

# Effectiveness of Digital Marketing in Promoting Rural Entrepreneurship in Malaysia and its Impact on Small Entrepreneurs' Income

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## Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can be strengthened through rural entrepreneurship, which in turn helps rural areas by creating jobs and revenue. This study aims to identify the extent to which rural entrepreneurship affects the income of small entrepreneurs in Penang. The study design consisted of a quantitative form for each research instrument using the Google Form online survey. This study's sample was selected using purposive and snowball samplings involving 158 small rural entrepreneurs in Penang, Malaysia. The data in this study were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 27.0 to measure the frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and cross-distribution. The results of this study found the relationships between the income of rural entrepreneurs with variables such as age group, gender, marital status, educational level, type of business and business marketing platform. Regarding the relationship between a business profile and respondents' income, the total income of small entrepreneurs in Penang is influenced by employment, type of business, duration of business, ownership of computers and devices to access the internet. In contrast, internet applications, product conversion and business operating hours do not influence the income of small entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** Rural Entrepreneurship, Sme Entrepreneurs, Income, Rural Area.

## Introduction

An entrepreneur is a person who has the ability, inclination and capability to innovate, seek business opportunities and be able to do business that can benefit themselves and society (Abdul Aziz et al. 2022). In addition, Azlizan Talib et al. (2012) define entrepreneurship as a unique activity carried out by an individual to be used as a career for profit and requires a

combination of basic things such as personality, behavior, experience, thinking, ability, capital, knowledge and others. In comparison, Joseph Schumpeter (1934) believes that the concept of innovation is the use of an invention to create a new commercial product or service, which is the key force in creating new demands and thus new wealth.

In Malaysia, through the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021-2025), various initiatives have been created and intensified to produce competitive and sustainable entrepreneurs. Efforts have been made to enhance their entrepreneurial development skills by encouraging innovation-driven entrepreneurs. Taking into account various aspects of the national transformation plan, various initiatives are undertaken to create more innovative entrepreneurs among youth, Bumiputeras and specific target groups. In particular, it targets those involved in strategic and high-impact industries such as smart agriculture and the digital economy, in line with Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0). The Government is also committed to ensuring the success of entrepreneurship, primarily because it acts as a catalyst in ensuring that the country achieves high-income status by offering various initiatives and employment opportunities (Prime Minister Office, 2021). Rural development is generally denoted as the initiatives, actions, and movements taken to improve the standard of living in rural areas, non-urban neighborhoods, remote villages, and the countryside (Manzoor et al. 2021). These communities are characterized by a low ratio of inhabitants to open space. Rural development aims to find ways of improving rural life with rural people's participation to meet the needs of rural areas. As such, local people have to engage themselves in their sustainable rural development. One of the ways to improve their economic well-being is by engaging in entrepreneurship.

Rural entrepreneurship is an emerging dynamic concept. It is generally defined as entrepreneurship emerging from the village level, which can take place in various fields of endeavor such as business, industry, and agriculture. Therefore, it is a potent factor for economic development Abbasi, Jafari, and Alizadeh (2021); Kulkarni and Narkhede (2016). Furthermore, according to Chege and Wang (2020), rural enterprises are often defined as those (enterprises) located in the countryside with the entrepreneurial potential to generate rural progress. Therefore, rural entrepreneurship has emerged as one of the most potential tools for stimulating the development of rural areas Adewumi and Keyser (2020); Korsgaard, Müller, and Tanvig (2015); Manzoor et al. (2021); Pato and Teixeira (2018).

The development of rural areas is currently linked to entrepreneurship more than ever before. Entrepreneurship is now regarded as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the process of rural development by institutions and individuals promoting rural development (Kulkarni and Narkhede, 2016). Hence, entrepreneurship stands as a vehicle to improve the quality of life and communities in order to sustain a healthy economy and environment Abbasi, Jafari, and Alizadeh (2021); Parwez (2017).

In addition, rural entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in reducing poverty, migration and expanding employment opportunities in rural communities (Ihejimaizu, 2019). It can be defined as a major force of economic development in villages and the creation of positive change, innovation, and production services. In addition, rural entrepreneurship is a significant activity that attempts to resolve many challenges in rural areas, such as unemployment, poverty and lack of economic diversity. Furthermore, it positively impacts other aspects of the villagers' life (Abbasi et al. 2021). Thus, rural entrepreneurship development is considered a vital means of sustainable rural development. Recently, entrepreneurship has become an essential strategy in development. It has also been regarded

as an evolutionary process for achieving positive economic and social impacts Abbasi, Jafari, and Alizadeh (2021); Ihejiamaizu (2019); Kolawole and Ajila (2015).

