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(IJIREV)www.ijirev.comCURATING THROUGH CRISIS: VISUAL ART EXHIBITION
PRACTICES OF KELANTAN'S ART ORGANIZATIONS IN THE
POST-PANDEMIC ERA (2020–2022)Nadya Ahmad Kamal¹, Tan Tse Guan^{2*}, Tengku Fauzan Tengku Anuar³, Arif Datoem⁴¹ Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
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DOI: 10.35631/IJIREV.723015**Abstract:**

This study explores the situation of visual art exhibitions and curatorial practices in Kelantan during the post-pandemic period of 2020–2022. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the local arts ecosystem, forcing cancellations of physical exhibitions and limiting artists' visibility. Organizations were compelled to adapt, with some experimenting with digital platforms, though virtual exhibitions could not fully replace physical interaction. Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered from literature, official reports, websites, social media, and semi-structured interviews with representatives of seven organizations: Balai Seni Lukis Kelantan (BSLK), Persatuan Pelukis Kelantan (PESENI), Persatuan Penggiat Seni Lukis (PELUKIS), Persatuan Seniman dan Warisan Kelantan (PESTA), Sendi Studio & Gallery (SSG), Balai Kartun Rossem (BKR), and Kotak Seni. Thematic analysis focused on exhibition formats, changes in curatorial practices, and post-pandemic challenges and opportunities. Findings show traditional organizations such as PESENI, PELUKIS, and PESTA struggled due to weak digital literacy and reliance on physical exhibitions, while BSLK and BKR used temporary digital measures before returning to physical formats. In contrast, SSG and Kotak Seni adapted more effectively, positioning digital platforms at the core of their curatorial strategies and expanding international networks. The study concludes that technological adaptation is no longer optional but a fundamental requirement for sustaining visual art exhibition culture in Kelantan.

**Keywords:**

Visual Art Exhibitions, Curatorial Practices, Digital Adaptation, Kelantan, Post-Pandemic

Introduction

Kelantan is often described as one of the most important centers of culture and the arts in the Malaysian art landscape. As a state rich in art and traditional heritage, Kelantan has a strong cultural DNA that continues to be a source of inspiration and local identity. Various initiatives and the existence of organizations that support the development of the arts and culture, as well as the dissemination of knowledge while providing entertainment and inspiration to society in understanding the history, culture, customs, and natural wealth of Kelantan, have emerged and developed, coloring its contemporary progress.

In the framework of visual arts development specifically, art organizations, both governmental and private, play a vital role as supporters of cultural sustainability. These organizations include state cultural departments, art centers, galleries, artist associations, and academic institutions that facilitate exhibitions, art residencies, art funding, and collaborations. Through the intervention of such art organizations, local art is not only exhibited but also managed strategically so that it can withstand social, economic, and technological challenges.

Equally important is curatorial practice — the approaches, strategies, and methods used by curators or exhibition managers in presenting artworks to the public. Curatorial strategies play a critical role in professional practice, influencing the quality of visitors' experiences in exhibitions (Saidon et al., 2011). Curatorial strategy refers to the actions, methods, and procedures applied to achieve one or more goals of an art exhibition. It is the result of a detailed strategic planning process involving concepts, theoretical frameworks, as well as the identification of core questions and themes by outlining the objectives of the exhibition as the primary target. This includes detailing aspects such as identifying target audiences, selecting artworks, arranging and displaying exhibits according to themes and plans, environmental control, designing interaction between artwork and visitors, writing and interpreting works, as well as promotion and the design of informative infographics. From a curatorial perspective, the role of the curator extends beyond managing exhibitions to functioning as a cultural mediator who shapes meaning and visitor experience (O'Neill, 2012). According to him, curatorship is a conceptual process that organizes the relationships between artworks, space, and audiences. Terry Smith (2015) similarly emphasizes the concept of contemporary curating as a practice that is responsive, relational, and often rooted in community contexts and social situations. This theoretical framework is crucial for understanding the variations in curatorial approaches in Kelantan, particularly the differences between institutional curating, community-based curating, and digital curating that emerged during the pandemic.

However, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, almost all economic and social sectors worldwide have been affected, including art exhibition activities in Malaysia. In the first six months after the spread of the pandemic, the country suffered losses of RM85.06 million due to the postponement and cancellation of arts and cultural programs (Hamzah, 2020). To ensure the continuity of the visual arts, curatorial practices and strategies had to be adjusted according to the suitability of the circumstances. With the prolonged closure of

galleries and public spaces for social activities, artists and art exhibition organizers were forced to adapt and shift to virtual platforms to continue operating and maintain their reputation (Wahiza, 2021). Most physical exhibitions were cancelled or postponed due to movement restrictions, bans on gatherings, and the closure of gallery spaces for public health purposes. As a result, many artists were affected in terms of income, visibility of their works, and relationships with audiences (Sedon et al., 2021). In this situation, adaptation to digital media and the transformation of curatorial practices became crucial steps to ensure that visual arts activities did not completely fade. This is supported by MacRitchie (2024), Zhang et al. (2023), and Gherheş et al. (2025), who stated that digital adaptation is necessary for organizations to remain relevant, and that delivering art in virtual spaces can support exhibition activities and visitor interaction.

This article aims to examine and analyze the situation of visual arts exhibition activities and curatorial practices in the post-pandemic context in Kelantan from 2020 to 2022. With a focus on a state outside the national art center, this study seeks to reveal how adaptation took place at the local level and the challenges faced.

Literature Review

Visual Arts Organizations in Kelantan

The culture of art exhibitions is closely related to the development of art and culture within the surrounding community. Visual art has long been practiced in Kelantan in various forms of local crafts before being developed into artists' expressions through artworks of strong aesthetic value. The first visual arts association in Kelantan, *Persatuan Pelukis Kelantan* (PESENI), established in 1979, further enriched the local art scene. The initial aim of PESENI was to bring Kelantanese artists together to strengthen the development of the nation's visual arts and to provide space and opportunities for these artists to gather and exhibit. PESENI was also the body responsible for submitting the proposal for the establishment of Balai Seni Lukis Kelantan (BSLK) to the state government and has since organized various art activities. The association has played a highly significant role in exhibition culture among Kelantanese artists. Through this association, local artists were able to participate in exhibitions ranging from small-scale showcases to national and international levels. The association's activities also added value to its members in terms of career development in the arts.

BSLK founded in 1988, is a specialized arts institution supporting visual art activities under the administration of the Kelantan State Museum Corporation. It houses and exhibits a permanent collection while also providing space for Kelantanese artists to hold exhibitions and organize artistic activities such as workshops, art talks, and competitions. Unlike smaller galleries, BSLK organizes themed exhibitions in a professional manner, with structured and planned frameworks. It provides exhibition space and facilities, technical staff, publicity, as well as appropriate publications and writings in each periodic exhibition with groups of artists involved.



Figure 1: Exhibition Hall In Balai Seni Lukis Kelantan.

Source: Perbadanan Muzium Negeri Kelantan

The artworks exhibited in Kelantan in its early stages were largely dominated by the naturalistic genre using media such as watercolor, oil, acrylic, and batik painting. The establishment of educational institutions later provided locals with the opportunity to gain knowledge and broader exposure to modern painting (Muliyadi, 2001). Nevertheless, the strong cultural essence of Kelantan remained the unique identity of its artists, which ensured that opportunities to exhibit were always open and in demand. The migration of Kelantanese artists to larger cities also opened two-way networks and enabled them to organize and participate in exhibitions elsewhere.

From 1999 to 2008, Kelantanese artists progressed to a more professional stage with collaborative art programs and exhibitions with visual arts associations outside Kelantan, undertaking international art tours, and cooperating with the National Art Gallery as well as organizations such as the Malaysian Watercolor Organisation (MWO). They also organized exhibitions in Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, and other major cities. Between 2009 and early 2020, exhibition culture in the Kelantan visual art scene became increasingly vibrant. PESENi's membership under the *Gabungan Persatuan Pelukis SeMalaysia* (GAP's) provided a broader network and greater opportunities for participating in and organizing visual art exhibitions. Kelantanese artists actively joined exhibitions locally and abroad, while the growth of galleries, studios, residencies, and other art ecosystems flourished. Exhibition activities were strongly supported by private and governmental bodies under the umbrella of the National Visual Arts Gallery and other ministries such as the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC).

