

Transforming Rural Entrepreneurship Through Digital Marketing

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10100239>

Received: 16 January 2026; Accepted: 21 January 2026; Published: 02 February 2026

ABSTRACT

The transformation of rural entrepreneurship through digital marketing is a key driver of rural economic development in Malaysia. This study examines how digital marketing platforms have succeeded, focusing on several success stories, including Jungle Girl (Pahang), Agropreneur Perlis, Nanakamalbiz (Johor), Biskut JK (Perak), and food entrepreneurs in Sabah. Descriptive qualitative methods were used, leveraging academic reports, e-commerce data, and government policies such as MyDIGITAL and the MADANI Budget 2026. The study found that digital marketing strategies, such as the use of social media, e-commerce, storytelling, and live stream advertising, helped expand markets, increase sales, and strengthen the identity of rural products. The study also addressed challenges such as lack of infrastructure support or uneven internet connectivity in rural communities, which hindered optimal access to digital transformation. In conclusion, digital marketing not only strengthens rural economies but also empowers rural communities as active players in the country's digital economic ecosystem.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Rural Entrepreneurship, Economic Development, Malaysia Rural Economy, E-commerce Transformation

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has been a key catalyst for the transition from a traditional economy to a digital economy, with advances in information and communication technology (ICT) revolutionizing the global entrepreneurial landscape by accelerating innovation in business structures and improving market access. In the era of the Digital Economy, this transformation is not limited to urban areas but is increasingly impacting rural communities, which were previously considered marginalized in the modern entrepreneurial ecosystem (Zainal et al., 2021). In Malaysia, the rapid pace of digital transformation, coupled with strategic government initiatives such as the 12th Malaysia Plan, the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030, and the implementation of MyDIGITAL, have opened up new opportunities for rural entrepreneurs to tap into broader markets through digital channels. This initiative aims to empower the micro, small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, especially those that were previously limited in terms of infrastructure, digital literacy and market networks (Economic Planning Unit, 2021). Digital marketing, which includes the use of social media, e-commerce platforms and content-based strategies, has emerged as a strategic tool that can increase brand visibility, strengthen customer relationships and accelerate business growth. In the context of rural entrepreneurs, digital marketing strategies are not only a catalyst for innovation but also an instrument for community economic empowerment (Abdullah & Hashim, 2020). This study aims to examine the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in improving the performance and resilience of rural entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Through case studies of several micro entrepreneurs such as Jungle Girl (Pahang), Agropreneur Perlis, Nanakamalbiz (Johor), and JK Biskut (Perak), this study will analyze how rural entrepreneurs can balance technology and digital strategies while identifying challenges and opportunities in implementing digital marketing to contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective policies and intervention strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have shown that digital marketing has an impact on the competitiveness and sustainability of rural businesses. Sharabati (2024) in the Asian Journal of Business Research stated that the implementation of digital technology is closely related to increased revenue and market expansion of local products. This is supported by Olalekan et al. (2024) who emphasized that social media-based marketing strategies strengthen customer relationships through two-way interactions, directly increasing trust in local products. Furthermore, the AIBES study (2025) found that increased digital literacy among rural entrepreneurs is closely related to the

