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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND CULTURAL RESILIENCE IN KELANTAN'S TRADITIONAL MARKETS

Nur Ain Amirah Nazli^{1*}, Hana Yazmeen Hapiz², Mohd Safwan Ghazali³

¹ Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Pengkalan Chepa, 16100 Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia

Email: a22d051f@siswa.umk.edu.my

² Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 16300 Bachok, Kelantan, Malaysia

Email: Hana@umk.edu.my

³ Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Pengkalan Chepa, 16100 Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia

Email: Safwan.g@umk.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

This paper explores the transformation of pasar tradisional (traditional markets) in Kelantan as traders increasingly adopt digital tools while sustaining their presence in physical marketplaces. Drawing on an anthropological perspective, the study examines how vendors integrate online banking, social media platforms, and e-commerce practices into daily business routines, yet continue to uphold the cultural and social value of face-to-face interactions. Rather than being replaced, the traditional market is reshaped by digital technologies, which expand customer networks, enhance financial management, and redefine entrepreneurial practices. Findings suggest that Kelantan's pasar tradisional function as hybrid spaces where tradition and modernity coexist. Digital adoption does not undermine their cultural role but reinforces resilience by allowing traders to adapt to shifting consumer preferences and competitive pressures. These hybrid practices demonstrate how local communities negotiate continuity and change, ensuring that the market remains not only an economic arena but also a vital cultural and communal institution. This research offers insights into the adaptive strategies of small-scale traders in the digital era by placing Kelantan's markets within wider discussions of digitalisation and cultural resilience. It highlights how local entrepreneurship reflects both innovation and heritage, offering implications for design, education, and policy on sustaining community-based economies in times of technological transition.

Keywords:

Pasar Tradisional, Digital Transformation, Cultural Resilience, Hybrid Marketplaces, Small-Scale Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Over the last decade, Malaysia has been progressing towards digitalisation, with increasing acceptance of these developments by the government, businesses, and households. To foster ongoing economic growth, a development strategy that balances the manufacturing and modern service sectors is essential. The Malaysian government has been actively reforming various industries through digital initiatives, and SMEs have a keen interest in the emerging digital economy (Chong et al., 2025). The digital economy as encompassing transactions on e-commerce platforms, payments via mobile services, and the use of advanced technology in business processes.

This research examines the significance of integrating digital technology into the business models of SMEs, which has been shown to enhance long-term productivity and sustainability. Embracing technology will enhance capacity and capability for greater competitiveness and innovation, aiding in the reduction of the productivity gap between SMEs and large enterprises. Indonesia have been using the local e-commerce platforms in order to digitalise their products in the markets. The digital platforms or applications that have been used which some of that is also are used in Malaysia which is Grab, Tokopedia and others. Even several of the other market increased in their usage of the digital platform, traditional market in Asia is still the main place to sell the produce. However, the trend for traditional market in Asia is still relevant and widely used by the sellers. Now, both Indonesia and Malaysia have used hybrid market, which they have, their online platform but they still have the physical store to sell their items. E-wallet user in Malaysia is 62% in 2023, which shows the rapid changes in cashless transaction (Malaysia Economic Monitor, 2023). There are survey show that more than 70% of the small trader have move to digital payment especially after pandemic. Vendors in Kelantan's traditional market also have this trend where most of the users uses social media to reach the customers.

Literature Review***Digital Adaptation of Traditional Market Traders***

Many aspects of life, including commerce, have undergone significant changes due to the digital age. A large number of consumers are currently choosing digital shopping platforms, which is causing challenges for traditional market sellers. Many aspects of life, including commerce, have undergone significant changes due to the digital age. A large number of consumers are currently choosing digital shopping platforms, which is causing challenges for traditional market sellers. In order to cope with the challenges brought about by digitalization, traditional market vendors need to develop effective strategies, which might include using technology, creating products, improving customer service, and innovating marketing approaches (Purbaet al., 2024). Traders in traditional markets play a vital part in social sustainability and the local economy (Cook et al., 2024). This study can offer insights into how their sustainability contributes to the community's economic and social stability.

