pranaditya, and Andini 2026; Shao et al. 2025). Digitalization support in North Musi Rawas Regency should therefore be staged according to MSME readiness, beginning with basic digital literacy for non-adopters, marketplace and digital-payment assistance for early adopters, and more advanced support in digital marketing, content production, customer management, and financial management for more digitally mature businesses.

The novelty of this research lies in the finding that the success of MSME digitalization is not primarily determined by the number of digital platforms introduced, but by the suitability of the government's communication strategy with the level of digital readiness of business actors. This research shows that multichannel communication, digital readiness mapping, continuous mentoring, and collaboration between stakeholders need to be integrated in one gradual empowerment process. In contrast to previous research that tended to examine technology adoption, digital literacy, or MSME performance separately, the findings in North Musi Rawas Regency show that there is a digital readiness gap between MSMEs that have been digitized and MSMEs that are still in the pre-adoption stage, so that the form of communication and mentoring cannot be standardized. Thus, the new contribution of this research is to place an adaptive communication strategy based on digital readiness as a mechanism that bridges the government's digitalization program with the adoption and actual use of technology by MSME actors.

The implications of the research findings show that the MSME digitalization program needs to shift from a uniform approach to adaptive assistance based on the level of digital readiness of business actors. For the Disperindagkop, this requires an initial mapping of digital literacy, device availability, internet access, and experience using the platform before determining materials, communication media, and forms of assistance. MSME actors in the pre-adoption stage need basic training, hands-on practice, and intensive mentoring, while actors who have utilized technology need reinforcement in content creation, digital marketing, marketplace use, digital payments, and customer management. Program communication also needs to maintain a combination of WhatsApp, social media, and face-to-face meetings in order to reach business actors with diverse levels of digital capabilities. In addition, collaboration between the Disperindagkop, partners, communities, academics, village governments, and financial institutions needs to be strengthened so that mentoring does not stop at training, but continues through consultation, monitoring, and evaluation of the application of technology in business activities. Thus, the main practical implication of this study is the need to build a gradual, differentiated, collaborative, and sustainable digital communication and mentoring model so that the digital transformation of MSMEs takes place more inclusive and equitable.

This study has limitations in the scope of cases that only focus on North Musi Rawas Regency, the number of informants is limited to four main actors, and data collection is carried out in one period, so that the findings cannot describe the variation in communication strategies and digital readiness of MSMEs more broadly as well as changes in technology adoption from time to time. This study also emphasizes more on the experiences and perceptions of informants so that the impact of digitalization on objective indicators,

such as changes in turnover, digital transaction intensity, customer growth, and sustainability of platform use, has not been analyzed longitudinally. Based on these limitations, further research is recommended to use a multi-case design in several districts or cities by involving more MSME actors from various sectors and levels of digital readiness. The *mixed methods* approach can also be used to integrate the experience of business actors with quantitative data on the use of technology and changes in business performance. In addition, longitudinal research is needed to trace the development of MSMEs from the pre-adoption stage to a higher level of digital maturity while testing the effectiveness of adaptive communication strategies and differentiated digital readiness-based mentoring resulting from this research.

Conclusions

This study concludes that the communication strategy of the North Musi Rawas Regency Disperindagkop in the development of digital-based MSMEs works most effectively when implemented in a multichannel, adaptive, and sustainable manner, through a combination of face-to-face communication, WhatsApp, social media, training, direct practice, and mentoring. The main findings of the study show that the problem of digitizing MSMEs does not only lie in the availability of technology, but also in the difference in the level of digital readiness of business actors, which is reflected in the gap between MSMEs that have utilized social media and QRIS and MSMEs that are still in the pre-adoption stage due to limited literacy, devices, networks, and digital experiences. Assistance and collaboration between the Disperindagkop, partners, communities, and business actors have proven to be an important link between information delivery and the application of technology in business activities. Thus, this study answers that the communication strategy for MSME digitalization needs to be built based on the level of readiness of business actors, not using a uniform approach. The implication of this research is the need for the Disperindagkop to implement differentiated assistance, namely to strengthen literacy and basic practices for pre-adoption MSMEs as well as the development of marketing, content, marketplaces, digital payments, and customer management for MSMEs that are more digitally mature, so that the digital transformation process can take place more inclusively, effectively, and sustainably.

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