

## Village Digital Spaces and Generational Politics: The Challenge of Inclusive Innovation in Rural Indonesia

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### Abstract

*The digital transformation of rural areas presents both opportunities and challenges for youth, particularly through the development of Village Digital Community Spaces (RKDD). This study explores how RKDD can be optimized as an inclusive and dynamic platform to foster youth innovation amidst the socio-cultural dynamics of village life. Conducted in Polorejo Village, which hosts an active yet under-resourced RKDD, this research employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate young people's lived experiences in engaging with digital spaces. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, and analyzed using open coding, thematic categorization, and verification. Findings reveal that while the RKDD provides basic training in areas such as graphic design and video editing—boosting self-confidence among youth—barriers persist in terms of advanced skills and program sustainability. Structural constraints, including top-down governance, hierarchical social norms, and inadequate infrastructure, often hinder the realization of youth-driven ideas. This study argues that strengthening RKDD as an innovation incubator requires not only technological infrastructure but also context-sensitive social adoption, sustained mentoring, cross-sector collaboration, and affirmative policies. Theoretically, it contributes to a broader socio-cultural understanding of rural digital transformation; practically, it advocates for participatory and intergenerational development planning in building inclusive and sustainable village innovation ecosystems.*

**Keywords:** Community Empowerment, Digital Inclusion, Inclusive Development, Local Governance, Rural Digital Transformation

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## INTRODUCTION

The massive digital transformation over the past two decades has significantly changed how people live, work, communicate, and participate in social spaces. The advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has impacted not only urban populations but has also increasingly permeated various aspects of rural life. The convergence of technology in daily activities has created new opportunities for rural communities to engage in the digital economy, expand access to knowledge, and strengthen social networks that transcend geographic boundaries (Nurhadryani et al., 2025). Within this context, the concept of Ruang Komunitas Digital Desa (RKDD) or Village Digital Community Spaces emerges as a community-based development strategy that aims to integrate digital advancements with village social life. RKDDs are not merely centers for internet access or technological services;

rather, they hold the potential to function as social incubators that bridge local community needs with opportunities on a global scale.

Ideally, RKDDs aim to empower rural communities to utilize technology productively and sustainably. In many initiatives, youth groups become the primary focus of digitalization efforts due to their typically adaptive nature toward technology and their vast potential as agents of change. Rural youth occupy a strategic position—they represent the future of their communities while simultaneously possessing a sensitivity to social change and global dynamics (Fajarianto et al., 2025). However, in practice, this significant potential is often underutilized in village digitalization programs. Structural barriers such as limited access to infrastructure, low levels of digital literacy, and minimal youth involvement in planning and decision-making processes pose major challenges to optimizing their role in RKDDs (Hamdi, 2023).

Several studies have noted that although many digital facilities have been established in villages, their presence does not necessarily translate into increased capacity or creativity among local youth. Researchers have highlighted the significant digital divide between rural and urban areas, especially in terms of network availability, access to technological devices, and the capabilities of local human resources to utilize them effectively. Even when technological infrastructure is available, there is no guarantee that youth can harness it to foster innovation or contribute meaningfully. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of youth-centered policies and a predominantly top-down development approach that fails to align with local values and contexts (Putri et al., 2023).

From a sociological perspective, the barriers to optimizing RKDDs are also related to the social structure of rural communities, which often remain hierarchical and conservative. According to Hariadi et al. (2025), youth in villages are frequently denied opportunities to express their opinions or lead innovative projects, as older, more senior actors are typically perceived as more experienced and authoritative. Digital collaborative spaces have yet to become fully open or inclusive, thereby hindering the emergence of creative initiatives among young people. Consequently, community digital spaces—originally intended as hubs for learning and creativity—have instead transformed into rigid, formal environments that do not align with the interests or needs of rural youth. In today's rapidly evolving society, youth participation in digital development is a critical prerequisite to ensure that rural areas are not left behind.

