

Sustainable communication for MSMEs in Kampung Laos: Study on the digital economic empowerment of villages

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Abstract

This research examines sustainable communication practices in the digital economic empowerment of MSMEs in Kampung Laos, Merah Mata Village, Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra. Although the digitalization of MSMEs is often understood as a matter of technology adoption, there is still limited research that places communication, local values, and power relations as the foundation for the sustainability of the digital economy in rural communities. This research uses a qualitative approach with a participatory case study design. Data was collected through participant observation in university-community engagement programs, in-depth interviews with purposively selected key informants (farmers, MSME actors, village officials, and institutional representatives), and a review of CSR documents and community production archives. The research findings identify four main dimensions of sustainable communication, namely, local narrative-based social marketing in "Kampung Laos," CSR support as an initial trigger for empowerment, community participation in collective decision-making, and low-digital technology adaptation through WhatsApp and Instagram. This practice increases product visibility and order flow stability, although it still faces limitations in digital literacy and distribution. This study shows that digital economic empowerment lies on a spectrum between independence and dependence on external actors. This research contributes to the development of sustainable communication studies by affirming that integrating local values, social innovation, and participatory communication is more crucial for the economic sustainability of MSMEs in the digital age than simply adopting technology.

Introduction

The digitalization of the economy in rural areas of Indonesia is uneven and tends to be slower compared to urban areas, leading to a significant digital divide. This gap is not merely a difference in access to technology, but also encompasses digital literacy, community communication capacity, and institutional relationships that affect the ability of village Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to use technology sustainably (Avista et al., 2025). In many rural contexts, the adoption of digital technology does not stand as a

neutral technical process, but rather takes place within already established socio-economic structures.

Statistical data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) shows that MSMEs remain the backbone of the Indonesian economy. In the 2023 Complete Cooperative and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (PL-KUMKM) Survey, MSMEs were recorded as comprising 99.87% of the total business units in Indonesia, with thousands of businesses spread across 215 districts/cities in 32 provinces, reflecting the dominance of micro-enterprises in the national economic structure (BPS, 2023). However, this quantitative dominance is not always accompanied by strengthening digital capacity, especially in rural areas.

Digital transformation for rural MSMEs still faces significant barriers, including low levels of technological literacy, limited connectivity, and dependence on external actors in the digital adoption process. Studies show that the digital divide—the difference in the ability to adopt and utilize digital technology—is wider in rural areas compared to urban areas, which impacts the limited participation of rural MSMEs in the broader digital economic ecosystem (Amalia et al., 2025). At the national level, Sitompul et al. (2025) assert that the digital transformation of Indonesian MSMEs is uneven and tends to be adaptive-selective, where technology adoption is often partial and has not yet been able to change established market relations and traditional distribution structures. This condition indicates that digitalization in rural areas cannot be understood solely as a technical process, but rather as a social process closely linked to the local institutional context and economic relations.

In this context, a framework for sustainable communication becomes relevant for understanding digitalization as a gradual and contextual social process. This framework positions communication not merely as the dissemination of information, but as a medium for empowerment, the formation of social relationships, and the negotiation of interests within the socio-economic structures of communities (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). This approach emphasizes that social and economic sustainability is built through participatory communication that integrates technology with local values, norms, and practices, rather than solely through the adoption of technology as a technical instrument.

Merah Mata Village in Banyuasin I District, Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra, is a concrete example of this dynamic. This village, with an area of approximately ±6,266 hectares and a population of ±8,745 people, is dominated by agricultural activities and micro-enterprises. Among the various village potentials—such as grape cultivation, songket weaving, and cassava tape—the cultivation and processing of galangal (laos) in the area known as “Kampung Laos” are developing collectively through farmer groups and local MSMEs.

Since receiving support for facilities, infrastructure, and training through PT PLN (Persero)’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program since 2021, local galangal production has increased significantly, from an average of 300 kg/month to approximately ±900 kg/month in 2023 (interview with the Head of Merah Mata Village, August 12, 2023). This increase in production is driving the diversification of processed products such as chips, shredded meat, and galangal sticks, which are starting to be marketed through simple digital channels like WhatsApp and Instagram. This practice demonstrates how low-tech technology is utilized as the most viable economic communication infrastructure amidst resource limitations.