Technology has progressed rapidly owing to the widespread availability of internet access, the increasing use of smartphones, and consumer confidence in digital transactions. Online shopping platforms offer a variety of advantages, such as the convenience of shopping from home, flexible timing, secure payment methods, and effective delivery of goods. This change influences nearly all business sectors, including traditional markets that have historically been the hub of economic activity for local communities, and alters individuals' consumption habits. The shift in consumer preferences toward online shopping poses significant new challenges for traditional markets, which have historically been essential to the economic, social, and cultural sustainability of communities.

Traditional markets are vital as venues for distributing daily necessities, arenas for social interaction, and custodians of local cultural values, including the consumer practice of haggling (Irwan et al., 2024). Nonetheless, traditional markets are facing a real threat because of the rise of online shops. Due to a reduction in customer numbers, the necessity to offer competitive prices, and increasing costs of operations linked to technological adaptation, merchants in traditional markets have experienced a decline in their income. On the other hand, these changes create new opportunities for traditional market vendors willing to adopt technology and expand their market reach through digital marketplaces.

Digital marketing enables businesses from various sectors to obtain real-time customer insights and deliver value to customers more effectively. This has led to a considerable expansion of the customer base and revenue. Digital marketing research outlines the media channel types and highlights the goals of digital marketing by utilizing online media to influence audiences and customer segments. Broekhuizen et al. (2020) have analyzed the stakeholders involved in digital marketing, which includes the four main stakeholders: the merchant, the network, the publisher, and the customer.

Digital marketing targets the customer through multiple media channels. It is lacking an integrated system and strategic direction, which are necessary for these stakeholders to work together and aspire towards more intelligent and sustainable digital marketing. The disruption brought about by digital technology has resulted in unprecedented chaos and crises across all sectors. SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) are increasingly adopting public platform technologies for digital marketing, such as e-commerce platforms, social media, and mobile applications, in order to expand their marketing reach, enhance operational efficiency, gain customer insights, and create new business opportunities (Aidargaliyeva et al., 2025). Numerous small businesses can thrive, grow, and establish themselves as market leaders by consistently utilizing technology from various public platforms and developing digital marketing portfolios (Ikenga & Egbule, 2024). Thus, the academic community ought to concentrate on the essential facet of this expanding phenomenon: how to adapt effectively to rapidly evolving digital marketing technologies in order to secure a competitive edge.

Digital platforms have emerged as innovative catalysts for change in economic structures, the establishment of new sectors, and the evolution of consumer experiences in the early twenty-first century. These include e-commerce, fintech solutions, and digital logistics systems, leading to substantial changes in the commercial domain that present infinite possibilities for enhancing efficiency, expanding markets, and increasing customer value creation (Zekos, 2021). Companies operating in traditional sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and retail, which have depended on practices from before the information age for their production

and service activities, are now under significant pressure to adopt digital initiatives in order to survive in the current digital environment (Zekos, 2021)

In today's business world, "digital" is frequently employed as a buzzword. There is no denying that the term "digital" has impacted every person on Earth. People are perpetually coming across more advanced and refined technology in different facets of their everyday lives be it at home, in their jobs, or while commuting encompassing everything from desktop computers and tablets to smartphones and robots. At the same time, are more interconnected than ever before, thanks to the wide range of communication channels available for personal interaction, advertising, sharing, social networking, and even education. The influence of this phenomenon on business practices and individual behaviour can be seen.

Networking and digitalization technologies are shaping the market for digital content, leading to a diverse array of information and services. Due to the characteristics of these new technologies, the digital content market is growing rapidly, and traditional content providers must determine how to adapt their services.

Technology Adaptation

Over the last few years, there have been changes to payment systems in Malaysia. A major development is the advent of payment systems that rely on electronic methods. Based on the belief that electronic payment methods can improve overall economic efficiency, the central bank has played an active role in shaping the development of payment systems, particularly with respect to their gradual adoption. In recent years, the value and volume of transactions per capita involving e-payment instruments have risen due to their proactive adoption (Oyelami et al., 2020). nonetheless. By adopting e-payment schemes, small and medium enterprises could enjoy significant benefits such as enhanced operational efficiency, cost reductions, improved security measures, and a wider array of payment options.

