

Online Marketing and Sustainability Training for MSMEs in Medan City

Siti Normi Sinurat^{1*}, Kristanty M.N. Nadapdap², DIMITA H.P. Purba³, Duma Megaria Elisabeth⁴, Rintan Saragih⁵, Rike Y. Panjaitan⁶, Januardi Mesakh⁷, Markus Doddy Simanjuntak⁸, Septony B. Siahaan⁹

^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9} Fakultas Ekonomi, Universitas Methodist Indonesia

⁸ Fakultas Ekonomi, Universitas Sari Mutiara

Corresponding Author: Siti Normi Sinurat sitinormisinurat@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This community service focuses on increasing online marketing capacity and implementing sustainability principles in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Medan City. The main objectives are to improve digital marketing skills, expand market reach, and encourage sustainable business practices to strengthen MSME competitiveness. The methods used include digital marketing training through social media and marketplaces, creative content creation workshops, e-commerce introduction, and education on sustainable business practices, especially the use of environmentally friendly packaging. This program involved 25 MSMEs from various sectors selected based on product potential and commitment to growth. The results showed a significant increase in participants' digital marketing skills, marked by an average increase of 55% in online sales and 143% in social media interactions during the three-month evaluation. As many as 72% of participants began to adopt sustainable business practices, including the use of biodegradable packaging and waste management. For the sustainability of the program, the community service team formed a Medan MSME digital community to support continuous learning and collaboration between participants.

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in the Indonesian economy, especially in Medan City. Data from the Medan City Cooperative and MSME Service shows that in 2024, there will be around 45,000 MSMEs that will absorb more than 60% of the local workforce and contribute 30% to the city's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) (Medan City Cooperative and MSME Service, 2024). However, MSMEs in Medan City still face various challenges in business development, especially in terms of product marketing and adaptation to global market demands that increasingly prioritize sustainability aspects.

The digitalization era has significantly changed the marketing landscape, where online marketing has become an increasingly dominant channel in reaching consumers (Hartono et al., 2023). Research shows that MSMEs that utilize digital platforms are able to increase market reach by up to 65% wider than those that only rely on conventional marketing methods (Saragih & Ramadhan, 2023). However, there are still many MSMEs in Medan City that have not maximized the potential of online marketing due to limited digital knowledge and skills.

In addition, global trends show increasing consumer awareness of sustainable business practices, which encourages business actors to adopt environmentally friendly principles in their business operations (Hasibuan & Lubis, 2024). A study by Kasmiyati (2024) revealed that 78% of Indonesian consumers, especially millennials and generation Z, prefer products from companies that implement sustainable practices. However, according to a survey conducted by Putra and Siregar (2024) of 150 MSMEs in Medan City, only 23% have implemented sustainability principles in their business.

Several previous studies have shown that the integration of digital marketing and sustainable practices can significantly increase the competitiveness of MSMEs. Novita and Kurniawan (2024) concluded that MSMEs that implement digital marketing strategies have a 40% higher sales growth rate than those that do not. Meanwhile, Widodo et al. (2023) found that the implementation of sustainable business practices not only improves the positive image of MSMEs but also long-term operational efficiency through waste reduction and resource optimization.

Based on the needs analysis conducted in the early stages of the program, the community service team identified several main problems faced by MSMEs in Medan City, namely: (1) limited knowledge and skills in utilizing digital platforms for marketing; (2) minimal understanding of effective digital content strategies; (3) low awareness and knowledge of sustainable business practices; (4) limited access to information and networks to develop sustainable practices; and (5) lack of understanding of the economic benefits of implementing sustainability principles.