However, this digitalization process did not happen automatically or linearly. The obstacles of limited network access, low digital skills, and dependence on external actors—such as Community Service Program (KKN) students or accompanying institutions—demonstrate that digitalization is a social process involving learning, power relations, and

gradual adaptation. Literature on digital inclusion in rural areas confirms that the success of economic transformation is heavily determined by digital literacy, community participation, and the sustainability of mentoring, not by technology alone.

Kampung Laos was chosen as the research context not to represent all rural SMEs in Indonesia, but because of its unique characteristics: (1) collective land management and production; (2) commodity-based economic transformation rooted in organically grown local products; and (3) the gradual but consistent adoption of simple digital technology. This context aligns with the hybrid sustainability communication approach, which emphasizes the integration of local values, social practices, and low-tech digital technologies in building the socio-economic resilience of rural communities.

Based on this background, this research aims to: (1) analyze how social marketing and citizen participation shape the collective identity of Kampung Laos MSMEs; (2) explain how the integration of simple digital technology and local values creates an adaptive yet ambivalent empowerment mechanism; and (3) identify structural challenges—including market dependence and digital capacity limitations—that hinder the optimization of the rural digital economy. Theoretically, this research enriches the development of the concept of sustainable communication through a contextual hybrid approach. Practically speaking, the research findings offer a reference for developing more inclusive and sustainable models for empowering rural MSMEs.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design to understand sustainable communication practices in the digital economic empowerment of MSMEs in Kampung Laos, Merah Mata Village, Banyuasin I Regency. The intrinsic case study design was chosen because the research focuses on the uniqueness of the socio-cultural context and local dynamics, requiring an in-depth understanding of communication practices, social relations, and the empowerment processes that occur naturally within the community (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

Data collection was conducted during July–August 2023 using three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was carried out during community activities, including the process of galangal chip production, village meetings, and informal digital training. The researcher's position as a community companion allows for the natural observation of social interactions and communication practices. To maintain reflexivity and objectivity, the researcher kept descriptive notes on activities and conversations, as well as reflective notes on assumptions and potential biases during the research process.

In-depth interviews were conducted semi-structurally with six key informants purposively selected based on their strategic roles in the village MSME ecosystem, namely two female MSME actors, one community leader, two village officials, and one representative from a supporting institution. The interviews focused on digital transformation experiences, marketing strategies, local communication practices, and perceptions of CSR support and external actors. The number of informants was adjusted to the exploratory nature of the study, which emphasizes the depth and richness of the data rather than statistical representation. Additionally, document analysis was conducted on the village's social media posts (Instagram @tp_pkk_desa_merah_mata), mentoring notes, CSR reports, and UMKM production archives. Document analysis was used as a means of triangulation to assess consistency between informant narratives, the community's actual practices, and available documentation. The brief profile of the research informants is

presented in Table 1 to illustrate the diversity of roles and positions held by the informants within the Kampung Laos MSME ecosystem.

Table 1. Research Informants

Code	Role	Description
INF1	Village Head	Village policymaker and facilitator of support for local MSMEs
INF2	Female MSME Actor	Galangal chip producer, limited digital engagement
INF3	Female MSME Actor	Informal marketing manager
INF4	Community Leader	Community communication liaison
INF5	Village Official	Training activity coordination and administrative support
INF6	Representative of Relevant Agency	Digital literacy program mentor

Data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), through six stages: data familiarization, initial code generation, theme development, theme review, theme definition and naming, and findings report writing. This approach allows researchers to capture meaning at the semantic level—what the informants convey—and the latent level—the meaning behind practices and narratives—and to connect it to a framework of sustainable communication.

The validity and credibility of the data are maintained through several strategies, including technique triangulation (observation, interviews, and documents), peer debriefing through regular discussions with fellow researchers to review the coding process and theme development, reflexivity through recording the researcher's position and involvement as a community companion, and an audit trail consisting of the systematic storage of field notes, interview transcripts, and analysis documentation. These steps are taken to minimize potential bias resulting from the researcher's proximity to the research context.

