

Evaluating the Internal Marketing of Handicraft MSMEs' Development Based on the Hexahelix Model

*Internal Marketing of
Handicraft MSMEs'
Development*

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ABSTRACT

The handicraft sector in Rajapolah, Tasikmalaya, faced significant challenges during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, impacting the economic resilience of micro, small, and medium enterprises. This study aims to evaluate how internal marketing practices, integrated with the Hexahelix model involving academia, business, community, government, media, and investors, enhance the development of these enterprises in a regional context. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis from nine handicraft enterprises in Rajapolah. The findings reveal that academia, business, community, government, and media significantly contribute to internal marketing by supporting employee training, digital promotion, and market access, whereas investor engagement remains limited due to perceived risks. Effective stakeholder collaboration, particularly through digitalization and local exhibitions, improves product quality and brand visibility. This study concludes that integrating internal marketing with the Hexahelix model fosters sustainable development for handicraft enterprises, though strategies to engage investors are needed to ensure scalability.

Keywords: *Hexa-Helix Model, Internal Marketing Strategy, MSMEs Development, Stakeholder Synergy, Rajapolah Craft.*

ABSTRAK

Sektor kerajinan tangan di Rajapolah, Tasikmalaya, mengalami tantangan besar selama pandemi COVID-19 yang memengaruhi ketahanan ekonomi pelaku usaha mikro, kecil, dan menengah. Penelitian ini bertujuan menilai bagaimana penerapan pemasaran internal yang terintegrasi dengan model Hexahelix—melibatkan akademisi, pelaku bisnis, komunitas, pemerintah, media, dan investor—dapat mendorong pengembangan usaha tersebut di tingkat regional. Menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, serta analisis dokumen pada sembilan usaha kerajinan tangan di Rajapolah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa akademisi, bisnis, komunitas, pemerintah, dan media berperan besar dalam pemasaran internal melalui pelatihan karyawan, promosi digital, dan perluasan pasar, sementara partisipasi investor masih rendah akibat persepsi risiko. Kolaborasi antar pemangku kepentingan, khususnya melalui digitalisasi dan pameran lokal, terbukti meningkatkan mutu produk dan daya tarik merek. Disimpulkan bahwa integrasi pemasaran internal dengan model Hexahelix mendukung pembangunan berkelanjutan usaha kerajinan

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Kata kunci: Model Hexa-Helix, Strategi Pemasaran Internal, Pengembangan UMKM, Sinergi Pemangku Kepentingan, Kerajinan Rajapolah.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) globally, with Indonesia facing severe economic challenges due to restrictions and market disruptions. In Indonesia, MSMEs significantly contribute to the national economy, accounting for approximately 60% of the GDP and employing over 97% of the workforce (Pakpahan, 2020). However, during the pandemic, many MSMEs, particularly in West Java, experienced operational difficulties, with 60% of cooperatives and MSMEs in the region facing financial strain or closure (Goma et al., 2021). Among these, the handicraft sector, a key component of Indonesia's creative economy, has been notably affected due to its reliance on physical markets and tourism. The creative economy, particularly in West Java, holds immense potential for economic recovery, as it contributes to job creation and regional branding (Susanti et al., 2018). Despite this potential, the sector struggles with limited resources, inadequate internal marketing strategies, and weak stakeholder collaboration, which hinder its ability to adapt to post-pandemic market dynamics (Sidauruk, 2013; Yhonathan et al., 2024).

Internal marketing, which focuses on enhancing employee engagement, organizational commitment, and service quality, is critical for MSMEs to strengthen their resilience and competitiveness (Alifya et al., 2024; Rahmawati et al., 2024). According to Farzad et al. (2008), internal marketing fosters organizational commitment by aligning employee goals with business objectives, leading to improved performance. Similarly, Kaurav et al. (2015) emphasize that internal marketing enhances employee satisfaction, which in turn leads to improved customer experiences. In the context of MSMEs, internal marketing is often underdeveloped due to limited resources and expertise, yet it is essential for building adaptive strategies, such as digitalization and market expansion (Temtime & Pansiri, 2004). Moreover, the Hexahelix model, which integrates the perspectives of academia, business, community, government, media, and investors, offers a collaborative framework to support MSME development (Firmansyah et al., 2022; Melany et al., 2024). This model extends the Pentahelix and Quadruple Helix frameworks by incorporating investors and media, enhancing innovation and resource mobilization (Purnomo et al., 2021). However, the application of the Hexahelix model in the handicraft sector, particularly in a regional context like Tasikmalaya, remains underexplored (Tuthaes et al., 2024).