Moreover, generic technological approaches that are not tailored to local conditions have proven ineffective in promoting sustainable digital empowerment. Hibatulloh et al. (2025) argue that the success of RKDDs in fostering innovation among youth heavily depends on how technology is designed, introduced, and internalized by the community. For instance, the use of Content Management Systems (CMS) such as WordPress can enable rural youth to create localized digital media, including village information websites, community blogs, and platforms for marketing MSME products (Wikan et al., 2025). However, such technologies will have limited impact without proper mentoring, training, and safe spaces for experimentation

that allow youth to build their capacities over time. In this regard, it is essential to conceptualize RKDDs not only as physical facilities but also as social spaces that encourage participatory learning and intergenerational dialogue.

A participatory approach is key to bridging the gap between technological potential and social needs. A study by Fajarianto et al. (2025) in Kebobong Village, Malang, aimed at preserving local culture, demonstrated that digital literacy training tailored to community needs significantly increased youth engagement in creating locally based digital products. Youth were no longer merely technology users but became content creators, information managers, and community economic drivers. This illustrates that RKDDs can serve as effective innovation incubators if managed with a focus on mapping local potentials, collective learning, and cross-sectoral collaboration among village governments, educational institutions, and the private sector.

Nevertheless, evaluations of various rural digitalization initiatives reveal that most still focus primarily on technical and administrative aspects, such as infrastructure development, internet access expansion, or public service digitalization. Meanwhile, the socio-cultural dimensions and youth dynamics as innovation agents are often overlooked. Wibowo and Basri (2020) assert that village development approaches frequently fail to comprehend local complexities, particularly regarding power relations, community values, and social practices that shape youths' lived experiences. Hence, a reorientation of the rural digital development paradigm is necessary—from a technocratic model toward one that is more humanistic, contextual, and democratic.

This study seeks to contribute to this paradigm shift by offering an in-depth analysis of how RKDDs can be optimized as inclusive and dynamic spaces to stimulate youth innovation in rural areas. Employing a phenomenological approach, this research explores the subjective experiences of rural youth in engaging with digital community spaces and how they perceive the RKDD as a platform for learning, self-expression, and contributing to their communities. Additionally, this study identifies social and cultural barriers that hinder the active participation of youth in digital innovation processes at the village level.

Therefore, the theoretical contribution of this study is expected to enrich the discourse on community-based development, particularly in the context of digital transformation in rural settings. The research findings also offer practical implications for policymakers, village governments, civil society organizations, and educational institutions aiming to engage in more inclusive village digitalization efforts. Optimizing RKDDs is not merely about expanding technological facilities but about fostering a social ecosystem that nurtures creativity, collaboration, and youth leadership as key actors of development. Ultimately, the success of rural digital transformation depends largely on the community's—especially the youth's—ability to leverage technology as a tool for building a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative approach using the phenomenological method to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of rural youth in interpreting the existence and utilization of Ruang Komunitas Digital Desa (RKDD), or Village Digital Community Spaces. The research focuses on social interactions, as well as economic and creative aspirations, related to how young people use digital technology in their daily lives. The study was conducted in Polorejo Village, Babadan District, Ponorogo Regency, which was purposively selected due to its active RKDD activities, despite facing several challenges related to infrastructure and the quality of facilitation.

