

Smacking to increase productivity: changing the narratives of asnaf entrepreneurs from MyJANA 2023 project

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ABSTRACT

The MyJANA 2023 Project is an innovative endeavor designed to uplift financially underprivileged Asnaf entrepreneurs in Perlis, Malaysia, through comprehensive training in entrepreneurship and digital marketing. Addressing systemic barriers, it seeks to foster economic independence and self-reliance among participants using the SMACK approach—centering on Self-motivation, Measurability, Assessment, Culture, and Knowledge. This methodology incorporates training on social media marketing, branding, and AI tools for business enhancement. The project has significantly improved entrepreneurial skills, business productivity, financial empowerment, and digital marketing proficiency, contributing to individual and broader social-economic upliftment. Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), the initiative demonstrates the transformative power of targeted educational programs. Despite challenges like digital transition resistance and skills gaps, it has showcased the importance of adaptability, inclusivity, and

continuous support. Looking forward, MyJANA 2023 aims to scale its model and enhance learning experiences through technology. It stands as a testament to the impact of education and entrepreneurship on transforming lives, laying a foundation for empowering disadvantaged communities.

Keywords: Digital Entrepreneurship, Digital Marketing Skills, Economic Empowerment, Adaptive Learning Strategies, Asnaf

MYJANA'S BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE

The MyJANA 2023 Project, based in Perlis, Malaysia, emerges as a beacon of hope and empowerment for Asnaf entrepreneurs. Asnaf, defined within the Islamic Zakat system, refers to individuals and families who are financially underprivileged and thus eligible for zakat (charitable donations). Historically, these communities have faced systemic barriers to economic self-sufficiency, often relying on financial aid to meet their basic needs. In an era where entrepreneurship and digital literacy are increasingly recognized as pivotal for economic independence, the MyJANA 2023 Project seeks to bridge the gap for the Asnaf community, enabling them to leverage these avenues towards a more self-reliant future.

The core objective of the MyJANA 2023 Project is twofold. Firstly, it aims to provide comprehensive entrepreneurial training covering crucial aspects such as business planning, financial management, marketing, and customer relations. This foundational knowledge is vital for any entrepreneur looking to establish or expand a business. Secondly, the project places a significant emphasis on digital marketing skills. Given the digital age's relentless expansion, mastery over online business tools and platforms has become indispensable. Digital literacy empowers entrepreneurs to navigate the vast online marketplace effectively, expanding their reach and enhancing their business's potential.

Entrepreneurship, particularly within disadvantaged communities, is more than a pathway to financial stability; it is a catalyst for holistic community upliftment. By equipping Asnaf entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge to thrive in the business world, the MyJANA 2023 Project does not merely aim to alleviate immediate financial need but to foster a culture of self-sufficiency and innovation. This initiative acknowledges the untapped potential within the Asnaf community and seeks to transform it into a tangible force for economic and social change.

Through targeted training and support, the project endeavors to change the narrative around Asnaf entrepreneurs. Instead of being seen as perpetual recipients of aid, they are recognized as capable and innovative individuals, poised to contribute significantly to their communities and the broader economy. This shift in perception is crucial, not just for the entrepreneurs themselves but for society's broader understanding of poverty and empowerment. MyJANA 2023 Project is more than an entrepreneurial program; it is a comprehensive strategy aimed at changing lives and narratives. By focusing on both the foundational aspects of entrepreneurship and the cutting-edge requirements of digital marketing, the project seeks to pave a new path for Asnaf entrepreneurs. This initiative represents a critical step towards a future where financial need is not a barrier to economic independence and success but a challenge to be overcome through innovation, education, and community support. See Figure 1.



Figure 1: Photography Session with Trainers, Participants, and Organizer.

MYJANA'S METHODOLOGY

The SMACK Approach

Central to the MyJANA 2023 Project is the innovative SMACK approach, an acronym that stands for Self-motivation, Measurable, Assessment, Culture, and Knowledge. This holistic strategy is designed to tackle various aspects of entrepreneurship and personal development, ensuring that participants receive a well-rounded education. Figure 2 shows that we delve into each component of the SMACK approach to understand its contribution to the program's methodology.

