

Preserving Heritage, Embracing Digitalisation: Modern Marketing Strategies for Malaysian Traditional Craft Businesses

Siti Nur Izaura Bt Mohd Razis

Kolej Pengajian Seni Kreatif, Universiti Teknologi MARA Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100801099>

Received: 06 September 2026; Accepted: 11 September 2026; Published: 25 September 2026

ABSTRACT

The traditional craft sector in Malaysia is a significant nexus of entrepreneurship, artistic expression, cultural legacy, and regional economic growth. The knowledge and skills passed down through the generations are embodied in traditional crafts like batik, songket, weaving, wood carving, ceramics, metalworking, rattan products, and other handmade cultural goods. However, traditional craft entrepreneurs now face new obstacles due to shifting customer behaviour, increased competition, globalisation, and increasing digitisation. In order to reach younger and geographically scattered consumers, marketing strategies that formerly relied on physical retail, exhibits, craft fairs, tourism, personal networks, and word-of-mouth may no longer be adequate. In order to preserve cultural authenticity and heritage value, this conceptual paper looks at how Malaysian traditional craft companies might incorporate contemporary digital marketing techniques. The study suggests an integrated conceptual framework connecting Cultural Heritage Value, Digital Marketing Adoption, Digital Storytelling, Customer Engagement, and Sustainable Business Performance. It does this by drawing on literature on digital marketing, cultural entrepreneurship, customer engagement, social media marketing, e-commerce, and business sustainability. The article makes the case that traditional artisan methods shouldn't be thought of as being replaced by digitisation. Rather, digital technologies can serve as channels for communicating cultural meanings, craftsmanship, artisan tales, and legacy narratives to modern markets. The suggested framework emphasises customer engagement as a crucial step toward sustainable performance, digital marketing as a means of market accessibility, digital storytelling as a link between heritage and modern consumers, and cultural heritage value as the basis for craft differentiation. In Malaysia's traditional craft sector, the study makes a conceptual contribution by framing digital business change and heritage preservation as complimentary rather than antagonistic goals.

Keywords: traditional craft, Malaysian handicraft, digital marketing, cultural heritage, digital story telling, customer engagement, business sustainability, craft entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge, abilities, cultural customs, resources, and artistic traditions of Malaysia's people have created the country's rich and varied craft legacy. Textiles like batik and songket, weaving, ceramics, wood carving, metal crafts, forest-based crafts, and many other forms connected to local and regional identities are examples of traditional craft goods.

Traditional crafts are economically significant in addition to their cultural importance. Malaysian craft activities provide sources of primary and supplementary income and involve craft communities from Malaysia's diverse ethnic and cultural groups. The Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation has consequently emphasised both preservation of craft heritage and the development and marketing of commercially viable craft products.

Nonetheless, the industry's marketing environment is changing significantly. Direct selling, physical stores, exhibitions, craft festivals, tourism-related marketplaces, government-run promotional programs, personal networks, and word-of-mouth marketing have all historically been major sources of support for craftsmen. Although these methods offer beneficial direct communication between producers and consumers, they are often geographically limited and rely on the presence of actual customers.

The experience reaffirmed how crucial it is for craft enterprises to reach customers through alternate means. Through social media, e-commerce, digital marketplaces, websites, online communication, and digital payment systems, digital platforms give traditional enterprises the chance to overcome geographical constraints.

In Malaysia's artisan environment, the shift has already started. For instance, during the Movement Control Order in April 2020, Kraftangan Malaysia launched E-Kraf Bazar as an online marketing campaign. The platform integrates online product advertising, interactivity, and live craft demonstrations with social media to link craft entrepreneurs, consumers, and enthusiasts.

However, the topic of whether traditional craft enterprises should sell their goods online becomes increasingly complicated as a result of digitalisation. Authenticity, workmanship, cultural symbolism, human skill, heritage tales, and linkages to local communities and locations all contribute significantly to the value of traditional crafts. As a result, the difficulty is:

How can traditional craft companies adopt contemporary internet marketing strategies without compromising the cultural authenticity that distinguishes their goods?