Live streaming through e-commerce platforms has emerged as a new online marketing tool and is becoming increasingly popular globally (Lu & Siegfried, 2021). Live streaming refers to e-commerce activities in which the streamer (merchant or manager) provides consumers with product display and purchasing services through trials and experience sharing in an online live streaming room (Liu et al., 2022). Tourism e-commerce live streaming (TECLS) has certainly become popular and important on a global scale.

Recently, the popularity of live streaming as a direct selling channel has skyrocketed, offering small, self-employed sellers levels of consumer interaction and engagement that were previously unheard of. Although previous research has focused on consumer motivation and intention to shop via live streaming, the seller's perspective has not been thoroughly investigated (Zheng et al., 2022). Although the possible advantages of live streaming commerce are accessible to everyone, sellers experience different levels of success with this medium.

Kelantan's Cultural Context and the Significance of the Traditional Market

Due to its strong Islamic cultural heritage and the renowned Pasar Siti Khadijah, often regarded as a symbol of female entrepreneurship and family continuity, discussions regarding market digitalization frequently highlight Kelantan. The market has traditionally functioned as a

central venue where women have managed stalls over generations, reinforcing family connections and sustaining local economic networks.

This unique social environment influences traders' responses to technological changes: many adopt digital tools like social media, e-wallets, and online banking to broaden their customer base, while still upholding the cultural values of trust, community involvement, and direct negotiation. Research conducted on Kelantan's pasar tradisional emphasizes that this blend of innovation and tradition allows traders to maintain resilience, displaying the possibility for local entrepreneurship to incorporate contemporary practices while preserving religious and familial customs (Deb et al., 2022).

This research examines how market traders in Kelantan fuse tradition with digital innovation to establish a hybrid economy, expanding on these discoveries.

This study aims to examine how traders are able to align social media, online banking, and e-commerce with traditional cultural values like Islamic ethics, face-to-face interaction, and the principles of multigenerational family businesses through their daily practices and decision-making processes. This study examines how these technologies can be reconciled with long-standing cultural norms, whereas previous research has focused on using them to expand customer networks.

This study offers a deeper understanding of how local entrepreneurs manage the tension between technological advancement and cultural continuity by focusing on Pasar Siti Khadijah and other traditional markets. It illustrates that although digitalization changes tradition, it does not eliminate it; instead, it reshapes tradition into a more robust and contextually suitable economic model.

Methodology

A qualitative, anthropological approach was used in this study to depict the richness of daily life in the traditional markets of Kelantan. This design was chosen to explore not only visible practices but also the emotions, values, and narratives that support traders' engagement with digital technology.

The collection of data involved informal discussions, participant observation, and the conducting of semi-structured interviews. A range of vendors participated in semi-structured interviews, including seasoned 'pakcik' and 'makcik' traders as well as younger entrepreneurs. While allowing for the investigation of new topics, the interviews kept a steady emphasis on essential matters like cultural values, technology adoption, and business strategies.

The researcher was able to see routine exchanges like supplier negotiations, customer discussions, and payment patterns because participant observation was carried out in the real market. This intense involvement revealed routines and behaviors that might not have surfaced in standard interviews. Family histories, individual motivations, and the importance of market life were also revealed through casual conversations with traders and customers.

All field notes, interview transcripts, and observational data were compiled and then thematically analyzed to identify patterns in the adoption of technology and cultural continuity. This anthropological method made it possible to comprehend how Kelantan's traders blend

tradition with digital innovation to produce a hybrid economy that exhibits resilience and adaptation in the digital era.

In terms of sampling strategy, a total of five traders were involved in the semi-structured interviews. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on traders from different market sections such as poultry, fruits and vegetables to ensure variation in business types and experiences. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of one month, allowing sufficient time for repeated visits, observation of daily routines, and the building of rapport with participants.

A thematic analysis for data analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed. All interview transcripts, field notes, and observational records were systematically coded. Themes such as heritage, family continuity, and digital adoption emerged inductively from the data through the repetition of ideas, phrases, and experiences shared by traders during interviews and informal conversations, particularly when similar meanings and narratives recurred across participants. In terms of positionality, the researcher is a local resident who is familiar with the traditional markets in Kelantan and frequently shops there. However, the researcher occupied an outsider role in this study, positioning herself as a customer rather than a trader. This positional stance may have influenced interpretations by allowing access to traders' perspectives through everyday interactions, while also requiring reflexive awareness to avoid assumptions based on prior familiarity with the market setting.

