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Participatory training for digital empowerment: Developing graphic design skills with Canva

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ABSTRACT

The advancement of digital technology requires rural communities to acquire relevant skills to adapt and enhance their competitiveness across various sectors. Responding to this need, this community service activity aimed to improve the digital skills of Gerbosari Village residents through graphic design training using the Canva application. The method employed was a participatory approach consisting of several stages, beginning with preliminary observation to identify participants' needs, potentials, and supporting resources. The next stage involved preparing training materials and implementing sessions that included an introduction to graphic design and Canva, hands-on practice in creating accounts and exploring Canva features, as well as independent design exercises with team guidance. University students served as facilitators, helping participants overcome technical challenges to ensure an effective training process. The activity was held on July 7, 2025, at the Gerbosari Village Hall, Samigaluh District, Kulon Progo Regency, and was attended by 24 participants. The training materials focused on the basics of graphic design, the use of Canva, and practical exercises in designing logos and product packaging. Evaluation results indicated that 95 percent of participants were able to apply the acquired skills, demonstrating that this activity successfully enhanced digital competence, creativity, and self-confidence, while also supporting the community's competitiveness in the digital era.

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ABSTRAK

Perkembangan teknologi digital menuntut masyarakat desa untuk memiliki keterampilan yang relevan agar mampu beradaptasi dan meningkatkan daya saing di berbagai bidang. Menyadari kebutuhan tersebut, kegiatan pengabdian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan digital masyarakat Desa Gerbosari melalui pelatihan desain grafis berbasis aplikasi Canva. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan partisipatif dengan beberapa tahapan, dimulai dari observasi awal untuk mengidentifikasi kebutuhan, potensi, serta sarana pendukung peserta. Tahapan berikutnya mencakup penyusunan materi, pelaksanaan pelatihan yang terdiri atas sosialisasi mengenai desain grafis dan Canva, praktik langsung membuat akun, pengenalan fitur-fitur Canva, serta latihan mendesain secara mandiri dengan pendampingan tim. Mahasiswa berperan sebagai fasilitator yang membantu peserta ketika menghadapi kendala teknis sehingga proses pelatihan berlangsung efektif. Kegiatan ini dilaksanakan pada 07 Juli 2025 di Balai Desa Gerbosari, Kecamatan Samigaluh, Kabupaten Kulon Progo dengan jumlah peserta 24 orang. Materi pelatihan difokuskan pada pengenalan dasar desain grafis, penggunaan Canva, serta praktik membuat desain logo dan kemasan produk. Hasil evaluasi menunjukkan bahwa 95 persen peserta mampu mengaplikasikan keterampilan baru, sehingga kegiatan ini terbukti meningkatkan keterampilan digital, kreativitas, dan kepercayaan diri masyarakat sekaligus mendukung daya saing di era digital.

Kata Kunci: Canva; desain grafis; keterampilan digital

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes across various aspects of life, including education, the economy, and social systems. Digital transformation requires every individual to possess digital skills to adapt and remain competitive in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Digital literacy not only involves the ability to operate technological devices but also the capacity to utilize applications and digital platforms to enhance productivity and broaden access to information (Lasaiba, 2024). This condition highlights the urgent need for digital skills, particularly among rural communities that continue to face limitations in access and experience with modern technology.

On the other hand, rural communities have substantial potential to be developed through the use of digital technology, particularly in the creative economy sector. One skill that can significantly support community empowerment is graphic design, as it plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of visual communication and product promotion (Saputra & Siswanto, 2025). With graphic design skills, communities can create visually appealing promotional materials to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and expand their market reach through digital platforms (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Therefore, graphic design training serves as a strategic solution to enhance community competence, especially in today's competitive digital era.

One user-friendly graphic design application that suits community needs is Canva. Canva offers a range of ready-to-use templates, along with a simple drag-and-drop feature, making it accessible to even beginners (Pedroso et al., 2023). This application enables rural communities to create different types of promotional media, ranging from posters and brochures to social media content, in a practical and visually appealing manner (Arifah et al., 2024). As such, Canva is considered an effective training medium since it not only provides hands-on learning experiences but also allows participants to develop creativity without requiring advanced technical expertise (An-Nisa & Sutikno, 2024).

Gerbosari Village is one of the regions with significant potential for developing a locally based creative economy. However, the community still faces limitations in digital skills, particularly in the field of graphic design, which hinders its ability to support product promotion and social activities. The lack of access to training and mentoring has caused many community members to rely on traditional methods of promotion, which are less effective in the digital era (Khasanah et al., 2025). For this reason, Canva-based training is highly relevant to meet the needs of the Gerbosari community in enhancing digital skills while also supporting the development of local potential.

