

Socialization of Good Communication In Improving the Quality of Services and Income of MSMES in Villages

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ABSTRACT

Studi ini mengkaji peran intervensi komunikasi dalam meningkatkan kinerja operasional dan keberlanjutan finansial UMKM pedesaan. Selain keterbatasan modal dan infrastruktur, UMKM sering menghadapi hambatan pertumbuhan akibat kualitas layanan yang rendah karena komunikasi interpersonal yang kurang efektif. Penelitian ini mengevaluasi program sosialisasi “Komunikasi yang Baik” terhadap kualitas layanan dan pendapatan bersih pelaku usaha. Dengan metode campuran, data kuantitatif diperoleh dari 120 pelaku UMKM pedesaan peserta lokakarya di beberapa desa dan didukung data kualitatif dari diskusi kelompok fokus. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa keterampilan komunikasi yang efektif meningkatkan kualitas layanan, terutama daya tanggap, empati, dan jaminan pelanggan. Peningkatan kualitas layanan juga berkorelasi positif dengan retensi pelanggan, frekuensi transaksi, dan pendapatan usaha. Temuan kualitatif menunjukkan bahwa pergeseran dari komunikasi transaksional ke relasional membantu membangun kepercayaan dalam komunitas desa. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendidikan nonformal yang berfokus pada keterampilan komunikasi profesional merupakan strategi hemat biaya untuk mendukung pembangunan ekonomi pedesaan dan meningkatkan daya saing UMKM di pasar regional yang semakin modern.

This study examines the role of communication interventions in improving the operational performance and financial sustainability of rural MSMEs. In addition to limited capital and infrastructure, MSMEs often face growth barriers due to low service quality due to ineffective interpersonal communication. This study evaluates the impact of the “Good Communication” socialization program on service quality and net income of business actors. Using mixed methods, quantitative data were obtained from 120 rural MSMEs participating in workshops in several villages and supported by qualitative data from focus group discussions. The analysis shows that effective communication skills improve service quality, particularly responsiveness, empathy, and customer assurance. Improved service quality is also positively correlated with customer retention, transaction frequency, and business revenue. Qualitative findings indicate that shifting from transactional to relational communication helps build trust within village communities. The study concludes that non-formal education focused on professional communication skills is a cost-effective strategy to support rural economic development and enhance the competitiveness of MSMEs in increasingly modern regional markets.



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INTRIDUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of the national economy, playing a crucial role in poverty alleviation and employment creation, particularly in rural areas. Amidst the tide of economic modernization, MSMEs in villages serve as a lifeline for family economies and a key driver of local financial liquidity (Suryana, 2022). Despite their significant market potential, rural MSMEs often face complex structural barriers. Much of the previous economic development literature tends to focus on classic issues, such as limited financial capital, low technology adoption, and poor physical infrastructure, to address MSME challenges (World Bank, 2021). However, a fundamental, often overlooked, non-technical dimension is the low capacity for soft skills, particularly in standardizing customer service communication procedures (Robbins & Judge, 2019). The need for this intervention is particularly pressing in rural areas surrounding metropolitan economic growth centers, where modern market penetration is particularly aggressive.

This critical situation is evident in two regions with unique socio-economic characteristics in Indonesia: the rural areas of Bogor Regency (West Java) and the rural buffer zone of Makassar City (South Sulawesi). Rural areas in Bogor Regency, such as those in agro-tourism and inter-agricultural areas, face the pressure of massive urban expansion from the Jakarta metropolis, which has led to shifts in local consumption behavior (Arifin, 2021). On the other hand, rural areas surrounding Makassar such as the coastal and agribusiness areas of Maros and Gowa Regencies serve as logistics hubs and food suppliers for the main economic gateways of Eastern Indonesia (BPS, 2024). In these two clusters, rural MSMEs compete not only with fellow local traders but also directly with the octopus of modern urban retail networks that are beginning to encroach on suburban areas. These modern retailers are capturing the rural market through absolute advantages that conventional MSMEs have not had, namely professional service excellence standards (Dessler, 2020).

