

Enhancing the Financial Performance of Orang Asli Entrepreneurs in Malaysia through Digital Marketing Initiatives

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Abstract

Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia encounter significant challenges in improving household income and achieving commendable business performance. Engagement in digital marketing strategies has become an integral initiative for enhancing the financial performance of businesses by increasing visibility, market reach, and access to customers. This study aims to examine the impact of digital marketing engagement on the financial performance of Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia. The method of analysis in this study uses multiple regression linear statistical analysis. The sample study collected 147 Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia as respondents. The results showed that digital marketing on products, prices and places affects Orang Asli entrepreneurs' financial performance. Digital marketing on promotion has no effect. This proves that Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia still lack digitalization in promoting their products. The implication of the study is to highlight the potential engagement of digital marketing to boost economic growth and reduce inequality among Orang Asli in Malaysia.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Entrepreneur Performance, Orang Asli

Introduction

In an era of rapid digital development, entrepreneurial marketing combines innovative approaches with traditional marketing techniques to optimize business results. The integration of technology into marketing strategies is essential for enhancing digital marketing capabilities (DMC). It promotes agility and responsiveness to market changes, which can lead to improved digital marketing capabilities (Mithas et al., 2013). Entrepreneurs who use technology effectively are better equipped to implement digital marketing strategies

that resonate with their target audiences (Rupeika-Apoga et al., 2022). Digital marketing strategies enable entrepreneurs to increase their visibility, engage with customers and ultimately improve their business performance. The integration of digital marketing into entrepreneurial practices is critical to improving the business performance of SMEs (Buratti, et al., 2018). Therefore, by adopting effective digital strategies, utilizing social media, embracing technological advancements, and committing to ongoing training, entrepreneurs can significantly improve their market reach and customer engagement, ultimately leading to greater success in a competitive landscape. Social media platforms are critical tools for entrepreneurs to promote their brands and products. A study highlighted that effective use of social media improves brand awareness and fosters customer relationships, which are essential for increasing sales and improving overall business performance (Iqmar Omar et al. 2020). The interactive nature of social media allows entrepreneurs to get immediate feedback and align their strategies accordingly.

This research focuses on Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Orang Asli (OA) is an indigenous minority group living in Peninsular Malaysia, and they are also a vulnerable group. OA communities are located in rural areas with inadequate internet connectivity (Poline, & Tan, 2021). Previous studies documented several digital marketing challenges of OA that hinder their participation in the digital economy. Selvaratnam et al. (2022) convey that OA lack of reliable access significantly restricts their ability to engage in online marketing and e-commerce. A study highlighted that while some youths are active on social media, only a small fraction engage in online purchases due to these connectivity issues. Many OA entrepreneurs lack the necessary skills to effectively utilize digital marketing tools (Jamak et al. 2010; Karim et al. 2018). The marketing capability of OA entrepreneurs is observed still lacking in terms of presentable packaging, labeling, and marketing management (Tuah et al. 2023). Furthermore, marketing capabilities can specifically provide better market sensing, customer relationships, and the ability to strengthen the bonds between channels in the market to enhance their business performance (Akpór-Robaro & Erigbe, 2019). Nonetheless, studies of digital marketing's impact on OA entrepreneurs' performance have limited evidence. Therefore, there is potential for the OA to thrive through digital marketing and entrepreneurship.

According to the issues and evidence of the aforementioned studies above, this study aims to provide new evidence on the effect of digital marketing engagement on the financial performance of OA entrepreneurs in Malaysia. The findings would contribute to the Malaysian government's policy on the involvement of OA entrepreneurs in digital marketing. These issues have a multifaceted approach that combines product promotion, education, entrepreneurship development, and community support initiatives. Henceforth, enhancing OA entrepreneurs' digital marketing involvement is essential to improving their productivity and long-term viability, and will improve their economic performance and ensure sustainable development within their communities. The implication of this study is to give evidence addressing digital marketing to greatly increase the potential for economic growth of OA entrepreneur performance. Consequently, reducing significant barriers to digital marketing of OA that remain requires concerted efforts from both government and non-governmental organizations.

