

Analysis of the Implementation of Design Thinking in the Marketing Strategy Design of HerJamu MSMEs in Pangkalan Jambi Village

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Design Thinking approach in developing a marketing strategy for HerJamu MSME located in Pangkalan Jambi Village, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province. HerJamu is a local herbal drink business facing challenges in expanding its market due to limited promotional channels and dependence on word-of-mouth marketing. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The Design Thinking framework, consisting of five stages—empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test—was applied to explore innovative and user-centered marketing strategies. The results show that applying Design Thinking enabled HerJamu to identify customer needs, improve branding, and integrate digital marketing tools with traditional sales practices. This integration successfully expanded market reach and strengthened consumer trust while maintaining cultural authenticity. The findings suggest that Design Thinking serves as an effective framework for enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of rural MSMEs by combining empathy-driven innovation with local identity.

Keywords: Design Thinking, Marketing Strategy, HerJamu, MSMEs

1. INTRODUCTION

Pangkalan Jambi is a village located in Bukit Batu District, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia. The village, consisting of three hamlets, represents one of the outermost areas of Bukit Batu and borders Lubuk Muda Village in Siak Kecil District. The people of Pangkalan Jambi are widely recognized for their strong sense of togetherness, cooperation, and cultural identity. These social values shape the foundation of community life, supporting both traditional practices and emerging economic initiatives within the village.

In terms of education, Pangkalan Jambi demonstrates a strong commitment to human development. The village provides several educational institutions such as kindergartens, SD 12 Pangkalan Jambi, and SMKN 1 Bukit Batu, a vocational school that focuses on nautical studies and computer network engineering. This educational infrastructure fosters creativity, discipline, and innovation among young people, laying the groundwork for the growth of small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the region.

Economically, most residents of Pangkalan Jambi depend on rubber and palm oil plantations as their main sources of livelihood. Nevertheless, a portion of the population has diversified into entrepreneurship, public service, and fisheries. This diversification illustrates the adaptive and resilient character of the community. Over time, the local economy has been enriched by the emergence of MSMEs that combine traditional knowledge with modern business concepts to enhance community welfare.

One of the most prominent MSMEs in Pangkalan Jambi is HerJamu, a local enterprise engaged in producing traditional herbal drinks. HerJamu was established to promote the use of natural and locally sourced ingredients such as ginger, turmeric, and lemongrass—plants that have long been valued in Indonesian culture for their health benefits. Through its operations, HerJamu not only contributes to the local economy but also helps preserve traditional knowledge and cultural heritage.

The production process of HerJamu is still carried out in a traditional manner to maintain the authenticity of taste and quality. Ingredients are selected carefully, processed manually, and packaged in simple yet practical containers. However, despite its cultural and economic potential, HerJamu faces several challenges in terms of marketing and production

scalability. Limited resources, lack of marketing innovation, and minimal technological adaptation have hindered the business from expanding beyond its local market.

Furthermore, HerJamu relies heavily on word-of-mouth marketing, which restricts its reach and visibility. While this approach may effectively build trust among nearby consumers, it fails to capture broader market segments, particularly outside the village. As a result, the business experiences inconsistent demand and fluctuating sales (Pangestuti & Sudrajat, 2025). The absence of an integrated digital marketing strategy also prevents HerJamu from optimizing online platforms that could enhance product promotion and customer engagement.

In the modern business landscape, digital transformation has significantly changed how consumers search for, evaluate, and purchase products (Wardani, 2023). People now prefer online shopping due to its convenience, accessibility, and the wide range of available options. Moreover, digital platforms allow consumers to easily compare prices, read reviews, and make purchases without time or location constraints (Juhana et al., 2024). Consequently, MSMEs are encouraged to adapt to this digital shift to remain competitive and sustainable in the market (Sifwah et al., 2024).