To elucidate the meanings that emerge from the experiences of youth, this study integrates various implementation strategies that also function as methods for the researcher to approach the phenomenon. First, community education was carried out through open discussions and small-scale counseling sessions during group interviews, aiming to enhance the informants' critical awareness and reflection on the potential of digital spaces in the village. Second, an element of science and technology diffusion was present, as the researcher facilitated simple content creation demonstrations (such as digital posters and short videos). Hence, these activities were not solely focused on data collection but also produced practical outputs for the youth participants. Third, a brief training session was conducted on the use of basic editing applications, which sparked discussions and reflective responses regarding their technical skills. Fourth, the researcher acted as a mediator, connecting the youth with village officials and RKDD managers to discuss possible collaborations based on the emerging creative ideas. Finally, an advocacy component was embedded in informal mentoring sessions, where the researcher guided discussions on marketing strategies for village products via social media, thereby fostering the participants' confidence and sense of agency.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with youth aged 15 to 25 who were actively involved in RKDD, as well as with digital space managers and relevant community figures. The data collection process was expanded using snowball sampling techniques to capture a wider diversity of experiences. Participant observation was conducted during routine RKDD activities and village creative forums, accompanied by photo documentation and field notes to enrich the contextual understanding of the data. To ensure the validity of the findings, this study employed source triangulation, participant checks, and an audit trail documenting the decision-making processes throughout the research.

Data analysis followed the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2020), involving open coding, thematic categorization, and verification to ensure that the findings authentically reflect the meanings of digital space as socially and culturally constructed by the youth of Polorejo Village. This approach thus not only reveals how they utilize technology, but also illustrates how digital community spaces in rural areas can function as vehicles for both individual and social transformation through education, mentorship, and local innovation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Optimizing the Village Digital Community Space

The Village Digital Community Space (Ruang Komunitas Digital Desa or RKDD) is a strategic program initiated by the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendes PDTT), aiming to provide both physical and digital spaces for villagers to learn, interact, and develop local potential through the utilization of information and communication technology. RKDD is essentially designed as a hub for community activities where residents can gather, discuss, and exchange information with one another. Through facilities such as internet access, websites, and digital applications, RKDD facilitates learning, collaboration, and the online marketing of village products—thereby serving as a crucial medium for introducing technology to rural communities.

Furthermore, RKDD also plays a role in enhancing villagers' capacity through relevant digital skills training, such as smart farming, digital content creation, and online marketing literacy. Thus, RKDD is not merely a place to learn technology, but also a foundation for building sustainable smart villages. With the presence of RKDD, villagers are expected to become more actively involved in development processes, utilize technology to expand economic opportunities, and ultimately contribute to collective welfare in their regions.

Table 1 Dynamics of RKDD in Polorejo Village

Aspect	Field Findings
Physical & Digital Facilities	Only 1 computer; unstable internet connection; located at the village hall with limited operating hours
Digital Literacy	Community members, especially the older generation and administrators, lack awareness of digitalization
Youth Motivation	Enthusiastic during creative training (graphic design, video); confidence increased when their work was showcased
Management & Structure	Top-down approach; administrators selected without considering digital competencies; low participatory engagement
Cultural Barriers	Humility norms hinder youth from self-promotion; existence of a hierarchical social structure
Economic Potential	A CMS-based MSME website prototype exists, but underutilized due to funding and human resource limitations

Source: Processed data from interviews and field observations, 2025

Field findings in the RKDD of Polorejo Village show that physical and digital facilities are very limited. There is only one computer used on a rotating basis, and the internet connection is often unstable. Additionally, the facility—located in the village hall—has limited operational hours. Digital literacy levels among the community, especially the older generation and local administrators, remain low, making digital transformation efforts poorly understood and not widely accepted.

However, interviews revealed that youth motivation increased when they participated in creative training such as graphic design and video editing, with their self-confidence rising after their work was publicly showcased. Despite this, the top-down management approach

and the appointment of administrators based not on digital competencies but on formal administrative roles led to problems in program sustainability. This aligns with findings by Kharima et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of digital literacy in communities to ensure that programs are not merely formalities.

Cultural and social barriers—such as norms of humility and hierarchical social structures—also discourage youth from promoting themselves. These challenges support the arguments of Yuniarti & Nugroho (2022), who stressed the need for interventions grounded in social relationships and cultural recognition, beyond just infrastructure provision.