This study has limitations as a single-case study-based qualitative exploratory study in the socio-cultural context of Kampung Laos. This approach provides depth of understanding, but has limitations in terms of generalizing the findings. Additionally, qualitative analysis contains the potential for researcher subjectivity, even tho mitigation efforts have been made through reflexivity, triangulation, and discussions among researchers. Therefore, the findings of this study are more accurately understood as an initial stepping stone for further research, such as multi-case studies or longitudinal designs, in order to broaden the context and strengthen theoretical exploration (Lim, 2025; Raskind et al., 2018).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings from participant observation, in-depth interviews with key informants, and a review of CSR documents and production archives of MSMEs in Kampung Laos. The results and discussion are presented in an integrated manner to show how sustainable communication practices shape the community's digital economic capacity through the interaction between local identity, production and marketing practices, and external interventions. The analysis highlights the role of communication in strengthening the "Kampung Laos" narrative, negotiating market relations, the ambivalence

of low-tech digitalization, and the contribution of social innovation and community participation in building economic resilience and communication sustainability.

Production, Local Identity, and the Transformation of Economic Meaning

This section integrates empirical findings and theoretical discussions to explain how communication processes play a role in shaping economic capacity, production practices, and community resilience in Kampung Laos. The main findings of the study indicate that increased galangal production and local economic diversification cannot be understood solely as a result of technical interventions or the adoption of digital technology, but rather as a social process involving changes in meaning, the strengthening of local identity, and collective communication practices built through the daily interactions of residents. In this context, communication serves not only as a medium for conveying information, but also as a mechanism for shaping community values, social relations, and economic orientations.

Empirically, this study found that the Laos Makmur Sejahtera Farmers Group experienced a significant increase in galangal production capacity since PT PLN's CSR program began to be implemented more structurally in 2021. This group manages approximately 62 hectares of land with 53 active members. Based on field observation data and the group's production records, the production volume of galangal increased from an average of approximately 300 kg per month before 2021 to approximately 900 kg per month in 2023. This increase reflects success at the technical level, such as the availability of seedlings, production tools, and basic cultivation knowledge. However, more than that, the increase in production also indicates a change in farmers' perspective on galangal as a valuable and strategic economic commodity.

In in-depth interviews, several farmers stated that before the CSR program's mentoring and support, galangal was more often positioned as an intercrop or side crop grown for household needs. This shift in orientation occurred gradually through group communication processes, discussions in farmers' meetings, and informal interactions among community members. Through this collective communication process, galangal began to be understood as a major source of income worthy of being managed together. This finding suggests that economic transformation at the community level is not solely determined by material inputs, but also by communication processes that shape shared consciousness and collective action orientation.

Along with the increase in primary production, this study also found the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) based on galangal as an effort to produce downstream products. The awareness that the production of galangal as an upstream commodity is insufficient to ensure economic sustainability led to the formation of the MSME "Laos Makmur Sejahtera Farmers Group" in 2023, chaired by Sri Wahyuni. This MSME processes old galangal purchased for around Rp3,000 per kilogram into various downstream products, such as galangal floss, galangal chips, and galangal sticks. One of the flagship products, galangal floss, is sold for Rp10,000 per 50-gram package. As stated by Sri Wahyuni, "Our MSME processes old galangal purchased for Rp3,000/kg. From that galangal, we process it into galangal floss with a selling price of Rp10,000 for 50 grams. The sales of galangal floss certainly greatly help family income" (personal interview, July 29, 2023).

This downstream activity opens up new economic participation opportunities for community members, especially women. Observation data show that approximately 80% of MSME actors are women who play a dominant role in the initial processing, packaging, and marketing of products. Women's involvement in MSMEs not only impacts household income but also expands their social and economic roles at the community level. Thus, downstream processing of products not only increases the economic value of galangal but also contributes to transforming gender relations in local economic practices.

In marketing practice, Kampung Laos MSMEs are starting to utilize simple digital technology as part of the community's digital life. Processed galangal products are promoted through the Instagram social media account @tp_pkk_desa_merah_mata and the WhatsApp application, which serves as the main communication channel with consumers. Additionally, galangal floss products are also marketed through the Waroeng Pehkaka platform under the product name "Serundeng Laos Kampoeng Laos". This platform was built by the South Sumatra Province Family Empowerment and Welfare Movement Team (TP PKK), which curates and markets MSME and UP2K products from various districts/cities in South Sumatra.

