Agro-entrepreneurs Digital Marketing Awareness Program Among Youth of Kuala Penyu Sabah, Malaysia.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - The Community Project’s major goal is to increase awareness of the importance of agriculture-based entrepreneurship (Agro-entrepreneurship). The initiative also aims to foster entrepreneurship among local Sabahan, especially in digital marketing technology.

Methods – Conducting workshops and training sessions on agro-entrepreneurship to help educate existing and potential entrepreneurs on the best practices, techniques, and skills required to establish and run successful agro-businesses. Simultaneously, show them how to advertise their products online. This programme comprises two stages of implementation, each with 30 participants and four facilitators.

Result and discussions – Agro-entrepreneurs should learn and use strategies for digital marketing by receiving training. Agro-entrepreneurs could reach more clients by using digital marketing methods including social media, email, and content marketing. Agro-entrepreneurs could build and maintain their businesses by using digital marketing.

Conclusion – In principle, the awareness programme would have assisted agro-entrepreneurs in improving their knowledge of digital marketing as well as their digital marketing abilities, which would have enabled them to expand their businesses and keep them going over the long term.

Keywords: Community services, awareness, business, youth, digital marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Agro-entrepreneurship in Sabah, Malaysia refers to the business of producing, processing, and marketing agricultural products and services in the state. Sabah is one of the states in Malaysia with vast agricultural resources and is known for its diverse flora and fauna, fertile soil, and favorable climate (Esterman, 2021). Agro-entrepreneurship in Sabah covers a wide range of products, including fruits, vegetables, crops, livestock, and aquaculture. Some of the most popular products include palm oil, cocoa, rubber, coffee, and pepper (Rautner & Hardiono, 2005; Wulffraat et al., 2017). The agro-entrepreneurship sector in Sabah is diverse and consists of small-scale farmers and large-scale commercial enterprises (Chan et al., 2020). Many of these entrepreneurs are involved in sustainable and eco-friendly agricultural practices, including organic farming, conservation of biodiversity, and the use of renewable energy (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture Development and Food Industry, 2007).

Marketing and promotion of agro-entrepreneurship products in Sabah have largely been done through traditional methods such as word of mouth, local markets, and agricultural fairs (Iv & Ahmad, 2009). However, in recent years, the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter has become more common among agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah to reach out to a wider audience and promote their products. The Sabah state government has been actively promoting agro-entrepreneurship as a key economic activity in the state through various initiatives and programs, including providing financial assistance and technical support to agro-entrepreneurs.
Generally, agro-entrepreneurship in Sabah, Malaysia is a dynamic and growing sector with vast potential for growth and development. With the right support, infrastructure, and marketing strategies, agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah can achieve success and contribute significantly to the state's economy (Esterman, 2021). As an agro-entrepreneur, social media marketing can be a powerful tool to increase your brand's visibility, attract potential customers, and build a loyal community (Dubbelink et al., 2021). However, agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah often face challenges in accessing markets beyond their local areas. This limits their ability to reach a wider audience and get better prices for their products. Furthermore, many agro-entrepreneurs in Malaysia (including Sabah) have limited technical knowledge and skills in modern farming practices, agro-processing, and marketing (Akeel & Gubhaju, 2020; Mat Rani et al., 2020). This limits their ability to adopt new technologies and practices to improve their businesses. Consequently, educating the community at large about the significance of digital marketing is the primary goal of this outreach initiative. It is intended that by raising members' understanding of the benefits of digital marketing, this initiative would help Sabah's agro-entrepreneurial community as a whole.

**Agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah**

Sabah is a state located in the northern part of Borneo Island, Malaysia. Agriculture is one of the key economic sectors in Sabah, with a diverse range of crops including oil palm, rubber, cocoa, coffee, tea, fruits, vegetables, and spices. Agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah are individuals or groups of people who are involved in agricultural activities as a business venture. Agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah are diverse, ranging from smallholders with just a few acres of land to large-scale plantation owners. Many of these entrepreneurs are engaged in oil palm cultivation, which is the dominant crop in Sabah. They cultivate oil palm trees and process the fruits to produce crude palm oil (CPO) and palm kernel oil (PKO), which are then sold to local and international buyers (Ting, 2019).

Apart from oil palm, some agro-entrepreneurs are involved in other crops such as rubber, cocoa, coffee, tea, fruits, vegetables, and spices. For example, there are cocoa and coffee farmers in the district of Ranau, Sabah, who produce high-quality cocoa beans and coffee beans that are sought after by chocolate and coffee manufacturers. In recent years, there has been a growing trend of young entrepreneurs in Sabah who are venturing into agriculture as a business. These agro-entrepreneurs are often tech-savvy and use modern techniques and technology to improve their productivity and efficiency (Ignatius, 2022). They are also more conscious of sustainable farming practices and are adopting environmentally friendly methods of farming. Overall, agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah are an important component of the state's economy, contributing to the development of the agriculture sector and the creation of employment opportunities (Mojikon et al., 2019).
Digital Marketing and Agro-entrepreneurs' Product

Digital marketing is a type of marketing strategy that uses digital channels such as social media, search engines, email, and websites to promote a product or service (Pradhan et al., 2013). In Sabah, digital marketing is becoming increasingly popular among agro-entrepreneurs who are looking to expand their customer base and increase sales. Agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah are using digital marketing strategies to promote their products and reach a wider audience. They are using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to showcase their products and engage with customers. By creating a strong social media presence, they can increase brand awareness and attract potential customers (García et al., 2019).