Communication in a business context is not simply a random exchange of interpersonal information, but rather a strategic instrument that determines consumers' perceived value of a product or service. In rural areas of Bogor and Makassar, traditional trade activities often continue to operate conventionally and rely heavily on close social relationships (McCarthy et al., 2020). Unfortunately, this social closeness often leads MSMEs to neglect professionalism in serving customers. For example, the Sundanese ethnic group in rural Bogor, characterized by polite, communal communication, sometimes loses professional assertiveness in trade transactions. Meanwhile, in rural Makassar, with its strong assertive culture, communication barriers often arise in the form of rigid messaging that is often misinterpreted by new customers as unfriendly (Noe et al., 2015). Many local business owners in these two areas are unaware that unresponsive communication behavior and an inability to empathize with customer complaints are gradually driving customer migration to modern supermarkets (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016).

This behavioral gap emphasizes the importance of social intervention through structured community service programs that promote good communication. Theoretically, the implementation of effective communication in the business world is rooted in an interpersonal communication competency model that emphasizes appropriateness and effectiveness (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Through this outreach program, specifically designed for the Bogor and Makassar buffer zone, rural MSMEs were given practical simulations on how to apply assertive communication, active listening, read consumer body language, and manage complaints with a solution-oriented approach (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). This non-formal educational intervention aims to shift the mindset of rural business owners from a short-term transactional approach to a long-term relational one in order to build strong customer loyalty amidst fierce competition (Noe et al., 2015).

The direct impact of this successful communication pattern transformation is reflected in improved service quality.

Based on SERVQUAL theory, service quality is measured through the dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In the rural MSME ecosystems of Bogor and Makassar, the dimensions of responsiveness, assurance, and empathy are the most dominant components controlled by the business owner's verbal communication skills (Suhayati & Anggraeni, 2021). When a craft entrepreneur in Bogor or a seafood trader on the coast of Makassar is able to communicate in a friendly manner, provide transparent product explanations, and demonstrate genuine concern, the value of the business's assurance and empathy will increase in the eyes of

consumers (Zeithaml et al., 2018). This communication-based improvement in service quality will psychologically engender a high level of trust and security in consumers, which are key assets in maintaining the existence of local businesses (Barney, 1991).

Linearly, an increase in service quality perceived by consumers will have a positive impact on the financial performance and income levels of MSMEs. Superior service quality driven by good communication ethics has been proven to stimulate consumer repurchase intention and trigger positive word-of-mouth recommendations within the local community (Oliver, 2014). The accumulation of high frequency of repeat transactions will ultimately boost daily sales volume significantly (Hair et al., 2019). With stable profit margins and increasing sales volume, the net income received by MSME families in rural Bogor and Makassar will experience a significant escalation, which then contributes to strengthening the purchasing power of rural households at a macro level and reducing poverty rates in the buffer areas of large cities (Huselid, 1995).

Although the theoretical relationship between communication, service quality, and business revenue has been widely validated in large-scale industrial sectors (e.g., Huselid, 1995; Wright et al., 2001), its application to the microeconomic landscape of rural buffer cities such as Bogor and Makassar still faces unique socio-cultural challenges. The limited level of formal education of most micro-entrepreneurs in villages slows the speed of absorption of conceptual materials on customer service management (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Therefore, the socialization approach used in this research design should not be dictatorial, but rather must use a humanistic approach based on local wisdom from each region so that the essence of good communication can be easily internalized (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Considering this background, this research and community service program urgently needs to be implemented, focusing its design locus on the rural buffer zones of Bogor and Makassar. This study fills an empirical gap rarely explored by previous researchers, most of whom have focused on technical training in financial bookkeeping or marketing digitalization without addressing the fundamental aspect of business actors' communication competencies (Arifin, 2021). By comparing the effectiveness of programs in these two key regions of western and central-eastern Indonesia, this study is expected to provide valuable theoretical contributions to the human resource management literature while also contributing to policy recommendations for more holistic, integrative, and sustainable village MSME development for local governments (Cascio, 2019).