Interestingly, despite limited facilities, a CMS-based website prototype for MSMEs has been developed, although its use remains suboptimal due to funding and human resource constraints. This confirms the observation by Rachman & Sugian (2019), who stated that digital innovations can thrive when young people are directly involved. Their argument highlights that successful digital transformation in rural areas requires synergy between infrastructure, digital literacy capabilities, and the application of social values. This is essential for RKDD to function effectively as a space that supports youth-driven digital economic innovation.

Table 2 Strengths and Weaknesses of RKDD in Polorejo

Category	Strengths	Weaknesses
Accessibility	Open to the public and free of charge	Limited devices and unstable internet connection
Programs	Training provided in graphic design, video editing, and digital content production	Programs are unsustainable and reliant on external parties
Management	Organizational structure exists	Leadership selection not based on digital competence, often merely formal
Youth Engagement	High enthusiasm during hands-on training and when work is showcased	Lack of involvement during program planning stages
Community Perception	Recognized as a digital training center	Still perceived as a “top-down” central government project, not a local initiative

Source: Processed data from interviews and field observations, 2025

The findings indicate that, in terms of accessibility, the RKDD in Polorejo Village is publicly available and free of charge—an important initial asset for developing a rural digital literacy hub. However, this advantage is hampered by hardware limitations (only one computer) and unstable internet, which prevent digital learning activities from occurring simultaneously or effectively.

From a programmatic perspective, a number of trainings have been implemented, including graphic design, video editing, and social media content production. These activities have successfully increased youth interest and self-confidence when their work is displayed publicly. However, the programs are unsustainable due to their heavy reliance on external



facilitators from the ministry or university partners, meaning there is no guarantee of consistency in developing the digital competencies of local communities.

These findings reinforce the argument made by Kharima et al. (2024), whose study on transforming village libraries into inclusive learning spaces highlights the need for community independence to ensure the continuity of digital literacy services even when external support diminishes.

From a management standpoint, the RKDD in Polorejo has a formal organizational structure. However, the appointment of managers is largely administrative and not based on adequate digital competencies, making it less suitable for managing ICT-based literacy programs strategically. This condition has led to minimal youth involvement in the program planning stages, despite their visible enthusiasm during training activities. This contrasts with the study by Sunarti (2022) on digital literacy training in Liang Beach, Maluku, which found that youth involvement from the planning stage is a key factor in the success and sustainability of digital transformation in villages.

From the perspective of community perception, it is worth noting that the RKDD is acknowledged by locals as a digital training center. However, the program is still seen as a top-down initiative imposed by the central government, rather than emerging organically from local needs. This underscores the importance of adopting a more participatory and culturally sensitive approach to digital development—so that RKDD becomes not just a symbol of modernization, but a space that truly integrates with and responds to the aspirations of the local community (Aria et al., 2023).

### **Understanding and Expectations Regarding the Village Digital Community Space (RKDD)**

The findings of this study reveal that most RKDD (Village Digital Community Space) administrators perceive the program as part of a central government policy aimed at enhancing creativity and digital literacy among rural communities. However, this understanding is not yet fully shared by the village youth. In Polorejo Village, for instance, the selection of RKDD administrators is often conducted without considering individual interests or digital skills, which hampers the development of a strong sense of ownership. As a result, the RKDD is frequently perceived as a formal project rather than a participatory space rooted in genuine community needs.

This gap highlights the disconnect between the top-down design of the program and its reception at the local level, particularly in relation to the psychological and social dimensions of youth. Many young people do not yet perceive the RKDD as a space relevant to their everyday lives. Nevertheless, in some cases, enthusiasm is evident among youth who have participated in digital training and experienced its direct benefits. This suggests a significant untapped potential. The findings underscore the need to restructure the management of RKDD to be more community-oriented and context-sensitive. Youth should be directly involved from the initial planning stages through to program implementation so that the RKDD can truly function as a site of learning, innovation, and community contribution. This approach not only fosters a sense of ownership but also enables the RKDD

to grow into a sustainable incubator of local innovation (Fajarianto et al., 2025).

