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REBRANDING OF STREET MARKETS: A DESIGN DRIVEN APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The street market, including the night and farmers' market, is considered as a less formalized economic activity that operates as part of the coping strategies in communities caught by the domestic response to changes in the global economy. While it is considered as the bottom of the retail pyramid, studies on street markets have found quite a substantial number of advantages that strengthen human and social interactions. Low prices and the possibility of finding deals, and a melting pot for people's diversity and culture have become the street market essence. However, the liberation of sub-scale retail sector has somehow affected the consumer's acceptance of the market. Low prices and better-quality products are the retailers' competitive advantages, while cleanliness, prices do not standardize, and poor services are tarnishing the market's image. Therefore, it raises the question of how the street markets can regain their competitive advantage and survive in the industry, given the intense competition from the retailers. Malaysian NKEA was introduced to create a balance in equipping the street markets with the modernize transformation in its distribution and operation. In addition, recently TN50 was also launched to further transform and modernize the street market image. However, the action and the development related to the achievement are yet to be well strategized. Hence, it is critical to rebrand the street market into a modern and informative culture. To address the issue, we propose to develop a street market app that will boost users' experience and later improve their acceptance by using the design driven approach. As IT has become the lifestyle, it is vital that street markets remain savvy, even in digital form, and responsive to consumers' needs.

Keywords: street market, rebranding, open-air market, competitive advantage, retail market

INTRODUCTION

Street markets, influenced by informal work and urban landscape, have expanded in Malaysia since the medieval period (Sinha & Choudhury, 2023). They attract tourists and are a cultural attraction due to their high value. Governments support microenterprises by establishing policies, regulations, and financial assistance (Wang & Xu, 2021). Street markets offer a variety of products, including accessories, food, and delicacies, at good bargaining prices. The concept of street markets in Malaysia is synonymous with lifestyle and culture, with local authentic food offerings in every city and village (Yuen May et al., 2021).

During Ramadhan, street markets in Malaysia offer a unique experience for food vendors, known as bazaar Ramadhan. However, the operation of these markets is challenging and requires extensive labor tasks. Vendors must prepare tents, set up electrical supplies, and pay a specific plot number based on space availability and product type. Local councils monitor licensing and activities. Street market food vending is common in Shah Alam, the capital city of Selangor, where food trucks replace traditional desk operations. The internet has also revolutionized food delivery, making it challenging for food vendors to succeed (Hassoun et al., 2023). The research aims to assess how individual, organizational, and environmental factors interact to affect the success of food street market vendors in today's digital lifestyle.

Problem Statement

Malaysia, a vibrant tapestry of cultures and traditions, has long been synonymous with its bustling street markets. The street markets in Malaysia are not just places to shop for aromatic spices to the colorful display of local crafts and many other products or services offered, but also a cornerstone

of its informal economy (Squarzon, 2020). Traditional street markets in Malaysia are struggling to maintain their vitality and relevance in the face of rising competition, outdated practices, and a changing consumer landscape.

Competition from Formal Retailers

The most immediate threat comes from the relentless expansion of modern retail. Air-conditioned supermarkets, sprawling hypermarkets, and sleek shopping malls offer a sterile but alluring alternative to the often-chaotic street market. These establishments boast consistent pricing, predictable hours, standardized quality, and comfortable shopping experience and environments. They also often have sophisticated marketing strategies and loyalty programs that draw customers away from traditional markets. The convenience and perceived higher quality make it difficult for street markets to compete, especially with younger, more affordable consumers or customers (Sevtsuk, 2020).

Cleanliness and Hygiene Issues

One of the most persistent challenges for street markets in Malaysia and indeed many developing nations, is the issue of cleanliness. Overflowing bins, unsanitary food handling practices, and the present of pets can deter shoppers, particularly tourists and those comfortable to the hygiene standards of modern retail outlets. While some markets have attempted to improve their sanitation, a lack of consistent maintenance, adequate waste disposal facilities, and enforcement of regulations often challenge these efforts (Nijhawan et al., 2023). This is not just an appealing issue, but also a significant health concern.

