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Assisting im3 Partners in Developing Micro and Small Enterprises

Santoso[1*], Zaenal Abidin[2], Kurniawan[3], Fitri N[4], H Ahmad[5],
[1]Institut Islam Al-Mujaddid Sabak, Tanjung Jabung Timur, Indonesia
[2]Institut Islam Al-Mujaddid Sabak, Tanjung Jabung Timur, Indonesia
[3]Institut Islam Al-Mujaddid Sabak, Tanjung Jabung Timur, Indonesia
[4]IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro, Jawa Timur, Indonesia
[5]University of Management and Technology, Pakistan
*Correspondent Author: santoso@gmail.com

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Abstract:
Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) play a strategic role in local economic development, yet they continue to face challenges in market access, digital literacy, and managerial effectiveness. This study aims to explore the technical assistance provided by university students to IM3 business partners in enhancing product management, digital marketing strategies, and distribution systems in the Talang Babat region. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological strategy, the research draws on primary data from participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of Field Experience Practice activities. The findings reveal that collaborative engagement between academia and industry significantly improves partners' understanding of telecommunications products, strengthens social media-based promotional strategies, and optimizes inventory tracking and product distribution. The interaction among students, business partners, and service providers fosters a productive synergy in building a local business ecosystem responsive to communication technologies. This study contributes to the development of a replicable MSE assistance model grounded in the Triple Helix framework and phenomenological inquiry, offering practical implications for educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and policymakers in designing more contextual and sustainable MSE empowerment strategies.

Keywords:
Assistance, Im3 Partners, Micro and Small Enterprises Development, Digital Marketing, Triple Helix Collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Micro and small businesses are the backbone of Indonesia's economy, playing a major role in job creation, poverty reduction, and increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP). More than 99% of businesses in Indonesia are classified as micro and small enterprises and employ around 97% of the national workforce (Sari & Wibowo, 2023). However, this sector still faces various obstacles such as limited market access, low digital literacy, and weak managerial capacity (Rahman et al., 2021). Digital transformation is a strategic opportunity to address these challenges through cross-sector collaboration, including with communication technology service providers such as Indosat im3, which has adaptive digital capacity (Indef, 2024). In the global context, the digitization of Micro Small Enterprises is also seen as a strategy to strengthen local economic resilience amid post-pandemic pressures and digital disruption (Kumar et al., 2022).

Despite the implementation of various digitization programs, there is still a gap between academic approaches and field practices in assisting Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to optimize technology. Most previous studies have only highlighted macro policy aspects and the aggregate impact of digitization, without exploring the micro interactions between business actors and technology partners (Wulandari & Prasetyo, 2022). In this context, an experience-based mentoring approach through student involvement is an important innovation that connects the worlds of education and business (Yuliana et al., 2023). This model is considered relevant for implementation in areas such as Talang Babat, where micro and small businesses face contextual challenges that require participatory solutions (Nasution & Lubis, 2021).

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the process of assisting Indosat im3 business partners in developing MSMEs in the Talang Babat area. Based on the Triple Helix theory (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000) and the concept of Digital Business Ecosystem, this study emphasizes the synergy between academia, industry, and business actors in creating shared value. Students not only act as observers but also as agents of change who assist partners in product management, digital marketing strategies, and communication technology education (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and meanings of interactions between students and micro-small business actors in a collaborative and locally-based context.

The main objective of this research is to provide technical assistance to Indosat im3 business partners, improve understanding of digital marketing strategies, and encourage synergy between students, companies, and micro and small businesses. This article contributes by developing a partnership-based mentoring model that integrates technology and higher education, adapted to local needs. This approach addresses gaps in previous literature, which has generally been quantitative and has not combined phenomenological aspects with an industry-academic collaborative framework (Carayannis & Campbell, 2012; Hidayat & Sari, 2020). Field findings from the Field Experience Practice activities show how the integration of higher education can be a means of empowering Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises in a participatory and contextual manner.