Theme	Description	Supporting Quote
Commitment to Heritage	Emotional and cultural attachment to the physical market as a symbol of identity and tradition	"The market will lose its soul if we leave."
Family Continuity	Intergenerational transfer of stalls, knowledge, and responsibility within trading families	"This shop was passed down from my mother to me."
Digital Adoption as Support, Not Replacement	Use of digital tools to support, rather than replace, face-to-face market interactions	"The phone brings customers to the market, but the real business happens face-to-face."

Table Key Themes and Supporting Quotes

Results

The five participants represented a diverse range of ages and types of trade within the traditional market. Their ages ranged from 35 to 60 years old, reflecting both senior and middle-aged traders. The types of goods sold included fruits, vegetables, poultry, and fish, allowing the study to capture experiences across different sections of the market and varying degrees of physical, economic, and social engagement with customers.

Specifically, the participants comprised a 60-year-old fruit seller, a 35-year-old vegetable trader, a 55-year-old poultry seller, a 47-year-old fruit vendor, and a 56-year-old fishmonger. This variation provided a broader understanding of how age and type of trade influence attitudes toward tradition, family continuity, and digital technology adoption.

Commitment to Heritage

The traders' strong traditionalism is the study's first significant discovery. Many participants took great pride in the market's survival, even going so far as to say that

"the market will lose its soul if we leave."

For these merchants, the market was a place of both cultural obligation and commercial activity. Many respondents viewed their everyday jobs as a way to maintain community identity, and their booths as locations where they actively preserve Kelantanese food traditions, dialect, and customs. Even while digital platforms may provide more realistic or even more lucrative business opportunities, their feeling of obligation compels them to continue participating in the physical market.

Family Continuity

The second topic that emerged from the data is the importance of family legacy. Most sellers said they inherited their booths from their parents or grandparents, which made trade a part of their family's identity and strengthened their ties to the market. In addition to giving the family a source of income, many regard running the stall as a way to preserve the family's presence in the community and pay tribute to the sacrifices made by previous generations. As one participant explained,

"This shop was passed down from my mother to me"

highlighting the sentimental importance of continuing the family business. Some dealers reportedly revealed that they had already begun preparing their children to take over the business in order to keep the market a multigenerational organization. It's fascinating to see that younger family members frequently serve as digital ambassadors by implementing QR payment codes, adding extra technical tools, and managing social media marketing, thereby bridging the gap between traditional and modern commercial practices.

Digital Adoption as Support, Not Replacement

The third subject focuses on how digital technology might be intelligently used to enhance existing trading methods rather than replace them. Traders publish daily stock updates and exclusive deals on Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp; they employ e-wallets and QR codes to cater to customer preferences; and they are increasingly using online banking to pay suppliers. Crucially, these technologies are believed to complement the actual marketplace rather than replace it. According to a seller,

"The phone brings customers to the market, but the real business happens face-to-face."

This demonstrated the ongoing importance of face-to-face communication. In a touching example of intergenerational learning the transfer of digital skills between age groups while maintaining the sense of community at the market even older vendors are starting to learn how to use QR codes, frequently with the assistance of their grandchildren.

Discussion

The straightforward story of technology displacing tradition is called into question by these numbers, which show a hybrid market model. The ability of a group to assimilate new customs while preserving fundamental values is known as cultural resilience, and Kelantan's traditional pasar exemplifies this rather than being supplanted by internet shopping. Instead of withdrawing, traders strategically use digital technologies like social networking, online

banking, and QR payments to improve their market position. Better financial record-keeping, quicker transactions and larger consumer networks are just a few advantages that these technologies offer.

The human element will always be at the center of market life, nevertheless, thanks to the traders' dedication to tradition. Greetings, bartering, and storytelling continue to define interactions between buyers and sellers, maintaining the warmth and familiarity that distinguish the market from impersonal online platforms. This harmony shows how technological progress and cultural history may coexist to produce a modern economy that is deeply rooted in local character.