Literature shows that numerous research studies have been carried out regarding entrepreneurship and rural development Adewumi and Keyser (2020); Tuitjer (2022); Manzoor et al. (2021). However, studies on rural entrepreneurship and the impact on the income of small entrepreneurs have yet to be extensively explored. This study aims to identify the extent to which rural entrepreneurship influences the income of small entrepreneurs in Tasek Gelugor and Balik Pulau, Penang. Furthermore, this paper intends to evaluate the respondents' sociodemographic and business profiles so their impact on the income of the respondents can be examined.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Entrepreneurship***

The term "entrepreneur" is defined in a variety of ways. Entrepreneurship is the process by which an entrepreneur, with new ideas, identify new opportunities and mobilize resources as well as creates new businesses and companies Moha Asri (1999); Zimmerer (1998). They are new and innovative organizations that are associated with accepting risks Gerschewski and Xiao (2015); which led to the introduction of products or new services to the community (Gerschewski and Xiao, 2015; Kirkley, 2016). An entrepreneur is defined as a person who organizes and manages a business or economic institution and accepts the risks arising from it (Choi, 2018; Kirkley, 2016; Pahuja, and Sanjeev, 2015; Park, 2017; Moha Asri, 1999).

Entrepreneurship refers to the process of creating value through the combination of resources using an opportunity, which requires an entrepreneurial action and an entrepreneurial agent (Kirkley, 2016; Tusi Ramadan, Jamshidi Alireza, Taqdisi Ahmad, 2014). According to Schumpeter (1934), *an entrepreneur undertakes a venture, organizes it, raises capital to finance it, and assumes the whole or major part of the risk of the business. In other words, entrepreneurship is the process of giving birth to a new business.*

### ***Rural Entrepreneurship***

According to Zargoosh and Mozaffari (2016), rural entrepreneurship is the identification of new opportunities, innovation and creativity in agricultural and non-agricultural activities, innovation and creativity in land use and, in fact, the optimal and innovative use of rural resources for sustainable rural development. It can also be defined as an activity that allows the villagers to turn opportunities into profitable economic activities (Abbasi, Jafari, and Alizadeh, 2021; Najafi Kani et al. 2015). Rural Entrepreneurship emerges at the village level and plays a vital role in transforming rural areas for sustainable rural development. In addition, rural entrepreneurs focus on the creation of new organizations that introduce new products, services or create new markets, or utilize new technologies in a rural environment (Prakash and Goodwin, 2018; Nagler and Naude, 2017).

Rural entrepreneurship is labor-intensive and creates large-scale employment opportunities for the rural community (Jayadatta, 2017). According to Vinay Prasad and Naveen (2021), rural entrepreneurship provides a straightforward solution to the growing problems of large-scale unemployment and underemployment in rural areas. In addition, the development of industrial units in rural areas through rural entrepreneurship has a high potential for employment generation and income creation (Ihejiamaizu, 2019).

***Medium-Sized Enterprises***

According to SME Corp. Malaysia (2021), medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are divided based on two criteria: the annual sales value of a business and the number of full-time employees of a business. Generally, SMEs in Malaysia refer to the manufacturing sector, with an annual sales value of less than RM50 million or less than 200 full-time employees. Meanwhile, the services and other sectors have an annual sales value of less than RM20 million, with full-time employees not exceeding 75.

Entrepreneurship and SMEs have customarily played a substantial role in every economy and are identified as the pillar of most economics (Okyere, 2017). Both are fundamental elements for economic growth and positively impact development (Karadag, 2016; Manzoor et al. 2021). SMEs play an increasingly important role in sustaining economic growth and providing employment opportunities to every entrepreneur (Neagu, 2016; World Bank, 2021). Moreover, entrepreneurship is highly dependent on individual capabilities in the business (Van der Zwan et al. 2016; Kirkley, 2016).

In Malaysia, SMEs result from government initiatives to reduce poverty and the income gap between the rural and urban populations. In this regard, entrepreneurs' ability to implement small and medium enterprises is crucial and necessary to develop a business to increase their income. The ability of an entrepreneur to manage a business can be measured through the internal capabilities they have within themselves and can be manifested through personal leadership, management skills and proactive abilities. For instance, they can add more value to economic activities by empowering people to achieve self-development and become more independent (Adewumi and Keyser, 2020; Bilal and Al Mqbali, 2015), generating income (Scheyvens et al. 2019; Sykes et al. 2016), employment (Ihejiamaizu, 2019), and alleviation of poverty (Kolawole and Ajila, 2015; Manzoor et al. 2019; Nwankwo and Francis, 2017; Scheyvens et al. 2019) and stimulate the expansion of trade (Strickling, 2016). They also have a positive impact on the country's GDP by contributing to the government's further income flows (Ferreras-Méndez et al. 2021), creating new products and services (Morgan et al. 2015), and decreasing the rate of unemployment (Kolawole and Ajila, 2015).

**Methodology*****Research Methods***

This study employed the quantitative research method. The population of this study consisted of small entrepreneurs from Tasek Gelugor and Balik Pulau areas in Penang. Balik Pulau is one of the districts located southwest of Penang Island. It is a suburban area where the majority of the residents engage in informal activities such as agriculture, fisheries and Small Medium Enterprises (SME) food products. Tasek Gelugor area, on the other hand, is a town in the Seberang Perai Utara district near the Kedah state border. Most of the communities in Tasek Gelugor conduct businesses through SMEs in addition to oil palm farming activities and other occupations (Refer to Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Map of the study area.