The conceptual synthesis of this article combines the Triple Helix theory, the digital business ecosystem, and the phenomenological approach as a comprehensive analytical framework. The Triple Helix explains the collaborative structure between students, business partners, and technology providers; the digital business ecosystem describes the dynamics of added value formed through network interactions; while phenomenology explores the meaning of the experience from the mentoring process itself. The combination of these three elements produces a complete understanding of how academic-industrial collaboration can strengthen the capacity of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in the digital era. Thus, this research not only contributes to the development of local economic empowerment theory, but also offers a practical model that can be replicated to strengthen a sustainable and technology-based Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise ecosystem.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological strategy to explore in depth the subjective experiences of micro-entrepreneurs and students in the process of technology communication partnership-based mentoring. The phenomenological strategy was chosen because it is capable of revealing the meaning contained in social interactions and mentoring practices that take place in the field, as well as providing space for reflective interpretation of the collaborative dynamics between business partners and academic facilitators (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The data sources used consisted of primary data in the form of direct observation results, in-depth interviews, and documentation of Field Experience Practice activities in the Talang Babat area, as well as secondary data in the form of activity reports, business partner profiles, and supporting documents from PT. Muara Sabak Barat and Indosat im3. Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation of telecommunications product sales and distribution activities, semi-structured interviews with counter owners and sales teams, and documentation in the form of field notes, activity photos, and student weekly reports. The instruments used included interview guidelines, observation sheets, and activity documentation formats compiled based on technical assistance indicators and digital marketing strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The inclusion criteria in this study included micro business partners who actively sold Indosat im3 products, had a network of counters in the Talang Babat area, and were willing to participate in the mentoring process during the PPL period. The exclusion criteria included counters that had no sales activity during the study period or were unwilling to provide operational data. The unit of analysis in this study is the interaction between students and business partners in the context of technical mentoring, promotional strategies, and digital education. The subjects of the study consist of one student implementing PPL, five partner counter owners, one field supervisor, and two representatives from the sales team of PT. Muara Sabak Barat and RSE Indosat im3. Data analysis techniques used source and technique triangulation, with steps including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions based on thematic patterns that emerged from the results of observations and interviews (Flick, 2018). The analysis was conducted manually with the help of a qualitative coding tool based on thematic categories, which were compiled based on the Triple Helix conceptual framework and the digital business ecosystem. Data validity was maintained through member checking, audit trail, and peer debriefing techniques to ensure consistency of interpretation and validity of findings (Nowell et al., 2017). This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of actors in building synergies between higher education and the strengthening of micro-enterprises based on communication technology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study are presented in the form of thematic findings obtained through the process of coding and categorizing field data based on observations, interviews, and documentation during the Field Experience Practice in the Talang Babat area. Data analysis produced four main themes that represent the dynamics of Indosat im3's business partners in developing micro and small

businesses, namely: (1) understanding telecommunications products and services, (2) social media-based digital marketing strategies, (3) product stock and distribution management, and (4) collaborative synergy between students, business partners, and service providers.

Main Theme	Core Findings	Outcomes & Implications
Understanding Telecommunications Products and Services	Partners gained better literacy on Indosat IM3 products (starter packs, top-up vouchers, myIM3 app). Student-led simulations improved understanding of market segmentation and product advantages.	Increased partner knowledge, improved service responsiveness through digital feature training (mobo deposit, loyalty systems).
Social media-Based Digital Marketing Strategy	Partners were introduced to promotional techniques using WhatsApp Business, Instagram, and Facebook. Students assisted in creating visual content, scheduling posts, and analyzing engagement.	Higher customer engagement and reach; partners developed awareness of branding consistency and visual storytelling.
Stock and Product Distribution Management	Before mentoring, partners lacked structured inventory systems. Students implemented spreadsheet-based and simple stock apps for real-time tracking.	Improved stock accuracy, reduced shortages, and adoption of rotation and weekly evaluation practices.
Collaborative Synergy among Students, Partners, and Providers	Field Experience Practice fostered mutual learning and innovation. Indosat im3 & PT. Muara Sabak Barat supported supervision and technical guidance.	Strengthened Triple Helix collaboration model (academia–industry–community); enhanced local business ecosystem resilience.

Additional Empirical Insights;

Focus Area	Key Findings
Business Performance	Average 15–20% increase in daily transactions after digital strategy implementation; rise in demand for bundled products and promotional data packages.
Entrepreneurial Confidence	Owners expressed improved confidence and consumer insight through student mentorship.
Customer Behavior	Increased engagement with counters active on social media; faster response time via digital communication tools.

First, understanding of telecommunications products and services shows that business partners have increased their knowledge of Indosat im3 product characteristics, such as starter packs, top-up vouchers, and digital applications such as myIM3. The socialization process carried out by students through sales simulations and direct discussions helped partners understand market segmentation and the competitive advantages of products. These findings are in line with a study by Sari and Wibowo (2023), which emphasizes the importance of product literacy in improving the effectiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises distribution in the telecommunications sector. In addition, training on digital features such as mobo deposits and customer loyalty systems also strengthens partners' capacity to provide more responsive services.