The community service program, focusing on Canva-based graphic design training, aims to provide both conceptual understanding and practical skills to participants. The participants not only gain theoretical knowledge of graphic design but also practice creating promotional media tailored to their specific needs (Rofiah et al., 2024). Through active participation in the program, participants are expected to improve their digital independence, creativity, and adaptability to technological advancements. In addition, this activity provides space for creative exploration, which can foster new potential in supporting the creative economy in Gerbosari Village.

Based on previous community service programs, graphic design training has proven effective in enhancing digital skills while also making a positive contribution to the local economy's growth. For instance, Canva-based training demonstrated an increase in participants' creativity and their ability to create promotional media for their products independently (Oya et al., 2023). Similarly, community service found that Canva usage helped SMEs design more attractive product packaging and branding (Rosyadi et al., 2020). These findings reinforce the argument that Canva-based training in Gerbosari Village is highly relevant and strategic in enhancing community digital skills while supporting rural economic independence in the digital

era. This activity aims to enhance the digital skills of the Gerbosari Village community through graphic design training utilizing the Canva application.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Skills

Digital skills have become one of the essential competencies required by society in facing the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Digital skills not only encompass technical abilities in operating technological devices but also cognitive, social, and emotional skills in utilizing technology to solve problems, communicate, and create meaningful content (Thelma et al., 2024). Digital literacy is also regarded as one of the pillars of sustainable human resource development, as it enables individuals to access, evaluate, and utilize digital information to support productivity and innovation (Chen et al., 2024; Pertiwi & Lestari, 2024; Sánchez-Cruzado et al., 2021). Thus, digital skills play a crucial role in empowering communities, enhancing competitiveness, and expanding both economic and social opportunities.

Various studies have shown that digital-based training can enhance community capacity in entrepreneurship and adaptation to technological advancements. Providing digital marketing training to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), for instance, has been shown to significantly improve product promotion strategies (Siswanto, 2024). Moreover, mastering digital skills also broadens employment opportunities in the informal and creative sectors (Khotimah et al., 2024; Momanyi et al., 2024). This emphasizes that training programs focusing on practice-based digital skills are highly relevant in equipping rural communities to avoid being left behind in the digital transformation wave, while simultaneously strengthening local, potential-based economic resilience.

Graphic Design

Graphic design is one of the essential areas of digital skills that supports visual communication, promotion, and the development of a product or organizational identity. Sari in the book entitled "*The design frames my micro poem: Exploring students' critical reflection on using design graphic*" states that graphic design can be defined as a form of visual communication art that utilizes elements of text, images, colors, and composition to convey messages effectively. In the business context, graphic design plays a strategic role in strengthening branding and creating visual appeal for consumers (Ni, 2024). Logos, product packaging, and digital promotional media all require proficient graphic design skills to ensure that messages are more easily received by the target audience (Ebighbagha, 2021). Therefore, mastering graphic design has become a highly relevant skill for society, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Previous studies support the importance of graphic design in enhancing product competitiveness. Attractive product packaging design, for instance, has been shown to increase consumer purchase interest by up to 35% (Rahman et al., 2024). This aligns with findings that creative graphic design can strengthen brand identity and increase consumer trust in local products (Liang et al., 2024). Thus, providing graphic design training is a strategic step to support community economic independence, particularly in rural areas that are beginning to develop superior products based on local potential.

Canva

Canva is one of the most popular digital-based graphic design applications due to its accessibility for a wide range of users, from beginners to professionals. Canva has been chosen as a training medium because it provides a variety of ready-to-use templates, simple drag-and-drop features, and compatibility with Android and iOS devices (Muhajir et al., 2022). This convenience makes Canva an effective platform for offering hands-on experience to training participants, particularly for communities who are being introduced to graphic design for the first time. In addition, Canva offers flexibility in designing various needs, ranging from logos and brochures to digital-based promotional media.

Several community service studies have shown that the use of Canva in training significantly improves digital skills. Training programs using Canva have been reported to increase participants' creativity while accelerating mastery of practical graphic design skills (Rahma et al., 2024; Safitri & Kurniadi, 2023). This is further supported by findings that Canva helps rural micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) create packaging and promotional designs independently, thereby reducing dependence on professional design services (Suhaimi et al., 2025). Thus, Canva is not only a technical tool but also a medium that empowers communities in the digital era.