However, field findings indicate that although MSMEs have been connected to the digital marketing ecosystem, control over packaging design, product naming, and distribution is still largely mediated by external actors, particularly the provincial TP PKK. In practice, the galangal floss products produced by MSMEs are often purchased as finished products and then resold by TP PKK through various digital platforms they manage. This pattern indicates structural dependence, where MSME actors have not fully mastered the entire digital marketing value chain, even tho they are involved in the production and processing stages.

This finding shows that economic transformation in Kampung Laos is happening alongside the strengthening of local identity, which is formulated through the narrative of "Kampung Laos." This identity was not designed as a formal branding strategy, but rather grew organically from community communication practices, such as farmer group discussions, mutual aid work, and informal meetings between residents. This local identity then became a symbolic anchor connecting production, processing, and marketing activities within a single framework of collective meaning. In this context, the identity of "Kampung Laos" serves as social capital that strengthens group cohesion while also legitimizing the collective economic efforts being undertaken.

This local identity narrative is beginning to be translated into simple digital media, primarily WhatsApp and Instagram. WhatsApp has become the main channel because it best suits the communication habits of the residents, is easy to operate, and does not require complex technical skills. Through the WhatsApp group, members of the farmer groups and MSMEs share information about production, orders, and distribution. Instagram was introduced gradually to reach a wider market, especially through mentoring by KKN students and community cadres. However, the use of Instagram is still limited, and only about 30% of MSME actors are able to produce digital content independently.



Figure 1. Community Service Seminar on Digital Economy in Kampung Laos 2023

Source: Researcher Documentation

This condition indicates that although local identity has become the basis of marketing narratives, the digital independence of communities has not been fully achieved. This

finding aligns with the community-based marketing approach, which emphasizes that community-based marketing grows from social capital and citizen engagement, not solely from external strategies (Salim, 2025). Within the framework of sustainability communication, this situation can also be understood through the dimensions of education and empowerment as proposed by Godemann and Michelsen (2011), where new digital technologies serve as communication aids but have not yet fully become a means of learning and transforming community capacity.

Furthermore, these findings confirm that communication in the context of rural development cannot be separated from local social and cultural practices. Digitalization that is not integrated with the daily rhythm of community life tends to result in sporadic and instrumental use of technology. Therefore, the transformation of galangal's meaning from a side crop to a main commodity in Kampung Laos was actually more supported by face-to-face communication, deliberation, and social interaction processes than by digital technology itself. Thus, the initial part of these results and discussion indicates that the success of increased production and economic diversification in Kampung Laos is a result of a combination of material interventions, strengthening local identity, and collective communication practices, while digitalization plays a supporting role, not the main determinant.

Ambivalence of Digitalization, Gender, and Market Relationship Structures

Continuing the discussion from the previous section, this part delves deeper into the dynamics of digitalization in sustainable communication practices in Kampung Laos, specifically focusing on market relations, digital literacy, and gender dimensions in the economic empowerment of MSMEs. Research findings indicate that the utilization of digital technology has opened up new opportunities for marketing processed galangal products, but its impact on transforming the community's economic structure remains ambivalent. Digitalization presents opportunities for increased revenue and product visibility, but is simultaneously constrained by traditional distribution structures, limitations in digital capacity, and deeply rooted socio-economic relationships.

Empirically, the use of digital technology by MSME actors in Kampung Laos is still dominated by a low-tech approach, primarily through WhatsApp and Instagram. Processed galangal products, especially galangal floss, are promoted through the Instagram account @tp_pkk_desa_merah_mata and WhatsApp as the main communication channel with consumers. Additionally, the product is also marketed through the Waroeng Pehkaka platform under the name "Serundeng Laos Kampoeng Laos," an initiative of the South Sumatra Provincial TP PKK that curates and markets MSME products from various districts/cities. Through these channels, MSME actors stated that there was increased product visibility and market reach beyond the village area. This pattern of utilizing simple platform-based digital media aligns with the findings of Rahmawati et al. (2024), which show that the use of WhatsApp Business and Instagram Business by rural SMEs effectively increases product visibility and communication with consumers, but generally still relies on mentoring support and has not developed into a fully independent digital marketing system.