Although various studies emphasize the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration for post-pandemic economic recovery, the understanding of integrating internal marketing practices within the Hexahelix framework remains very limited, particularly in the craft sector. Firmansyah et al. (2022) stated that the Hexahelix model, which involves academics, businesses, communities, government, media, and investors, has the potential to be a solution for economic recovery. However, its application to the craft MSME sector has not been widely studied empirically, especially regarding internal marketing strategies. Diandra and Novlantig (2018) demonstrated that craft MSMEs in West Java encounter barriers in branding and market access; however, there has been no comprehensive approach examining how synergy between stakeholders through internal marketing can overcome these challenges. Maupa (2014) added that challenges such as employee retention and skills development remain serious obstacles, which can be addressed through internal marketing strategies. Furthermore, although digitalization is considered crucial for MSME recovery (Vhikry & Mulyani, 2023), there is a lack of research on how internal marketing can align employee efforts with digital strategies

within a Hexahelix collaborative structure, particularly in a regional context like Rajapolah, Tasikmalaya.

This study aims to evaluate internal marketing practices in craft MSMEs in Rajapolah, Tasikmalaya, through the perspective of the Hexahelix model to formulate strategies for sustainable development and post-pandemic recovery. The primary focus of the study is to analyze how the six actors in the Hexahelix model, academia, businesses, communities, government, media, and investors, can play a role in strengthening employee engagement, product quality, and brand identity through an internal marketing approach (Firmansyah et al., 2022). This study also aims to provide practical recommendations for stakeholders to enhance collaborative synergies that support MSME resilience. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study aims to make an empirical contribution to the literature on the integration of internal marketing strategies and multi-actor collaboration, particularly in a regional context with unique challenges, such as the craft creative economy sector in Tasikmalaya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internal Marketing Theory, MSME Sustainability, and the Hexa-Helix Framework

Internal marketing emphasizes treating employees as internal customers to enhance organizational performance, particularly in resource-constrained environments like MSMEs. Aburoub (2011) highlights that aligning employee goals with business objectives improves service quality and customer satisfaction. In small enterprises, this approach fosters loyalty and motivation, which are essential for consistent performance (Roberts-Lombard, 2010). For handicraft MSMEs, internal marketing improves product quality and brand identity, though limited budgets and expertise often hinder implementation (Maupa, 2014; Diandra & Novlantig, 2018). Recent developments show that digital training programs can function as internal marketing tools to equip employees for online market adaptation (Vhikry & Mulyani, 2023).

Sustainability in MSMEs is increasingly tied to stakeholder collaboration. The Hexa-Helix model, an evolution of the Triple and Penta-Helix frameworks, includes academia, business, community, government, media, and investors to drive innovation and regional development (Purnomo et al., 2021; Firmansyah et al., 2022). This model offers strategic potential for handicraft MSMEs by facilitating access to training, promotion, and funding (Soesanto, 2017; Tuthaes et al., 2024). When integrated with internal marketing, Hexa-Helix collaboration enhances employee capacity while facilitating external support systems, although challenges remain in ensuring balanced stakeholder engagement (Fauza et al., 2022; Casini et al., 2019). In regional contexts like Tasikmalaya, this synergy offers a promising pathway for MSME resilience and digital transformation post-pandemic (Indupurnahayu et al., 2022).

