# Empowering Students and Entrepreneurs: Collaboration Innovation in Packaging and Digital Marketing for the Dried Fruits and Herbs Products

**1Siti Nor Bayaah Ahmad**

1Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia

E-mail: 1sitinor.ahmad@ums.edu.my

This study investigates the application of a Project-Based Learning (PBL) methodology in an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) course which is offered to semester 5 students taking major in Marketing. This course aim to achieved four course learning outcome and aimed at bridging the theory-practice gap through practical collaborations with local dried fruit and herb entrepreneurs. Through PBL The project aimed to enhance students' practical abilities in packaging design, digital marketing, and professional development through experiential learning (Krajcik et al, 2022; Chen et al, 2023). As marketing consultants for the project, students devised new, user-focused packaging solutions and produced TikTok advertising content that corresponded with current digital trends, while tackling unique market issues encountered by partner entrepreneurs. The three-phase methodology—Preparation, Execution, and Evaluation—integrated industry site visits, practical product processing, collaborative design workshops, and final presentations assessed by academic and industry panels (Mutanga, 2024).

Figure 1: 3 Phases of methodology

From one of the project outcomes, the student student-designed Dried Lemon packaging garnered a Silver Award at the PEREKA competition organised by the Centre of Research and innovation, Universiti Malaysia Sabah has acknowledged the project's practical significance. Thus, to ensure that the PBL effectively promotes critical thinking, technical skills (such as design software and video editing), and professional ethics, while also improving cultural and entrepreneurial awareness a peer assessment was executed through the University course content platform name as iTEL. The assessment approach is to appraised student dedication based on four criteria: Interaction (quality of engagement with peers, self-identified strengths and weaknesses), Relationship and Collaboration (effectiveness of teamwork and active participation), Leadership (capacity to direct oneself or others towards team goals), and Respect (exhibition of mutual regard). Scores varied from 0 to 10. Of the 57 pupils who participated, 44% attained scores between 9 and 10, 37% scored between 8 and 8.83, and 19% scored between 6.67 and 7.86. The effort underscores the scalability of Project-Based Learning across other disciplines, providing a reproducible framework for academia-industry collaborations to address real difficulties in marketing, engineering, and the creative arts. Significant contributions encompass a systematic framework for immersive learning, demonstrable increases in student engagement, and practical recommendations for curriculum developers seeking to synchronize educational practices with corporate requirements. This study highlights the significance of experiential pedagogies in connecting academic rigor with practical application, thereby equipping students for evolving professional environments (Harris et al, 2019). It facilitates collaboration among the university, entrepreneurs, and students, which can be sustainably implemented in the future.

 Figure 2: Academia-Industry Collaboration

**Keywords:** Project-Based Learning (PBL), Immersive Learning, Academia-Industry collaboration, Peer-assessment, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

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