This community service program aims to increase online marketing capacity and encourage the implementation of sustainability principles in MSMEs in Medan City. Specifically, this program aims to: (1) improve the knowledge and skills of MSME actors in utilizing digital platforms for marketing;

(2) assist MSMEs in designing and implementing effective digital content strategies; (3) increase awareness and understanding of MSME actors about sustainable business practices; (4) facilitate the adoption of environmentally friendly packaging and sustainable waste management practices; and (5) encourage the formation of MSME communities that care about sustainability.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

Materials

This community service program uses various materials and equipment to support the implementation of training, including:

1. Digital Marketing Training Materials:
 - a. Online marketing training module covering basic digital marketing strategies, use of social media (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok), and marketplaces (Shopee, Tokopedia, Lazada).
 - b. Guide to creating attractive digital content (photos, videos, copywriting).
 - c. Content planning template and social media posting calendar.
 - d. Tutorial on using social media analytics tools to evaluate digital campaign performance.
2. Materi Edukasi Sustainability:
 - a. Basic concept module of sustainable business for MSMEs.
 - b. Catalog of environmentally friendly packaging options along with supplier information.
 - c. Practical guide to waste management.
 - d. Case studies of MSME successes that apply sustainability principles.
3. Supporting Devices:
 - a. Laptop and projector for presentation.
 - b. Stable internet connection for hands-on practice.
 - c. Smartphone for demonstration of social media application usage.
 - d. Simple photography equipment (ringlight, tripod, backdrop) for content creation training.
 - e. Eco-friendly packaging samples (paper, bamboo, leaf, and bioplastic).

The selection of materials and equipment was based on the needs of participants identified in the initial analysis, taking into account availability, affordability, and ease of use.

Method

This community service program uses a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that emphasizes the active involvement of participants in identifying problems, designing solutions, and evaluating results. This method was chosen because it allows effective collaboration between the implementing team and partners, so that the solutions developed are relevant to the specific needs of MSME actors.

The determination of MSME partners is based on several selection criteria: (1) having products with good market potential; (2) showing commitment to developing the business; (3) having the time and resources available to implement the training results; and (4) coming from various industrial sectors to enrich collective learning. Based on these criteria, 25 MSMEs from various sectors (food and beverage, crafts, fashion, and cosmetics) in Medan City were selected to participate in this program.

The program is implemented in several stages as follows:

1. Needs Analysis and Problem Identification: This stage begins with a survey and in-depth interviews with MSMEs to understand the main challenges faced in online marketing and the implementation of sustainability principles. The survey used a structured questionnaire to measure the level of digital literacy, use of social media for business, and understanding of sustainable practices. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 selected MSMEs to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their specific context and needs.
2. Program Planning: Based on the results of the needs analysis, the community service team designed a training program that covers aspects of online marketing and sustainable business practices. Planning includes preparing materials, determining schedules, selecting delivery methods, and preparing evaluation instruments. The program is designed by considering the balance between theory and practice, as well as the specific needs of various types of MSMEs.
3. Program Implementation: The program is implemented through a series of activities which include:
 - a. Digital Marketing Workshop
 - Session 1: Introduction to basic digital marketing concepts and social media usage strategies.
 - Session 2: Digital content creation practice (photos, videos, copywriting).
 - Session 3: Marketplace optimization and customer relationship management (CRM)
 - b. Sustainable Business Training
 - Session 1: Introduction to the concept of sustainability in business and case studies of sustainable MSMEs.
 - Session 2: Workshop on selecting environmentally friendly packaging and waste management practices.
 - c. Mentoring and Consultation
 1. 8 weeks of intensive mentoring to help implement digital marketing strategies and sustainable practices.

2. Online consultation via WhatsApp to resolve problems faced by participants.
- d. Showcase and Networking
 1. Exhibition of participating MSME products that have implemented digital marketing strategies and sustainability principles.
 2. Facilitate meetings with potential buyers and other stakeholders.
4. Evaluation and Follow-up: Evaluation is conducted to measure the effectiveness of the program, changes in participants' knowledge and skills, and the real impact on their business. Evaluation instruments include:
 - a. Pre-test and post-test to measure changes in knowledge.
 - b. Observation of social media usage and implementation of sustainable practices.
 - c. Collection of sales data and social media engagement to measure the impact of digital marketing.
 - d. Interviews with participants to obtain qualitative feedback.