Lack of Standardization and Regulation

Street market in Malaysia often operate in a largely decentralized manner unlike regulated retail spaces. This leads to a lack of uniformity in pricing, product quality, and even the way businesses are conducted. The absence of clear regulations and standardized operating procedures means that market vendors often lack the necessary training in business management, food safety, and customer service (Prevolšek et al., 2021). This inconsistency can make shopping at street markets unpredictable and at times frustrating for customers.

Modernization Context

Malaysia's vibrant street markets, known locally as 'pasar malam' and 'pasar tani' are integral to the nation's cultural and economic landscape. These bustling hubs offer affordable goods, local flavours, and a social gathering point for communities. However, in an era of rapid modernization and aspirations of Transformasi Nasional 50 (TN50), these traditional marketplaces face the challenge of adaptation. While efforts have been made to modernize them, progress has been slow, leaving a gap between the vision and reality. Malaysia's national transformation plan spanning 2020 – 2050 (TN50), aimed to build a future proof nation through sustainable and inclusive growth (Karim, 2021). Key elements relevant to street market modernization include economic empowerment, technological advancement, urban renewal and sustainability and community engagement. TN50 focused on empowering small businesses and fostering entrepreneurship, which directly applies to street vendors. Initiatives should aim to improve their income and business practices. Embracing digital platforms, e-commerce, and financial technology was a core aspect of TN50. This is relevant to enhancing payment systems, online marketing, and inventory management for street vendors. TN50 emphasized the development of livable and sustainable cities. This necessitates improving the infrastructure and hygiene of street markets, aligning them with urban development goals. Furthermore, TN50 stressed inclusive participation and preserving cultural heritage. Street markets, as community hubs, need to be modernized in a way that respects their cultural significance and involves the local communities.

Research Objectives

This study explores rebranding strategies through a design-driven approach. This involves looking at everything from physical infrastructure to brand identity. The rebranding elements include modernizing stalls, branding and signage, creating a thematic experience and improved infrastructure. Redesigning more aesthetically pleasing stalls improves the market's visual appeal and creates a more organized layout. This will lead to clearer and attractive signage to enhance navigation and communicate the unique offerings of each vendor. Besides, vendors should adopt themes or highlight specific local craft or food items to create a more immersive experience. Moreover, for infrastructure,

vendors should also upgrade their lighting, sanitation facilities, and waste management systems that will contribute to a more comfortable and hygienic environment. Digital solutions such as online presence using online platforms or social media profiles can expand reach and visibility. E-commerce options offer online ordering and delivery services that can attract a wider customer base. E-wallet and other forms of digital payment can create a seamless and convenient transaction process. In the era of data-driven applications, it will help to provide valuable insights into customer preferences and help vendors make informed business decisions.

A proposed mobile application has the potential to be a catalyst for significant transformation. It will serve as a connection between vendors and customers and streamlining various aspects of market operations. Providing tools for inventory management, digital payments, and access to market data, enabling better decision making and financial planning for the street market stakeholders. Besides, the apps can offer a seamless browsing experience, highlighting unique products, and fostering transparency in pricing and quality. Moreover, it will facilitate efficient logistics by reducing waste and promoting local, eco-friendly products.

RELATED WORK

Malaysia's MSMEs contribute to national economic development by creating jobs, strengthening community ties, attracting expertise, and promoting stability. Street markets, a Southeast Asian lifestyle trademark, offer unique experiences and serve as business incubators for aspiring entrepreneurs (Lim, 2021). However, the city's authority is dissatisfied with the number of foreign traders, leading to a rebranding, uniform aprons, and a new zoning system. The emphasis on cleanliness and rubbish bin placements further enhances the industry's success.