### ***Participants and Procedure***

The study sample was selected based on the list of small entrepreneurs in the Tasek Gelugor area (77 people) and small entrepreneurs in the Balik Pulau area (89 people). The study's sampling for this research was selected using Purposive Sampling, and the study was conducted in several phases.

The first phase was a survey questionnaire using Google Form links. Researchers shared Google Form links with the small entrepreneurs in the Tasek Gelugor and Balik Pulau areas (166 people). During the first phase of the survey, the number of respondents obtained was only 42 people. During the second phase, the number of respondents obtained increased to 57 people, making the total number of respondents 99 people.

Since the number of respondents was relatively low, the researchers decided to use the Snowball Sampling method to select small entrepreneurs in Tasek Gelugor and Balik Pulau, Penang. Through this method, the researchers provided personal links to individuals conducting business only in Tasek Gelugor and Balik Pulau, suburban areas in Penang. The total number of respondents who participated in this phase of the survey was 59 people, making the total number of respondents 158 people. The following is a table of sample selection methods used for this study:

Table 1

*Method of Sample Collection*

Category	Population	1st survey	2nd survey	Snowball Sampling	Sample
Tasek Gelugor	77	20	26		46
Balik Pulau	89	22	31		53
i. Food Delivery Tasek Gelugor, Sungai Dua, Kepala Batas				21	59
ii. Balik Pulau Food & Healthy Product Delivery				38	
Total					158

Source: Online survey (2020)

**Data Analysis**

The data in this study were then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 27.0 to measure the frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and cross-distribution.

**Result And Discussions****Demographic profile**

Based on the study, the demographic profile of the respondents are as follows (Table 2). The findings indicate that most respondents (36.7%) are aged between 31 to 40 years old. The age range of 51 to 60 is the least number of respondents, comprising only nine people (12.7%). In terms of gender, 109 of the respondents (69%) are females, with only 49 people (31%) being males. Based on the level of education, the majority of respondents have a high level of education: 98 with higher education (62%), 17 people (10.8%) obtained secondary school certificates, and only 43 people (27.2%) have only secondary education.

Table 2

**Demographic profile**

Profile	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		
21 to 30	50	31.6
31 to 40	58	36.7
41 to 50	30	19.0
51 to 60	20	12.7
Total	158	100.0
Sex		
Male	49	31.0
Female	109	69.0
Total	158	100.0
Education level		
Higher education (1st degree)	98	62.0
Higher School Certificate	17	10.8
Secondary education	43	27.2
Total	158	100.0

Source: Online survey (2020)

**Business profile**

Table 3 shows the business profile of the respondents. Since the respondents are small entrepreneurs in rural areas, 97 people (61.4%) run food-based businesses. Besides that, the respondents consist of entrepreneurs who run clothing businesses (18 people or 11.4%), beauty and health products (12 people or 7.6%), service businesses (25 people or 15.8%) and other businesses (six people or 3.8%). During this period, they need to be relatively creative in providing customers with daily necessities such as toothpaste, soap, shampoo, and others to ensure that customers can place orders.

The entrepreneurs, especially small rural entrepreneurs, turn to the digital versions of the businesses because they recognize ICT's potential in developing the community's economy, offering employment opportunities and eradicating poverty. The findings also show that the respondents use various social media platforms to promote their businesses. Facebook & WhatsApp social media platforms are the respondents' primary choices with a total of 97 people (61.4%) using them. Apart from that, the respondents also use social media platforms such as Facebook only (15.2%), Facebook and Instagram (11.4%), WhatsApp only (7%) and Instagram only (5.1%). The data suggest that small entrepreneurs can still do business transactions online and promote their business products to customers while maintaining a continuous income. Based on the duration of the business, most respondents are still new to running a business. Sixty-three people (23.4%) have only been in business for 1 to 3 years, 16 people (10.1%) have been in business for ten years or more, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3