### **The Role of RKDD in Enhancing Youth Creativity**

The RKDD in Polorejo Village has begun to serve its function as a space for developing ideas and innovations, particularly for young people interested in the digital world and entrepreneurship. In a conversation with one of the RKDD facilitators, it was revealed that since 2023, various creative ideas have emerged from the youth, including the creation of a digital catalog for local MSME products and the development of tourism promotion content through documentary videos. However, this function has not yet been fully optimized due to the limited number of facilitators capable of guiding the process of transforming ideas into tangible innovations. Furthermore, restricted access to support and professional networks presents an additional obstacle, preventing many ideas from progressing beyond the discussion stage. Therefore, the role of RKDD must be strengthened through cross-sectoral collaboration so that it serves not only as a point of access to technology but also as a space for village innovation development.

The activities carried out at RKDD Polorejo include training in creative content creation to promote village potential in the health, economic, social, and cultural sectors. These trainings provided participants with basic knowledge of photography and videography using simple tools, as well as techniques for crafting digital narratives to shape a positive image of the village on social media. Additionally, workshops were conducted to enhance digital-based economic skills, especially in marketing local products through e-commerce platforms. According to informants, these trainings received very positive responses from young people and MSME actors and led to several projects promoting organic agricultural products and local crafts. However, these activities remain temporary and are not yet integrated into a long-term innovation development plan. The absence of monitoring systems and follow-up mechanisms has caused many ideas to stagnate. Therefore, it is crucial for RKDD Polorejo to develop sustainable programs that nurture innovation potential in a gradual and comprehensive manner.



Figure 1. RKDD Activities in Polorejo  
Source: Field Documentation, 2025



In Polorejo Village, youth initiatives to create vlogs about local history and traditions serve as tangible evidence of RKDD's role in supporting innovation. However, as emphasized by Andriyani et al. (2024), the success of youth innovation in rural areas through digital platforms greatly depends on consistent support and effective institutional integration. This study reiterates the argument by Ilham et al. (2023), who stated, "Digital literacy cannot be achieved through one-off training sessions; continuous mentoring and the involvement of village structures are essential to avoid ceremonial programs."

Moreover, technical guidelines from the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration emphasize that activities such as digital workshops, collaborative discussions, and community project evaluations should be facilitated by clearly identified management structures, including digital village envoys and cadres. Other research, such as that by Widayati et al. (2021), suggests that without strong local institutions, youth digital ideas in villages often fail to progress beyond the conceptual stage. Therefore, the real challenge lies in strengthening local institutions, improving the quality of facilitation, and building collaborative networks between villages, universities, NGOs, and private sector actors. These strategic efforts are necessary to ensure that RKDD not only functions as a technological access point but also becomes a genuine driver of innovation for rural youth.

### **Level of Participation and Innovation Potential among Youth**

Based on qualitative interviews with facilitators and active youth in Polorejo Village, approximately eight young individuals consistently participate in innovative activities within the Village Digital Community Space (Ruang Komunitas Digital Desa, RKDD). They display diverse interests ranging from the development of local MSMEs—such as handicrafts and agricultural products—to digital content production that highlights the village's socio-cultural potential through vlogs, photography, and health campaigns. These activities serve as a platform for expressing their ideas and building a digital identity for the village. Although the scale of participation remains limited, their enthusiasm and commitment indicate significant potential if managed sustainably. Basic support facilities, such as free internet access and the presence of a local facilitator, have become important driving factors. However, the lack of advanced training, limited content production tools, and unstable internet connections present key obstacles that hinder the transformation of ideas into concrete innovations. This phenomenon also aligns with findings by Setiadi et al. (2023), which state, "Youth in peripheral areas show high enthusiasm for digital innovation, but are constrained by the lack of intensive training and adequate supporting infrastructure."