METHODS

This activity was conducted at the Gerbosari Village Hall, Samigaluh District, Kulon Progo Regency, attended by 24 participants. It employed a participatory approach through several systematically designed stages, starting with initial observations to identify the needs, potential, and supporting facilities of the partners. Sugiyono in the book entitled "*Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*" states that the observation stage aimed to ensure that the training materials were aligned with the participants' real conditions and requirements, thereby enhancing the program's effectiveness. Following this stage, the activities proceeded with material preparation and training implementation, which included a socialization session in the form of a presentation on graphic design and the Canva application, hands-on practice in account creation and feature operation, as well as independent design practice under the guidance of the facilitators. To ensure the achievement of objectives, the program involved university students as assistants who supported participants when they encountered technical difficulties. In the final stage, an evaluation was conducted using questionnaires to measure participants' understanding of the materials and the skills they had acquired. This method proved to be relevant as it integrated theory, practice, and evaluation, consistent with previous findings that practice-based training with intensive mentoring effectively enhances participants' digital skills and self-confidence in applying technology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This activity was carried out on Monday, July 7, 2025, at the Gerbosari Village Hall, Samigaluh District, Kulon Progo Regency. Overall, the activity went smoothly and in accordance with the plan that had been prepared beforehand. At the initial stage, the implementing team conducted a field observation to identify the number of prospective partners involved, their potential, the available supporting facilities, and to prepare relevant materials to be delivered during the program. This observation step served as an essential foundation to ensure that the program was designed according to the participants' needs and could address the real challenges they faced in developing their businesses or other productive activities.

During its implementation, the activity received full support from the village government and the Gerbosari Youth Organization. This support was not only in the form of facilities but also moral encouragement, which further motivated both the team and the participants to engage actively in the program. A total of 24 partners attended and participated in the introduction to Canva, a practical and user-friendly platform for

designing logos and product packaging. The participants' enthusiasm was evident through their active involvement during the session, especially when experimenting directly with Canva's features. This indicates that the activity successfully attracted participants' interest and aligned well with their actual needs.

The selection of topics on logo and packaging design was based on the results of the initial observation conducted by the team. The findings revealed that these two aspects were the most demanded and needed by the partners. Logos and packaging are considered essential elements in supporting product marketing; therefore, mastering design skills becomes highly relevant. By delivering materials tailored to participants' needs, this program not only provided new insights but also offered practical skills that could be directly applied to their businesses. Consequently, this initiative is expected to have a positive impact on enhancing creativity, improving product quality, and strengthening the competitiveness of partners in Gerbosari Village.

Table 1. Activity Implementation Structure

No	Materials	Activities	Number of Participants
1	Introduction to graphic design	Socialization	24 participants
2	Introduction to the Canva app	Socialization	24 participants
3	How to log in or create an account on the Canva app	Practice	24 participants
4	Design creation training	Practice	24 participants
5	Evaluation		Members of the community service group

Source: Community Service 2025

This training activity consisted of several stages attended by 24 participants. First, participants attended a socialization session in the form of a presentation that introduced graphic design, followed by an introduction to Canva as a practical platform for creating designs. Next, the participants received hands-on practice on logging in or creating an account on the Canva application, followed by training on how to create designs using the platform. At the final stage, the service team evaluated to assess the achievement of the program's objectives as well as the effectiveness of its implementation.

The next session of the program involved the delivery of materials presented by the trainer in a systematic and structured manner. At the beginning of this session, participants were introduced to methods for optimizing the use of smartphones with the Android operating system as the primary device for supporting digital activities. This explanation was provided to ensure that participants understood that smartphones are not only tools for communication but can also be utilized as productive instruments, particularly in the field of graphic design. Afterward, the participants were introduced to Canva, including its basic features, benefits, and its importance in supporting design needs for logos, packaging, and other promotional media.

Furthermore, the trainer provided a more detailed explanation regarding how to log in and operate Canva. Participants were guided to practice account creation directly, become familiar with the interface, and explore the available menus. To reinforce understanding, the trainer also presented concrete examples of how to initiate the design process, such as selecting templates, incorporating graphic elements, and refining media to make it more visually appealing and communicative. This process was intended not only to introduce Canva but also to enable participants to apply design skills in creating works that are more visually appealing and functional, thereby supporting business development and other creative activities.



Figure 1. Socialization of Canva Utilization
Source: Author's Documentation

After the materials were delivered sequentially, as shown in **Figure 1**, the trainer provided participants with the opportunity to practice what they had learned directly. In this practice session, participants were given the freedom to explore their creative ideas, particularly in designing posters. The process began with creating a new file, determining the design size, and arranging graphic elements to produce an attractive poster. All stages were carried out under the guidance of the training team, who consistently provided direction to ensure that each participant could clearly understand the technical steps. This practice activity also served as a direct application of the theories previously presented, allowing participants to experience the connection between the material and its real implementation.