Follow-up in the form of forming an MSME learning community to ensure the sustainability of the program and collaboration between participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service program "Online Marketing Training and Sustainability for MSMEs in Medan City" has been successfully implemented by involving 25 MSMEs from various sectors. The following are the results and discussions of the implementation of the program:

Needs Analysis Results

The needs analysis conducted in the early stages of the program identified several important findings related to the condition of MSMEs in Medan City (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of needs analysis and problem identification

Aspects Analyzed	Findings	Partner Needs
Digital Marketing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 68% of MSMEs have not utilized social media optimally. 2. 82% do not have a planned digital content strategy. 3. 75% have not used the marketplace. 4. 90% have not conducted digital marketing data analysis. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Basic training on using social media for business. 2. Creative content creation workshop. 3. Marketplace optimization assistance. 4. Introduction to digital marketing analytics tools.

Aspects Analyzed	Findings	Partner Needs
Sustainable Practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 85% of MSMEs do not understand the concept of sustainable business. 2. 92% still use conventional plastic packaging. 3. 78% do not have a waste management system. 4. 65% are interested in implementing environmentally friendly practices but are constrained by information and costs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Education on basic sustainability concepts. 2. Introduction to environmentally friendly packaging options. 3. Production waste management training. 4. Information on suppliers of environmentally friendly materials at affordable prices.
Human Resources Capacity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 60% of MSMEs have limited digital literacy. 2. 72% do not have special staff to manage digital marketing. 3. 85% have limited time to manage social media consistently. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Basic digital literacy training. 2. Time management tips for social media management. 3. Templates and tools for efficient content creation.
Access to Networks and Information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 70% of MSMEs are not members of the business community. 2. 82% have difficulty accessing information about market trends and product innovation. 3. 88% have limited marketing networks. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitate the formation of MSME communities. 2. Share information about market trends and innovations. 3. Meet potential buyers and stakeholders.

Based on the needs analysis, the community service team designed a training program that combines aspects of online marketing and sustainable practices according to the specific needs of the participants.

Program Implementation

Digital Marketing Workshop

Workshop pemasaran digital dilaksanakan dalam tiga sesi dengan fokus pada pengenalan konsep dasar, pembuatan konten, dan optimalisasi marketplace. Materi yang disampaikan mencakup strategi pemasaran di Instagram, Facebook, dan TikTok, teknik fotografi produk, copywriting, dan pengelolaan marketplace.

The training was conducted with a practical approach, where participants directly practiced the material they had learned. In the content creation session, participants were guided to take interesting product photos using smartphones

and simple photography equipment. Participants were also trained to write effective captions and plan social media content using the content calendar template provided.

One of the highlights of the workshop was the “Instagram Makeover” session, where participants’ business Instagram accounts were evaluated and redesigned to improve visual appeal and branding consistency. Participants were also introduced to free content design tools like Canva and posting schedulers like Later.

Sustainable Business Training

Sustainable business training is conducted in two sessions that focus on the introduction of sustainability concepts and their practical implementation for MSMEs. Participants are introduced to various aspects of sustainability that are relevant for MSMEs, such as the use of environmentally friendly packaging, energy efficiency, waste management, and the concept of a circular economy.



Image: Sustainable Business Training

In the second session, participants were introduced to various eco-friendly packaging options available in the local market, such as paper, bamboo, leaf, and bioplastic packaging. The community service team also introduced participants to eco-friendly packaging suppliers to provide direct access to raw material sources. The workshop also included a discussion on sustainability value communication strategies as part of product branding and marketing.

Mentoring and Consultation

After the workshop, the service team provides intensive mentoring for 8 weeks to help participants implement digital marketing strategies and sustainable practices in their businesses. Mentoring is done through direct visits and online consultations via WhatsApp. The mentoring team assists participants

in overcoming the challenges they face, such as technical difficulties in managing social media, optimizing online stores in marketplaces, and adapting to the use of environmentally friendly packaging. During the mentoring period, participants are also encouraged to share experiences and best practices via WhatsApp.