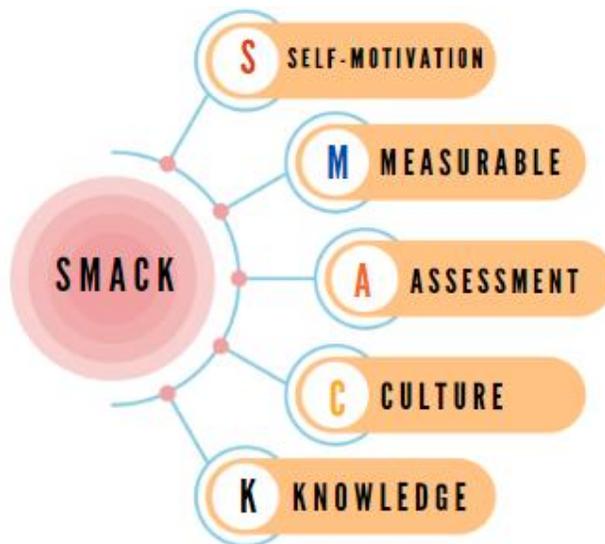


Figure 2: SMACK Model

- Self-motivation: Recognizing the intrinsic drive needed for entrepreneurial success, the project emphasizes self-motivation as its cornerstone. This emphasis is grounded in the

understanding that self-efficacy and motivation are critical factors that positively impact entrepreneurship interest, as demonstrated in a study of students at the Medan State Polytechnic College, North Sumatra (Kurnia & Sari, 2019). Participants are encouraged to set personal goals and envision their success, fostering an environment where motivation is driven by personal achievement and the desire to advance.

- **Measurable:** Objectives within the training modules are designed to be measurable, allowing participants to track their progress and achievements. This aspect ensures a tangible assessment of skills acquired, business milestones reached, and overall growth as entrepreneurs.
- **Assessment:** Regular assessments are integral to the methodology, providing feedback loops for both the participants and trainers. These assessments help in identifying areas of strength and improvement, ensuring that the training is responsive and tailored to the needs of the Asnaf entrepreneurs.
- **Culture:** The project places a significant emphasis on culture, specifically aiming to cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship and continuous learning within the Asnaf community. This includes sharing success stories, fostering a supportive community, and emphasizing ethical business practices.
- **Knowledge:** At the heart of the SMACK approach is the impartation of knowledge. The curriculum covers essential entrepreneurial skills such as business planning, financial management, and customer relations, alongside digital marketing skills crucial for modern business success.

Training Modules

The initiative has rolled out a series of advanced training modules tailored to meet the unique requirements of the Asnaf entrepreneur community. Among these, the digital marketing module, a creation from the EntrepWeek project developed by Dr. Fatin Husna Suib, has been implemented (Suib, et al, 2023). The included modules are:

- **Designing Business Advertisements via CANVA:** Participants learn to use CANVA, a user-friendly graphic design tool, to create engaging advertisements for their businesses.
- **Entrepreneurial Mindset:** This module focuses on cultivating the attitudes and beliefs necessary for entrepreneurial success, including resilience, innovation, and problem-solving.
- **Social Media Marketing (Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook Page Marketing):** Given the importance of social media in today's marketplace, this module teaches effective strategies for engaging customers and promoting products on popular platforms.
- **Branding:** Entrepreneurs learn the significance of building a strong brand identity and how it impacts customer perception and loyalty.
- **Video Marketing via CAPCUT:** Recognizing the growing trend of video content, this module covers the basics of creating and editing videos using CAPCUT, enhancing marketing efforts with visual storytelling.
- **Business Model Canvas (BMC):** The BMC module provides a strategic and visual framework for developing or refining business models, encouraging a structured approach to business planning.
- **Copywriting via ChatGPT:** Leveraging AI tools like ChatGPT for effective copywriting, participants learn how to craft compelling messages that resonate with their audience.

- Go-Ecommerce Portal from MDEC: This module introduces participants to the Go-Ecommerce platform by MDEC, equipping them with the knowledge to navigate online marketplaces and expand their digital footprint. Figure 3 shows the training session.



Figure 3: Digital Marketing Workshop Using CANVA

Through the SMACK approach and these tailored training modules, the MyJANA 2023 Project aims to build a foundation of knowledge and skills that empowers Asnaf entrepreneurs to thrive in a competitive market. The incorporation of digital technology into entrepreneurship education, as highlighted by Sulistianingsih (2023), has fundamentally changed the way students learn, interact, and prepare for successful business ventures, aligning with the project's innovative methodology. This methodology not only addresses the immediate needs of starting and running a business but also instills a long-term vision for growth, innovation, and community contribution.

IMPACT ON ASNAF ENTREPRENEURS

The MyJANA 2023 Project has engineered a multifaceted impact on Asnaf entrepreneurs, transforming not only their business operations but also their personal development and community engagement. This section elaborates on the significant outcomes achieved through the project's innovative methodology.