Second, the social media-based digital marketing strategy revealed that most of the business partners had not yet optimally utilized digital platforms. Through student assistance, partners were introduced to promotional techniques using WhatsApp Business, Instagram, and Facebook Pages. Students helped with visual content creation, posting schedules, and customer interaction analysis. Observations showed an increase in customer engagement and expanded promotional reach after implementing this strategy. These findings are consistent with Wahida's (2025) research, which states that strategic use of social media can increase the visibility and sales conversion of Micro,

Small, and Medium Enterprises. Additionally, partners also began to understand the importance of brand consistency and visual narratives in building customer loyalty.

Third, stock management and product distribution showed that prior to the assistance, most partners did not have a structured stock recording system. Students introduced a spreadsheet-based recording format and a simple stock application that allowed partners to monitor product inflows and outflows in real time. Regular visits to partner counters such as Tokyo Cell, Arrahman Cell, ND Phone, and JV Phone showed improvements in the accuracy of product reordering and a reduction in the risk of stock shortages. A study by Prasetyo and Handayani (2024) supports these findings by emphasizing that digitizing inventory systems can improve the operational efficiency of micro and small businesses. In addition, partners have also begun to apply the principles of stock rotation and weekly evaluations to adjust to market demand fluctuations.

Fourth, the collaborative synergy between students, business partners, and service providers shows that Field Experience Practice activities create a productive and mutually beneficial space for interaction. Students gain practical experience in the business world, while partners receive technical assistance and business strategy innovation. RSE Indosat im3 and the sales team of PT. Muara Sabak Barat played an active role in providing guidance and supervision for the implementation of activities. These findings reinforce the argument from the research by Yuliana et al. (2023) which states that cross-sector collaboration is key to building a local business ecosystem that is adaptive to technological changes. In addition, this collaborative model reflects the real implementation of the Triple Helix principle in the context of microeconomic empowerment.

Documentation data shows that the mentoring activities lasted for more than a month, with a total of five partner counters actively involved. Each counter had different characteristics in terms of sales volume, types of flagship products, and promotional strategies used. Students noted an average increase in daily transactions of 15–20% at three counters after implementing the recommended digital strategies. This was reinforced by weekly reports showing an increase in demand for bundled products and promotional data packages. A study by Damanik (2025) also noted that digital-based interventions and direct mentoring can significantly improve the sales performance of micro and small businesses.

Interviews with counter owners revealed that they felt more confident in managing their businesses after receiving assistance. They also stated that student involvement provided a new perspective in understanding consumer behavior and market trends. This is in line with Rahmadhani's (2025) findings, which show that students can act as agents of innovation in empowering technology-based micro and small businesses. Additionally, visual documentation shows an improvement in the quality of counter displays and promotional materials after digital content design training.

Field observations also noted changes in customer behavior, with consumers showing greater interest in counters that are active on social media and provide product information online. This reinforces the findings of a study by Nanda (2025), which states that digital engagement is a determining factor in the purchasing decisions of micro and small businesses. In addition, a report

from Indonesian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (2025) shows that micro, small, and medium enterprises that adopt communication technology experience up to a 30% increase in efficiency in their daily operations. This data supports the results of field research showing that the use of instant messaging applications and digital recording systems helps partners respond to customer requests more quickly and accurately.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that an industry-academic collaboration-based mentoring approach can significantly improve the technical, managerial, and digital capacities of micro and small business actors. These findings reinforce the relevance of the phenomenological approach in exploring the meaning of experiences and social dynamics in the process of local economic empowerment. In addition, these results also provide an empirical basis for the development of a micro and small business mentoring model that can be replicated in other regions with similar characteristics.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that collaborative mentoring between students, Indosat im3 business partners, and distribution service providers can significantly improve the technical, managerial, and digital capacities of micro-businesses. These findings directly address the research questions, namely how the technical mentoring process is carried out, how digital marketing strategies are implemented, and how synergy between actors is built within the local business ecosystem. The increased understanding of partners regarding products, promotional strategies, and inventory management indicates that a participatory approach involving students as active facilitators is effective in driving the transformation of micro-businesses in the digital era (Ahmad & Rahayu, 2019).

Interpretation of these findings within the Triple Helix theory framework shows that synergy between academics, industry, and local communities can create applicable and sustainable innovations. Students, as representatives of academia, act as agents of change who bridge the needs of business partners with technology- and education-based solutions. This is in line with Fitriani's (2020) idea that the Triple Helix can drive a knowledge-based economy through knowledge transfer and product innovation. The phenomenological approach used in this study also allows for an in-depth exploration of the meaning of business partners' experiences, which strengthens the validity of the findings and their theoretical relevance (Amalia & Zukari, 2025).