Sources reveal that digital marketing allows for an increase in order frequency, especially during certain periods such as before major holidays or when promotional content is actively disseminated by official PKK accounts or accompanying partners. Some MSME actors also mentioned that daily sales flow became relatively more stable compared to before using digital media, although the sales volume was not consistent throughout the year. This finding indicates that digitalization provides a tangible additional revenue stream, but it is still limited in scale and highly dependent on promotional momentum.

However, this study also found that the use of digital technology has not completely replaced the role of traditional distribution channels. Approximately 70% of farmers and business owners still rely on middlemen as the primary channel for selling fresh galangal harvests. The reasons cited include the certainty of cash payments, the ease of transactions, and long-established social relationships. This situation indicates that farmers' economic decisions are not solely based on price rationality, but also on considerations of economic security and the sustainability of social relations. Thus, digitalization has not yet functioned as an instrument of structural transformation, but rather as an additional strategy in maintaining the economic sustainability of households.

The ambivalence of digitalization is becoming increasingly apparent in the structure of market relations for processed products. Field observation results show that although Kampung Laos MSMEs have connected with the digital ecosystem through curation platforms like Waroeng Pehkaka, control over branding, packaging design, and distribution is still dominated by external actors, particularly the provincial TP PKK. In this scheme, MSME actors primarily serve as producers, while strategic decisions regarding product image, visual standards, and marketing channels are beyond the direct control of the community. This pattern creates structural dependence, where the added value of digital marketing has not been fully enjoyed by MSME actors at the local level.



Figure 2. MSMEs of the Laos Makmur Sejahtera Farmers Group with Downstream Products

Source: Researcher Documentation

This condition strengthens the finding that the adoption of digital technology in rural communities is often partial and mediated by institutions, rather than being the result of full mastery by the business operators themselves. Digitalization operates within established social and institutional structures, so its impact is heavily determined by the power relations that accompany it. This finding aligns with Dlela's (2025) view that digital media in rural communities tends to produce incremental increases in market access, but does not necessarily alter power relations within the value chain. In the Indonesian context, Amalia et al. (2025) also show that limited digital literacy and a lack of ongoing support are major obstacles to the optimal use of digital technology by rural MSMEs.

Nevertheless, the evolving digital marketing practices in Kampung Laos can be understood as the initial stage (embryonic stage) of village-based e-commerce development. Online transactions are still simple, based on personal communication via WhatsApp and visual interaction on Instagram, without integrated digital payment or logistics systems. However, this practice has opened up space for collective learning among MSME actors in managing customer relationships, negotiating prices, and building product narratives

based on local identity. In the context of limited resources, digital technology serves as the most realistic and accessible economic communication infrastructure for communities.

The gender dimension is an important aspect in understanding these dynamics. The research found that women play a dominant role in processing galangal products and offline marketing activities, but their involvement in digital marketing is still relatively limited. Many female informants stated difficulties in creating digital content, understanding social media platform features, and managing online communication with consumers. These barriers are not only technical but also relate to domestic workload, time constraints, and social norms that affect women's access to technology and decision-making spaces.

This finding is consistent with the study by Limilia and Prasanti (2024), which revealed a gender-based digital literacy gap in Indonesia, where women often have more limited access to technology training despite being the primary actors in the family economy. The study by Yuliatiningtyas et al. (2024) also confirms that gender-sensitive digital training can boost women's confidence and capacity to utilize technology for marketing. In the context of Kampung Laos, women's involvement in digital marketing still heavily relies on external support, whether from CSR mentors, TP PKK, or younger family members.

At the global level, Shahwir et al. (2025) identified four main barriers to women's digital empowerment in rural communities: limited technological literacy, unstable infrastructure, financial constraints, and social norms. These four factors were also found in this study, indicating that the challenges of digitalization in Kampung Laos are part of a broader structural issue. Therefore, digital empowerment for women cannot be reduced to simply providing technical training, but requires a sustainable, reflective, and contextual communication approach.