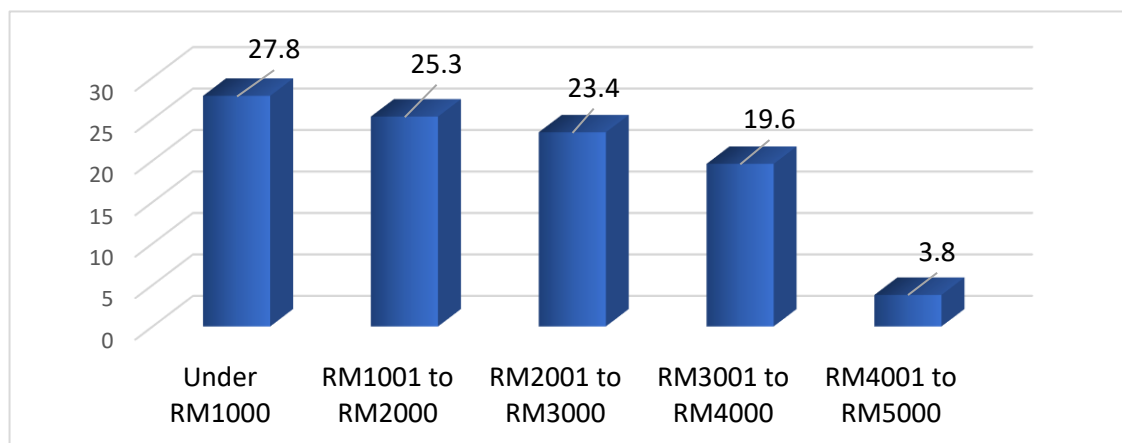
**Business Profile**

Profile	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Types of business</b>		
Food business	97	61.4
Clothing business	18	11.4
Beauty and health products business	12	7.6
Service business	25	15.8
Others	6	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Business medium</b>		
Facebook	24	15.2
WhatsApp	11	7.0
Instagram	8	5.1
Facebook & WhatsApp	97	61.4
Facebook & Instagram	18	11.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Business period</b>		
Less than 1 year	37	23.4
1 to 3 years	63	39.9
4 to 6 years	34	21.5
7 to 9 years	8	5.1
10 years and above	16	10.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Online survey (2020)

### ***Analysis of Respondents' Income***

As shown in Figure 2, the income profile of the respondents are as follows: 44 people (27.8%) earn RM1000 and below, followed by 40 people (25.3%) who earn RM1001 to RM2000, 37 people (23.4%) earn RM2001 to RM3000, 31 people (19.6%) earn RM3001 to RM4000 and the highest income of RM4001 to RM5000 is earned by six respondents (3.8%). However, the monthly income of the respondents is not fixed for each month as it depends on the sales revenue of their business products. In fact, several factors influence the change in the income of small entrepreneurs. In current outbreak of Covid-19 has also affected the total sales revenue of entrepreneurs because their businesses could not operate during the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO).



**Figure 2:** Estimated monthly income (%)

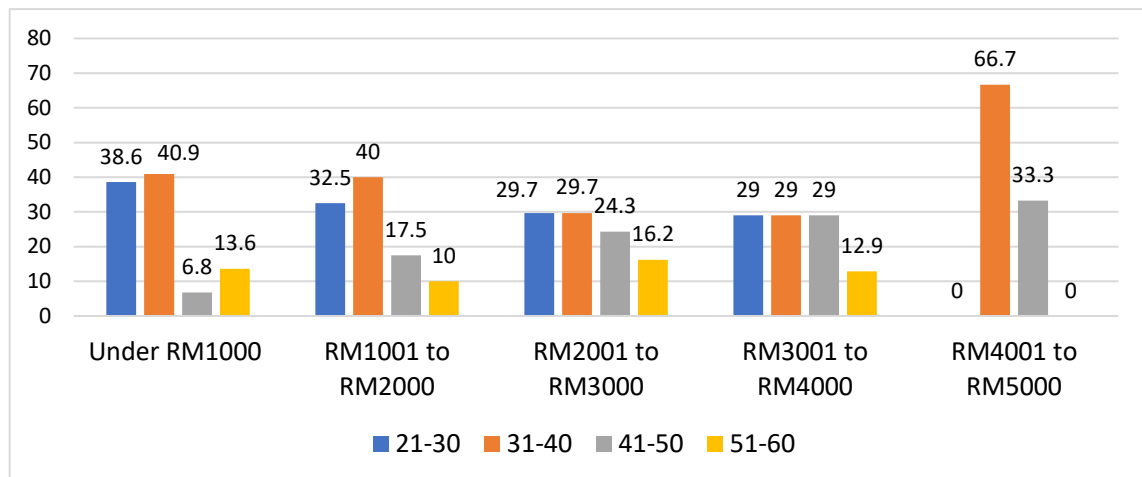
Source: Online survey (2020)

### ***The cross-tabulation between demographic profile and total income***

#### ***Cross-tabulation between age group and income***

As could be summarized in Figure 3 that most respondents aged 31-40 years receive an income between RM4001-RM5000 (66.7%) and RM1001-RM2000 (40%). On the other hand, respondents aged 21 to 30 years (38.6%) receive an income of under RM1000. In addition, the study results indicate that respondents aged 21-30 years, 31-40 years and 41-50 years also receive an income between RM3001-RM4000 (29%). The results of the study show that respondents aged 31-40 years earn higher income than other age groups. In contrast, respondents aged 51-60 earned the lowest income. Most respondents are at a very productive age. However, younger respondents need to be given more exposure to venture into entrepreneurship. This study's findings align with previous studies (Funken and Gielnik, 2015; Minola, Criaco, and Obschonka, 2015), who found that middle-aged individuals are typically more likely to engage or show interest in entrepreneurship.