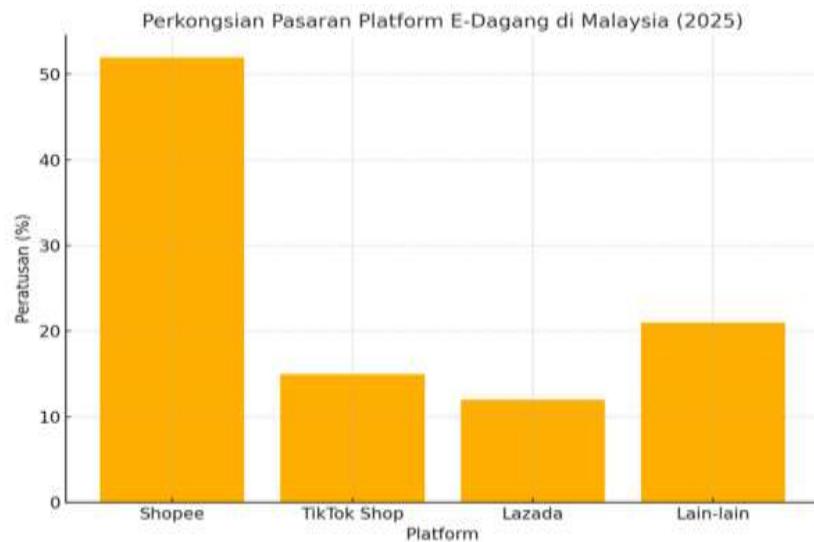
level of education and participation in workshops or seminars organized by government agencies such as MDEC and TEKUN. In the Malaysian context, this finding is in line with the case of Jungle Girl and Agropreneur Perlis, which used live streaming and storytelling marketing techniques to build brand trust and authenticity. In conclusion, this case study shows that digital marketing is not only a business strategy but also the fastest and easiest way without incurring high advertising costs.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that emphasizes a deep understanding of the digital marketing phenomenon in the real-life context of rural entrepreneurs. Secondary data were obtained from the Department of Statistics Malaysia report (2025), MDEC annual report (2024), journal articles (2020–2025), and media coverage such as Bernama. A source triangulation approach was also used by comparing academic findings with industry data to ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis results.

Marketing through social media platforms

Developments The development of digital marketing through e-commerce and social media platforms such as Shopee, TikTok Shop, and Facebook has been a key aspect of the business transformation of rural entrepreneurs in Malaysia over the past five years, marked by the increasing use of digital technology as a market expansion strategy. Recent statistics show that e-commerce transactions in Malaysia continue to increase, with a growth rate of around 14% per annum, driven by major platforms including Shopee and TikTok Shop, which are driving the penetration of digital sales among small and micro businesses (NewNormz, 2025). TikTok Shop, in particular, is recording rapid growth with active users increasing dramatically between 2023 and 2025, supported by a viral content marketing strategy and customer engagement through short videos, positioning the platform as a low-cost, high-impact marketing tool for small businesses (ezi-payroll.com, 2025). E-commerce data also shows that the social commerce market in Malaysia is expected to reach one billion USD by 2025, with over 25 million potential social media users as active buyers, making platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram a key marketing channel for entrepreneurs in rural areas (grtech.com, 2025; DataReportal via Digital 2025). Shopee Malaysia, through initiatives such as 'Kempen Tani' (Farmer Campaign), has provided training and resources to farmers and agri-entrepreneurs in rural areas. Nearly 100 participants attended workshops and live streaming sessions, which successfully increased product visibility and sales, thus supporting digital transformation in rural communities (Bernama, 2024; SAYS.com, 2025). Case studies of successful rural entrepreneurs show that businesses such as Nanakamalbiz, a traditional food business from Johor, successfully expanded their market nationwide using Shopee, while Biskut JK from Perak recorded an increase in sales of up to RM4,000 in a day during a major sales campaign after adopting the Shopee Live marketing strategy (Bernama, 2024). Furthermore, empirical studies have shown that digital platforms such as TikTok, Facebook and Instagram have a significant impact on increasing sales, especially through frequent advertising and active customer engagement, although entrepreneurs face challenges such as high advertising costs and creative content requirements (Digital Marketing Effectiveness, Perlis, 2025).



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2025)

A study titled "The Effectiveness of Digital Marketing in Increasing the Competitiveness of Asnaf Entrepreneurs" (2025) found that the active use of social media and digital marketing platforms helped increase sales and market reach among asnaf entrepreneurs in Perlis, with formal and informal training factors contributing to the effectiveness of digital strategies (ResearchGate, 2025). Another study also highlighted that although there are barriers such as the cost of digital access and low technological literacy in rural areas, social factors, technological facilities, and supportive conditions influence the acceptance and success of digital marketing use among agricultural entrepreneurs (Jurnal Intelek, 2025).