In order to answer this question, a framework for digitally enabled sustainable craft business is proposed, and the interaction between historical preservation and contemporary marketing is examined.

Background of the Malaysian Traditional Craft Industry

Traditional crafts are a symbol of both cultural expression and economic activity. Craft items, in contrast to mass-produced consumer goods, often have symbolic implications related to local resources, traditional knowledge, cultural customs, community identity, and skilled craftsmanship. Entrepreneurs operating at various levels, from individual and family-based producers to more economically developed firms, are part of Malaysia's craft ecosystem.

The industry showed significant commercial activity prior to the COVID-19 disruption. According to official figures, 11,096 workers and 5,816 craft enterprises sold over RM519.7 million worth of goods in Malaysia in 2019. Recent events point to ongoing economic potential. According to Malaysian government data, about 7,000 registered business owners sold crafts for about RM409.9 million in 2024.

As a result, the Malaysian craft industry is significant both culturally and commercially. However, in order to maintain the industry, craft entrepreneurs must adapt to shifting consumer demands. Before making a purchase, modern consumers are increasingly coming into contact with brands through digital touch points.

Social media posts, videos, search engines, online marketplaces, influencer referrals, and online communities can all be used to find products. Traditional craft enterprises therefore require skills that go beyond production workmanship. They increasingly need expertise in branding, content production, social media communication, online customer relationship management, e-commerce, digital storytelling, online payment, digital market development, and photography and video.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it sheds light on how Malaysian traditional craft companies can employ contemporary digital marketing while maintaining their authenticity and cultural legacy. Although traditional crafts like batik, songket, weaving, ceramics, and wood carving are significant aspects of Malaysian culture, craft business owners must adjust to shifting consumer preferences and the expanding usage of digital platforms.

The study emphasises how digital storytelling, social media, video content, and online sales can assist craft entrepreneurs in expanding their market reach and enhancing consumer interaction. It highlights how crucial it is for digital marketing communication to preserve traditional expertise, craftsmanship, and cultural identity.

Problem Statement

Despite Malaysian traditional crafts' cultural importance and economic potential, many craft entrepreneurs work in a competitive market that is changing quickly. Limited market accessibility is the first issue.

Although they frequently rely on geographic closeness, traditional marketing channels such as exhibitions, festivals, physical stores, tourism outlets, and direct selling can effectively promote craftsmanship. Opportunities for small producers looking for domestic or foreign customers are limited by this reliance.

The digital capability gap is the second issue.

Although social media account creation alone does not constitute an efficient digital marketing plan, digital platforms have lowered barriers to market entry. Content strategy, consumer segmentation, platform selection, narrative, digital branding, customer interaction, and turning online attention into purchases are all important concepts for entrepreneurs to grasp.

The authenticity of culture is the third issue.

Businesses may be encouraged by rapid commercialisation to simplify, alter, or reposition traditional cultural features mainly in accordance with market trends. Product adaptation is essential for corporate sustainability, but over-commercialization can cause traditional products to lose their cultural significance.

Research Gap

First, a lot of the research on digital marketing focuses on mainstream SMEs and consumer businesses, while culturally ingrained micro and family craft businesses receive relatively little attention.

Second, studies of heritage preservation tend to focus less on business and marketing transformation and more on conservation, cultural identity, artistic activities, and the transfer of traditional knowledge.

Third, adoption of technology is frequently presented in digitalisation research as a means of achieving efficiency and competitiveness. But for traditional craft companies, technology needs to convey craftsmanship, cultural narratives, and authenticity all at once.

Fourth, a single conceptual model for Malaysian traditional craft enterprises still does not adequately combine the links between cultural heritage value, digital marketing adoption, digital storytelling, consumer engagement, and sustainable company success.

In order to fill these gaps, this article suggests a paradigm for heritage-centered digital marketing.

Research Objectives

The paper aims to :

RO1: To Examine the role of traditional and modern marketing strategies in Malaysian traditional craft businesses.