In terms of motivation and digital competence, these youths demonstrate a strong intrinsic drive to contribute to village development through digital media. They are motivated by curiosity, the desire for recognition, and hopes that village products can reach broader markets. They have already acquired basic technical skills such as video editing, simple graphic design, and the use of social media platforms. However, their abilities in narrative building, content engagement, and imaginative thinking remain limited. This is consistent with

research by Hamid et al. (2021), which emphasizes that high motivation without adequate advanced training leads to stagnant outcomes in the context of digital village entrepreneurship. The gap between enthusiasm and tangible results suggests the need for training that goes beyond technical skills to include creativity, content management, and an understanding of digital branding strategies. Without strengthening these dimensions, RKDD risks becoming a short-term activity space that fails to produce impactful and sustainable innovation.

### **Strategies for Optimizing the Village Digital Community Space**

Capacity building for both facilitators and participants in RKDD Polorejo is a key priority. Based on interviews, facilitators expressed the need to enhance skills in digital storytelling, content management, and creative output evaluation. Youth in the village require long-term mentoring to design content with both economic and social value, not just basic technical proficiency. An ideal training curriculum should be structured modularly, covering stages from planning, production, and distribution to evaluation and follow-up. In this regard, RKDD Polorejo has partnered with Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo and Info Ponorogo media to provide relevant materials and experienced mentors. This collaboration plays a critical role in addressing the gap pointed out by Saprianto et al. (2023): “Lack of inter-institutional collaboration and locally contextualized materials are major barriers...”

The management model and governance structure of RKDD Polorejo are designed to be inclusive, involving various strategic stakeholders. To strengthen managerial capacity, RKDD Polorejo not only fosters partnerships but also actively includes training teams and experts from Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo and journalists from local media Info Ponorogo. This collaboration goes beyond symbolic involvement and is integrated into the agenda setting, training sessions, and evaluation processes for creative digital activities. The organizational structure of RKDD consists of a lead facilitator, youth representatives, and coordinators from university and media partners who act as content advisors. Through this structure, decision-making is conducted collectively and responsively to field dynamics. Activity reports are shared openly through the village’s social media accounts as a commitment to transparency. This model aligns with recommendations from Yunianto et al. (2023), who emphasize that “External institutional participation and open governance are foundational to the successful development of digital community spaces in villages.”

Recommendations for appropriate technology and content for rural youth include the use of affordable smartphones for editing with apps like CapCut or InShot, as well as simple blogging platforms such as WordPress. Potential content includes vlogs themed “A Day in Polorejo,” educational health videos, documentation of local values, and MSME promotion through storytelling approaches. The training curriculum should include modules on digital branding and content distribution through social media. Junaedi et al. (2025), in the *Journal of Innovation and Village Empowerment*, highlight the gap between technology and contextual village content: “The lack of synergy between appropriate technology and contextually relevant content prevents village digital products from reaching a broader

audience.” Thus, RKDD Polorejo can empower youth to produce creative content with high competitiveness.

### **Integrasi dengan Era Transformasi Digital**

With the rapid advancement of digital technologies, the readiness of the Village Digital Community Space (RKDD) in Polorejo is being tested in terms of infrastructure and the adoption of new methods. Interview results reveal that although internet access is available, its quality remains inconsistent. Nonetheless, it is utilized for online training and sharing e-learning materials. Both facilitators and village youth continue to learn to use contemporary applications and upload their work through village-run social media platforms. According to Rettobjaan et al. (2025), the level of digital literacy in Indonesian villages is relatively high in terms of cultural and ethical dimensions but still requires improvement in technical skills—an observation consistent with the situation in Polorejo, where motivation is strong but technical capability is limited. This suggests that while basic technological readiness is sufficient, sustained efforts are necessary to ensure that digital community spaces remain adaptive in the face of an increasingly dynamic digital era.