Literature Review

According to Sawicki (2016), digital marketing is the utilization of digital technology for the purpose of creating channels through which the interest of potential customers may be attracted, objectives achieved and client needs better satisfied. Digital marketing is conducted through digital channels that present a brand to a vast number of prospective clients online (Al Deehani, 2023). The term "digital marketing" is used to describe the utilization of electronic channels for the promotion of brands or products. The implementation of digital marketing enables businesses to direct targeted communications, including information, advertisements, and promotions, to specific clientele. Moreover, digital marketing is defined as a form of communication that enables consumers and traders, or business partners, to interact through the use of electronic devices, digital information, and communication channels, thereby establishing a network of interactions (Sokolova & Titova, 2019).

As indicated by Wee et al. (2013), the Orang Asli are also known as *Aslian* or *Sakai*. They are a group of people who reside in forested areas and adhere to a lifestyle that is relatively undifferentiated from that of their ancestors. Additionally, they do not adhere to a particular religion or adhere to any fixed set of rules governing their conduct. The majority of the Orang Asli population resides in forested areas, where they continue to adhere to traditional lifestyles in accordance with the practices of their ancestors. The digital marketing engagement of the Orang Asli community in Malaysia has attracted attention as a potential means of enhancing their economic performance and integrating them into the broader market. This engagement is centered on a number of initiatives designed to promote the products of the community, improve digital literacy and foster entrepreneurship. In addition, the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) has implemented a number of programmes with the aim of introducing the OA community to the internet.

Among the programmes being implemented is the Outreach Programme Cultivation of ICT Literacy and Community Service for the Orang Asli Community, which has been developed in line with the new norms advocated by a non-governmental organization (NGO) known as the International Strategy Institute (ISI). The objective of the programme is to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and expertise in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) within the OA community. It is recommended that OA entrepreneurs make effective use of the opportunities provided by the government, particularly by JAKOA, to increase product sales through digital marketing (Mat Isa, 2021). This is because digital marketing can assist OA entrepreneurs in expanding their market size, accelerating the buying and selling process, increasing sales volume, improving communication between entrepreneurs and customers, enhancing the company's image, and maximizing entrepreneurs' productivity (Rahayu & Day, 2016).

It is worthy of note that a number of previous studies have concentrated on the digital marketing engagement of the Orang Asli in Malaysia. Mohd & Ahmad (2023) have documented that the improvement of marketing capabilities is essential for the success of Orang Asli entrepreneurs. This entails optimizing product presentation through enhanced packaging and labelling, as well as the implementation of effective marketing management strategies. In accordance with the findings of Sulaiman et al. (2023), the ascendance of social media as a marketing instrument has also been acknowledged as an opportunity for Orang

Asli entrepreneurs. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram allow for the advertisement of goods, direct interaction with customers, and the expansion of reach to a wider audience. This strategy serves to raise awareness and foster a sense of connection among customers who are interested in Indigenous items. The digital marketing of Orang Asli in Malaysia is also supported by the study conducted by Zainal et al. (2023), which developed mobile applications specifically designed to promote Orang Asli products, representing a significant advancement. To illustrate, the "MARI" application strives to establish a dedicated platform for these products, addressing the challenges posed by larger e-commerce platforms like Shopee and Lazada. This app facilitates easier access for consumers to discover and purchase high-quality Orang Asli products, thereby increasing their income and enhancing their ICT skills.