Program Evaluation Results

Program evaluation was conducted to measure changes in knowledge, skills, and real impact on participants' businesses. The evaluation results showed significant changes in various aspects as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of conditions before and after the program

Aspect	Before the Program	After Program
Digital marketing knowledge and skills	32% have basic knowledge of digital marketing.	94% have basic digital marketing knowledge and skills.
Using social media for business	68% have not utilized social media optimally.	88% actively use at least 2 social media platforms with planned content.
Digital content quality	25% have good quality content	80% produce good quality content (photos, captions, stories)
Utilization of the marketplace	25% listed on the marketplace	92% aktif di minimal 1 marketplace
Online sales	Average Rp. 2,500,000/month	Average Rp 3,875,000/month (increased 55%)
Social media engagement	Average 35 interactions/week	Average 85 interactions/week (up 143%)
Sustainable business understanding	15% understand basic concepts	90% understand the concept and benefits of sustainable business
Use of environmentally friendly packaging	8% use eco-friendly packaging	72% have started adopting eco-friendly packaging
Waste management practices	22% have a waste management system	68% implement waste management practices

Aspect	Before the Program	After Program
Communicating sustainability values	5% communicating sustainability values	65% actively communicate sustainability values as part of branding

DISCUSSION

The community service program "Online Marketing and Sustainability Training for MSMEs in Medan City" has shown significant results in increasing digital marketing capacity and encouraging sustainable practices among MSMEs. This section will discuss in depth the results of the program, the challenges faced, and the broader implications of the findings.

Digital Transformation of MSMEs

The evaluation results show a significant digital transformation in participating MSMEs. The increase in digital marketing skills is reflected in the increase in the percentage of participants who have basic knowledge of digital marketing from 32% to 94%. This increase is not only at the level of knowledge but also practical implementation, with 88% of participants now actively using at least two social media platforms for their business.

This transformation is in line with a study conducted by Hartono et al. (2023) which emphasizes the importance of digital adaptation for MSMEs in the contemporary marketing era. Their research shows that the adoption of digital technology significantly expands market reach and increases the visibility of MSMEs. This is confirmed in this program, where the increase in social media engagement reached 143% (from an average of 35 interactions/week to 85 interactions/week), indicating an increase in consumer visibility and interaction with participating MSME brands.

The increase in online sales by 55% (from an average of IDR 2,500,000/month to IDR 3,875,000/month) is a concrete indicator of the economic impact of this digital transformation. This is consistent with the findings of Saragih & Ramadhan (2023) which state that MSMEs that utilize digital platforms are able to increase their market reach by up to 65% wider than those that only rely on conventional marketing methods.

One of the important factors in the success of this digital transformation is the learning approach applied. This program uses the "learning by doing" method with intensive mentoring, which allows participants to directly practice the knowledge gained. This method has proven effective for adult learning, especially in the field of technology, as stated by Purwanto et al. (2023) in their study on experiential learning methods for MSMEs.

Adoption of Sustainable Practices and Its Challenges

The program has successfully increased awareness and adoption of sustainable practices among participating MSMEs. The increase in understanding of sustainable business concepts from 15% to 90% demonstrates the effectiveness of the education provided. More importantly, this

understanding translates into practical implementation, with 72% of participants now adopting eco-friendly packaging (up from 8%) and 68% implementing waste management practices (up from 22%).

These results confirm Kasmiyati's (2024) study which revealed that 78% of Indonesian consumers, especially millennials and generation Z, prefer products from companies that implement sustainable practices. By adopting sustainable practices, participating MSMEs are positioning themselves to attract this increasingly environmentally conscious consumer segment.

However, the adoption of sustainable practices is not without challenges. Despite increasing understanding and awareness, comprehensive implementation is still hampered by economic factors. Many participants reported that the initial cost of switching to environmentally friendly practices and materials was a major consideration. This is in line with the findings of Wijaya and Nugroho (2023) who identified economic factors as the main barrier to the adoption of sustainable practices by MSMEs.

The stepwise strategy implemented in this program has proven effective in overcoming these barriers. By starting with simple practices that require minimal investment, participants can see concrete benefits before making larger investments. This approach can serve as a model for similar programs in the future, given the resource constraints that MSMEs generally face.

Synergy of Digital Marketing and Sustainability Value Communication

An innovative aspect of this program is the integration of digital marketing and sustainability value communication. The program not only educates participants about sustainable practices but also trains them to communicate these values as part of their branding and digital marketing strategies.