Street markets, including night markets, flea markets, and farmers' markets, are less formalized economic activities that strengthen human and social interactions (Chen & Liu, 2019). They offer low prices, deals, and a melting pot for people's diversity and culture. Famous street and night markets include Chatuchak Weekend Market in Bangkok, Souks of Marrakesh in Marrakesh, Shilin Night Market in Taipei, and La Boqueria in Barcelona. Information technology is crucial for business sustainability and user experience enhancement (Gil-Gomez et al., 2020).

Street markets, the vibrant arteries of urban life, pulse with a unique energy. In Malaysia, these markets are more than just places to buy goods, they are cultural hubs, economic drivers, and social gathering spots. Malaysia street markets serve as vital engines for microentrepreneurs to test their products and reach their target audiences (Krishnan et al., 2020). Furthermore, they embody cultural traditions, passing down culinary secrets, craft techniques, and community bonds through generations.

The sustained success of Malaysia street markets pivots on the involved interaction between individual vendors and supportive government policies. Well-designed policies can empower vendors with access to loans, business training and infrastructure improvements, ultimately boosting their sales and ensuring the longevity of these markets (Taylor et al., 2022). This includes access to proper waste disposal systems, reliable electrical connections, and shaded spaces to enhance the overall shopping experience for customers.

However, while the economic and cultural contributions of street markets in Malaysia are well-documented, existing research often falls short in addressing the challenges they face in a rapidly evolving environment. Furthermore, research often lacks critical analysis of the limitation inherent in past studies related to lack of diversity in the perspectives considered such as online ordering and delivery services for street market vendors.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Action Research (AR) method was employed to answer the research objectives of the study. This research method is well suited in the area of information systems development. AR is a combination of action and research and committed to the production of new knowledge by seeking solutions or improvements to real life practical situations (McKay and Marshall, 2001). There are two stages involves in this proposed study namely diagnostic stage and therapeutic stage (Baskerville and Myers, 2004). The first stage involves a collaborative analysis of the problems by the researchers and the subjects of the research (local authority, customers and business operators). Semi structured interview and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted to determine the problems and issues related to the study from the perspectives of participants.

Population and sample

A set of criteria was established to guide the researchers during the selection process to ensure that those involved in the mini focus group study can represent the population. The criteria include (1) the vendors are considered successful in their business with more than one year experience; (2) they represent food vendors of street market in the local area; and (3) they have received various types of aid form certain agencies to run their business and sustain in the street market.

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Variables	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Products	Food	6	60.0
	Beverages	2	40.0
Age	31-40 years old	3	37.5
	41-50 years old	2	25.0
	51-60 years old	2	25.0
	61-70 years old	1	12.5
Marital Status	Single	0	0.0
	Married	8	100.0
Business Experience	Less than 5 years	0	28.0
	5-10 years	6	75.0
	More than 10 years	2	25.0
Monthly Sales	Less than RM2500	3	37.5
	RM2500 - RM9000	3	37.5
	RM9001 - RM31000	2	25.0
Costs of Operation	Less than RM1000	2	25
	RM1000 - RM3000	3	37.5
	RM3001 - RM12000	3	37.5
Gross Monthly Income	Less than RM1800	2	25.0
	RM1800 - RM3800	3	37.5
	RM3801 - RM20000	2	25.0

	More than RM20000	1	12.5
Monthly Expenses	Less than RM700	2	25.0
	RM700 - RM2000	2	25.0
	RM2001 - RM3800	1	12.5
	More than RM3800	3	37.5
Number of Employee	0 employee	0	0.0
	1 employee	2	25.0
	2 employees	4	50.0
	3 employees	1	12.5
	4 employees	1	12.5

