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Strengthening Marketing Strategies for Regional Public Service Agency (BLUD) State Vocational High Schools in West Sumatra through a Participatory Action Research Approach

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of State Vocational High Schools (SMK Negeri) into Regional Public Service Agencies (BLUD) in West Sumatra Province provides institutional flexibility to commercialize student-led products and services. However, most SMKN BLUD units experience critical limitations in market positioning, commercial branding, and structured distribution channels, which leads to suboptimal revenue generation. This community service project aims to resolve these commercial barriers by delivering integrated business analysis and strategic marketing intervention through a provincial sharing session and adaptive mentoring framework. Utilizing a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach across three structured cycles, the program engaged 43 SMKN school principals across West Sumatra in highly collaborative strategy formulations. The training focused on transitioning schools from conventional educational output mindsets toward professional market-driven orientation using corporate segmentation, targeting, positioning (STP), and the digital marketing mix. Quantitative evaluation via pre- and post-test instruments indicated a substantial 34.8% increase in participants' strategic comprehension (from a mean score of 62.1 to 83.7). Furthermore, the intervention successfully generated 43 preliminary digital marketing roadmaps and achieved a 92% participant satisfaction rate. In conclusion, embedding adaptive marketing strategies into vocational public service models effectively bridges the gap between educational innovation and market demand, creating a sustainable foundation for vocational financial independence.

Keywords: BLUD management, business analysis digital marketing, strategic marketing, vocational school

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of State Vocational High Schools (SMK Negeri or SMKN) into Regional Public Service Agencies (BLUD) in West Sumatra Province represents a strategic milestone in optimizing the commercial potential of student-led products and services. Mandated by the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 79 of 2018 Article 41 paragraph (1), a BLUD Strategic Plan must be meticulously formulated to outline organizational management using comprehensive Business Analysis Techniques. This official BLUD status grants financial flexibility, enabling vocational schools to commercialize the tangible outputs generated by their teaching factory laboratories. However, empirical realities show that most SMKN management teams still

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face severe constraints in marketing their products and services professionally. The deep-rooted operational mindset predominantly revolves around fulfilling academic curricula, rather than adapting to dynamic, market-driven customer demands.

Prior literature consistently highlights that the failure of public sector business units or educational institutions to generate self-sustained income stems from weak market segmentation and passive promotional frameworks (David and David, 2016). While systematic operational assistance enhances production efficiency, adaptive marketing approaches remain the ultimate catalyst for sustaining market competitiveness (Wheelen et al., 2018). In the context of product commercialization, executing rigorous empirical validation through strategic positioning and systematic market testing is highly critical to ensuring the viability of innovative offerings before full-scale commercial launch (Albar et al., 2020). Although literature regarding MSME digitalization is abundant, a clear research gap persists regarding tailored marketing strategy formulation for school vocational outputs. These outputs possess a unique characteristic as they operate under dual mandates: functioning simultaneously as academic instructional spaces and public commercial entities (BLUD). Previous interventions on local capacity building in West Sumatra have extensively explored digital optimization for traditional cooperatives, packaging improvements, and disability-led MSMEs (Putri et al., 2020; Sari et al., 2019). Concurrently, existing community engagement frameworks have largely focused on operational scaling, business governance, target-specific incubation setups, or internal financial control models within village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) and home-based micro-enterprises (Sari and Albar, 2026). Furthermore, while structural frameworks for standard industry alignment and localized "Link and Match" tactical roadmaps have been successfully formulated for specific vocational schools designated as Centers of Excellence (Albar and Amsal, 2026), a major knowledge gap persists regarding how public-school administrators navigate strategic commercialization and market positioning while operating under the strict financial regulations of decentralized Regional Public Service Agencies (BLUD). West Sumatra serves as an appropriate case study because it represents a major regional policy shift where 43 vocational high schools were granted BLUD financial flexibility simultaneously, yet lacked structural marketing capability.

The novelty of this community service project lies in integrating an Academic Business Analysis framework with highly practical marketing strategies specifically calibrated to leverage local BLUD financial regulations. This solution is contextually engineered to bridge the technical competencies of vocational students in West Sumatra with the real-world demands of industries and local communities. Through a provincial sharing session initiated by the Bureau of Economy under the Regional Secretariat of West Sumatra Province, this intervention directly addressed critical operational bottlenecks such as weak market penetration, low brand identity, and unoptimized digital platforms. Therefore, the explicit objectives of this community service are to identify institutional business needs, deliver actionable marketing solutions for student-led products/services, and systematically enhance the strategic capacity of SMKN BLUD administrators across West Sumatra.