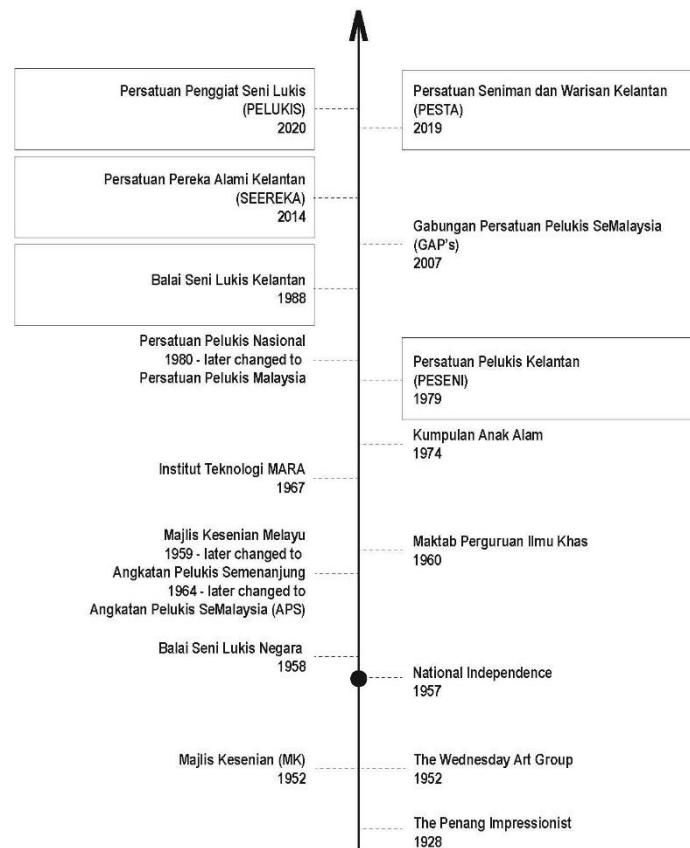


Figure 2: The Establishment of Art Organizations in Kelantan Within The Timeline of Modern Malaysian Art.

Source. Muliyadi, 2001

Beyond associations and independent artists, the visual art exhibition scene in Kelantan became more dynamic with the establishment of educational institutions offering specialized studies in fine arts such as the Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA in Machang, and the Faculty of Creative Technology & Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, in 2007. The Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan in 2012, Prof. Dr. Raduan bin Hj. Che Rose, announced that UMK aspired to become a hub of art activities in the East Coast in line with efforts to sustain the nation's cultural and artistic heritage. These institutions organized visual art exhibitions as course requirements for students, with the artworks produced accompanied by written research. Exhibition activities in Kelantan thus began to be linked with academic contributions and the involvement of young artists from among these art students.

From a theoretical perspective, the visual arts ecosystem can be understood through Bourdieu's Field Theory (1993), which positions art organizations as part of the field of cultural production shaped by the interaction between habitus, social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital. Through this lens, visual art organizations in Kelantan operate within a structured cultural field defined by power relations, social networks, and inherited cultural practices that influence their capacity to adapt during periods of disruption. In the post-pandemic context, the degree to which these organizations are able to mobilize their cultural and social capital becomes a key determinant of their resilience. Within a broader regional discourse, visual art organizations in Kelantan should not be viewed as isolated local entities but as participants in a wider continuum

of modern and contemporary art development in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. As Sabapathy (2018) highlights, the sustainability of visual and cultural arts must be contextualized within regional art history, cultural policy frameworks, and heritage preservation efforts. Complementing this perspective, Wan Abdullah Thani (2021) emphasizes that cultural sustainability in Malaysia depends on recognising the arts as a societal identity marker and symbolic foundation—yet this sustainability is increasingly tested by rapid modernization, ecological pressures, and technological change.

Situation of Art Organizations during COVID-19: Malaysia and International

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the visual arts ecosystem. In Malaysia, the report *COVID-19: The Impact on Malaysian Visual Arts Scene* (Sedon et al., 2021) found that most art exhibitions had to be postponed or canceled during the Movement Control Order (MCO). This affected the financial sustainability of galleries and the visibility of artists, forcing them to shift to digital platforms as an alternative space. However, the impact of virtual exhibitions did not fully replace the physical interactions and social networks that are the main features of art exhibitions.

At the international level, art organizations and major galleries also faced the same challenges. According to Szostak (2022), global curatorial practices began to focus on hybrid exhibitions, the use of virtual reality (VR) technology, and digital documentation to ensure the continuity of art activities. This phenomenon also created opportunities for smaller institutions and “peripheral” regions to become more involved in global networks through virtual platforms.