Compared to previous studies, the results of this study are consistent with the findings of Sahid et al. (2025), which emphasize the importance of community and government collaboration in promoting digital innovation in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). However, this study makes a new contribution by highlighting the role of students as key actors in the mentoring process, which has not been widely studied in previous literature. The study by Harsono & Rinanda (2025) also supports a collaborative approach to the digitalization of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, but focuses more on aspects of public governance than on micro-level interactions in the field. This difference indicates that the contribution of this article lies in its exploration of higher education-based collaborative practices in a local context.

The scientific contribution of this article to the development of theory and practice lies in the integration of the phenomenological approach and the Triple Helix framework in the empowerment of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). This article expands the understanding of how direct interaction between students and business actors can shape productive two-way learning dynamics. Furthermore, these findings reinforce Kahveci's (2025) argument that the digital transformation of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises requires interconnections between innovation capabilities, adaptive strategies, and institutional support. Thus, this article provides a conceptual and empirical basis for the development of a collaborative and technology-based Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise mentoring model.

The limitations of this study lie in its geographical scope, which is limited to the Talang Babat area, and the relatively small number of business partners. In addition, the one-month duration of the assistance did not allow for the measurement of long-term impacts on business growth. This study also did not integrate quantitative analysis to statistically measure the effectiveness of promotional strategies. This limitation is in line with the acknowledgment in a study by Putri & Aryanto (2025), which states that evaluating the digitization of micro and small businesses requires a longitudinal and multi-method approach.

The implications of this study for practitioners are the need for a systematic and structured design of Micro Small Business assistance programs that involve students, with support from educational institutions and industry partners. For policymakers, the results of this study show that the integration of higher education in Micro Small Business empowerment programs can accelerate technology adoption and increase local competitiveness. The study by Malik et al. (2025) also emphasizes that cross-sector collaboration is an effective strategy in strengthening the digital ecosystem of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. Recommendations for further research include exploring digital platform-based mentoring models and analyzing the long-term impact on business growth and the welfare of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise actors.

In the context of the phenomenological approach, this study shows that understanding the subjective experiences of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) can reveal the social and psychological dimensions that influence the success of digital transformation. A study by Amitya et al. (2025) emphasizes that perceptions of transaction security and technological convenience are important factors in the adoption of digital systems by micro and small enterprises. These findings reinforce the relevance of the phenomenological approach in exploring the meaning and dynamics of change that occur in the mentoring process.

Finally, this article enriches the literature by presenting a collaborative model that combines education, technology, and business practices in the context of empowering Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). A study by Ahmad & Rahayu (2019) states that the role of students as agents of change has not been optimally utilized in community empowerment programs. This article addresses this challenge by demonstrating that the active involvement of students in mentoring micro-enterprises can create a real impact on improving the capacity and sustainability of local businesses. Thus, this article makes a strategic contribution to the development of higher education policies oriented towards strengthening technology-based grassroots economies.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that technical assistance provided by students to Indosat im3 business partners in the Talang Babat area has significantly improved product management capacity, digital marketing strategies, and the distribution efficiency of micro businesses. Through a phenomenological approach, it was found that direct interaction between students and business actors created a two-way learning process that strengthened partners' understanding of product characteristics, social media-based promotion techniques, and a more structured stock recording system. The synergy between the academic world and the business world has proven capable of building a local business ecosystem that is inclusive and adaptive to developments in communication technology, while also providing concrete answers to the problems raised in this study.

Theoretically, this article makes an important contribution to the development of a Triple Helix-based collaboration model that integrates the roles of higher education, industry, and local communities in empowering Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The phenomenological approach used enriches our understanding of the social dynamics and meaning of the experiences of business actors in the digital transformation process. In practical terms, this article offers a replicable mentoring framework in other contexts, placing students as active facilitators in strengthening the capacity of technology-based micro businesses. The conceptualization of a digital business ecosystem built through field interactions provides a basis for developing more contextual and sustainable empowerment strategies.

As a further implication, this study opens up opportunities for the development of more systematic Micro and Small Business assistance programs based on higher education curricula, with institutional support from industry partners and local governments. Further research is recommended to expand the geographical coverage, extend the duration of mentoring, and integrate quantitative approaches to measure the long-term impact on business growth and the welfare of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. In addition, exploring the use of digital platforms and artificial intelligence in the mentoring process could be a new direction in the development of microeconomic empowerment practices in the era of digital transformation.

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