In addition to social media, agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah are also using e-commerce platforms such as Lazada and Shopee to sell their products online. By leveraging these platforms, they can reach a wider audience beyond their local market and increase sales. Agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah are producing a diverse range of products such as palm oil, rubber, cocoa, coffee, tea, fruits, vegetables, and spices. To promote their products, they are highlighting their unique selling points such as their organic and sustainable farming practices, the quality of their products, and their locally sourced ingredients. Digital marketing has also enabled agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah to create their brands and market their products directly to consumers (Swaminathan et al., 2018). By creating a strong brand identity, they can differentiate themselves from their competitors and build a loyal customer base (García et al., 2019; Swaminathan et al., 2018). In conclusion, digital marketing has become an essential tool for agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah to promote their products and reach a wider audience. By leveraging digital channels, they can increase brand awareness, attract new customers, and ultimately increase sales (Key, 2017).

Awareness Programs

Digital marketing awareness programs are important for agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah as they can help them increase online visibility, improve customer engagement, expand market reach, increase sales, and stay competitive in the market. By investing in digital marketing, agro-entrepreneurs can grow their businesses and contribute to the development of the agriculture sector in Sabah (Malay Mail, 2021). From other perspectives, digital marketing awareness programs are important for agro-entrepreneurs in Sabah as they can help them with cost-effective marketing, measuring marketing effectiveness, building brand reputation, staying relevant, and accessing resources and support. By investing in digital marketing training and education, agro-entrepreneurs can improve their digital marketing skills and grow their businesses in the competitive marketplace (Ajayi, 2015; Key, 2017).

METHOD

As an agro-entrepreneur in Sabah, digital marketing can be a powerful tool to help the player to promote their business and reach a wider audience. Through this community engagement, our team assists the community in Kuala Penyu Sabah with effective digital marketing processes. By using these tips, you can effectively use social media to promote your agro-entrepreneurship business in Sabah and reach a wider audience. This program involves 2 implementation phases involving 30 participants and 4 facilitators. The presentation takes the form of a presentation by an expert and is supplemented by questions and activities from the participants.

Define your target audience Choose the right platform Create engaging content Use hashtags Engage with your audience Offer promotions and discounts

Phase 1 Phase 2

Figure 2. Digital marketing processes for agro-entrepreneur in Sabah
1. Define your target audience: Before you start promoting your products on social media, you need to identify your target audience. This will help you create content that is tailored to their interests and needs. For example, if you are selling organic fruits and vegetables, your target audience might be health-conscious individuals who are interested in sustainable farming practices.

2. Choose the right platform: There are many social media platforms available, but not all of them will be effective for your business. Consider which platforms your target audience is most active on and focus your efforts on those. For example, Facebook and Instagram are popular platforms for promoting food and agricultural products.

3. Create engaging content: Your social media posts should be visually appealing and provide value to your audience. This could include sharing recipes, photos of your farm or products, or educational content about sustainable farming practices. Be creative and experiment with different types of content to see what resonates with your audience.

4. Use hashtags: Hashtags can help your posts reach a wider audience by making them more discoverable. Research relevant hashtags that are popular in your niche and use them in your posts.

5. Engage with your audience: Social media is a two-way conversation, so make sure to respond to comments and messages from your followers. This will help you build a relationship with your audience and show them that you value their feedback.

6. Offer promotions and discounts: Social media is a great platform to offer promotions and discounts to your followers. This can help encourage them to try your products and increase sales.

The programme ends with a visit to a selected agricultural site to provide all participants with firsthand exposure to the farm. Participants are requested to receive information from the farm's owner. Figure 3 below is one example of a poster used in this program.

![Program poster](image)

**Figure 3. Program poster**

**RESULTS**

Implementing an awareness program among agro-entrepreneurs regarding digital marketing can be an effective way to help them understand the importance of digital marketing and how it can benefit their business. This program involves 2 implementation phases involving 30 participants and 4 facilitators. The first step is to define the objectives of the awareness program. This could include educating agro-entrepreneurs about the benefits of digital marketing, how to create a digital marketing strategy, how to use social media to reach customers, and more. The next step is to identify the target audience for the program. This could include agro-entrepreneurs who are just starting their businesses or those who are looking to expand their business using digital marketing. Based on the objectives and target audience, a comprehensive training program should be developed. This program includes topics such as digital marketing basics, social media
marketing, email marketing, content marketing, and more. It is important to collaborate with digital marketing experts who can provide valuable insights and guidance to agro-entrepreneurs. This programme invited prominent speakers to provide sessions and partnered with digital marketing businesses to give individual consultations. Figure 4 below is an overview of knowledge sharing in the field of digital marketing with program participants.