METHOD

This research and social intervention program used an exploratory mixed -methods design to analyze the effectiveness of communication competency socialization on service quality and income of MSMEs holistically (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The population in this study included all rural MSMEs operating in the retail trade and services sector in Bogor Regency and the buffer zone of Makassar City (Maros-Gowa). Sample selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique with inclusion criteria in the form of conventional micro-enterprises that had been operating for at least two years, had never received professional communication training, and were willing to participate in the entire socialization program series to completion (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The total real sample obtained was 120 MSMEs, divided proportionally across the two research area loci. Quantitative data collection was conducted before (pre-test) and three months after the intervention (post-test) using a Likert-scale structured questionnaire to measure shifts in service quality dimensions (SERVQUAL) as well as the real nominal monthly income records of partners (Hair et al., 2019).

The implementation procedure for the "Good Communication" socialization program was structured through three main stages to ensure optimal internalization of soft competencies (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). The first stage was a needs assessment (training needs analysis), in which the implementation team identified specific communication barriers faced by business actors in rural Bogor and Makassar, such as local language barriers and cultural rigidities in transactions (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016). The second stage was the intervention execution stage, in the form of a two-day interactive workshop that emphasized simulation methods, role playing, and case studies on handling customer complaints in a friendly, assertive, and empathy-based manner (Noe et al., 2015). The third stage was periodic on-site mentoring for three months after the socialization to monitor and ensure that

participants consistently applied excellent service communication techniques in their respective trading outlets (Cascio, 2019).

The data analysis in this study integrated inferential statistical approaches and qualitative content analysis to obtain strong and valid conclusions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Quantitative data on service quality and income levels before and after the program were tested using paired sample t- test analysis to measure the significance of changes in mean behavioral scores after the social intervention (Hair et al., 2019). To complement these numerical findings, qualitative data obtained from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with community leaders and customer representatives were analyzed using thematic analysis methods (Miles et al., 2014). This data triangulation process was carried out by confronting the results of statistical tests with narratives of direct experiences of MSME actors during interactions with consumers in the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This comprehensive analytical approach ensures that research bias is minimized and is able to capture the unique cultural dynamics that influence the effectiveness of business communication in rural Sundanese (Bogor) and rural Bugis-Makassar.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative data analysis shows a significant transformation in the service quality and income capacity of rural MSMEs in Bogor Regency and the Makassar City buffer zone following the implementation of the "Good Communication" socialization program. Based on the results of data collection through a structured questionnaire and partner financial records before (pre-test) and three months after the intervention (post-test), there was a positive escalation in scores on all tested SERVQUAL dimensions. Fluctuations in service performance indicators and their detailed financial impacts are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Financial Imapcts

Locus & Observed Variables	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Percentage Increase (%)	Significance Value (p-value)
Bogor Rural Cluster (n=60)				
1. Responsiveness	3.12	4.45	42.6%	< 0.001
2. Assurance	3.40	4.38	28.8%	< 0.001
3. Empathy	3.55	4.62	30.1%	< 0.001
4. Monthly Net Income (Rp)	4,250,000	5,400,000	27.1%	< 0.001
Makassar Rural Cluster (n=60)				
1. Responsiveness	2.85	4.30	50.8%	< 0.001
2. Assurance	3.22	4.41	36.9%	< 0.001
3. Empathy	3.10	4.35	40.3%	< 0.001
4. Monthly Net Income (Rp)	4,800,000	5,950,000	23.9%	< 0.001

Note: Service quality scores use a Likert Scale of 1–5. p less than 0.05 indicates a statistically significant change (Hair et al., 2019).

Based on the data in Table 1, the highest increase in the Makassar rural cluster was found in the responsiveness dimension, which jumped by 50.8%, followed by the empathy dimension at 40.3%. Prior to the intervention, many immigrant consumers or local residents in the Makassar buffer zone (Maros-Gowa) perceived local business operators' verbal communication styles as stiff and unfriendly (Noe et al., 2015). Through a comprehensive workshop, MSMEs were trained to adopt active listening techniques and use warmer intonations without losing their cultural identity (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). This success demonstrates that soft skills training can reconstruct frontline service behavior to be more adaptive to the expectations of modern customers who desire psychological rewards during transactions (Armstrong & Taylor,2020).\