During the program's implementation, the trainer involved three university students who actively supported the smooth operation of the activities. The presence of these students aimed to assist participants when they encountered difficulties during practice and to clarify parts of the material that required additional explanation. They acted as facilitators, accompanying participants individually to ensure that each one fully understood how to use the Canva application. Such mentoring had also been implemented in previous community service programs, where students played an active role as facilitators to reduce participants' technical barriers. Thus, the involvement of students in this program not only facilitated the training process but also provided added value in the form of collaborative learning experiences.

At the end of the practice session, a discussion and Q&A session was held between the participants, the trainer, and the student facilitators. This discussion enabled participants to express the difficulties they encountered while also exploring their potential. The purpose was to identify weaknesses that needed improvement as well as strengths that could be further developed. This pattern of interactive discussion aligns with findings from previous community service programs, which have emphasized the importance of two-way communication between trainers and participants. Through this open forum, participants felt more confident in expressing their opinions, while trainers gained valuable feedback to improve training methods.

Based on the results of the activity, it was observed that participants were able to absorb the material well and complete the entire practice process without significant obstacles. They succeeded in creating engaging yet straightforward graphic designs using Canva on their own devices. This indicates that the

materials provided were relevant to participants' needs and could be applied directly. These outcomes are consistent with previous community service programs, where participants showed improvements in digital skills after receiving practice-based training. With this continuity, it can be concluded that a training model emphasizing direct practice is proven effective in enhancing participants' competencies.

After the training was completed, the team proceeded to distribute a comprehension questionnaire to measure participants' mastery of the material. The results from the 24 participants showed that 95% agreed they were capable of creating graphic designs using Canva after attending the program. This finding reinforced the results of previous programs, in which evaluations using similar instruments also demonstrated significant improvements in participants' understanding. Therefore, this training program not only provided technical skills but also enhanced participants' confidence to create independently. This serves as evidence that practice-based training, combined with continuous evaluation, can have a tangible, positive impact on the target community.

Discussion

The discussion of the results from the graphic design training activities using Canva in Gerbosari Village reveals that a practice-based approach can have a significant impact on improving the community's digital skills. This success cannot be separated from the initial stage of observation carried out by the implementing team to ensure that the materials were aligned with the participants' needs. Such an approach is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of needs analysis before implementing training programs to achieve more relevant and beneficial outcomes (Janah et al., 2025). Based on these observations, the activities ran effectively, and participants felt that the materials provided were truly needed for the development of their businesses.

The support of the village government and the youth organization (Karang Taruna) also proved to be an important factor driving the success of the program. Similar institutional support has been noted to strengthen community participation in service activities (Pisriwati et al., 2025; Zainuri & Huda, 2023). In this implementation, the support was not only in the form of venue facilities but also moral encouragement that fostered participants' motivation. With 20 active and enthusiastic participants, this activity demonstrated that synergy among implementing institutions, local government, and the community is the key to achieving training objectives.

This training also reaffirmed the importance of combining theoretical and practical approaches. Participants not only gained basic knowledge about graphic design and Canva but were also directly trained to create accounts, explore features, and produce simple design works. Such a training model aligns with findings that direct practice provides more meaningful learning experiences compared to theory-based learning alone (Hart, 2024; Hasanah et al., 2024). Thus, this activity successfully integrated conceptual understanding with practical skills, enabling participants to apply them independently.

The involvement of university students in assisting participants also contributed significantly to the smooth implementation of the training. The students acted as facilitators, helping to answer technical questions and providing intensive guidance during practice. This collaborative model aligns with previous research, which emphasizes that student participation in community service programs not only facilitates the training process but also enhances participants' confidence in practicing new skills (Adeoye & Jimoh, 2023; Wendling & Evans, 2023). With their involvement, technical barriers were minimized, while participants felt more supported throughout the learning process.

The outcome of the activity, namely the 95% improvement in participants' understanding based on evaluation questionnaires, indicates that the training program successfully achieved its objectives. This finding is consistent with earlier service program results reporting that the use of digital applications in

community training can enhance both skills and confidence (Wagwu et al., 2024; Yogyanto et al., 2024). Therefore, it can be concluded that practice-based training needs observation, institutional support, and intensive assistance to be a determining factor for program success. These results reinforce previous research, showing that community empowerment through digital technology can significantly enhance the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises.

CONCLUSION

A graphic design training using the Canva app in Gerbosari Village demonstrated improved digital skills among participants. This success was influenced by several key factors, including initial observations that tailored the program to participants' needs, support from the village government and Karang Taruna (Youth Organization), practical and hands-on training methods, and student mentorship. Therefore, it is recommended that similar programs continue to be developed by adding advanced materials, such as digital marketing strategies or social media design, so that participants not only develop technical skills but also utilize them to expand market reach and improve the competitiveness of local products.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author confirms that the data and contents of the article are free from plagiarism.

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