RO2: To Identify important digital marketing strategies that can enhance market accessibility and customer engagement among Malaysian craft entrepreneurs.

RO3: To Examine how cultural heritage and authenticity can be incorporated into digital marketing communication.

Research Questions

RQ1: How are traditional marketing approaches being transformed by digitalisation within Malaysian traditional craft businesses?

RQ2: Which modern digital marketing strategies are most relevant to traditional craft entrepreneurs?

RQ3: How can Malaysian craft businesses communicate cultural authenticity through digital channels?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysian Traditional Craft as Cultural and Economic Heritage

Traditional craft encompasses more than just making functional or decorative objects. It stands for accumulated skills, knowledge, cultural values, identity, craftsmanship, symbolism, and production techniques that have been handed down over the ages. Traditional crafts like batik, songket, weaving, wood carving, porcelain, metalwork, bamboo, and rattan craft comprise a large portion of Malaysia's cultural heritage. Their significance is therefore simultaneously cultural, social, and economic.

Traditional craft products, in contrast to mass-produced goods, often derive their worth from connections to authenticity, location, craftsmanship, and cultural significance. According to Downey, McAdam, and Crowley (2024), craft-based businesses use connections to tradition, location, and quality to set themselves apart from mass-produced substitutes. This implies that cultural identity and traditional knowledge should be seen as strategic assets that can create market difference rather than just as traits that need to be preserved.

In the Malaysian context, heritage products also give small enterprises and communities the chance to start their own businesses. However, the ability of craft firms to remain profitable is becoming more and more important to the survival of craft traditions. Thus, business sustainability and heritage preservation are strongly intertwined. The continuation and intergenerational transfer of traditional skills may become more challenging if craft entrepreneurs are unable to create enough demand and revenue.

Digital Transformation and Modern Marketing

The relationship between companies and customers has changed significantly as a result of digital transformation. Without relying solely on in-person interactions, digital technologies allow firms to market items, interact with consumers, conduct transactions, gather market data, and sustain relationships.

Digital marketing is especially crucial for small and medium-sized businesses since it can offer reasonably accessible ways to increase market reach. Some of the geographical difficulties faced by small enterprises may be mitigated by social media, websites, online marketplaces, mobile communication, and digital commerce.

The adoption of social media marketing is influenced by organisational, technological, and environmental factors, according to research on Malaysian SMEs. Based on data from 214 Malaysian SMEs, Abbasi et al. (2022) discovered that the adoption of social media marketing was highly influenced by perceived relative advantage, perceived cost, top-management support, competitive pressure, and vendor pressure. Their results show that organisational preparedness and competitive conditions have an impact on digital adoption in addition to technological accessibility.

Traditional craft firms, many of which are tiny, small, or family-run operations with limited financial, technological, and human resources, should pay particular attention to this factor. These companies might not have specific marketing teams or staff members who specialise in creating digital content, in contrast to larger companies.

Stronger proof of this problem comes from research that focuses on Malaysian batik entrepreneurs. Social media was the most popular digital marketing channel used by participants, followed by mobile marketing, e-commerce marketplaces, websites, and search engine optimisation, according to Rosli and Juhdi's (2024) research of SME batik entrepreneurs in Terengganu. However, the survey found a number of obstacles, such as insufficient digital expertise and knowledge, a lack of financial and business resources, challenges in creating digital content, unpredictability in the business climate, and intellectual property issues.

These results show that platform adoption alone is insufficient for digital transformation in heritage businesses.

Craft entrepreneurs need to acquire skills that enable them to make smart use of digital technologies.

C. Digital Marketing Adoption among Malaysian Handicraft Entrepreneurs

Malaysian handicraft enterprises are becoming more aware of the significance of digital marketing. Small craft companies can interact directly with consumers through social media without having to spend a lot of money on traditional advertising.