Figure 4. Digital media marketing

Based on Figure 5 below are some pictures that were taken during the program implementation. Participants were given exposure to the importance of agro-entrepreneurs.

Figure 5. Program Implementation

DISCUSSION

Digital marketing can help entrepreneurs build brand awareness (Halik et al., 2021; Husniati Sya’idah et al., 2019). Brand awareness is important for both new businesses and businesses that are already established (Putri, 2021). The majority of the program’s participants are small and medium-sized enterprises, but they’ve gained the knowledge and confidence to keep up their digital marketing efforts. The expected results of the awareness program among agro-entrepreneurs regarding digital marketing would be to improve their business operations and enable them to grow and sustain their business in the long run (More Chinakidzwa & Maxwell Phiri, 2020). The
program will help agro-entrepreneurs understand the importance of digital marketing in today’s business landscape and how it can benefit their business.

By providing training on various digital marketing techniques, agro-entrepreneurs will be able to improve their digital marketing skills and implement them in their business (Halik et al., 2021; Putri, 2021). With the help of digital marketing techniques such as social media marketing, email marketing, and content marketing, agro-entrepreneurs will be able to reach a wider audience and attract more customers to their business. By implementing effective digital marketing strategies, agro-entrepreneurs can increase their sales and revenue, leading to the growth and sustainability of their business (Karen & Zai, 2022). Finally, with the knowledge gained from the program, agro-entrepreneurs can better compete with other businesses in their industry and stand out in the market (Swaminathan et al., 2018).

Digital marketing has a significant impact on agro-entrepreneurs in several ways. Digital marketing provides a platform for agro-entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services to a wider audience. By using online platforms such as social media, blogs, and websites, agro-entrepreneurs can increase their visibility and reach potential customers beyond their local community (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Putri, 2021). Digital marketing allows agro-entrepreneurs to engage with their customers in real time. By using social media and other online platforms, agro-entrepreneurs can respond to customer inquiries, provide product information, and receive feedback. This engagement can help build trust and loyalty with customers.

Finally, digital marketing provides agro-entrepreneurs with data-driven insights into their marketing campaigns (Editor KB., 2019). By analyzing website traffic, social media engagement, and other metrics, agro-entrepreneurs can optimize their marketing strategies for better results (Akeel & Gubhaju, 2020). This data can also help them understand customer preferences and behavior, which can inform product development and sales strategies (Rashid et al., 2021). Digital marketing is essential for agro-entrepreneurs who want to expand their customer base and increase their revenue. By leveraging digital marketing strategies, agro-entrepreneurs can reach a wider audience, engage with customers, and make data-driven decisions to improve their business (Halik et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

By participating in the program, agro-entrepreneurs would have gained knowledge and skills in various digital marketing techniques, including social media marketing, email marketing, and content marketing. They would have also learned how to create a digital marketing strategy that suits their business needs and objectives. The program would have enabled agro-entrepreneurs to understand how digital marketing can help them reach a wider audience, attract more customers, and increase their sales and revenue. By implementing these strategies in their business operations, they would have been able to compete better with other businesses in their industry. In conclusion, the awareness program would have helped agro-entrepreneurs to improve their digital marketing skills and understanding, enabling them to grow and sustain their business in the long run.

The program’s success would be evaluated based on the level of knowledge gained by agro-entrepreneurs, the impact of the program on their business operations, and their ability to implement digital marketing strategies effectively. However, we do have some ideas about how to make this programme better in the long run. These suggestions can help future awareness programs among agro-entrepreneurs regarding digital marketing to be more effective in helping them understand the importance of digital marketing and how to implement digital marketing strategies effectively in their business operations. 1). Focus on specific digital marketing techniques: Future programs could focus on specific digital marketing techniques such as social media marketing, search engine optimization, email marketing, and content marketing. This would allow agro-entrepreneurs to gain more in-depth knowledge and skills in a specific area of digital marketing. 2). Provide ongoing support: After the program, ongoing support in the form of
webinars, workshops, and consultations could be provided to help agro-entrepreneurs implement digital marketing strategies effectively. 3). **Conduct impact assessments:** Conducting impact assessments after the program to evaluate its effectiveness and the impact on agro-entrepreneurs' business operations would help identify areas for improvement and refinement for future programs. In general, these recommendations may aid in the success of future digital marketing awareness campaigns targeted at agro-entrepreneurs by raising their understanding of the field’s significance and preparing them to successfully adopt digital marketing techniques.

**REFERENCES**