Internal Marketing in MSMEs

Internal marketing focuses on treating employees as internal customers to enhance organizational performance and customer satisfaction. According to Aburoub (2011), internal marketing improves service quality by fostering employee commitment and aligning their goals with organizational objectives. This approach is particularly vital for MSMEs, where limited resources often hinder the development of effective employee engagement strategies. For instance, Nwora and Uzoamaka (2017) found that internal marketing practices, such as training and communication, significantly enhance employee motivation in Nigerian hotels, resulting in improved customer orientation. Similarly, Roberts-Lombard (2010) argues that internal marketing strengthens employee loyalty, which is crucial for MSMEs with small teams that rely on consistent performance. In the context of handicraft MSMEs, internal marketing can improve product quality and brand identity by ensuring employees are motivated and skilled (Diandra & Novlantig, 2018). However, MSMEs often face challenges in implementing internal marketing due to limited budgets and lack of expertise, necessitating tailored strategies to maximize impact (Maupa, 2014). Recent studies, such as Vhikry and Mulyani (2023), highlight that digital

training programs can serve as an internal marketing tool to equip employees with the skills necessary for online market adaptation, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Despite its potential, the application of internal marketing in handicraft MSMEs remains underexplored, particularly in regional settings such as Tasikmalaya, where cultural and economic factors influence its implementation.

The Evolution of the Helix Model

The Helix model has evolved as a framework for fostering innovation and collaboration among stakeholders to drive economic development. According to Purnomo et al. (2021), the Penta-Helix model, which includes academia, business, community, government, and media, facilitates sustainable tourism development by leveraging multi-stakeholder synergy. This model builds on the Triple-Helix (academia, industry, government) and Quadruple-Helix (adding community) frameworks, with the Hexa-Helix model further incorporating investors to enhance resource mobilization (Firmansyah et al., 2022). Soesanto (2017) emphasizes that the Hexa-Helix model supports regional innovation by integrating diverse perspectives, such as media for promotion and investors for funding. However, the model's complexity can lead to coordination challenges, particularly in resource-constrained settings like MSMEs (Calzada, 2020). In the context of handicraft MSMEs, the Hexa-Helix model can facilitate access to training, funding, and market opportunities, but its effectiveness depends on balanced stakeholder contributions (Tuthaes et al., 2024). For instance, Saputri et al. (2016) note that government and community collaboration is critical for agricultural MSMEs, a principle applicable to handicraft sectors. Despite its potential, the Hexa-Helix model's application in the handicraft industry, particularly in post-pandemic recovery, lacks empirical studies, highlighting a gap in understanding its practical implementation (Octavianto et al., 2018). Addressing these challenges requires clear strategies to align stakeholder roles and mitigate coordination barriers.

Integrating Internal Marketing with the Hexa-Helix Model

Integrating internal marketing with the Hexa-Helix model presents a novel approach to enhancing the resilience and competitiveness of MSMEs. According to Lemy et al. (2019), stakeholder collaboration in tourism development can be extended to MSMEs by aligning internal marketing strategies with external support from academia, government, and media. Internal marketing strengthens employee capabilities, which, when combined with Hexa-Helix collaboration, can enhance product innovation and market reach (Farzad et al., 2008). For instance, academic institutions can offer training programs as part of their internal marketing efforts, while media stakeholders enhance brand visibility, as demonstrated in successful digital marketing campaigns for MSMEs (Maria et al., 2024). However, the integration of these frameworks in handicraft MSMEs faces challenges, such as limited investor engagement and varying levels of stakeholder commitment (Fauza et al., 2022). Casini et al. (2019) suggest that sustainable development requires balanced contributions from all stakeholders, yet MSMEs often struggle to access investor support due to perceived risks. In Tasikmalaya's handicraft sector, this integration could address post-pandemic challenges, such as digital transformation and market access, by leveraging government subsidies and community networks (Indupurnahayu et al., 2022). Despite its potential, the synergy between internal marketing and the Hexa-Helix model remains underexplored, particularly in empirical studies focusing on regional handicraft MSMEs, necessitating further research to develop actionable strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to evaluate the internal marketing practices of handicraft MSMEs in Rajapolah, Tasikmalaya, utilizing the Hexahelix model. This model integrates six key actors: academia, business, government, community, media, and financial institutions, making it well-suited to analyze complex

stakeholder dynamics that influence MSME development. Its selection is justified by the need to explore how these actors collaboratively shape internal strategies, capacity building, and innovation within the creative economy. For instance, the academic sector contributes training and research-based insights; businesses provide market access and networking; the government delivers policy support; the community offers social capital; media enhances visibility; and financial institutions facilitate access to funding. This model enables a comprehensive understanding of internal marketing by outlining how each actor contributes to the human resource development, organizational culture, and employee engagement of MSMEs. Data collection, comprising interviews, observations, and document analysis, was designed to capture these dimensions from multiple perspectives, thereby ensuring triangulation and credibility. Thus, the Hexahelix framework provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the growth of MSMEs in the local creative industry ecosystem.