Improved Entrepreneurial Skills

One of the project's foremost achievements is the substantial enhancement of entrepreneurial skills among participants. By covering a wide array of topics, from business planning and financial management to customer relations, entrepreneurs have gained a robust foundation necessary for navigating the complexities of running a business. This skill set empowers them to

make informed decisions, optimize their operations, and drive sustainable growth. This outcome aligns with the findings of Galvão, Marques, and Ferreira (2020), who assert that entrepreneurship education and training programs positively influence individual entrepreneurial orientation, skills, and company creation, fostering company formation and regional development.

Enhanced Digital Marketing Proficiency

In today's digital age, the ability to effectively market one's business online is indispensable. The MyJANA 2023 Project has placed a significant emphasis on digital literacy, equipping participants with the skills to leverage social media platforms, engage in video marketing, and utilize e-commerce portals. As a result, Asnaf entrepreneurs have reported an increase in their online presence, customer engagement, and sales, illustrating the critical role of digital marketing in business success. Figure 4 shows the online session.

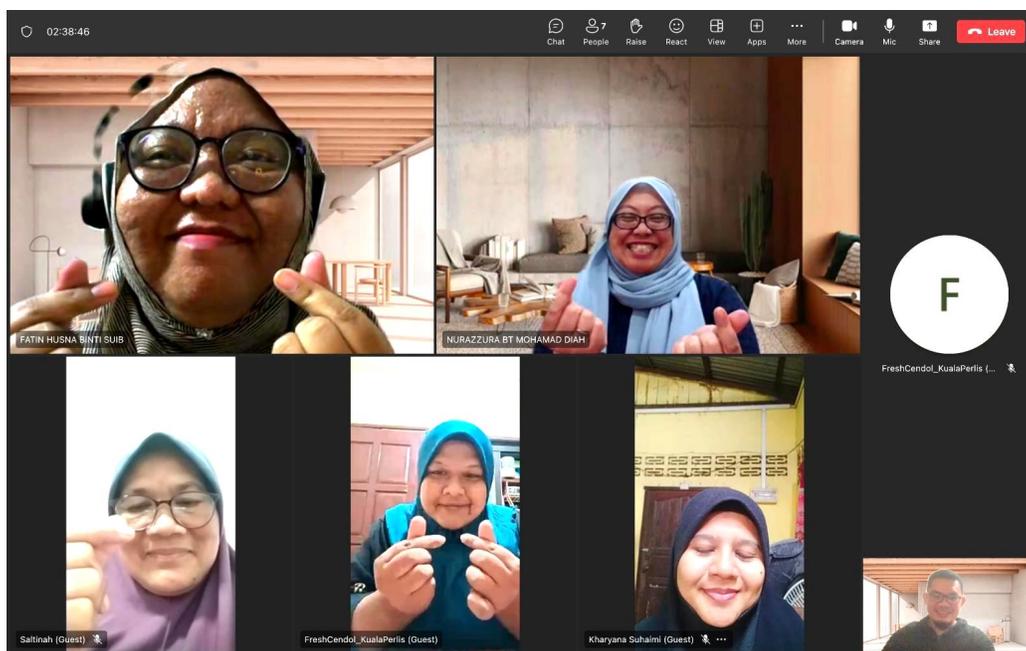


Figure 4: Online Digital Marketing Class for TikTok Module

Increased Business Productivity

The comprehensive training provided by the MyJANA 2023 Project has translated into increased productivity for Asnaf entrepreneurs. With a better understanding of business processes and the adoption of efficient digital tools, participants have optimized their operations, leading to improved product and service delivery. This increase in productivity not only enhances profitability but also contributes to the overall competitiveness of their businesses. This outcome is supported by the findings of Suminar, Yusuf, and Utsman (2020), who observed that entrepreneurship training significantly contributes to the productivity of Semarang City SMEs, with a 14.5 percent positive impact, improving human resource quality and enhancing competitiveness.

Financial Empowerment

Financial empowerment is a crucial outcome of the MyJANA 2023 Project. By fostering entrepreneurship among Asnaf individuals, the initiative has enabled participants to generate sustainable income streams, reducing their reliance on financial aid. This shift towards self-reliance marks a significant step in breaking the cycle of poverty and contributing to the economic upliftment of the Asnaf community.