Recognizing this trend, the Indonesian government has placed great emphasis on the digitalization of MSMEs. Through various programs and partnerships, small enterprises are encouraged to utilize digital marketing tools and e-commerce platforms such as Tokopedia and Shopee (Sirait et al., 2025). These platforms not only increase product exposure but also enable local entrepreneurs to expand their customer base beyond regional boundaries. This initiative demonstrates the government's commitment to integrating MSMEs into the broader digital economy (Reniasi et al., 2025).

However, the reality in rural areas such as Pangkalan Jambi remains challenging. Many MSME owners still lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to fully engage in digital marketing. Limited understanding of online consumer behavior, inadequate technology access, and insufficient training contribute to these obstacles. Consequently, businesses like HerJamu struggle to compete with more digitally adept enterprises, underscoring the need for innovative approaches to improve marketing effectiveness.

In this regard, Design Thinking offers a promising framework for addressing these challenges. Design Thinking is a human-centered approach that integrates creativity, empathy, and logic to generate innovative solutions (Böckle & Kouris, 2023). It consists of five stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. Each stage encourages business owners to better understand customer needs, redefine problems, and develop innovative strategies that are both practical and customer-oriented (Dam & Siang, 2021).

Applying Design Thinking in the context of MSMEs like HerJamu provides multiple advantages. It helps entrepreneurs identify core issues based on real user experiences, develop creative marketing ideas, and design solutions that are feasible within their local context (Man et al., 2025). Moreover, the iterative nature of Design Thinking—testing and refining ideas—allows businesses to adapt more flexibly to market feedback and technological change. By applying this framework, HerJamu can enhance its understanding of consumer expectations and improve its marketing strategy through user-centered innovation (Wardana, 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to analyse the implementation of Design Thinking in the marketing strategy design of HerJamu MSMEs in Pangkalan Jambi Village. Through the integration of empathy-driven research and creative problem-solving, this study seeks to propose innovative strategies that align with both customer needs and market dynamics. The findings are expected to contribute not only to the growth and sustainability of HerJamu but also to provide valuable insights for other local MSMEs seeking to strengthen their competitiveness in the digital economy.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a vital role in promoting economic growth and social welfare in many developing countries, including Indonesia. MSMEs contribute significantly to employment creation, poverty reduction, and local innovation (Lubis & Salsabila, 2024). According to the Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises (2023), MSMEs account for over 60% of Indonesia's gross domestic product (GDP) and absorb more than 97% of the total workforce. Therefore, strengthening MSME competitiveness—especially through digital marketing and innovation—is essential for sustaining Indonesia's economic resilience.

However, many MSMEs in rural areas continue to face structural barriers such as limited capital, lack of managerial skills, and low technological literacy (Meinarto, 2025). These limitations often prevent small enterprises from optimizing their marketing performance and expanding their customer reach. Moreover, traditional marketing approaches, which rely heavily on personal selling and word-of-mouth, are no longer sufficient in the digital era (Malik et al., 2024). Hence, innovative and adaptive marketing strategies are necessary to help MSMEs remain competitive and relevant.

Digital marketing has emerged as one of the most effective tools to support MSME development. It allows businesses to reach a wider audience, engage customers directly, and build long-term brand loyalty through online platforms such as social media, e-commerce, and websites (Kotler & Keller, 2016). According to Chaffey et al. (2009), digital marketing not only enhances visibility but also provides valuable data analytics that can be used to understand consumer behavior. Nevertheless, the success of digital marketing depends on how well business owners can integrate customer-centered innovation into their strategies.

In this context, Design Thinking has gained increasing attention as a creative and user-centered approach to business problem-solving. Design Thinking emphasizes empathy, ideation, prototyping, and testing as essential steps in developing innovative solutions (Brown, 2009). Rather than focusing solely on profit or product features, it encourages entrepreneurs to understand customer needs and design experiences that create value (Liedtka, 2015). As a result, Design Thinking is particularly relevant for MSMEs that aim to strengthen their marketing and product development processes.