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As stated in Figure 1, the main factors contributing to the success of street market food vendors are dominated by individual factors either within control or beyond control. The first factor that is important to assist street market food and beverages vendors in achieving their business success is an individual factor mainly focusing on attitude. Attitude can be in the form of hardworking, smile, deep interest, survival instinct, focus and mentality. According to Correia & Kozak (2016), attitudes are also related to values, beliefs intentions, and behaviours, as in the case of counterfeiters. They did research focuses on personal attitudes, and as such the model presented hypothesizes that attitude towards street markets influences tourists' satisfaction and their intentions regarding repeat visitation or

recommending the experience of shopping in street markets to others. A study done by Trafialek et al. (2017) revealed that vendors had poor attitude levels. Thus, it is important to ensure the attitudes of vendors are the major factor contributing to business success. The finding is consistent with Soon (2019) stated that a number of factors could affect the ranking results inclusive of food handlers' knowledge and attitude, food safety training and education, and consumer's demands. Why is this individual factor important? The answer lies in the nature of business itself. It is possible that street food vendors were aware of the food safety news and consumers demand stricter food safety inspections from the local authorities. The unfortunate incident may have increased food handlers' awareness and attitudes towards food hygiene and safety (Soon, 2019). Several studies have been conducted to measure the level of vendors attitude towards food businesses such as in Turkey (Trafialek et al., 2017), Uganda and Kenya ((Muyanja, Nayiga, Brenda, & Nasinyama, 2011).

Skills that can be divided into communication and digital marketing skills is the second critical factor perceived by the food vendors of street market in Malaysia that contribute to business success. A study by Gatere (2016), through training women street vendors have acquired the relevant business management skills. They found that women lacked simple entrepreneurial skills such as auditing, accounting, marketing, planning and public relations. As a result, the respective institutions should organize training forums for women street vendors aiming at equipping them with the right credit and business management skills. Another study by Pletnev and Barkhatov (2016) found that all seven factors selected for the survey appeared to be quite important: financial resources, technological resources, entrepreneurial skills, government support, marketing strategy, business planning quality, and access to information contribute the business success factors for small-medium enterprises (SMEs) in the national economy of Pakistan. Therefore, entrepreneurial skills is important and considered as the skills that are pre-requisite for effective business operation guaranteeing some positive outcome (Gatere, 2016).

Operation such as running business every day, joint event, early preparation and enough workforce ranked as the second success factor in which categorized as important and within control of organizational factor. Another organization factor in the same category includes information management (brainstorming, cooperation, financial management, marketing techniques and prices comparison), machinery and other facilities for easy food and beverages management and resources available. This finding is supported by a study done by Lee et al., (2011) introducing a multilevel perspective of individual and organizational factors influencing business creation intentions. The findings of this study offer a number of opportunities for future research to advance our knowledge of the individual and organizational factors that predict IT professionals' intentions to start businesses. Aware of the business environment, transportation, location, technology and networking ranked as the third important factor contributing to the business success grouped under environmental factor. This finding was also reported by (Fernando, Chiappetta Jabbour, & Wah, 2019) who also found that environmental factors play an important role in chievingg business success.

Government support, which include the finance (repayment, funding and loans) and courses provided ranked as the fourth factor contributing to the business success. The findings is consistent with Long, Looijen and Blok (2018) and Muyanja et. al., (2011) which reported that support from government is crucial in sustaining business model innovation and economic effect. Financing can be in the form of low-interest loans, government grants, financial incentives, financial support from agencies such as TEKUN, MARA and other financial grants available in the country. Every business requires funding in terms of capital, premise, staffing, system and infrastructure investment to start off and to expand their business. Most private financial institutions rely on track records to award loans to businesses but for a new business venture, not having a favorable track record to award loans. For courses, encouragement by the government through local community programmes such as DuitNow, eRezeki and eUsahawan in Malaysia supported by MDEC for example can open up the opportunity for street market vendors in getting more demand via online platform for the food and beverages and at the same time increase their revenues.

Malaysian Street Market Survival

Malaysian street market survives as they preserve tradition crafts, culinary practices and social interactions that are vital to Malaysia's cultural identity and hub. Moreover, street markets in Malaysia provide livelihoods for countless individuals and families that often serving as entry points to

entrepreneurship for marginalized communities. Besides, the street market also draws for visitors eager to experience the authentic flavors and atmosphere of Malaysia. They foster community bonds and offer a space for social interaction that is gradually disappearing in modern urban life.