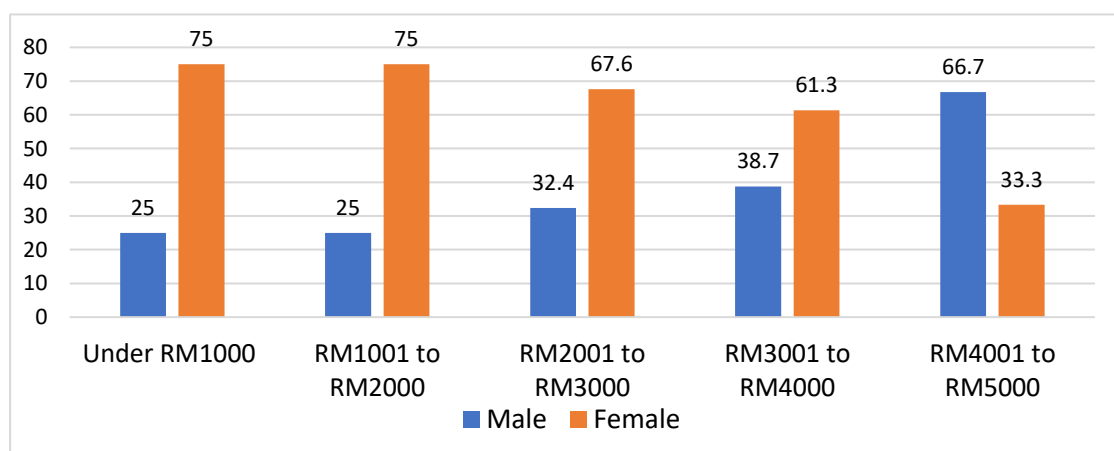


**Figure 3:** Cross-tabulation between age group and income

Source: Online survey (2020)

**Cross-tabulation between gender and income**

Based on Figure 4, it could be deduced that female respondents receive more income than males for the income category of under RM1000 and RM1001-RM2000 (75%). This is followed by RM2001-RM3000 (67.6%) and RM3001-RM4000 (61.3%). However, the highest income level of RM4001-RM5000 is obtained by males (66.7%) compared to females (33.3%). The findings of the study show that female respondents earn a higher income than males for each income group, but the income of male respondents exceeds that of female respondents for income of RM4001 to RM5000. The increase in the participation of females as entrepreneurs shows that the involvement of women in national development activities is becoming more significant and increasingly positive (Bullough et al. 2015; Faisal, Jabeen, and Katsioloudes, 2017). This is aided by the development of the country, which opens up many opportunities for women to improve their accomplishments in various fields and entrepreneurial activities to succeed in line with the national development process. This statement is in line with previous studies (Patil and Deshpande, 2018; Sajjad et al. 2020), which stated that women could be considered the fastest growing entrepreneurs in the world.

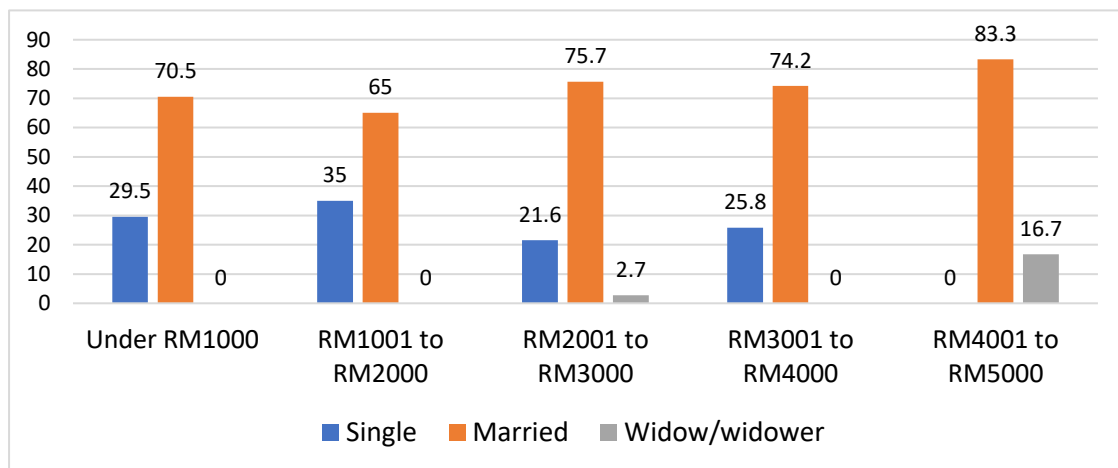


**Figure 4:** Cross-tabulation between gender and income

Source: Online survey (2020)

***Cross-tabulation between marital status and income***

Figure 5 shows that most married respondents receive higher income for all income groups compared to those with a single status and widow/widower. The results of this study found that the majority of small entrepreneurs involved are married, and this can be attributed the need for them to shoulder the responsibility as family providers as well as the commitment required of them. The results of this study are in line with the study conducted by Banki and Ismail (2015). Married entrepreneurs are found to work harder in managing their businesses compared to entrepreneurs with 'divorced' and 'single' status as they are influenced by factors such as responsibility and commitment to their families.