The five stages of Design Thinking—empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test—allow organizations to identify key problems and design practical solutions through iterative learning (Dam & Siang, 2021). During the empathize stage, businesses explore customers' needs through observation and interviews. In the define stage, they articulate the core problem to address. The ideate stage involves brainstorming creative ideas, while prototype and test stages focus on creating and refining real solutions based on user feedback. This cyclical process enables continuous innovation and improvement.

Several studies have applied Design Thinking to MSME development. For instance, Furr & Dyer (2014) demonstrated that Design Thinking encourages entrepreneurs to adopt a mindset of experimentation and adaptability. Similarly, Lewrick et al. (2018) found that small businesses using Design Thinking were better able to identify customer pain points and translate insights into marketable solutions. In the Indonesian context, Fitria et al. (2023) reported that MSMEs applying Design Thinking improved their product innovation and marketing performance significantly.

Furthermore, the integration of Design Thinking into marketing strategy design enables MSMEs to create more meaningful connections with customers. By involving users in the ideation and testing process, entrepreneurs can align marketing messages with real customer experiences (Gruber et al., 2015). This approach increases brand authenticity and customer loyalty—key factors for MSME sustainability. It also bridges the gap between creativity and practicality, ensuring that innovations are both feasible and desirable.

Previous research also indicates that Design Thinking fosters collaboration and learning within organizations. Lockwood (2010) highlighted that Design Thinking encourages cross-functional teamwork and knowledge sharing, allowing businesses to combine different perspectives in problem-solving. This is particularly important for MSMEs, which often operate with limited human and financial resources. By adopting a Design Thinking mindset, MSMEs can enhance their internal capacity for innovation and adapt more quickly to market changes.

Despite its potential benefits, the application of Design Thinking among MSMEs remains limited, especially in rural regions. Studies by Suharto (2025) revealed that many MSME owners still perceive innovation as costly and complex. In addition, insufficient understanding of the Design Thinking framework prevents entrepreneurs from fully utilizing its benefits. This knowledge gap underlines the need for research that contextualizes Design Thinking practices within local business environments.

To strengthen the competitiveness of rural MSMEs like HerJamu, integrating Design Thinking with digital marketing strategies may provide an effective solution. Design Thinking can help identify consumer insights, while digital marketing offers the tools to communicate these insights effectively to a broader audience (Hartman et al., 2024). Therefore, combining both approaches can lead to a more comprehensive and customer-oriented marketing framework.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature highlights that Design Thinking serves as an effective approach for fostering innovation, enhancing customer engagement, and improving marketing performance in MSMEs. However, empirical research on its practical implementation in rural Indonesian contexts remains scarce. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how Design Thinking can be applied in designing marketing strategies for the HerJamu MSME in Pangkalan Jambi Village. Through this analysis, it is expected to contribute to both academic discourse and practical applications of Design Thinking in the MSME sector.

3. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Design Thinking is implemented in the marketing strategy design of HerJamu MSME in Pangkalan Jambi Village. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices in depth. The research was conducted at HerJamu's production and marketing site in Pangkalan Jambi, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the business owner and key stakeholders, field observations, and documentation review. The main materials included interview guidelines, observation sheets, and audio recorders to ensure data accuracy and completeness.

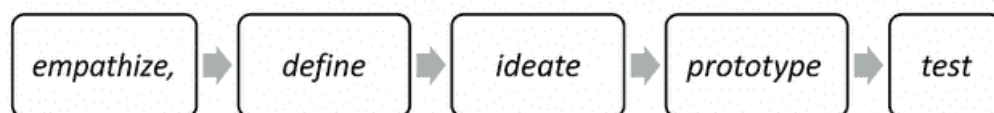


Fig. 1. Design Thinking Method.

The research procedures followed the stages of Design Thinking as the theoretical framework—empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Dam & Siang, 2021). During the empathize stage, the researcher identified customer needs and challenges faced by HerJamu through observation and interviews. The define and ideate stages involved analyzing problems and generating creative ideas for marketing improvement. Subsequently, the prototype and test stages focused on evaluating the feasibility of proposed strategies through

stakeholder feedback (Madzik, 2019). All data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques, allowing the researcher to identify patterns, themes, and insights related to the application of Design Thinking in shaping HerJamu's marketing strategy.