The hybrid practices also encourage communication between generations. Younger dealers introduce innovations like TikTok live-selling and digital marketing techniques, while elder vendors impart their extensive expertise of customer interactions, market etiquette, and the subtleties of face-to-face bargaining. As a result, the market becomes a space where individuals may actively preserve cultural continuity, share knowledge, and teach and learn from one another. By striking a balance between innovation and tradition, Kelantan's market traders not only adjust to economic change but also strengthen the social cohesion of their community, ensuring that the market will remain a vibrant cultural and economic center in the digital age.

Beyond cultural resilience, the marketplace also demonstrates strong elements of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Long-standing relationships between traders, customers, and neighbouring stalls foster trust, reciprocity, and informal support networks. These social bonds allow for knowledge sharing, emotional support, and even financial assistance during difficult times. Such deep-rooted social infrastructure makes digital tools more effective because they are layered on top of pre-existing relationships rather than acting as replacements. The continuity of greetings, bartering, and storytelling preserves the warmth and familiarity of the market atmosphere that no online platform can replicate.

These patterns of digital adoption also align with insights from digital anthropology (Horst & Miller, 2012), which emphasise that digital tools are always shaped by local cultural contexts. Traders do not use WhatsApp, Facebook, or TikTok as generic modern technologies; they repurpose them according to the rhythms and values of market life. For example, WhatsApp broadcasts become a digital version of "calling out to customers," while TikTok Live recreates the lively atmosphere of promoting items at the stall. This demonstrates that digital tools are culturally embedded extensions of existing social practices, not symbols of modernity that override tradition.

Intergenerational dynamics further strengthen the hybrid nature of the market. Younger traders those with greater familiarity with digital platforms take the lead in introducing innovations such as TikTok live-selling and digital marketing techniques. Meanwhile, older traders contribute extensive knowledge of customer behaviour, negotiation techniques, and market etiquette. This reciprocal exchange allows the market to become a space where cultural continuity and practical learning flow between generations.

Gendered dynamics also subtly shape digital engagement. Senior makcik traders, who often serve as custodians of tradition and regular customer relationships, tend to prioritise interpersonal communication over digital tools. They preserve the affective and cultural atmosphere of the market. In contrast, younger traders—both men and women—are more proactive in implementing QR codes, handling social media pages, or managing digital payment systems. This complementary division of roles further reinforces how tradition and innovation coexist across gender and generational lines.

This pattern of selective and strategic technology use aligns with recent discussions on everyday digitalisation, which emphasise how digital tools become embedded into routine social and economic practices without fundamentally transforming their cultural foundations (Rossato & Castellani, 2020). In the context of Kelantan's traditional market, digital platforms are normalised as practical extensions of daily trade rather than symbols of modernisation that override tradition.

Furthermore, these findings reflect emerging scholarship on digital resilience, which highlights the capacity of small-scale and informal economic actors to adapt to digital change while maintaining social ties and cultural meaning (Joseph et al., 2025). Rather than signaling a shift away from traditional market life, digital adoption in this study strengthens traders' economic sustainability and reinforces their embeddedness within the local community.

Viewed through this lens, Kelantan's traditional market represents a form of culturally grounded hybrid economy, where innovation and tradition coexist in mutually reinforcing ways. Digital technologies enhance reach, efficiency, and coordination, while face-to-face interaction continues to anchor trust, identity, and social cohesion. This demonstrates that technological change in traditional markets is not inherently disruptive, but can instead serve as a mechanism for continuity, adaptation, and long-term resilience in the digital era.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, Kelantan's traditional market serves as an example of how digitization does not always lead to cultural deterioration. Instead than replacing the traditional marketplace, technology is being used to preserve and even invigorate it. Traders employ internet banking, social media, and cashless payment methods as tools to increase output and their client base while preserving the market's social and cultural functions. This hybrid approach allows innovation and legacy to coexist, which promotes cultural resilience.

These findings have a variety of policy implications. First, small traders may be eligible for digital training programs offered by development groups and local governments. These efforts should target older vendors who may be hesitant to embrace new technologies. Second, enhancing company regions' internet infrastructure would boost online transaction dependability and make cashless payment methods easier to use. Third, youth engagement programs that teach new digital skills and encourage younger generations to stay involved in the market include mentorship programs, entrepreneurship courses, and incentives for family business succession.

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