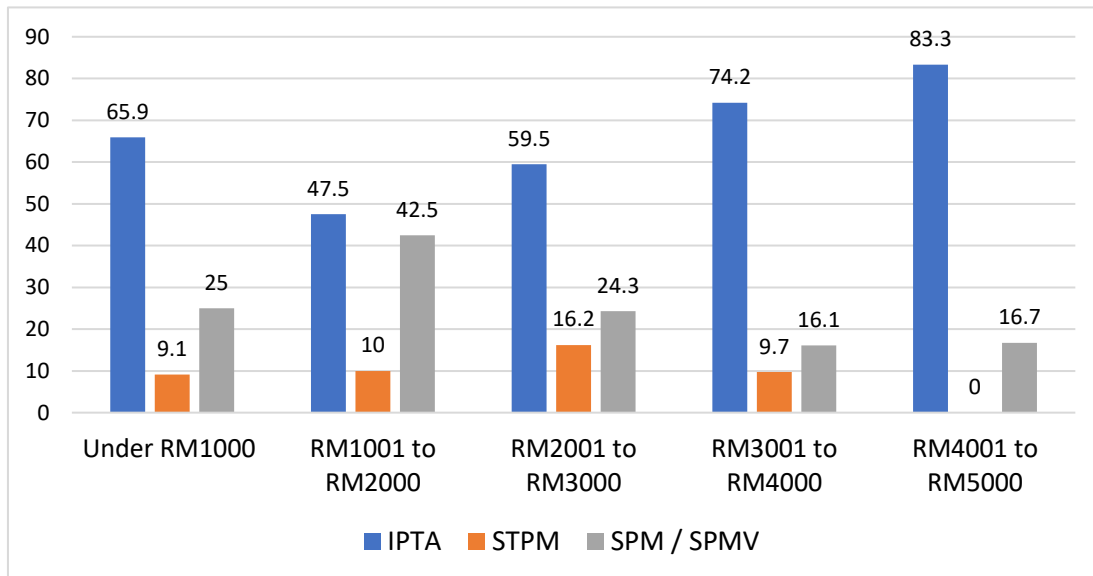


**Figure 5:** Cross-tabulation between marital status and income

Source: Online survey (2020)

***Cross-tabulation between educational level and income***

Based on Figure 6, it is shown that respondents with educational qualifications from private higher learning institutions get the highest income for all income levels compared to respondents with the academic level of STPM and SPM/SPMV. The findings of the study establish that the respondents of Public Higher Education graduates (IPTA) earn the highest income of RM4000 to RM5000, followed by the respondents of SPM graduates. This gives an impression that the higher the level of education, the higher the interest in getting involved in entrepreneurship. The findings of this study are similar to Jiménez et al. (2015), who found that tertiary education increases formal entrepreneurship as a consequence of higher self-confidence, lower perceived risk and enhanced human capital. Therefore, the government needs to play a more significant role in encouraging students at the school as well as the university levels to pursue entrepreneurship as their career choice.