William Jalil et al. (2022) conducted interviews with fifteen MSME handicraft entrepreneurs in Sarawak to examine their use of social media. Performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social relationship quality, social influence, and conducive factors were found to be significant themes linked to adoption. The results show that social media adoption by handicraft enterprises is not solely motivated by technology. Their propensity to engage in digital settings is also influenced by social connections, anticipated business advantages, and accessible support networks.

In a similar vein, Hassan et al. (2020) emphasised how social media can foster demand for traditional Malaysian handicrafts while supporting the preservation of cultural values. According to their research, digital platforms can serve two purposes: they can promote market growth and increase public awareness of traditional craft heritage.

More recent studies on Orang Ulu handicrafts also show how important social media is for expanding market reach and visibility. According to Abdullah et al. (2025), social media marketing offers chances to promote Orang Ulu handicraft goods to larger audiences, proving the ongoing value of digital platforms for indigenous and culturally specific craft enterprises.

When combined, these findings imply that social media can enhance consumer-craft business communication. However, rather than looking at how legacy meanings are intentionally communicated through those platforms, a large portion of current study focuses on whether entrepreneurs adopt social media and which platforms they utilise.

RESEACH METHODOLOGY

This study looked at marketing strategies employed by traditional craft companies in Malaysia using a qualitative case study methodology. Because it enables the researcher to comprehend how craft entrepreneurs employ both conventional and contemporary marketing techniques in their real-world business environment, the case study method was chosen.

Semi-structured interviews with chosen craft businesses were used to gather data. Three primary topics were covered in the interviews: communication of cultural heritage and authenticity, the employment of digital marketing tactics, and old and modern marketing practices.

The participants were questioned about the marketing strategies they employed, the digital platforms they favoured, the ways in which digital marketing enabled them to connect with consumers, and how they conveyed the cultural significance of their goods.

Additionally, the study looked at specific social media posts, including images, videos, captions, and product details. This made it easier for the researcher to comprehend how traditional craft companies advertized their goods and cultural identities online.

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data. The three study objectives were used to categorise similar responses into themes.

FINDINGS

Role of Traditional and Modern Marketing Strategies

The results demonstrated that traditional marketing is still crucial for traditional craft companies in Malaysia. Exhibitions, craft fairs, physical stores, direct sales, and word-of-mouth advertising were typical traditional marketing strategies.

Because consumers could immediately view and handle the products, traditional marketing was beneficial. Additionally, it made it possible for craftspeople to describe the products' quality, manufacturing method, and cultural context.

But contemporary marketing has grown in significance. Craft entrepreneurs use social media and online platforms to market their goods to a larger consumer base.

The results imply that it is possible to combine classic and contemporary marketing strategies. While digital marketing offers a larger market reach and ongoing contact, traditional marketing offers a direct customer encounter.

Important Digital Marketing Strategies

According to the research, one of the most crucial digital marketing techniques employed by craft business owners is social media. Social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp were frequently used to advertize goods, interact with clients, and answer questions.

Because craft products are very visual, photos and brief movies were especially helpful. Customers were also better able to comprehend the labour and skill required to make handmade goods thanks to videos that demonstrated the production process. Because consumers could buy goods without going to physical stores, online selling and e-commerce also increased market accessibility.

Additionally, direct connection via WhatsApp, texts, and comments helped business owners forge closer bonds with their clients. In order to increase market accessibility and consumer engagement, social media marketing, short-form video, online retailing, and direct customer communication were shown to be crucial tactics.

Cultural Heritage and Authenticity in Digital Marketing

The results demonstrated how storytelling can be used to integrate cultural heritage and authenticity into digital marketing. Craft business owners are able to describe the background of the craftspeople, the production methods employed, the significance of traditional themes, and the history of their products.

For instance, business owners can explain the meaning of the batik motif and demonstrate how it is made rather than only providing a photo and pricing of a batik product. Customers' sense of authenticity can also be reinforced by images and videos of the craftspeople producing the goods.

The results imply that product sales should not be the exclusive goal of digital marketing. Additionally, it should convey traditional knowledge, craftsmanship, and cultural values.