The results showed that 65% of participants now actively communicate sustainability values in their digital content, up from only 5% before the program. This strategy has proven effective in increasing consumer engagement, with many participants reporting increased interactions from consumers interested in the sustainability aspects of their products.

This finding is in line with the study by Hasibuan & Lubis (2024) which states that effective communication about sustainable practices can improve brand image and consumer loyalty. In the context of digital marketing, sustainability values become valuable and differentiating content that can increase the competitiveness of MSMEs in an increasingly crowded market.

This integration also supports the findings of Widodo et al. (2023) which states that the implementation of sustainable business practices not only improves the positive image of MSMEs but also long-term operational efficiency. This program has successfully demonstrated that sustainability is not only a social responsibility but also a business strategy that can increase competitiveness and profitability.

Formation of MSME Digital Community

One important aspect of the program is the formation of a digital community of Medan MSMEs. This community serves as a platform for ongoing

learning and collaboration between participants, so that knowledge and good practices can continue to grow even after the formal program ends.

This community addresses one of the main challenges identified in the needs analysis, namely limited access to networks and information. Before the program, 70% of MSMEs were not part of a business community and 82% had difficulty accessing information on market trends and product innovations. The formation of this community provides a network of support and a source of ongoing information for participants.

This community approach is in line with the concept of social learning proposed by Bandura (1977), where learning occurs through observation, imitation, and reinforcement in a social context. In this community, participants can learn from the experiences of their peers, gain inspiration from the successes of others, and receive support when facing challenges.

Implementation Challenges and Adaptation Strategies

Although the program showed positive results, there were some significant challenges in its implementation. The first challenge faced was the digital literacy gap among participants. With diverse digital knowledge and skills, some participants needed more time and guidance to adopt digital marketing strategies.

To overcome this challenge, the community service team implemented a personal mentoring approach tailored to the skill level of each participant. This approach proved effective, with 94% of participants eventually being able to master basic digital marketing skills. This finding emphasizes the importance of a personalized approach in digital training for MSMEs, given the diverse levels of digital literacy among MSMEs.

The second challenge was the time constraints faced by MSMEs to implement digital marketing strategies consistently. As business owners who often carry out various functions at once, participants found it difficult to allocate enough time to manage their social media and marketplaces.

To overcome this challenge, the program introduced various content management and scheduling tools that could streamline the process of creating and posting content. This strategy proved effective, with many participants reporting increased efficiency in managing their social media. This finding emphasizes the importance of considering time and resource constraints in designing training programs for MSMEs.

The third challenge was initial resistance to adopting sustainable practices due to the perception that it required large investments. To overcome this resistance, the service team demonstrated examples of simple sustainable practices that could be implemented at minimal cost, while also showing the potential for long-term savings and increased brand value.

This strategy proved effective in changing participants' perceptions, with 72% eventually adopting eco-friendly packaging. This finding highlights the importance of practical demonstrations and calculating return on investment in driving adoption of sustainable practices among MSMEs.

Policy Implications and Program Development

The results of this community service program have several important implications for the development of policies and programs to support MSMEs in the future. First, this program demonstrates the need for sustainable and integrated digital marketing training for MSMEs. Instead of sporadic short training, a sustainable program with intensive mentoring is needed to ensure effective adoption.

Second, this program shows the importance of integrating sustainability aspects into MSME development programs. In an era where consumer awareness of environmental issues is increasing, sustainable practices are no longer just a social responsibility but also a business necessity.

Third, the formation of learning communities and support networks has proven effective in ensuring the sustainability of training programs. This model can be adopted in other MSME development programs to maximize long-term impact.