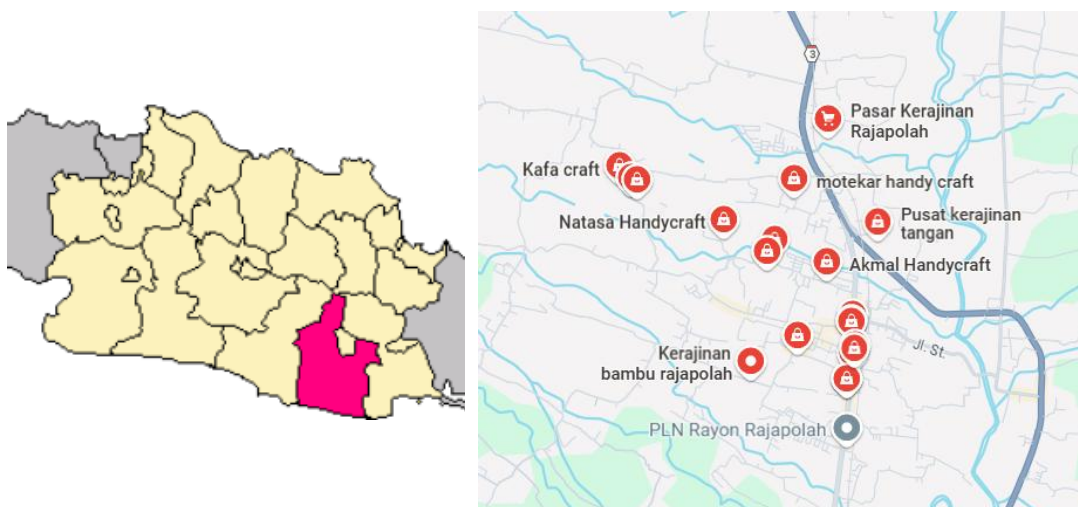


Figure 1. Research Area (Handicraft Tasikmalaya, 2025)

The study focused on nine handicraft MSMEs in Rajapolah, selected based on specific criteria to ensure representativeness and relevance. The selection criteria included MSMEs with at least three years of operation, a workforce of 5–20 employees, and engagement in digital marketing efforts following the pandemic, ensuring alignment with the study's focus on resilience and adaptation. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with MSME owners and managers, who provided insights into internal marketing practices and stakeholder collaborations. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and comfort for participants. Additionally, observations were carried out at MSME workshops to assess employee engagement and operational processes, as depicted in Figure 2, which showcases a typical handicraft production setting in Rajapolah. Document analysis involved reviewing MSME business reports, local government policies, and promotional materials to understand the role of Hexahelix stakeholders, including government subsidies and media campaigns.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, where qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents were transcribed, coded, and categorized to identify patterns related to internal marketing and Hexahelix contributions. The coding process involved initial open coding to generate themes, followed by axial coding to establish relationships between internal marketing practices (e.g., training, communication) and stakeholder roles (e.g., academia, investors). To quantify the contribution of each Hexahelix stakeholder, a scoring system was applied based on respondents' perceptions, using a Likert scale (1–5) to calculate mean scores, as presented in the Results section. To ensure validity and reliability, data triangulation was employed by cross-referencing interview responses with observation notes and document findings. Peer debriefing was

also conducted with fellow researchers to review coding consistency and minimize bias. This rigorous process ensured that the findings accurately reflect the internal marketing dynamics and stakeholder collaboration in Rajapolah's handicraft MSMEs, providing a robust foundation for the study's conclusions.