DISCUSSION

The results show that traditional marketing is still crucial for Malaysian traditional craft companies. Customers can see products firsthand and gain confidence in the quality of handmade goods through physical exhibitions, direct selling, and craft fairs. However, because it primarily targets consumers in particular areas, conventional marketing has drawbacks. By enabling craft entrepreneurs to access clients from many locations, digital marketing helps get around this restriction. Because social media enables business owners to showcase their items visually, it is especially appropriate for traditional craft firms. Because they can illustrate traditional craftsmanship and show the production process, short films are very helpful.

The results also demonstrate that current and conventional marketing strategies shouldn't be viewed as distinct or antagonistic. Alternatively, both can be mixed together. While modern marketing offers greater market access and ongoing client communication, traditional marketing delivers in-person experience and human interaction. The significance of digital storytelling is also emphasised in the study. Marketing communications can benefit from the cultural narratives, meanings, and production expertise found in traditional artisan produ-

cts. The significance of digital storytelling is also emphasised in the study. Entrepreneurs can raise consumer awareness and appreciation of Malaysian traditional crafts by telling the back stories of their products.

Additionally, authenticity can develop into a significant competitive advantage. Conventional craft companies might not always be able to successfully compete with mass-produced goods on pricing. Nonetheless, their craftsmanship, cultural identity, handmade quality, and heritage worth allow them to set themselves apart.

Overall, the findings suggest the following relationship:



The study therefore suggests that Malaysian traditional craft entrepreneurs should use digital marketing as a tool to strengthen, rather than replace, their cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

According to this study, both conventional and contemporary marketing techniques are crucial for Malaysian traditional craft companies. While contemporary digital marketing enables business owners to reach larger markets, traditional marketing is still useful for direct consumer engagement, trust, and the tangible product experience. While contemporary digital marketing enables business owners to reach larger markets, traditional marketing is still useful for direct consumer engagement, trust, and the tangible product experience. Digital marketing tactics that are crucial for increasing market accessibility and customer involvement include social media, short videos, online retailing, and direct online communication.

The study also discovered that storytelling, artisan profiles, production-process content, and explanations of cultural meanings may all be used to integrate cultural heritage and authenticity into digital marketing.

Thus, by fusing traditional marketing with contemporary digital communication, Malaysian traditional craft companies may embrace digitalisation while maintaining their legacy

REFERENCES

1. Abbasi, G. A., Abdul Rahim, N. F., Wu, H., Iranmanesh, M., & Ng, B. C. K. (2022). Determinants of SME's social media marketing adoption: Competitive industry as a moderator. *SAGE Open*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211067220>
2. Downey, H., McAdam, M., & Crowley, C. (2024). Authenticity and craft entrepreneurship: The interplay of passion and place. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 36(9–10), 1275–1293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2024.2313549>
3. Hassan, H., Sade, A. B., Migin, M. W., & Ooi, S. K. (2020). Cultivating traditional Malaysian handicraft market demand through social media technology. In 2020 IEEE 8th R10 Humanitarian Technology Conference (R10-HTC). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/R10-HTC49770.2020.9357002>
4. Jumbulingam, K., Fadel, H., Al-Daqqaq, D. M. A., & Mimaki, C. A. (2024). Examining the importance of digital marketing strategies in brand creation for SMEs in Malaysia. *Review of Management, Accounting, and Business Studies*, 5(1), 29–40. <https://doi.org/10.38043/revenue.v5i1.5285>
5. Rosli, R. H., & Juhdi, N. H. (2024). Adoption of digital marketing technology: A case study of Terengganu SME batik entrepreneurs. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Information Technology and Multimedia*, 13(2), 150–165. <https://doi.org/10.17576/apjitm-2024-1302-01>
6. William Jalil, S., Haris, N., Putit, L., & Awang Shuib, A. R. (2022). An exploration into the drivers of social media usage among MSME handicraft entrepreneurs. *Journal of International Business, Economics and Entrepreneurship*, 7(1), 53–61. <https://doi.org/10.24191/jibe.v7i1.18667>