Methodology

The study employed a three-part questionnaire instrument. The questionnaire comprises three sections. Part 1 comprises 19 items pertaining to the specific details of respondents' information data. Part 2 consists 40 items on digital marketing, including product, price, place, and promotion (Masbah & Latif, 2017; Mas'ari et al., 2019; Karpenko & Ivannikova, 2021). Part 3 includes 12 items pertaining to financial performance (Mihalciuc et al., 2022; Abdullahi et al., 2021). Respondents are required to provide a response to each question using a five-point Likert scale, with options ranging from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

The analysis method employed was multiple regression analysis, which was used to examine the hypotheses. The formula for multiple linear regression is as follows: μy is the value prediction enabler of change learning, while x_1 until x_p is an independent variable. Subsequently, β_0 represents the value of y at all times when the independent variables x_1 to x_p are at zero. β_1 and β_2 are the estimated regression coefficients (LaMorte, 2016). The model is formulated as follows:

$$\text{Financial Performance of OA} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ product} + \beta_2 \text{ price} + \beta_3 \text{ place} + \beta_4 \text{ promotion} + \varepsilon$$

Information:

μy = Financial Performance of Indigenous in Malaysia

β_0 = Constanta

β_1 = Product

β_2 = Price

β_3 = Place

β_4 = Promotion

ε = Error

Findings

Table 1 below presents the 147 Orang Asli (OA) respondents who engaged in online business activities in Peninsular Malaysia. The data from the respondents, including information on gender, age, marital status, religion, highest education level, and number of dependencies, are presented in both percentage and frequency forms. Most respondents, 120 people (81.6%) are male, who responded to the survey were in the 40-49 age group. Regarding marital status, the majority of respondents were married, with a total of 73 people of Orang

Asli (49.7%), and the majority of respondents were Christians, which is a total of 93 people (63.3%). Approximately 81.6% of respondents, or 120 people, only completed their education in intermediate school, which is notably the majority of Orang Asli who have a gap in educational attainment due to various socio-economic factors. In addition, the table also reveals that 117 Orang Asli families (79.6%) have dependents ranging from 1 to 5 individuals.

Table 1

Profile of Respondents of Orang Asli Entrepreneurs in Malaysia

| Profile of Respondent | Category | Frequency (n=147) | Percent (%) |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Men | 120 | 81.6 |
| | Female | 27 | 18.4 |
| Age | 20 – 29 years old | 34 | 23.1 |
| | 30 – 39 years old | 37 | 25.2 |
| | 40 – 49 years old | 76 | 51.7 |
| Marital Status | Single | 40 | 27.2 |
| | Get married | 73 | 49.7 |
| | Divorced | 34 | 23.1 |
| Religion | Islam | 40 | 27.2 |
| | Christian | 93 | 63.3 |
| | None Religion | 14 | 9.5 |
| Highest Education Level | Elementary School | 19 | 12.9 |
| | Intermediate School | 120 | 81.6 |
| | No Education | 8 | 5.5 |
| Number of dependencies | 1 – 5 people | 117 | 79.6 |
| | 6 – 10 people | 29 | 19.7 |
| | 11 – 15 people | 1 | 0.7 |

Source: OA Survey, 2024

Table 2 illustrates the total online spending amount over a 12-month period. The analysis revealed that all respondents had made purchases online and frequently utilized these platforms. With regard to the platforms on which OA most frequently makes purchases, the results indicate that WhatsApp, Shopee, TikTok and the Telegram platform are the most popular, with 100% of respondents utilizing these. Nevertheless, it is notable that OA has been utilizing Facebook with great frequency, at a rate of 79.6%, while Instagram is used to a lesser extent, at a rate of 6.1%. Furthermore, over 50 percent of respondents revealed that they had been victims of online fraud. The most common forms were not receiving items, receiving incorrect items, merchants disappearing after payment, and others.

Table 2

Involvement Of Orang Asli Entrepreneurs in Online Purchases

| Information | Category | Frequency (n=147) | Percent (%) |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Platform | <i>WhatsApp</i> | 147 | 100 |
| | <i>Shopee</i> | 147 | 100 |
| | <i>TikTok</i> | 147 | 100 |
| | <i>Telegram</i> | 147 | 100 |
| | <i>Facebook</i> | 117 | 79.6 |
| | <i>Instagram</i> | 9 | 6.1 |
| Experience been cheated | Ever | 80 | 54.4 |
| | Never | 67 | 45.6 |
| Online Spending Amount (one year) | Less from RM 500 | 22 | 15.0 |
| | RM 501 – RM 1,500 | 77 | 52.4 |
| | RM 1,501 – RM 2,500 | 41 | 27.9 |
| | RM 2,501 – RM 3,500 | 5 | 3.4 |
| | RM 3,501 to top | 2 | 1.3 |