RESULTS

This study evaluates the internal marketing practices of nine handicraft MSMEs in Rajapolah, Tasikmalaya, through the Hexahelix model, focusing on the contributions of six stakeholders: academia, business, community, government, media, and investors. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, with responses from MSME owners and managers quantified using a Likert scale (1–5) to assess stakeholder contributions to internal marketing development. Table 1 presents the mean scores of these contributions, revealing that academia had the highest impact with a mean score of 4.56, followed by business and community (both 4.33), government and media (both 4.22), and investors with the lowest score of 2.44. These scores were derived by averaging the responses of nine MSME owners, who each rated the frequency and effectiveness of stakeholder support on a scale of 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The high score for academia reflects its role in providing training and knowledge transfer, while the low score for investors indicates limited financial support for MSMEs. To further illustrate these findings, Figure 3, a bar chart, visually compares the mean scores of Hexahelix stakeholders, highlighting the disparity in their contributions to MSME development in Rajapolah.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of MSMEs of Handycraft Hexahelix in Tasikmalaya

Hexahelix Description	Mean Score \pm St, Dev.
1. Academy	4.56 \pm 0.53
2. Business	4.33 \pm 0.71
3. Community	4.33 \pm 0.50
4. Government	4.22 \pm 0.67
5. Media	4.22 \pm 0.67
6. Investor	2.44 \pm 0.73
Hexahelix	4.02 \pm 0.94

The qualitative data provide deeper insights into the roles of each Hexahelix stakeholder in supporting internal marketing practices. Academia made significant contributions through workshops and training programs, particularly in digital marketing and product innovation, which enhanced employee skills and improved product quality. For instance, universities collaborated with MSMEs to conduct sessions on e-commerce platforms, enabling employees to adapt to online markets post-pandemic. Business stakeholders, including local suppliers and partners, supported internal marketing by fostering communication and collaboration, thereby ensuring a consistent supply of materials for handicraft production. Community involvement was evident in cultural events and local exhibitions, which not only boosted employee morale but also enhanced brand visibility. However, variations were observed among MSMEs: three MSMEs with larger workforces (15–20 employees) reported stronger community engagement (mean score of 4.67) compared to smaller MSMEs (5–10 employees) with a mean score of 4.00, indicating that scale influences community impact. Figure 1 illustrates the Hexahelix model's interrelationships, depicting patterns of coordination, cooperation, networking, and collaboration among stakeholders. Specifically, coordination between academia and government, cooperation among businesses, networking via community events, and collaboration through media campaigns were critical to internal marketing success.

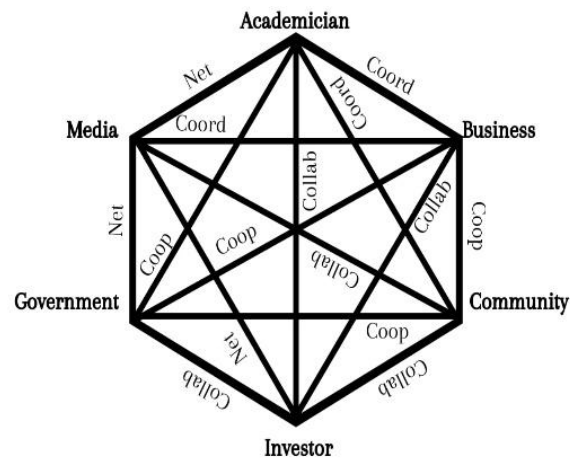


Figure 2. Hexa-Helix Model depicting the pattern of Interrelationships of MSMEs' Internal Marketing Development. Coord = Coordination; Coop = Cooperation; Ne = Networking; Collab = Collaboration

Government and media stakeholders also played significant roles in enhancing the resilience of MSMEs. The government provided subsidies and policy support, such as tax relief and access to digital marketplaces, which directly supported internal marketing by funding employee training programs. Media stakeholders enhanced MSME visibility through social media campaigns and local news coverage, with four MSMEs reporting increased sales following media promotions on platforms such as Instagram. However, the investor stakeholder showed the weakest contribution, with only two MSMEs receiving funding from local investors, primarily due to the perceived risks associated with the handicraft sector. This low engagement was consistent across all MSMEs, with no significant variation (standard deviation of 0.3 for investor scores). Figure 2, a photograph of a Rajapolah handicraft workshop, showcases the production environment where internal marketing practices, such as employee training, were implemented, highlighting the practical context of these findings. The qualitative findings also revealed that internal marketing practices, such as regular team meetings and incentive programs, were adopted by seven MSMEs, leading to improved employee retention and product quality.