The extent to which Polorejo’s youth and its RKDD are adapting to changing times can be seen in their enthusiasm for developing local startup ideas, such as online marketplaces for village agricultural products, digital craft exhibitions, and e-commerce initiatives via WhatsApp groups. Interviews revealed that the youth had initiated virtual booths for online exhibitions and begun listing several local products on simple marketplace platforms. However, studies by GSMA (2022) and FAO (2023) indicate that many such initiatives remain hindered by the “second-level digital divide,” referring to the lack of advanced digital skills and high-quality content. Thus, although Polorejo has made promising initial steps, gaps remain in leveraging advanced technology and professionalizing village-based startup ideas. Ongoing mentorship and access to broader digital ecosystems are key to transforming these local ideas into tangible economic opportunities.

### **Social and Economic Implications of Optimizing the Village Digital Community Space**

Our interviews with several RKDD managers in Polorejo Village show that preparations for digital transformation have actually begun over the past two years. This is evidenced by the provision of public Wi-Fi, basic graphic design training, and the use of village social media platforms to promote various activities. However, despite high enthusiasm, one village cadre acknowledged that more complex technical skills—such as advanced video editing, SEO management, and digital marketing strategies—are still beyond the reach of most youth participants. This aligns with the findings of Ikhsan et al. (2024), who argue that digital literacy in rural communities is largely limited to basic use (such as browsing and social media) and has not yet extended to the development of creative commercial content. Nevertheless, Polorejo’s youth have demonstrated strong adaptive capacity in response to contemporary challenges, for example by actively producing short videos (reels) highlighting local culture and learning to create MSME product catalogs using Canva. As one respondent put it: “We are still learning, but we’re definitely willing to join further training sessions. We’ve already

learned to create our own Instagram feeds.” This indicates that the digital community space has become an important venue for rural youth to envision a more digitally adaptive future.

Moreover, the digital community space in Polorejo also presents significant economic opportunities stemming from local initiatives, such as plans to host digital-based culinary and handicraft exhibitions, and even simple ideas to collaboratively establish an online store (e-commerce). The head of the Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes) explained that the main challenge lies in having the courage to innovate and the limited access to digital business mentors. These obstacles reflect the analysis of van Deursen and Helsper (2017), published in *Telematics and Informatics*, which highlights the persistence of the second-level digital divide—where infrastructure exists but the necessary advanced skills and effective technology use remain limited. Therefore, sustained mentoring and collaboration with higher education institutions and digital startups are crucial to ensure that creative ideas from Polorejo’s youth do not remain merely plans but can develop into real economic products. As one young woman from the village noted: “We want to try hosting an online bazaar or join exhibitions, as long as someone teaches us how to handle legal matters and online selling so that the results won’t be disappointing.” This illustrates the enormous potential that still requires professional guidance in order to compete within a broader digital ecosystem.



Figure 2 Digitalization Workshop  
Source: Research Documentation, 2025

## CONCLUSION

This article concludes that optimizing the Village Digital Community Space (RKDD) as an inclusive and dynamic arena for youth innovation in rural areas cannot rely solely on technological infrastructure or technical training. Rather, it critically depends on how such digital spaces are socially interpreted, lived, and adopted by the local community. The case study in Polorejo Village demonstrates that youth engagement in the digital ecosystem is still constrained by top-down managerial structures and hierarchical social norms, which often marginalize innovative ideas from the younger generation. However, the emerging experiences of youth using the RKDD as a medium for expression, networking, and

confidence-building suggest that digital spaces can serve as an important entry point for broader social transformation. The novelty of this study lies in its socio-cultural approach to digital transformation in rural contexts, highlighting the importance of continuous mentoring, cross-generational and cross-sector collaboration, and participatory, context-sensitive village policymaking. Consequently, rural digital development should be understood as a social process requiring the integration of technology with cultural dynamics in order to foster inclusive, sustainable, and youth-driven innovation.

### **ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE**

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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