The Role of Government through Budget & Digital Policy

The Malaysian government has emphasized the role of digitalization in economic development through the 2026 State Budget (APBN), particularly through allocations supporting an inclusive digital ecosystem, such as the RM53 million Malaysia Digital Accelerator Grant designed to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies in businesses, including digital marketing, data analytics, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. This initiative is recognized by the Ministry of Digital as a catalyst for technological growth for all segments of society including rural entrepreneurs (Malaysia Digital Accelerator Grant, APBN 2026). This allocation also reflects the government's commitment to strengthening access to digital tools and online marketing opportunities, as well as stimulating business innovation and competition at the micro and SME level, which are the backbone of the rural economy and can expand market reach through digital media.

In implementing this policy, the government also announced an allocation of RM350 million to strengthen the Digital Information Dissemination Centre (NADI) in Budget 2026 with the aim of developing digital skills for entrepreneurs and strengthening digital marketing support more broadly for rural communities—including training, workshops, and e-commerce networking programs that enable them to manage platforms such as Facebook, Allocation,25). This initiative is recognized as a strategic step to build an ecosystem that supports the growth of rural entrepreneurs in the digital era, providing them with opportunities to enhance their digital marketing capabilities, expand their markets online, and strengthen business competitiveness in Malaysia's growing digital economy.

The 2026 budget also emphasizes the implementation of the Malaysia Digital Economy Policy (MyDIGITAL) as a national strategy to strengthen global competitiveness through the integration of digital technologies across economic and social sectors. The policy emphasizes an "inclusive and integrated" approach, with the government allocating additional funds for the Go-eCommerce Onboarding Programme and the SME Digitalisation Grant, to help small entrepreneurs market their products online through recognised e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, Lazada and TikTok Shop. According to the MDEC Report (2024), over 1.3 million micro entrepreneurs in Malaysia have registered with the Go-eCommerce initiative, with 25% of them from rural areas. This demonstrates the effectiveness of government interventions in expanding digital engagement at the grassroots level, thus reducing the digital divide between urban and rural areas (MDEC, 2024; MyDIGITAL Blueprint, 2023).

From a macroeconomic perspective, this government move also strengthens the implementation of the Digital Economy and Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Industry4WRD) Action Plan coordinated by the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (MITI), where investment in digital skills and digital marketing is a key component to increase the efficiency and marketability of rural products. Overall, the government's strategy through this budget and digital policy not only supports the digitalization of rural businesses but also creates a more inclusive and sustainable digital economy ecosystem in line with the aspirations of the Malaysia Digital Economy Action Plan (MyDIGITAL) to make Malaysia a regional digital hub by 2030 (MyDIGITAL Unit, 2024, MOF, 2024).

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The findings highlight the need to strengthen collaboration between the government and the private sector in rural digital development. Through the MADANI 2026 Budget, the Malaysia Digital Accelerator Grant (MDAG), and the Go-eCommerce Onboarding Programme, the government has demonstrated its commitment to accelerating the adoption of digital technologies. However, the implementation of these policies needs to be monitored based on results to ensure tangible impact at the grassroots level. The main recommendation is to expand digital literacy training through NADI Centres and rural educational institutions, with a focus on digital content creation and analysis skills. The second recommendation is to develop rural e-commerce centres that

serve as joint marketing hubs and direct trading spaces for local entrepreneurs. In addition, the government and development banks should introduce digital micro-incentives such as advertising credits and internet data subsidies to reduce financial barriers. These recommendations need to be coordinated across regions to ensure the sustainability of business marketing over time.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of digital marketing has opened up new opportunities for rural entrepreneurs to thrive in the digital economy ecosystem. These initiatives range from traditional business concepts to digital marketing-based businesses. Studies show that digital marketing strategies not only increase income but also strengthen local cultural identities. Success stories such as Jungle Girl and Nanakamalbiz show that brand authenticity and strategic use of technology can transform the rural socio-economic environment. However, this success depends on government policy support, skills development, and a strong communication infrastructure to ensure long-term sustainability.

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