Confidence and Self-Esteem

Entrepreneurship training has had a profound effect on the confidence and self-esteem of Asnaf entrepreneurs. The acquisition of new skills and knowledge, combined with the experience of running a successful business, instills a sense of achievement and self-worth. This effect mirrors the findings of Costin, O'Brien, and Hynes (2021), who highlight that entrepreneurship education positively impacts students' entrepreneurial confidence, aptitude, and self-efficacy, leading to increased motivation and belief in their ability to start an entrepreneurial venture. This newfound confidence not only motivates entrepreneurs to pursue their business goals but also inspires others within the community to explore entrepreneurship as a viable path to financial independence.

Broader Social Impacts

Beyond individual success, the MyJANA 2023 Project has facilitated broader social impacts, including community engagement, knowledge sharing, and economic impact. As Asnaf entrepreneurs thrive, they contribute to the local economy by creating jobs, engaging with local suppliers, and participating in community development initiatives. Additionally, the culture of knowledge sharing fostered by the project encourages a collaborative environment where entrepreneurs support one another, further strengthening the community's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Long-Term Sustainability and Empowerment

The ultimate impact of the MyJANA 2023 Project lies in its contribution to the long-term sustainability and empowerment of Asnaf entrepreneurs. By equipping them with the tools and knowledge to succeed in the modern business landscape, the project ensures that participants are well-positioned to maintain and grow their enterprises. This enduring impact not only benefits the entrepreneurs and their families but also serves as a model for economic empowerment and self-sufficiency for underprivileged communities.

The MyJANA 2023 Project's comprehensive approach has created a ripple effect of positive outcomes, showcasing the transformative power of targeted entrepreneurship training. As we move forward, examining the challenges faced and reflecting on the project's journey offers valuable insights for future initiatives.

CHALLENGES FACED

Despite its significant achievements, the MyJANA 2023 Project encountered a range of challenges that tested its resilience and adaptability. These obstacles provided valuable lessons on the complexities of implementing entrepreneurship training programs, especially within underprivileged communities. This section explores the main challenges encountered and how they were addressed.

Resistance to Digital Transition

One of the primary challenges was the initial resistance among Asnaf entrepreneurs to adopt digital business practices. Many participants, accustomed to traditional ways of doing business, were hesitant to embrace new technologies and online platforms. This resistance stemmed from a lack of familiarity with digital tools and fear of the unknown.

Solution: To counter this, the project emphasized hands-on training and real-life success stories to demonstrate the tangible benefits of digital adoption. Gradual, step-by-step guidance helped participants build confidence in using digital tools, gradually overcoming their initial resistance.

Limited Awareness and Mastery of Digital Tools

The rapid pace of digital innovation means that new marketing tools and platforms are constantly emerging. Many Asnaf entrepreneurs had limited awareness of these resources, and even when introduced to them, mastering their use posed a significant challenge.

Solution: The project addressed this by providing continuous learning opportunities, including workshops, online tutorials, and mentoring. By fostering a culture of lifelong learning, entrepreneurs were encouraged to keep abreast of digital trends and tools, enhancing their digital literacy over time.

Challenges in Engaging Participants Actively

The traditional lecture-based format of training sessions initially led to passive engagement from participants, limiting the effectiveness of the learning experience.

Solution: Recognizing the need for a more interactive and participatory approach, the MyJANA 2023 Project incorporated active learning techniques, such as group projects, role-playing, and business simulations. These methods fostered a more engaging and immersive learning environment, encouraging active participation and practical application of skills.

Navigating the Digital Skills Gap

The varying levels of digital literacy among participants created a skills gap, with some entrepreneurs struggling more than others to keep pace with the training.

Solution: To ensure inclusivity, the project implemented differentiated learning paths tailored to the individual's skill level. Additional support, such as one-on-one coaching, was provided to those needing extra help, ensuring no one was left behind in the digital transition. Figure 5 shows the personal coaching session.



Figure 5: Personal Coaching Session with TikTok Influencer

Overcoming Traditional Mindsets

Shifting the mindset from dependency on financial aid to self-reliance and entrepreneurial thinking was a significant hurdle. Traditional beliefs and societal norms often conflicted with the entrepreneurial spirit, creating barriers to full engagement with the program.

Solution: Through motivational talks, influencer's success stories, and discussions, the project worked to change perceptions and foster a more entrepreneurial mindset. Emphasizing the dignity and potential of self-employment helped shift attitudes towards positive change and self-sufficiency.

The challenges faced by the MyJANA 2023 Project highlight the complexities of fostering entrepreneurship within disadvantaged communities. However, through adaptive strategies and a commitment to participant success, the project not only overcame these obstacles but also provided valuable insights for future initiatives. These experiences underscore the importance of flexibility, inclusivity, and continuous support in the implementation of entrepreneurship training programs.

REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The MyJANA 2023 Project, aimed at empowering Asnaf entrepreneurs in Perlis, Malaysia, has illuminated the transformative potential of entrepreneurship and digital marketing training for financially disadvantaged communities. This initiative's journey offers critical reflections and insights that pave the way for future directions in similar projects.

Reflecting on the Journey

Reflecting on its journey, the MyJANA 2023 Project has showcased the profound impact and transformative potential of entrepreneurship and digital marketing training for financially disadvantaged communities in Perlis, Malaysia. This pioneering initiative has provided valuable lessons and insights, setting a precedent for future projects aimed at empowering underprivileged entrepreneurs. The initiative has played a critical role in empowering Asnaf entrepreneurs by equipping them with essential skills and knowledge, fostering a newfound sense of self-reliance, confidence, and economic independence. The emphasis on education as a tool for empowerment underscores the project's significant impact on individuals and the broader community.

In today's digital era, the project also highlighted the critical importance of digital literacy for achieving business success. By focusing on digital marketing and the utilization of online business tools, the MyJANA 2023 Project has demonstrated how essential these skills are for accessing wider markets and boosting competitiveness. This aspect of the project has been pivotal in preparing entrepreneurs for the demands of the modern business landscape.

Moreover, the initiative's journey revealed the importance of adaptability and personalized support to overcome various challenges, including resistance to digital adoption and addressing the skills gap among participants. The project's responsive and flexible approach to these obstacles has been key to its success, illustrating the need for tailored training programs that meet the unique needs of participants.

A vital takeaway from the MyJANA 2023 Project is the significant value of community engagement and support. By fostering a collaborative environment where entrepreneurs can share their knowledge and experiences, the project has strengthened the entrepreneurial ecosystem within the community. This collaborative model has not only supported individual entrepreneurs but has also contributed to creating a sustainable framework for empowerment, demonstrating the collective benefits of shared learning and support in fostering entrepreneurial success and community development.

Future Directions

Looking ahead, the MyJANA 2023 Project anticipates several strategic directions to amplify its success and widen its reach. The project's scalability and potential for replication in various regions present a promising avenue to extend its benefits to a larger pool of Asnaf entrepreneurs and communities requiring support. This expansion is vital for magnifying the initiative's positive impact on economic empowerment and self-reliance among disadvantaged groups.

Moreover, the rapid evolution of the digital landscape underscores the necessity for the project to continually refine and update its training content and methodologies. Embracing the latest digital tools and entrepreneurial practices is essential to maintain the program's relevance and efficacy in a constantly changing business environment. In parallel, the development of enhanced support systems, such as comprehensive mentorship programs, networking platforms, and accessible financing options, is crucial. These support mechanisms aim to bolster the entrepreneurs' chances of success, offering them a reliable safety net and resources critical for their entrepreneurial journey.

Furthermore, a commitment to rigorous research and evaluation is key to understanding the project's impact fully. Such efforts will uncover valuable insights into the program's effectiveness, identifying areas for improvement that could shape future iterations. This ongoing evaluation will also contribute to the broader academic and practical understanding of entrepreneurship training's role in uplifting underprivileged communities.

Lastly, leveraging cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, holds the potential to revolutionize the learning experience for participants. By tailoring educational content to meet individual needs, these technologies can significantly enhance participant engagement and the overall effectiveness of the training. The MyJANA 2023 Project's future directions are thus anchored in a vision of growth, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to empowering the Asnaf community through entrepreneurship.

CONCLUSION

The MyJANA 2023 Project represents a beacon of hope and a testament to the power of education and entrepreneurship in transforming lives. As the project moves forward, the lessons learned and successes achieved provide a solid foundation for future initiatives aimed at empowering disadvantaged communities through entrepreneurship. The journey of the MyJANA 2023 Project is a reminder of the potential within each individual and the transformative impact of collective effort, innovation, and resilience.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the MyJANA 2023 Project utilize the SMACK approach to address the needs of Asnaf entrepreneurs, and what are the key components of this methodology?
2. What impact has the MyJANA 2023 Project had on the personal development and business operations of Asnaf entrepreneurs?
3. What challenges did the MyJANA 2023 Project face, and how were they overcome?
4. Reflecting on the MyJANA 2023 Project, what are the key lessons learned regarding empowering disadvantaged communities through entrepreneurship and digital marketing training?
5. Looking ahead, what future directions can be taken to enhance the effectiveness of programs like the MyJANA 2023 Project in empowering Asnaf entrepreneurs and similar communities?

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