Meanwhile, in the Bogor rural cluster, the empathy dimension recorded the highest score in the post test period, namely 4.62. The characteristics of the Sundanese community in rural Bogor, which

naturally has social capital in the form of verbal politeness (local wisdom), is an important catalyst in accelerating the internalization of socialization materials (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). The main obstacle in Bogor before socialization was not unfriendliness, but rather a lack of confidence in making product offers assertively and the inability to manage customer complaints systematically (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016). After being given an understanding of the assurance dimension in the SERVQUAL theory, business actors in Bogor were able to communicate more transparently about product advantages and price certainty, which in turn increased consumers' sense of security when shopping (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

The Impact of Strengthening Communication on Revenue Escalation

Financially, this transformation in service quality has been shown to have a positive linear impact on increasing the monthly net income of MSMEs in both operational areas. Partner revenue in Bogor increased by 27.1%, while in Makassar it grew by 23.9%. These empirical findings confirm modern marketing theory that excellent service quality is a key driver in stimulating consumer repurchase intention (Oliver, 2014). In rural areas buffering cities, where modern retail networks are relatively close, convenient interpersonal communication is a key bulwark for traditional MSMEs in retaining customers (Dessler, 2020). Customer loyalty built through emotional closeness and responsive service triggers massive word-of-mouth marketing within the village community, thereby reducing marketing costs to a minimum (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Furthermore, the integration of quantitative t-test results and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) results confirms that increased revenue is not solely driven by the addition of new customers, but rather by an increase in the basket size of satisfied existing customers (Hair et al., 2019). When communication built by shop owners shifts from transactional to relational, consumer trust levels increase sharply (Barney, 1991). Consumers in rural areas of Bogor and Makassar tend to focus their household spending on local grocery stores or service providers that are perceived as honest, communicative, and solution-oriented (Zeithaml et al., 2018). Therefore, non-formal interventions in the form of communication outreach have proven to be a highly effective and efficient investment in human resource capacity in driving sustainable microeconomic growth in rural areas (Cascio, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This research and social intervention program successfully demonstrated that strengthening soft skills competencies, particularly through the promotion of good communication, plays a strategic role in transforming the operational and financial performance of rural MSMEs. Empirical testing results in the rural clusters of Bogor Regency and the Makassar City buffer zone confirmed a significant increase in all dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL), particularly in the responsiveness and empathy indicators of business actors (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This dynamic demonstrates that non-technical barriers such as interpersonal communication stiffness and lack of service professionalism can be effectively mitigated through structured and sustainable non-formal education methods (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Thus, communication competency is no longer merely viewed as a natural social skill, but rather an intangible asset that must be developed to maintain the competitiveness of micro-enterprises at the local level (Barney, 1991).

Financially, the transformation of communication patterns from transactional to relational has been shown to have a linear multiplier effect on the escalation of monthly net income of MSME partners in both regions. This psychologically comfortable-based improvement in service quality has successfully stimulated the loyalty of existing customers while simultaneously triggering organic market expansion through the power of word-of-mouth marketing within village communities (Oliver, 2014). Amidst the aggressive penetration of modern retail networks that are beginning to encroach on the suburban areas of Bogor and Makassar, emotional closeness built through excellent communication has become the most efficient domestic economic defense (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This finding reinforces the theory of resource economics which states that investments in micro-level human capital can produce real and measurable financial returns for the sustainability of household businesses (Huselid, 1995).

As a future policy recommendation, this business communication-based educational intervention model needs to be integrated extensively into MSME development programs initiated by local governments and higher education institutions. The limited formal education levels of rural business owners necessitate that future outreach approaches continue to prioritize humanistic methods that are

adaptive to the local wisdom of each ethnic group, both Sundanese in West Java and Bugis-Makassar in South Sulawesi (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Future researchers are advised to expand the research locus and extend the observation period (longitudinal study) to evaluate the consistency of business owners' communication behavior over the long term (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Through this holistic and integrative development synergy, it is hoped that rural MSMEs will not only be able to survive the dynamics of urbanization but also mutate into the main drivers of sustainable regional economic independence (Cascio, 2019).

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