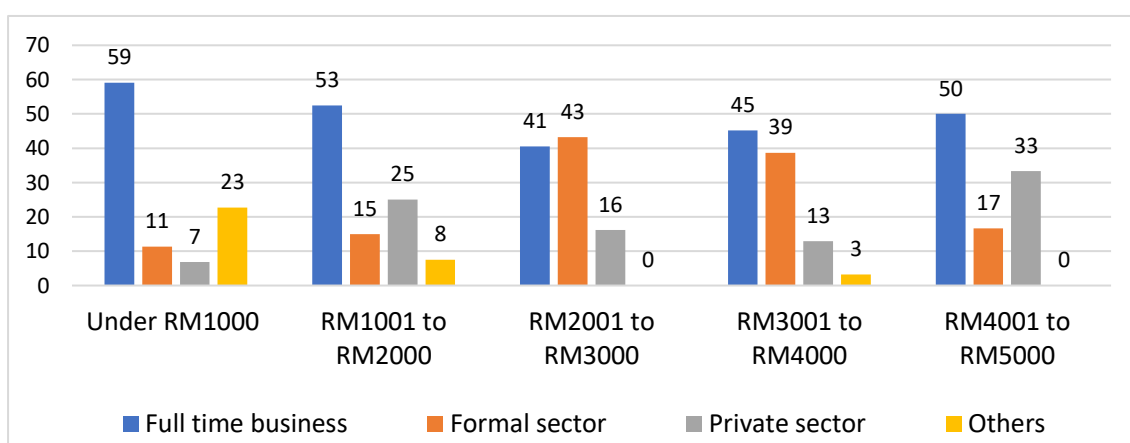


**Figure 6:** Cross-tabulation between educational level and income  
 Source: Online survey (2020)

**The cross-tabulation between a business profile and total income**

**Cross tabulation of employment and income**

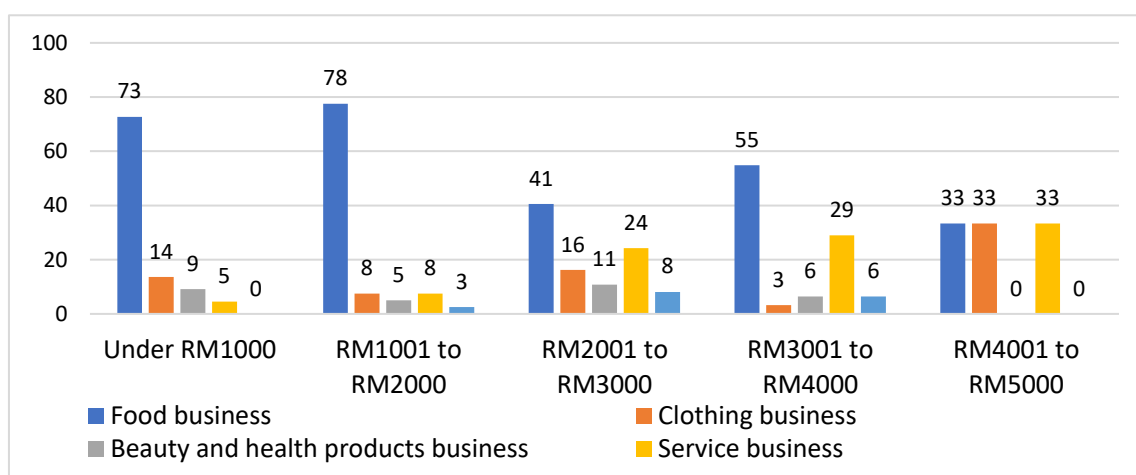
Figure 7 indicates that most of the respondents who have managed their business full-time receive an income under RM1000 (59%), RM1001-RM2000 (53%), RM3001-RM4000 (45%) and RM4001-RM5000 (50%). In addition, respondents who work in the formal sector mostly receive an income of RM2001-RM3000. In comparison, respondents involved in the private sector mostly receive an income of RM4001-RM5000 (33%). This study involved respondents who run the enterprise full-time and part-time. The results show that respondents who run a full-time enterprise earn the highest income for all income groups. However, respondents who work in the formal sector and those who run enterprises part-time earn the highest income of RM2001-RM3000.



**Figure 7:** Cross-tabulation between educational level and income  
 Source: Online survey (2020)

**Cross tabulation type of business and income**

As inferred from Figure 8, most respondents (78%) who run food businesses receive an income of RM1001-RM2000 and under RM1000 (73%). In addition, respondents who manage the clothing and service businesses mostly receive an income of RM4001-RM5000 (33%), respectively. Moreover, respondents who operate beauty and health products businesses mostly earn RM2001-RM3000 (11%). The study finds that food businesses earn the highest income for all income categories. The high participation in the food business is consistent with national statistics, which reveal that small businesses are heavily concentrated in the food industry as it is easier to start such businesses compared to other industries. In fact, currently, food entrepreneurs have started to sell food from home based on the concept of food delivery. As such, the food business is seen to have a boundless potential to go further and grow even faster. A study by Diana Eravia et al. (2015) found that SMEs in the food industry also showed an increasing trend. However, various environmental influences can affect these businesses because they are open and easily accessible by competitors and affected by a dynamically changing environment. To overcome these obstacles, small business owners should have a variety of entrepreneurial competence in order to survive.



**Figure 8:** The cross-tabulation type of business and income

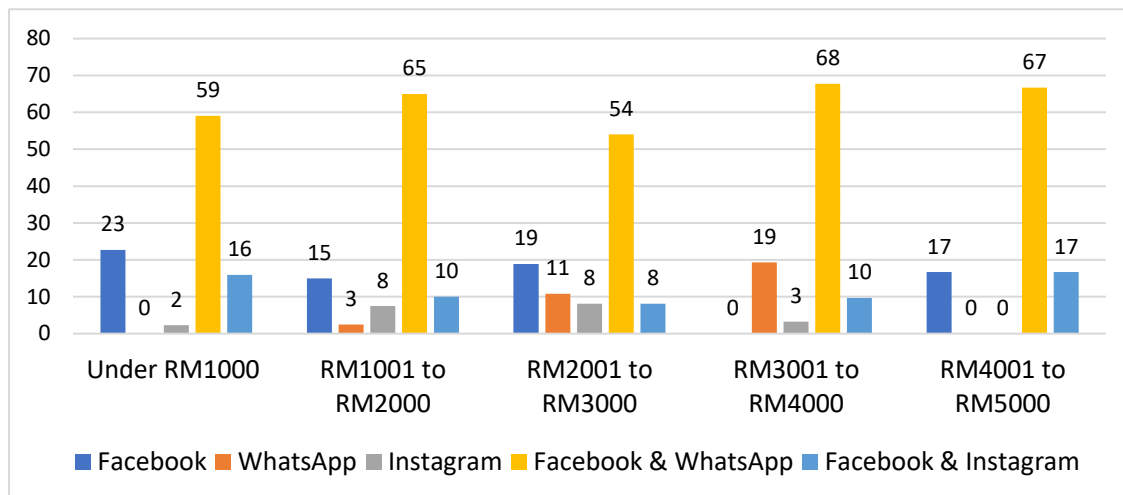
Source: Online survey (June 2020)

**Cross-tabulation between business medium and income**

Figure 9 reveals that Facebook & WhatsApp applications receive the highest option used by the respondents as a medium of communication in managing their business. These applications have allowed these entrepreneurs to earn an income between RM3001-RM4000 (68%) and RM4001-RM5000 (67%). In addition, the use of the WhatsApp application to communicate with customers has contributed to an earning of RM3001-RM4000 (19%). Meanwhile, employing Facebook & Instagram applications as a marketing platform has contributed between RM4001-RM5000 (17%) in revenue.