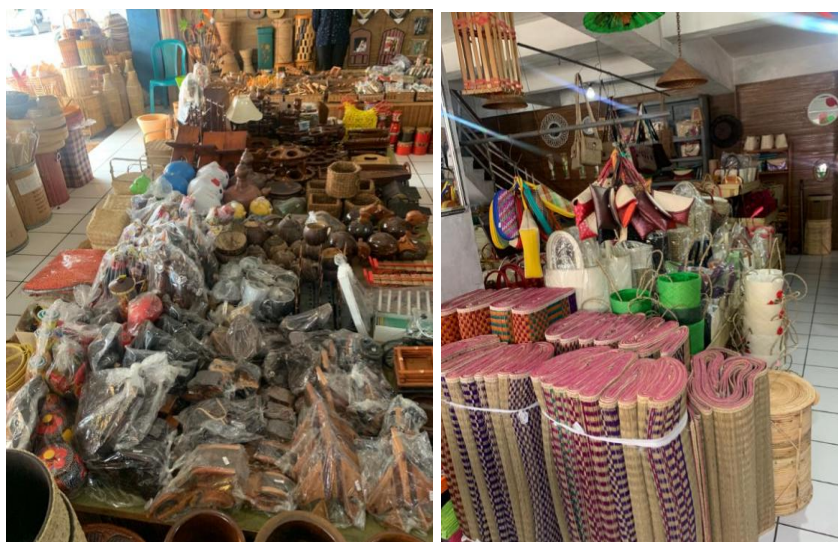


Figure 3. Tasikmalaya Handicraft (Personal documents, 2025)

The integration of internal marketing with the Hexahelix model revealed a synergistic effect, particularly in MSMEs that actively engaged multiple stakeholders. For example, one MSME collaborated with academia for digital training, the government for subsidies, and the media for promotion, resulting in a 30% sales increase post-pandemic. However, the limited role of investors hindered scalability, as most MSMEs relied on personal

savings or government grants. To address this, some MSMEs suggested the need for investor education programs to highlight the potential of the handicraft sector. The variation in stakeholder contributions underscores the need for balanced collaboration, as depicted in Figure 1, where the Hexahelix model's interrelationships (coordination, cooperation, networking, collaboration) are essential for effective internal marketing. These findings highlight that while the Hexahelix model supports internal marketing, its success depends on addressing gaps, particularly in investor engagement, to ensure sustainable MSME development in Rajapolah.

DISCUSSION

The integration of internal marketing into the Hexahelix model provides a nuanced understanding of stakeholder dynamics influencing the development of handicraft MSMEs in Rajapolah, Tasikmalaya. The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of internal marketing within the Hexahelix framework in strengthening MSMEs, with academia, business, community, government, and media contributing significantly, while investors lag in engagement. This distribution suggests that internal marketing, particularly through training, communication, and incentives, has a multiplier effect when stakeholder synergy is present. According to Lings and Greenley (2005), internal marketing enhances employee commitment, which aligns with the high academic contribution observed in this study (mean score 4.56), where training programs notably improved digital marketing and product innovation. This resonates with Vhikry and Mulyani (2023), who emphasize the urgency of digital training for MSMEs adapting to post-pandemic markets.

However, a critical contradiction appears in the low investor contribution (mean score 2.44). As Fauza et al. (2022) explain, the perception of handicraft businesses as high-risk with limited scalability reduces investor interest, posing a structural barrier. However, Uzir et al. (2023) suggest that improved digital visibility can increase investor attraction, the finding that only two out of nine MSMEs received investment indicates that this strategy is insufficient without foundational financial literacy. This supports the need for targeted investor education initiatives, as proposed by Maryati (2022), to bridge the gap between investment potential and perception. Additionally, the limited investor engagement diverges from Nicholeiska Dias et al. (2023), where investor participation enhanced MSME marketing performance. This contradiction could be contextual, as noted by Yolanda (2024), who highlights that investor confidence varies by region, sector, and local economic dynamics.