Besides gender factors, the agrarian market structure dominated by middlemen and intermediaries also limits the optimization of the digital economy. Dependence on both traditional and institutional intermediaries reflects the power dynamics that have long been established within the local distribution system. Ruben (2024) emphasizes that transforming rural value chains requires institutional support capable of ensuring transaction certainty and a fairer distribution of benefits. Meanwhile, Martens & Zscheischler (2022) show that the digitalization of agricultural value chains has the potential to exacerbate inequality if not accompanied by community participation and local capacity building.

In the context of Kampung Laos, limited digital literacy, dependence on external actors, and the lack of an integrated distribution system have prevented digital marketing practices from developing into an established e-commerce system. However, the increased order frequency and relatively stable daily sales flow indicate real potential for the digital economy. This potential confirms that digital communication, despite being low-tech and simple, has contributed to strengthening the MSME economy, while also revealing structural limitations that need to be overcome through continuous mentoring and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Thus, this section confirms that digitalization in the practice of sustainability communication in Kampung Laos is ambivalent. Digital technology opens up opportunities for increased income and market access, but it has not yet been able to transform existing distribution structures and power relations. This finding strengthens the argument that sustainability communication in rural contexts should be understood as a gradual process involving technological adaptation, capacity building, and the continuous negotiation of socio-economic relationships. This discussion serves as the foundation for understanding the role of CSR and social innovation in building community economic resilience, which is discussed in the next section.

CSR, Social Innovation, and Community Resilience in Sustainability Communication

This section discusses the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, local social innovation, and community participation dynamics in shaping economic resilience and sustainable communication practices in Kampung Laos. The research findings indicate that CSR interventions and the presence of state actors have contributed to increased production capacity and the socio-economic legitimacy of the community. However, its impact is still limited in creating long-term structural independence, especially in terms of market dominance and digital literacy. In this context, social innovations that grow from within the community play a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of economic and communication practices amidst structural limitations.

The dimension of empowerment in Kampung Laos cannot be separated from the presence of state and corporate actors as sources of initial legitimacy and support. The visit of the Governor of South Sumatra and the Regent of Banyuasin in August 2022 became a symbol of formal recognition of the success of galangal farmers in Kampung Laos in utilizing lowland swamp land as a productive economic source. In his statement, the Regent of Banyuasin emphasized that galangal cultivation can generate a profit of around Rp50 million per hectare with an initial investment of approximately Rp12 million per hectare. This narrative plays an important role in framing galangal as a strategic commodity and strengthening the community's confidence in their economic choices.



Figure 3. The Governor of South Sumatra and the Regent of Banyuasin Visiting Kampung Laos

Source: mediasumatera.id

This symbolic recognition not only impacts the economic aspect but also strengthens the social position of galangal farmers within local power dynamics. Galangal is no longer seen as an alternative crop, but rather as the village's new economic identity. This process demonstrates that empowerment in a rural context is not only material but also symbolic, where the legitimacy of state actors serves as a reinforcement of the success narrative and a tool for the community's social negotiation.

In addition to the support of the local government, the involvement of PT PLN (Persero) through a five-year CSR contract since 2020 has also strengthened the community's social and economic infrastructure. PT PLN's CSR program provides assistance with production tools, plant seedlings, product processing training, and digital marketing introduction. In the short term, this intervention has a positive impact on increasing galangal production volume and diversifying processed products. The digital training provided also introduced MSME actors to the use of WhatsApp and Instagram as promotional tools. This finding indicates

that CSR serves as an initial trigger for the process of technology learning and strengthening the local economy.

However, the research results also reveal that the effectiveness of CSR tends to decline after the project phase is underway or enters its final stages. Only about 15% of digital training participants remain active in practicing the skills they acquired, while the vast majority revert to conventional production and marketing patterns. The absence of a post-training mentoring system, periodic monitoring, and a participatory evaluation mechanism has led to digital knowledge and skills not being internalized evenly. This condition indicates that CSR is still positioned as a project-based program, rather than a sustainable communication and empowerment process.

This finding aligns with critical CSR studies that emphasize that one-way and short-term output-oriented approaches tend to produce temporary impacts. In a systematic review of CSR and community development, various studies show that CSR programs that do not actively involve the community in planning, decision-making, and evaluation often fail to create sustainable local capacity. Sari et al. (2025) emphasize that sustainable CSR must be designed as a collaborative process oriented toward social learning and strengthening community agency.