Overall, the pandemic became a spark for the transformation of how art organizations operate and how curators devised new strategies. Although infrastructure and digital literacy challenges remain, the pandemic experience demonstrated the necessity for art organizations to maintain flexibility and innovation in adapting to crises.

In shaping this study, a review of previous research found that the qualitative methodology is an appropriate approach to understanding artistic phenomena, as it allows researchers to examine the experiences, meanings, and strategies used by artists and art organizations. For example, the study *The Role of Visual Art in Facing the Corona Pandemic* by Duaa Alashari (2022) used qualitative content analysis to examine how visual artworks convey meaning in the context of the pandemic. Szostak’s (2022) study on *Art Management during the COVID-19 Pandemic* employed interviews with art practitioners and found that art management required new strategies to adapt to digital environments and to manage relationships with audiences. Meanwhile, Ong et al. (2023), in the study *Emerging Stronger from COVID-19 through Arts*, used a qualitative narrative approach to explore the role of art in conveying public health messages in Malaysia.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to identify the situation of visual art exhibition activities and curatorial practices in Kelantan in the post-pandemic period (2020–2022). Secondary data were obtained from academic articles and literature, official reports, the websites of art organizations, and the official social media accounts of these organizations. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with representatives of selected art organizations (gallery managers, curators, or association committee members). These interviews aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of:

- i. the forms of exhibitions organized throughout 2020 to 2022,
- ii. changes in curatorial practices,
- iii. the challenges and opportunities that emerged in the post-pandemic period.

The interview data were transcribed verbatim before being analyzed and subsequently validated using source triangulation by combining interview data, official documents, and secondary sources obtained from official documents (exhibition reports, digital catalogues), the websites of art organizations, and social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) used as communication and promotional spaces by the organizations.

Based on the mapping of Kelantan's visual art ecosystem conducted by Balai Seni Negara (2021), there were 28 galleries, residencies, and visual art studios as well as three (3) organizations (associations/communities/collectives) that were still active. From this total, purposive sampling was carried out using the following criteria:

- i. Organizations that existed prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and continued to operate in the post-pandemic period.
- ii. Not merely small-scale galleries or studios that only exhibited personal works.
- iii. Had organized themed exhibitions, whether solo or group, with a clear curatorial structure or at least a systematic exhibition framework for public visits.

Following this screening, only four (4) galleries and three (3) art associations were selected as the study sample.

Findings and Discussion

The selection of research subjects was conducted through non-random, purposive sampling, directly related to the scope of the study. According to the mapping of Kelantan's arts ecosystem carried out by the National Art Gallery in 2021, there were 28 galleries, residencies, and visual art studios as well as three registered organizations (associations/communities/collectives) still actively engaged in visual art activities with communities and target groups.

Table 1: List Of Galleries, Art Residencies And Visual Art Studios By Balai Seni Negara (2021)

No	Organization	Location
1	Balai Seni Lukis Kelantan	Kota Bharu
2	Balai Kartun Rossem (BKR)	Kota Bharu
3	SENDI Studio & Galeri (SSG)	Bachok
4	Galeri Kotak Seni	Kota Bharu
5	Galeri Seni Visual & Warisan Kelantan, Bazar Tok Guru	Kota Bharu
6	Galeri Seni Lukis Pak Ayub	Kota Bharu
7	Galeri Seni Lukis Ismail Kadir	Kota Bharu
8	Galeri Khairil Hussein	Kota Bharu
9	Galeri Payeguri	Kota Bharu
10	Galeri Mokte Rende	Kota Bharu
11	Abdullah Gallery	Kota Bharu
12	Titik Art Galeri	Pasir Mas

13	Lakarasa Studio & Galeri	Kota Bharu
14	Al- Amin Café & Art Galery	Machang
15	7D Fantasy Museum	Pasir Mas
16	Matliey Art	Kota Bharu
17	Hano Art	Kota Bharu
18	Rumah Ladang Contemporary Art Studio	Machang
19	Varna Art Studio	Kota Bharu
20	Illias Art Studio	Kota Bharu
21	Eiro Studio	Machang
22	ACM Studio	Ketereh
23	I.D.studio	Tumpat
24	Studio Mokte Rende	Kota Bharu
25	Studio Rusli Senik	Kota Bharu
26	Port Pelukis	Kota Bharu
27	Rumah	Pasir Mas
28	Teratak warna	Bachok