Source: OA Survey, 2024

Moreover, over 50% of respondents indicated that they spent between RM501 and RM1,500 on online shopping in a year. The items purchased online included clothing, food, home appliances, and other products. Only a small proportion of respondents, representing 1.3% of the total sample, indicated that they spent RM3,501 or above on online purchases. This suggests respondents are making purchases online. This evidence indicates that OA prefer online shopping because it is cheaper, with discounts and free shipping. Online platforms also save time because they can search for items without having to go to the store.

Table 3

The Result Test of The Effect of Digital Marketing on Financial Performance

| Digital Marketing | b | Value t | P -Value | Conclusion |
|-------------------------|-------|---------|----------|---------------|
| Product | 0.115 | 4,993 | 0.001* | Supported |
| Price | 0.088 | 3.622 | 0.001* | Supported |
| Place | 0.067 | 2.121 | 0.036* | Supported |
| Promotion | 0.067 | 1,954 | 0.530 | Not Supported |
| R | | 0.491 | | |
| R ² | | 0.241 | | |
| Adjusted R ² | | 0.220 | | |
| Statistics F | | 11.278 | | |

As illustrated in Table 3, the data analysis conducted using SPSS software yielded the following results. The results indicate that digital marketing, which is represented by three of the independent variables, product ($\beta = 0.115$, $t = 4.993$, $p\text{-value} = 0.001 < 0.05$), price ($\beta = 0.088$, $t = 3.622$, $p\text{-value} = 0.001 < 0.05$), and place ($\beta = 0.067$, $t = 2.121$, $p\text{-value} = 0.036 < 0.05$) has a significant effect. In light of the aforementioned evidence, it can be concluded that the alternative hypothesis is accepted or supported. This indicates that digital marketing, with its three independent variables (product, price, and place), has significant effects on the financial

performance of Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia. The independent variables (product, price, and place) contribute 24.1 percent ($r = 0.491$) variance change in the financial performance of Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia [$F(4,142) = 11.278, P < 0.05$]. However, one independent variable, namely promotion ($\beta = 0.067, t = 1.954, p\text{-value} = 0.530 > 0.05$), was found to be a non-significant factor in the financial performance of Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis is not supported. The results of the multiple regression analysis demonstrate that product, price, and place have a significant impact on the financial performance of Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia, while promotion does not.

According to the findings, this study contributes evidence that the integration of digital marketing strategies has shown promising results in improving the financial performance of the Orang Asli entrepreneur in Malaysia. Meanwhile, OA entrepreneur should improve their digital marketing, especially in promotion. Enhancing their digital promotion with tools to market their products effectively, these initiatives aim to reduce poverty levels and enhance their overall quality of life. The Malaysian government also has been proactive in supporting these initiatives through financial assistance and training programs aimed at developing entrepreneurial skills within OA the community.

Conclusion

For the economic development of the Orang Asli in Malaysia, it is essential to foster digital marketing engagement. By implementing targeted initiatives that enhance product visibility, improve marketing skills and leverage technology, there is considerable potential for increasing income and fostering sustainable growth within their communities. The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of digital marketing strategies on the financial performance of Orang Asli entrepreneurs in Malaysia. The findings indicate that the three digital marketing strategies, namely product, price, and place, exert a significant influence on the financial performance of OA entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Conversely, the digital marketing variable of promotion does not appear to have a notable impact on the financial performance of OA in Malaysia. A limitation of this study, the sample of OA entrepreneurs is still limited. The next research should expand the sample of Orang Asli respondents to various regions in Malaysia including Sabah and Sarawak. Nevertheless, the results of this study provide valuable insights that can inform the efforts of the Malaysian government and JAKOA to increase OA engagement in digital marketing. These efforts aim to enhance the economic growth and welfare of OA in Malaysia.

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