In the context of Kampung Laos, the limitations of CSR actually spurred the emergence of various bottom-up social innovations. The community developed an internal savings and loan system to support the working capital of MSME members, implemented adaptive traditional farming techniques to maintain the quality of raw materials, and diversified processed products as a strategy to survive market fluctuations. These innovations were not born from formal program design, but rather from the community's collective experience in facing limitations in access to capital, technology, and markets.

This finding strengthens the argument of Mushonnif et al. (2025) that social innovation in rural communities often emerges as a response to real needs and structural inequalities. This innovation not only generates additional economic value but also strengthens social cohesion and a sense of collective ownership. In the case of Kampung Laos, the internal savings and loan system and the division of roles in production create a mechanism of solidarity that strengthens community resilience amidst economic uncertainty.

Youth involvement in packaging design and digital content production is also an important part of social innovation. Although youth participation is fluctuating—as some work or study outside the village—their contributions demonstrate the potential for cross-generational collaboration in economic communication practices. This finding aligns with Steiner et al. (2021), who stated that social innovation in rural areas is often triggered by a combination of strong social capital and the involvement of young actors who bring new perspectives and skills.

From a sustainability communication perspective, these practices demonstrate that a community's economic resilience is not solely determined by the success of CSR programs or the level of digital technology adoption, but by the community's ability to mobilize its social, cultural, and symbolic resources. Communication serves as a medium connecting local values, collective practices, and adaptive innovations. For example, the regular meetings of farmers' groups serve as a deliberative space where economic decisions, the use of CSR funds, and production and marketing strategies are openly discussed. This process strengthens the collective sense of ownership and legitimacy toward every decision made.

These findings strengthen the framework for sustainability communication proposed by Godemann and Michelsen (2011), particularly in the dimensions of participation and empowerment. Communication serves not only as a tool for conveying information, but also

as a social process that shapes relationships, norms, and community capacity. In the context of Kampung Laos, sustainable communication is realized through daily interactions that integrate local values, economic practices, and simple technologies.

Nevertheless, this study also shows that empowerment in Kampung Laos still falls within a spectrum between independence and dependence. The shift in profession from rice farmers to galangal farmers occurred while maintaining local values and social relations, but strengthening internal capacity—especially in digital marketing and value chain mastery—remains a major challenge for achieving long-term sustainability. Without sustained institutional support and equitable multi-stakeholder collaboration, local social innovations risk stagnating or losing their leverage.

Therefore, the main recommendation of this research is the need to transform the CSR approach from a project-based model toward CSR as a process, where communication, mentoring, and evaluation are carried out continuously, placing the community as an equal partner. Additionally, strengthening village-based e-commerce needs to be designed in phases by optimizing familiar technologies like WhatsApp and Instagram, along with gender-sensitive and contextual mentoring.

Thus, this section asserts that the resilience of the Kampung Laos community is built through a combination of external interventions (CSR and the state), local social innovation, and participatory communication practices. Digitalization and CSR act as catalysts, but long-term sustainability is heavily influenced by the community's ability to integrate local values, simple technology, and social collaboration into everyday economic practices. This finding provides a conceptual contribution to the development of a contextual, reflective, and community-rooted model of sustainable communication.

Further Discussion

This section on further discussion formulates the practical and conceptual implications of the research findings by placing them within the framework of sustainable communication and the digital economic empowerment of MSMEs. Referring to the empirical findings in Kampung Laos, this study confirms that increasing digital economic capacity cannot be achieved through a single intervention or purely technical approach. Instead, a multi-layered strategy is needed that integrates digital literacy, strengthening local institutions, gender sensitivity, and sustainable, multi-stakeholder collaboration that is reflective of existing power relations.

First, digital literacy development needs to be understood as a long-term communication process, not just a transfer of technical skills. Field findings indicate that short-term digital training—whether through CSR or external mentoring—has not yet been able to foster the independence of MSME actors in managing technology-based marketing. These limitations are not only caused by low technical competence, but also by the absence of continuous learning spaces integrated with everyday economic practices. Therefore, a recurring mentoring scheme through periodic mentoring, practice-based learning, and collective reflection becomes crucial in helping MSME actors understand content design, digital platform management, and the interpretation of market responses. Literature indicates that digital literacy developed through the stages of socialization, education, and continuous mentoring is more effective in increasing the technological capacity and business sustainability of MSMEs (Sulistyo et al., 2022; Oktafiani et al., 2025).