Table 2: List of Registered Associations, Communities, and Collectives Still Active in Kelantan by The National Art Gallery (2021)

No	PERSATUAN/ KOMUNITI/ KOLEKTIF	Lokasi
1	Persatuan Pelukis Kelantan (PESENI)	Kota Bharu
2	Persatuan Seniman dan Warisan Kelantan (PESTA)	Kota Bharu
3	Persatuan Penggiat Seni Lukis (PELUKIS) Kelantan	Kota Bharu

From this list of galleries, residencies, and studios, only four were identified as having organized themed exhibitions, either solo or group, structured with a curatorial framework or at least a systematic framework for public access. These were Balai Seni Lukis Kelantan (BSLK), Balai Kartun Rossem (BKR), Kotak Seni Gallery, and Sendi Studio & Gallery (SSG). Accordingly, representatives from these four galleries and representatives from each registered association were selected as the research subjects as follows:

- i. Curator, BSLK
- ii. Founder/owner, BKR
- iii. Curator, Kotak Seni Gallery
- iv. Founder/owner, SSG
- v. President, PESENI
- vi. President, PESTA
- vii. President, PELUKIS

Research Findings

This study examined the situation of visual art exhibition activities and curatorial practices in Kelantan during the post-pandemic period of 2020 to 2022. Data were collected through interviews with several art organizations that play significant roles in the local art ecosystem, namely BSLK, PESENI, PESTA, PELUKIS, SSG, BKR, and Kotak Seni. The findings show that each of these organizations demonstrated different experiences in managing exhibitions,

adapting curatorial practices, and facing the challenges and opportunities that emerged in the post-pandemic context as shown in the table below;

Table 3: Comparison of Digital Adoption, Curatorial Practices, and Post-Pandemic Status of Kelantan Art Organizations

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Digital Adoption Level (2020–2022)</i>	<i>Curatorial Practices</i>	<i>Post-Pandemic Status</i>
<i>BSLK</i>	Low; used digital platforms only for two online competitions (cartoon & JPJ road-safety)	Ad hoc; no dedicated curator; program-driven rather than concept-driven	Returned to physical exhibitions; strengthened networks through online competitions
<i>PESENI</i>	Very low; attempts at online exhibitions ineffective due to low digital literacy	No structured curatorial framework; activity limited to WhatsApp/Google Meet during MCO	Gradual recovery through small-scale physical exhibitions; recognized need for digital literacy
<i>PESTA</i>	Low; shared artworks via WhatsApp; minimal digital presentation	Community-based curatorial practice; later began exploring digital catalogues through PMBK	Strong revival post-pandemic through public exhibitions in malls, museums, parks
<i>PELUKIS</i>	Moderate; one of the earliest to attempt virtual exhibitions via Facebook	Informal, community-driven curatorial structure	Resumed physical exhibitions; increased awareness of digital potentials
<i>SSG</i>	High; first digital organization; founded ASEDAS (international online exhibition)	Progressive digital curatorship; integration of contemporary digital art & Metaverse concepts	Expanded international presence; recognized as a pioneer of digital art in Kelantan
<i>BKR</i>	High; international collaborations, online seminars, talks, and exhibitions; temporary use only	Competition-focused curatorial logic; insists on physical exhibitions as core artistic experience	Returned strongly to physical exhibitions; strengthened international reputation
<i>Kotak Seni</i>	High; sustained engagement via social media, online competitions and digital promotions	Hybrid curatorial model: digital-first engagement + physical exhibitions post-pandemic	Maintained momentum; strong potential as digital literacy training hub for young artists

Before the pandemic, virtual exhibitions were not a primary choice among visual artists in Kelantan, as there were no records of virtual exhibitions or digital presentations organized by any art organization or individual artist in Kelantan, whether in written records, catalogues, or digital archives, until 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Even then, the number of such events was too small to make a significant impact on the continuity of Kelantan's art scene in the post-pandemic era. Up to July 2021, only one association, PELUKIS, had taken the initiative to organize a virtual exhibition through the social media platform Facebook, and a virtual experimental project called *Tumbuktikus* was launched in 2020, focusing on exploring the internet as a platform for new media art. The art scene in Kelantan appeared somewhat unprepared or had not fully adapted to changes that were highly critical for the survival and relevance of visual art organizations during such a challenging time.