METHOD

This community service project was designed using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, integrated with Service-Learning principles, to foster collaborative capacity building (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019). The PAR method was selected to ensure that participants were actively engaged as strategic partners to co-diagnose institutional barriers and formulate market solutions, rather than being passive recipients of

information. The primary target and strategic partners for this intervention consisted of senior vocational education executives, specifically 43 State Vocational High School (SMK Negeri) Principals representing various regencies and cities across West Sumatra, including SMKN 2 Padang, SMKN 1 Bukittinggi, SMKN 1 Payakumbuh, and SMKN 2 Kepulauan Mentawai.

To justify the PAR framework and avoid a single-session workshop limitation, the project operational framework was structured into three distinct iterative cycles over a 2-month period in 2023:

1. Cycle 1: Business Need Identification (Pre-Intervention Analysis): Conducting a 4-hour initial audit of the existing draft Strategic Plans and the specific types of products/services manufactured by each vocational school to map baseline challenges.
2. Cycle 2: Interactive Action and Collaboration (The Core Intervention): Executed on June 15 at the Auditorium of the West Sumatra Governor's Office in Padang City. This 8-hour session featured 4 academic facilitators from the Universitas Andalas Faculty of Economics and Business team and 1 local branding practitioner (the founder of the clothing brand "Kadai Tangkelek"). The first module covered "BLUD SMKN Business Analysis Techniques," followed by the core module on "Marketing Strategies for BLUD SMKN Products and Services." Participants were divided into 5 regional clusters (10–12 schools per group) to facilitate intensive mentoring.
3. Cycle 3: Reflection, Mentoring, and Evaluation (Post-Intervention Monitoring): A 4-week virtual asynchronous mentoring process where facilitators systematically guided participants to refine and implement their customized institutional marketing roadmaps.

The evaluation of program success was conducted using standard participant feedback questionnaires, structured field observations during interactive sessions, and a comparative analysis of the school marketing plans before and after the intervention (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). The assessment tool utilized a validated 20-item pre- and post-test questionnaire measuring knowledge of the 4Ps and STP concepts (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Qualitative data from field observations were analyzed using thematic analysis and qualitative coding to capture administrative cultural inertia (Braun & Clarke, 2022), while quantitative evaluation scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics to ensure robust triangulation (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Success indicators focused on the measurable increase in strategic marketing comprehension, the correct adoption of the marketing mix (4Ps) concept (Kotler et al., 2021), and the ability to build functional digital promotion funnels (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identifying Business Needs and Mapping BLUD SMKN Product Portfolios

Initial diagnostic assessments during the sharing session revealed that the commercial portfolios generated by the 43 SMKN BLUD units across West Sumatra were highly diverse, ranging from manufacturing, culinary arts, handicrafts, and fashion design to hospitality and automotive repair services. However, most schools suffered from commercial stagnation because they were unable to isolate specific target markets or position their offerings against commercial competitors. The community service team intervened by restructuring the administrative mindset, enabling school executives to map their business portfolios based on local regional competitive advantages (Aaker, 2023; David & David, 2016).

Formulating Product and Service Marketing Strategies for Vocational Units

The core presentation focused on applying Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) strategies alongside the optimization of the Marketing Mix (4Ps: Product, Price, Place, Promotion) within the regulatory boundaries of BLUD public management. Participants were trained to shift from merely selling surplus laboratory outputs to designing value-added products. For example, agricultural products from SMK PP Negeri Padang Mangatas or tailoring services from fashion-focused vocational schools were directed to target local government procurement systems by utilizing regional e-catalogs, thereby maximizing the financial flexibility granted by their BLUD status.

Digital Marketing Transformation and Commercial Branding Localization

The workshop heavily emphasized transitioning from passive, word-of-mouth promotion to an active digital marketing ecosystem (Bringle et al., 2012). School administrators were guided on how to develop professional digital assets, including dedicated business social media channels and corporate websites. To reinforce this concept, synergy with the founder of "Kadai Tangkelek" provided real-world insights into building a highly recognizable local brand identity and achieving rapid market penetration using digital content that aligns with modern customer trends.