Second, the findings regarding the dependence of farmers and MSMEs on middlemen and external actors in digital marketing reinforce the need for structural transformation in the marketing system, not merely the expansion of digital channels. Developing a community-

based collective marketing system—through simple production recording, joint minimum price negotiation, and group-based distribution—can strengthen the community's bargaining power in the value chain. Beside serving as an economic strategy, collective marketing also has the potential to shift power dynamics within the digital ecosystem, so that the “Kampung Laos” identity functions not only as a promotional narrative, but as a community brand managed autonomously. This aligns with the literature on digital marketing for MSMEs, which emphasizes the importance of shared institutional structures to improve market effectiveness and fairness (Sulistyo et al., 2022).

Thirdly, the gender dimension is a central concern in this discussion. Although women play a dominant role in the production and processing of galangal products, their involvement in digital marketing management is still limited and often mediated by external actors. Therefore, gender-sensitive digital literacy programs need to be designed not only by considering technical aspects, but also domestic workload, leisure time, and social norms that affect women's access to technology. Studies show that contextual and participatory community-based digital education is effective in improving digital skills and women's confidence in the MSME value chain (Helmi et al., 2025). In the context of Kampung Laos, strengthening the role of women in digital marketing is also key to reducing structural dependence on external parties.

Fourth, this discussion affirms the need to reorient CSR from a project-based approach toward CSR as a process of sustainable communication and empowerment. Research findings indicate that CSR focused on providing tools and initial training has not been sufficient to build internal community capacity. The participatory CSR approach—which includes joint planning, long-term mentoring, reflective monitoring, and participatory evaluation—has greater potential to strengthen community agency and local economic sustainability. Thus, CSR is not positioned solely as an external intervention, but as a space for social learning that allows communities to build control over their own economic practices.

Fifth, the strengthening of internal institutional capacity for MSMEs emerged as an important foundation for the sustainability of the digital economy. Simple operational standards, financial record-keeping systems, and internal savings and loan mechanisms not only improve business efficiency but also strengthen collective decision-making capacity. Integrating digital literacy with technology-based financial record-keeping and marketing serves as an economic communication infrastructure that strengthens MSMEs' resilience to market fluctuations and external dependence (Zahra et al., 2025).

Overall, this follow-up discussion confirms that the economic sustainability of Kampung Laos MSMEs can only be achieved through a sustainable communication approach that simultaneously integrates simple technology, local values, social legitimacy, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Digitalization, CSR, and social innovation are not understood as end goals, but rather as social processes that must be continuously negotiated, learned, and interpreted by the community. Thus, this research makes a significant contribution to expanding understanding of sustainability communication in rural contexts, particularly in bridging the discourse of digitalization, empowerment, and community resilience.

Conclusion

This research shows that sustainable communication practices in the digital economic empowerment of Kampung Laos MSMEs are developing as a contextual, relational, and non-linear social process. The economic transformation of a community is not solely driven

by increased production or the adoption of digital technology, but rather by changes in the meaning of the economy shaped through daily interactions, collective deliberation, and the strengthening of local identity. The “Kampung Laos” narrative serves as a symbolic anchor that unites production, downstream processing, and marketing practices within a shared framework of meaning, while also forming the basis for social marketing based on local stories. The use of low-tech digital technologies like WhatsApp and Instagram shows that simple yet contextual digitalization can increase product visibility and maintain a stable flow of orders, although it hasn’t completely transformed existing distribution structures and market relationships.

The research findings also confirm that digital economic empowerment at the community level requires sustainable and reflective multi-stakeholder collaboration on power relations. CSR support, state recognition, and university involvement served as initial catalysts for capacity building, but long-term sustainability is more determined by strengthening internal institutions, social innovation based on local needs, and the active participation of women and youth. Based on these findings, this study formulates a hybrid sustainability communication framework that integrates local identity, simple technology, community participation, and social innovation into a single, interconnected process. Although limited to a specific location and observation period, this study provides empirical and conceptual contributions to the development of sustainable communication studies within the context of Indonesia’s rural digital economy.

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