In terms of the forms of exhibitions organized, clear differences can be seen between traditional organizations and those that emerged or expanded in the digital era. BSLK, for instance, did not organize large-scale physical exhibitions throughout the pandemic. Instead, they only conducted two online art competitions: an international cartoon competition in collaboration with BKR and another themed competition on road safety in partnership with the Road Transport Department (JPJ). PESENI faced even greater difficulties as attempts to hold online exhibitions were ineffective due to the lack of digital literacy among its members. During the MCO period, the association's activities were mostly limited to meetings via WhatsApp or Google Meet, and exhibitions only resumed after restrictions were eased.

In contrast, SSG emerged during the pandemic with a distinctly different orientation. Established in 2021, this gallery focused on digital art and successfully founded the ASEAN Southeast Asia Digital Art Show (ASEDAS), organized online with participants from around the world. This initiative not only ensured the continuity of art exhibitions during the crisis but also elevated SSG's reputation on the international stage. PESTA, as a more community-oriented association, was severely affected by the closure of its gallery space in Bazar Tok Guru. Exhibition activities were only modestly continued through artwork sharing in WhatsApp groups with specific themes. However, once the pandemic subsided, PESTA became active again with physical exhibitions held at multiple locations, including KB Mall, Aeon Mall, the state museum, and recreational parks, thereby maintaining its role as an art organization closely connected to the community.

For BKR, the pandemic disrupted the continuity of its annual international cartoon competitions and exhibitions. Nevertheless, BKR quickly shifted to digital platforms, organizing online seminars, exhibitions, and talks, including invitations from abroad such as India and Iran. However, its founder emphasized that these digital activities were only temporary measures, as physical exhibitions were considered to provide the "soul of art" that virtual experiences could not replace. After the pandemic, BKR returned to organizing physical exhibitions with positive audience reception. Kotak Seni, meanwhile, stood out as one of the most prominent organizations during the pandemic. Despite having to close its physical premises, it maintained engagement with audiences through online art activities and drawing competitions, continuous promotion on Instagram and TikTok, and active interaction with local artists. In the post-pandemic period, Kotak Seni balanced physical exhibitions with digital curatorial strategies, making it a model of a community-based art organization that sustained momentum despite challenging circumstances.

From the perspective of curatorial practice, BSLK displayed a more ad hoc approach due to the absence of a dedicated curator. Its activities were largely limited to competitions or collaborative programs without clear curatorial narratives. PESENI, in contrast, showed significant weaknesses with the absence of a structured curatorial framework and the failure to adapt strategies towards digital practices. SSG, on the other hand, introduced progressive digital curatorial practices, not only through online exhibitions but also by integrating ideas such as the Metaverse and positioning digital art as part of the contemporary narrative. PESTA maintained a community-based curatorial approach, using WhatsApp as the main space for sharing artworks during the pandemic, and later attempted to move towards digital catalogues through collaboration with the Kelantan State Economic Development Corporation (PMBK). BKR, meanwhile, insisted that competitions and exhibitions were inseparable; although competitions could still be organized virtually, without physical exhibitions the art experience was seen as incomplete. Kotak Seni was among the most progressive, managing digital curatorial practices systematically through social media, supported by a young team handling digital content, promotion, and audience engagement.

Regarding the challenges and opportunities in the post-pandemic era, several similarities emerged across organizations. Almost all acknowledged weaknesses in digital literacy, especially among senior artists. The closure of exhibition spaces such as museums, galleries, and bazaars also negatively affected art activities, while lack of funding and the absence of professional curators remained pressing issues. Artists' motivation also declined during the MCO due to the loss of face-to-face interactions, which often serve as a source of inspiration for creativity. Nevertheless, the pandemic also opened new opportunities. BSLK and BKR managed to establish international connections through online cartoon competitions, while PESENI, PESTA, and PELUKIS recognized the need to improve digital literacy among their members. SSG stood out as a pioneer of digital art in Kelantan with a strong global network. PESTA gained advantages through collaboration with PMBK, which not only provided a permanent space at Bazar Tok Guru but also planned digital promotion strategies in the context of tourism. BKR strengthened its international reputation through invitations to serve as a jury member in overseas cartoon competitions. Kotak Seni demonstrated strength as an art organization capable of integrating both digital and physical curatorial strategies, with potential to serve as a training hub for digital literacy among local artists.