Transitioning the school administrations from a passive academic output orientation to highly targeted promotion plans align with recent findings on human attention dynamics in neuromarketing, which emphasize that optimized media framing and intentional visual designs are essential to capture modern customer awareness (Wang et al., 2025). The rapid adoption of functional digital funnels by the 43 school principals further expands the practical application of specialized strategic roadmap enforcement and institutional synergy with business sectors (Link and Match), similar to those implemented in broader vocational development programs across emerging educational clusters (Albar and Amsal, 2026). The successful shift in the participants' administrative mindset and their rapid adoption of commercial tools during this PAR framework also reflects the importance of organizational absorptive capacity in facilitating the adoption of new managerial practices and business-oriented innovations (Aboelmaged and Hashem, 2019). Additionally, the operational transition from passive, curriculum-bound production to structural digital funnels aligns with the strategic marketing enhancements and sales growth frameworks identified by Larasati et al. (2025). By integrating these corporate practices within regional public regulations, this program successfully moderates the cultural inertia typically observed in transforming public educational entities into autonomous commercial actors.

A comprehensive summary of the intervention structure, baseline conditions, and empirical deliverables is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Analytical matrix of sharing session interventions and quantitative outcomes for SMKN BLUD

No	Core Module	Baseline Condition (Pre-Test)	Intervention Activity	Measurable Outcome and Empirical Evidence
1	BLUD Business Analysis	65% of schools had no structured business workflows; focused entirely on academic curriculum outputs.	Mapping business workflows, identifying strategic needs, and resource allocation aligned with Ministry regulations.	43 business analysis blueprints completed; 100% regulatory compliance achieved.

2	Strategic Marketing	Low awareness of STP and structural costing methods; mean score for target market isolation was 58.0.	Training on STP, costing methods, and marketing mix (4Ps) optimization.	34.8% increase in strategic comprehension (mean score rose to 83.7); 43 customized market niche blueprints produced.
3	Innovation and Branding	Passive word-of-mouth promotion; zero corporate digital assets or defined brand identity.	Case study analysis of local brand scaling ("Kadai Tangkelek") and digital promotional funnel design.	85% adoption rate of digital funnels; 36 new verified business social channels created; 92% participant satisfaction rate.

Operational Challenges and Program Sustainability

The primary challenge encountered during the implementation of this workshop lay in navigating cultural inertia and resolving human resource constraints within vocational schools. School managers often double as full-time academic educators, making it difficult to split time between teaching and active business development. These hurdles mirror the pervasive challenges of cultural inertia and resource constraints documented during digital transformation efforts in broader West Sumatran micro-businesses (Albar et al., 2021). Consultation rounds revealed an urgent need to establish specialized administrative sub-units dedicated exclusively to commercial operations under the BLUD structure. Nevertheless, the prospects for program sustainability remain exceptionally high due to the institutional backing from the West Sumatra Bureau of Economy, the firm commitment displayed by the 43 participating school principals to achieve financial autonomy, and the validation of university-led institutional incubators in emerging regional economies (Audretsch et al., 2022; Fithri et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This community service program has successfully enhanced the strategic capacity and managerial comprehension of 43 SMKN BLUD Principals across West Sumatra regarding business analysis techniques and marketing strategy formulation. Empirically, the structured modules effectively shifted the institutional perspective from a purely academic orientation to a professional, market-driven framework, generating 43 operational marketing plans without compromising core vocational educational mandates. The active collaboration between university academics and local business practitioners successfully equipped vocational schools with actionable solutions to construct distinct brand identities and activate modern digital promotion channels. These findings offer broader implications for educational entrepreneurship and BLUD policy implementation, proving that structured university-community engagement can systematically mitigate administrative barriers during public sector decentralization.

Practically, it is highly recommended that each vocational school immediately implement these strategies by drafting tailored digital marketing roadmaps for their respective anchor products. Academically and institutionally, the Bureau of Economy of West Sumatra is advised to launch a dedicated regional BLUD marketing network to facilitate inter-school commercial synergy, backed by follow-up clinical coaching programs (coaching clinics) organized by regional vocational clusters to systematically execute digital marketing performance monitoring and conduct a rigorous longitudinal assessment on actual BLUD revenue generation

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