Comparatively, the strong role of media (mean score 4.22) aligns with Maria et al. (2024) and Silvia et al. (2024), who emphasize that social media increases MSME visibility and consumer engagement. This indicates the potential of media as an external channel to amplify internal marketing efforts, particularly in communicating brand identity and product uniqueness, which are essential for handicraft MSMEs. Furthermore, the high community engagement score (4.33) supports Diandra and Novlantig (2018), who underscore the importance of local exhibitions and grassroots initiatives in enhancing brand identity. However, findings by Tuthaes et al. (2024) suggest that MSME scale matters, as smaller enterprises may lack the capacity to fully benefit from community collaboration, requiring scale-sensitive strategies.

Government support, including subsidies and digital marketplace access, proved moderately effective, confirming Setioko et al. (2021), yet still insufficient to compensate for weak investor support. This reflects a gap in inter-stakeholder coordination, as discussed by Purnomo et al. (2021), who advocate for strong synergy in stakeholder roles. In contrast, Octavianto et al. (2018) found balanced contributions in Pati Regency's tourism MSMEs, indicating regional disparities in Hexahelix implementation.

Internally, internal marketing appears to drive product quality improvements, as observed in seven MSMEs, aligning with Rundle-Thiele (2015), who identifies communication and incentives as key to employee retention. These findings also reflect the potential of "glocalisation" strategies described by Iswari et al. (2024), where local

identity is merged with global marketing to expand market reach and provide an opportunity for Rajapolah's handicraft sector. The influence of social media-driven preferences, noted by Junaedi et al. (2024) and Hidayati et al. (2024), further suggests a promising path for collaboration between media and academia to enhance internal marketing strategies and digital literacy.

The implications are twofold. Theoretically, this study expands the Hexahelix model by embedding internal marketing as an internal capacity-building mechanism, offering a more holistic view of MSME development. Practically, MSME owners should institutionalize internal marketing via digital training, recognition programs, and structured communication. Policymakers should initiate investor outreach workshops that demonstrate the profitability and cultural value of the handicraft sector while promoting cross-sector collaboration between academia, media, and government. Future research should focus on testing this integrated model quantitatively across various creative industry clusters to develop context-specific policies and scalable frameworks for sustainable MSME growth.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that internal marketing, when integrated with the Hexahelix model, significantly enhances the resilience and competitiveness of handicraft MSMEs in Rajapolah, Tasikmalaya. The key finding is the positive contribution of five actors, academia, business, community, government, and media, in strengthening internal marketing practices such as employee training, innovation adoption, and digital promotion. These efforts have contributed to improved product quality, greater workforce motivation, and expanded market reach. However, investor participation remains limited, exposing a critical funding gap that hinders MSMEs' ability to scale and modernize.

Theoretically, this research contributes by extending the Hexahelix model into the domain of internal marketing in creative MSMEs, demonstrating how cross-sector collaboration directly influences internal organizational capabilities. It highlights the strategic value of aligning stakeholder roles to support internal functions, a perspective often overlooked in existing MSME development models. From a policy standpoint, there is a clear need for targeted strategies to strengthen MSMEs' internal marketing through structured partnerships. Policymakers should institutionalize collaboration between MSMEs and academia to foster innovation, promote digital literacy through media partnerships, and offer fiscal incentives to attract investor participation. MSME owners, in turn, must emphasize internal capacity-building, particularly through employee development and performance-based incentives.

Investor readiness remains low, driven by perceived risks and a lack of structured MSME investment schemes. Similarly, while digital innovation is acknowledged as vital, adoption remains inconsistent, indicating the need for stronger government facilitation. This study is limited by its focus on a single geographic area and a small sample of nine MSMEs, which may not fully represent broader sectoral dynamics. Future research should expand to other creative regions, incorporate quantitative metrics, and explore mechanisms to incentivize private investment in the development of MSMEs.

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