Overall, the findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic became a dividing line between art organizations that were able to adapt to technology and those that fell behind. Organizations such as SSG and Kotak Seni excelled by quickly adopting digital strategies, while traditional organizations such as PESENI, PELUKIS, and PESTA were more severely affected but gradually recovered after the pandemic. Nonetheless, all organizations demonstrated determination to remain relevant by leveraging their respective strengths, whether through community networks, international competitions, or digital marketing strategies. These findings affirm that technological adaptation is no longer optional but an essential requirement for the sustainability of visual art exhibition culture in Kelantan.

Conclusion And Future Research Directions

This study identified the situation of visual art exhibitions and curatorial practices in Kelantan during the post-pandemic period of 2020 to 2022, focusing on six main art organizations: BSLK, PESENI, PELUKIS, PESTA, SSG, BKR, and Kotak Seni. The findings show that the COVID-19 pandemic was not merely a health crisis, but also a turning point that tested the

resilience of the local visual arts ecosystem, involving shifts in income sources, uncertainty, and financial burdens during the closure of art activities (Jones, 2022). It highlights how the crisis compelled organizations to reconsider models of art production, marketing, and institutional sustainability (Jeannotte, 2021).

Overall, traditional organizations such as PESENI and PESTA faced significant difficulties due to weak digital literacy and reliance on physical exhibitions. Nevertheless, they continued community activities through basic platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook and began to recover with local-scale physical exhibitions in the post-pandemic period. This reflects how art workers and organizations adjusted their entrepreneurial practices in the context of change (Skaggs et al., 2025). BSLK and BKR, meanwhile, used digital strategies as temporary measures to maintain continuity, but later returned to prioritizing physical exhibitions once the crisis subsided.

In contrast, newer and more progressive organizations such as SSG and Kotak Seni demonstrated a higher level of adaptability. Both positioned digital technology as the core of their curatorial practices, whether through international virtual exhibitions or continuous promotion on social media. This proves that digital strategies not only ensured the continuity of art activities but also opened opportunities to expand networks at the global level. Kotak Seni were led by relatively younger teams with higher levels of digital literacy, greater familiarity with social media platforms, and stronger awareness of contemporary global art trends. For SSG, its founder's international exposure, prior involvement in digital art communities, and established networks in ASEAN and beyond enabled the gallery to conceptualize ASEDAS as a large-scale online exhibition model, something traditional organizations did not have the capacity or expertise to execute. Kotak Seni, meanwhile, benefitted from a youth-driven management team that approached curatorial work through digital-first strategies, treating social media and online art activities as legitimate extensions of gallery practice rather than supplementary promotional tools. These leadership qualities; age, skill orientation, and global connectedness created structural advantages that allowed both organizations to operate with agility during the pandemic.

Resource flexibility also played an important role. Unlike PESENI, PESTA, and PELUKIS, which relied heavily on physical spaces, volunteer structures, and community-based operations, SSG and Kotak Seni had lower infrastructural dependency and were therefore less constrained by lockdown restrictions. Their digital-forward orientation prior to the pandemic reduced transition costs and allowed them to maintain visibility during periods when traditional organizations struggled to mobilize members or secure funding for online initiatives. These differences highlight that successful digital adaptation was not merely a response to crisis but a reflection of pre-existing organizational capacities, leadership orientations, and the extent of international or digital exposure prior to the pandemic.

In conclusion, the pandemic accelerated the need to reassess exhibition and curatorial strategies in Kelantan. Technological adaptation is no longer a secondary option but a fundamental requirement to ensure the sustainability of visual art exhibition culture in the post-pandemic era.

Future Research Directions

Based on these findings, several areas can be explored in future research. First, this study was limited to visual art organizations in Kelantan; therefore, further research could be conducted through cross-state comparisons to assess different adaptation patterns based on socio-cultural contexts and infrastructure. Second, in-depth studies could focus on the role of young curators and digital literacy, as the younger generation demonstrates a higher level of technological acceptance compared to senior artists.

In addition, future studies could examine models of funding and government policies in supporting the sustainability of visual art organizations, particularly in building digital capacity and online platforms for marketing artworks. Longitudinal research is also recommended to evaluate the long-term effects of digital strategies on the sustainability of visual art organizations after the pandemic.

Finally, future research has the potential to combine quantitative approaches, such as surveys of artists and visitors, with qualitative findings. This would provide a more comprehensive picture of the extent to which technology influences curatorial practices, audience reception, and the effectiveness of visual art exhibitions in Malaysia.

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