The results of the study found that respondents who use social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp earn the highest income for all income categories. This shows that many entrepreneurs are starting to actively use media platforms as one of their product marketing mediums. The findings of this study are supported by previous studies (Chi, 2022; Paquette, 2013). Social networking is not just for selling products or services. On the contrary, it aims to communicate and is a critical channel in promoting new products. The use of social media as a business marketing platform has been mentioned in past studies as a factor of

business success in marketing their products, even if they are located in remote areas (Canavan, Henschion, and O’Reilly Canavan, 2007; Mokhtar, 2015).



**Figure 9:** Cross-tabulation between business medium and income  
 Source: Online survey (2020)

**The Relationship Between Business Profile and Total Income**

Chi-Square analysis was used to determine the relationship between two variables, namely the business profile and respondents’ income. Table 4 indicates that employment ( $\chi^2=33.990$ ,  $\rho=0.001$ ,  $\rho<0.05$ ), type of business ( $\chi^2=29.56$ ,  $\rho=0.020$ ,  $\rho<0.05$ ), the length of time used for business operation ( $\chi^2=24.369$ ,  $\rho=0.018$ ,  $\rho<0.05$ ), computer ownership ( $\chi^2 = 43.764$ ,  $\rho = 0.000$ ,  $\rho<0.05$ ), devices for accessing the internet ( $\chi^2 = 78.487$ ,  $\rho=0.000$ ,  $\rho<0.05$ ) have significant influence on the total income of respondents. In contrast, the internet application medium ( $\chi^2 = 23.398$ ,  $\rho=0.103$ ,  $\rho>0.05$ ), product conversion ( $\chi^2=16.998$ ,  $\rho=0.386$ ,  $\rho>0.05$ ) and business operating hours ( $\chi^2=23.398$ ,  $\rho=0.103$ ,  $\rho>0.05$ ) do not have a significant relationship with the total income of the respondents.

Table 4

*Chi-Square Analysis Between The Business Profile And Respondents’ Income*

Business Profile	Phi Value ( $\chi^2$ )	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Employment	33.990	<b>0.001</b>
Type of business	29.56	<b>0.020</b>
Internet application medium	23.398	0.103
Length of time in operation	24.369	<b>0.018</b>
Product conversion	2.583	0.630
Computer ownership	43.764	<b>0.000</b>
Business operating hours	16.998	0.386
Devices to access the internet	78.487	<b>0.000</b>

Note: Significant Level  $\alpha = 5\%$ , sig.  $\rho<0.05$

To sum up, the total income of small entrepreneurs in Penang is influenced by employment, type of business, duration of business, ownership of computers and devices to access the

internet. In contrast, internet applications, product conversion and business operating hours do not influence the income of small entrepreneurs.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study concluded that the majority of small entrepreneurs involved in this study are those aged 31 to 40. Most of them have basic business skills, especially IPTA graduates. However, vigorous efforts are needed to encourage more high school graduates to engage in entrepreneurship as a career choice. In terms of enterprise profile, most rural entrepreneurs run food businesses because they are easier to run and always get orders and requests from customers. To increase business sales, most small entrepreneurs use social media platforms such as Facebook & WhatsApp to promote their business to customers because the platform is the easiest and does not require high costs to introduce business enterprises to the public.

Apart from that, most rural entrepreneurs only earn RM1000 and below. The monthly income of these small entrepreneurs is volatile as it depends on their sales volume. This study also identifies the relationship between the income of rural entrepreneurs with variables such as age group, gender, marital status, educational level, type of business and business marketing platform. Regarding the relationship between a business profile and respondents' income, the total income of small entrepreneurs in Penang is influenced by employment, type of business, duration of business, ownership of computers and devices to access the internet. In contrast, the medium of internet applications, product conversion and business operating hours do not influence the income of small entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the active participation of rural communities in entrepreneurship enables them to earn income, reducing unemployment and poverty among the rural population. It is believed that entrepreneurship is one of the main catalysts of the economy in rural areas. Therefore, it is appropriate that these entrepreneurial activities be expanded to prosper the rural economy's potential further. To realize this goal, all parties, both the villagers, entrepreneurs and the relevant agencies, must work together to strengthen and further develop rural entrepreneurial activities. Meanwhile, the agencies involved should unite in providing better services and give a higher commitment so that the process of improving the quality of life of rural communities can be more comprehensively and efficiently achieved.

### **Contextual Contribution of Research**

The research's primary contextual contribution lies in its focus on rural Malaysia. It provides an in-depth understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and dynamics of digital marketing within the unique socioeconomic and geographic context of rural areas in Malaysia. In term of economic development and job creation, the research offers valuable insights into the potential of digital marketing to create jobs, stimulate economic growth, and reduce income disparities in rural communities. It can provide a roadmap for policymakers seeking to leverage digital marketing for rural development. In addition, the research can assess how government and NGO organizations in Malaysia have been utilizing digital marketing to support rural entrepreneurs. This can provide a critical evaluation of existing initiatives and suggest improvements. To sum up, the research makes contextual theoretical contributions by advancing our understanding of digital marketing's role in rural entrepreneurship. It also offers significant contextual contributions by focusing on the specific challenges and opportunities within the Malaysian rural context, which has implications for both local development and global best practices in digital marketing.

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