4. RESULT & DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented according to the five stages of the Design Thinking framework: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of HerJamu's current marketing challenges and provided a structured process to generate, evaluate, and refine solutions tailored to the context of micro-enterprises in Pangkalan Jambi Village.

Empathize Stage

At the empathize stage, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews and direct observations to understand the perspectives of the HerJamu owner, customers, and local stakeholders. These interactions revealed that HerJamu faced significant challenges in market expansion due to limited access to promotional platforms and reliance on traditional word-of-mouth marketing. Most of the existing consumers were residents who made purchases directly at the production site, while awareness of the product outside Pangkalan Jambi Village remained minimal.

Further exploration indicated that, although public interest in healthy living and traditional herbal drinks was increasing, HerJamu's visibility beyond its local area was still very low. The researcher observed that HerJamu's marketing efforts lacked digital integration, which constrained the business from reaching a broader audience. The local community viewed HerJamu positively for its authenticity and health value, but this appreciation had not yet translated into a wider customer base.

Therefore, this stage emphasized the necessity of strengthening brand identity and leveraging digital technology to expand market presence. The findings suggested that combining traditional values with modern communication tools—such as social media and digital storytelling—could significantly improve HerJamu's competitiveness. This insight laid the groundwork for defining the core marketing problems that needed strategic attention in the following stage.

Define Stage

During the define stage, the insights from the empathize phase were translated into clear and actionable problem statements. It was found that HerJamu lacked a consistent and structured marketing plan, resulting in irregular promotion and weak brand recognition. Additionally, the absence of a digital marketing strategy made it difficult to capture potential consumers who increasingly relied on online information for product selection.

The research also discovered that the owner's limited knowledge of digital tools and consumer behavior analysis contributed to HerJamu's stagnant growth. The business had strong potential due to its unique and authentic products, but the lack of marketing literacy hindered its ability to compete in a dynamic marketplace. Moreover, the production process remained small-scale, which restricted HerJamu from responding to sudden increases in demand.

As a result, the study highlighted a critical gap between HerJamu's product quality and its market performance. To bridge this gap, it was necessary to design a marketing strategy rooted in innovation, cultural values, and consumer insight. This stage ultimately defined the main challenge as creating an adaptive and sustainable marketing approach that could balance traditional identity with modern branding techniques.

Ideate Stage

In the ideate stage, brainstorming sessions were conducted to develop creative and feasible solutions to address the identified problems. Together with the business owner and several local youth volunteers, the researcher generated a range of ideas that focused on visual rebranding, digital presence, and community engagement. These discussions aimed to find solutions that were not only practical but also aligned with HerJamu's vision of promoting natural wellness.

One of the main outcomes of this phase was the decision to redesign HerJamu's product packaging. The new design combined modern aesthetics with traditional motifs to reflect both cultural heritage and professionalism. In addition, it was proposed to utilize social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to reach younger audiences, while maintaining authenticity through storytelling-based content that showcased the local process of herbal production.

The ideation process also encouraged collaboration with local influencers and small business communities to increase visibility and trust. Furthermore, the owner was advised to participate in entrepreneurship and digital marketing workshops offered by government and educational institutions. This stage emphasized that creativity, collaboration, and continuous learning were essential components of sustainable marketing innovation for small enterprises like HerJamu.

Prototype Stage

Based on the results of the ideation stage, a prototype marketing plan was developed to visualize and test the proposed strategies. The prototype consisted of both online and offline components to ensure comprehensive market engagement. Online strategies included establishing an official brand identity called "HerJamu Natural Wellness," redesigning product labels, and launching official social media pages. Offline strategies involved participating in local markets and cultural events to build direct customer relationships.



Fig. 2. HerJamu Products.

The researcher and the business owner worked together to create promotional materials, including a short video highlighting the traditional production process and the natural environment of Pangkalan Jambi Village. This visual content was designed to strengthen emotional connection and authenticity in the eyes of consumers. The packaging

redesign was finalized with eco-friendly materials and vibrant colors that symbolized freshness and trust.