Fourth, this program underlines the importance of a holistic approach in MSME development, which includes increasing technical capacity (such as digital marketing skills), mindset transformation (such as understanding sustainability), and developing support networks (such as learning communities).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The community service program "Online Marketing and Sustainability Training for MSMEs in Medan City" has succeeded in increasing online marketing capacity and encouraging the implementation of sustainability principles in 25 participating MSMEs from various sectors in Medan City. Based on the results and discussions that have been described, several things can be concluded as follows:

1. This program has succeeded in significantly increasing the digital marketing knowledge and skills of participants, with the percentage of participants who have basic knowledge of digital marketing increasing from 32% to 94%. This increase in capacity has had a positive impact on their business performance, with average online sales increasing by 55% and social media engagement increasing by 143%.
2. Adoption of sustainable practices among participating MSMEs has increased substantially, with 72% of participants now using environmentally friendly packaging (up from 8%) and 68% implementing waste management practices (up from 22%). This increase shows the effectiveness of education and mentoring carried out in the program.
3. The integration between digital marketing and communication of sustainability values has proven effective in increasing the attractiveness of MSME products. 65% of participants now actively communicate

sustainability values in their digital content, contributing to increased consumer engagement.

4. The “learning by doing” approach with intensive mentoring has proven effective in facilitating learning and adoption of digital technologies among MSMEs. This approach allows participants to directly apply the knowledge gained in their business context.
5. The formation of a MSME digital community has succeeded in creating a network of support and continuous learning for participants, overcoming one of the main challenges, namely limited access to networks and information.
6. Despite significant increases in the adoption of sustainable practices, economic factors remain a major barrier to comprehensive implementation. A gradual strategy by starting with simple practices that require minimal investment has proven effective in overcoming this barrier.
7. The program demonstrates that digital marketing and sustainable practices are not only social responsibilities but also business strategies that can increase the competitiveness and profitability of MSMEs in the digital era.

Suggestion

Based on the program results and identified challenges, here are some suggestions for developing similar programs in the future and for supporting policies for MSMEs:

1. Program Development
 - a. Extend the duration of mentoring to ensure more effective and sustainable adoption. A mentoring program of at least 6 months is recommended for optimal results.
 - b. Develop more stratified training modules based on participants’ digital literacy levels to accommodate the diversity of initial abilities.
 - c. Integrate aspects of impact measurement and analytics in digital marketing training to help MSMEs measure the effectiveness of their strategies.
 - d. Add training components on time management and productivity to help MSMEs optimize the use of their limited resources.
 - e. Develop a digital platform for MSME communities that can facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration more effectively.
2. Sustainability Practices

- a. Develop practical guidelines on sustainable practices that are economical and easy to implement by MSMEs with limited resources.
 - b. Facilitate cooperation between MSMEs to obtain environmentally friendly materials and packaging at more affordable prices through collective purchasing.
 - c. Promote case studies of MSMEs that have successfully increased profitability through sustainable practices to motivate more adoption.
 - d. Encourage collaboration with universities and research institutions to develop affordable, environmentally friendly packaging innovations.
3. Supporting Policy
- a. Develop incentive programs for MSMEs that adopt sustainable practices, such as subsidies for environmentally friendly packaging or tax reductions.
 - b. Form partnerships between the government, private sector, and universities to provide ongoing assistance to MSMEs in digital transformation.
 - c. Develop certification programs for sustainable MSMEs that can increase the value and competitiveness of their products in the market.
 - d. Facilitate MSME access to technology and innovation through special financing programs or soft loans.
4. Further Research
- a. Conduct a longitudinal study to measure the long-term impact of digital marketing integration and sustainable practices on MSMEs.
 - b. Develop indicators and metrics to measure the level of sustainability of MSMEs more comprehensively.
 - c. Research consumer preferences for MSME products that implement and communicate sustainable practices to provide insights for marketing strategies.
 - d. Assess the effectiveness of various mentoring models in encouraging digital transformation and adoption of sustainable practices in MSMEs.
5. Community Service Team Capacity Development
- a. Increase the capacity of the service team in the field of digital analytics and impact measurement to provide more comprehensive assistance.
 - b. Develop a collaborative network with experts from various fields (technology, sustainability, marketing) to enrich the perspective and approach of the program.
 - c. Conduct comparative studies with similar programs in other regions or countries to identify best practices and lessons that can be adapted.

The program has demonstrated that with the right approach, MSMEs can leverage digital technologies and adopt sustainable practices to improve their competitiveness and business sustainability. Through continued collaboration between universities, government, the private sector, and MSME communities, this transformation can be expanded and deepened to strengthen the MSME sector as an important pillar of the national economy.

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