The prototype served as a practical demonstration of how integrated marketing could enhance HerJamu's market competitiveness. It also provided a tangible example of how the Design Thinking process could be applied to micro-businesses with limited resources. The results from this stage showed that even small changes in design and communication could have a significant impact on brand image and consumer perception.

Test Stage

In the test stage, the prototype was implemented for a limited period of four weeks to evaluate its effectiveness in real-market conditions. Social media content, including photos, short videos, and customer testimonials, was uploaded regularly on Facebook and Instagram. The local community in Bengkalis and Siak Kecil responded positively, with a noticeable increase in online engagement and sales during the trial period.

Quantitative observations indicated that HerJamu's social media following grew rapidly, while offline sales increased by approximately 20%. Consumers expressed greater trust in the brand and a deeper appreciation for its authentic narrative. Many respondents highlighted the improved packaging and storytelling as reasons for their renewed interest in the product.

Feedback from the testing phase also revealed areas for improvement, such as maintaining content consistency, ensuring product availability, and expanding distribution channels. The owner realized the importance of planning regular updates and customer interactions online. Overall, this stage validated the relevance of the Design Thinking framework in developing adaptive marketing strategies for local MSMEs and demonstrated that innovation rooted in empathy could generate sustainable business growth.

Discussion

The application of Design Thinking in HerJamu's marketing strategy revealed the critical role of empathy, creativity, and user-centered innovation in addressing the real-world challenges faced by micro and small enterprises. Through systematic engagement in the five stages—empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test—the business owner developed a comprehensive understanding of consumer preferences, purchasing motivations, and behavior patterns. This deepened awareness allowed HerJamu to identify weaknesses in its existing marketing process, particularly the overreliance on word-of-mouth promotion and the absence of a coherent brand identity. As a result, the entrepreneur was encouraged to explore innovative and practical ideas that integrated digital tools with traditional selling methods to reach a wider audience.

Furthermore, the implementation of Design Thinking stimulated a transformation in the way HerJamu approached problem-solving. Instead of responding reactively to fluctuating demand, the entrepreneur began adopting a proactive mindset focused on continuous innovation and improvement. This shift in perspective enabled the development of more adaptive strategies such as rebranding, digital storytelling, and the use of social media platforms to communicate the product's cultural and health-related values. The process not only improved business performance but also cultivated confidence and creativity within the owner, demonstrating that small-scale entrepreneurs can thrive by aligning their marketing efforts with customer expectations.



Fig. 3. Design Thinking in Marketing Strategy Development for HerJamu MSMEs in Pangkalan Jambi Village.

In addition, Design Thinking fostered stronger collaboration between HerJamu, its consumers, and local community stakeholders, leading to a shared sense of ownership in the business's growth. The integration of digital marketing tools with community-based promotion enhanced the brand's visibility, accessibility, and authenticity. Consequently, HerJamu experienced higher sales and improved consumer trust, reinforcing its role as a sustainable rural enterprise. These findings are consistent with prior studies Lesmana, (2025) and Tran et al. (2024), which emphasize that Design Thinking promotes empathy-driven innovation and strengthens competitiveness. For rural MSMEs like HerJamu, this approach not only transforms marketing strategies but also preserves local culture while supporting long-term business sustainability.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Design Thinking approach in developing HerJamu's marketing strategy has proven effective in identifying key business challenges and generating innovative, user-centered solutions. By going through the five stages—*empathize*, *define*, *ideate*, *prototype*, and *test*—HerJamu was able to better understand consumer needs, improve product presentation, and strengthen its market presence through digital and offline integration. The findings demonstrate that Design Thinking not only enhances marketing performance but also supports the sustainability of local MSMEs by combining creativity with cultural authenticity. It is recommended that HerJamu continue applying this framework regularly, participate in digital marketing training, and collaborate with local institutions or e-commerce platforms to further expand its market reach and business resilience.

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