Several initiatives have been launched to modernize the Malaysian street markets attempting to align with TN50 involving the upgrades of infrastructure. Some markets have received basic infrastructure improvements like covered stalls, proper drainage, and waste management systems. This aims to create a more conducive and hygienic environment. More efforts have been made to encourage the use of e-wallets and other digital payment methods, reducing reliance on cash and promoting financial inclusivity. Workshops and training sessions have been introduced to equip vendors with basic business skills, hygiene practices and digital literacy. Some initiatives have focused on creating online platforms for vendors to sell their products, expanding their reach beyond the physical market. Besides, more organized market management effort has been madding to formalize market operations, introduce licensing systems, and establish better management practices.

Even though many initiatives have been considered and launched, modernization of Malaysian street markets has not reached its full potential several factors contribute to this slow progress includes lack of comprehensive integration, limited funding and resources, resistance to change, inadequate digital infrastructure and weak community engagement. A comprehensive plan with clear goals, timelines and assigned responsibilities across government agencies is crucial. Funds should be allocated not just for infrastructure but also for vendor training, digital literacy programs, sustainable waste management and community engagement for long-term impact.

Within Control		Beyond Control	
Important	Not Important	Important	Not Important
Individual (Rank #1) 1. Attitude 2. Entrepreneur skills Organizational (Rank #2) 1. Operation 2. Information management 3. Machinery and other facilities for easy F&B management 4. Resources available Environmental (Rank #3) 1. Aware of the business environment 2. Transportation 3. Location 4. Technology 5. Networking Government Support (Rank #4) 1. Finance 2. Courses	Individual 1. Online business encouragement 2. Lifelong learning Environmental 1. Product improvement (innovation) 2. Product quality Organizational 1. Business partner sharing Government Support 1. Compound 2. Price control	Individual 1. Learn from mistakes 2. Learn from experience 3. Family conditions 4. Technology advancement (online business) 5. Health condition Environmental 1. Accounting systems 2. Taxation 3. Provision of courses and seminars (training and development) 4. Competition 5. Weather 6. Family support Organizational 1. Sales 2. Profit 3. Capital 4. Resources supplies Government Support 1. Business guidelines/ regulation (government policy) 2. Financial assistance 3. Training assistance & facilities	Individual 1. Awards 2. Age Environmental 1. License issuance 2. Motivation 3. Support from peers and neighbors Organizational 1. Audit and classification Government Support 1. Government subsidies 2. Political changes 3. Government support 4. License issuance by Local Municipal

Figure 1: Summary of business success factors as perceived by the respondents.

Malaysian Street Market Unique Context

Rapid Urbanization

The rapid growth of Malaysian cities has led to the displacement of traditional markets, often replaced by high-rise buildings and commercial developments. This reduces the physical space available for markets and disrupts the established ecosystem of vendors and customers.

Cultural Shift

Malaysia's growing middle class is increasingly influenced by Western consumer culture, often favouring the convenience and perceived modernity of formal retail over the traditional experience of street markets.

Government Policies

While the government has, at times, made efforts to support local markets, a lack of consistent, targeted policies and enforcement often challenge these initiatives. A focus on attracting foreign investors and promoting large scale retail has in many ways, inadvertently downgraded traditional street markets.

Sustainable Future of Street Markets via Digital Solutions

Malaysia's street market can retain their cultural significance while adapting to the demands of a modern world. The integration of policies that support the modernization of street markets by invest in infrastructure upgrades and digital integration tools help to attract wider audiences.

CONCLUSION

Taken as a whole, the findings are consistent with (Lee et al., 2011) assertion that individual-level factors predict the processes of new venture development. This study is meant to explore the factors that contribute to business success based on the mini focus group study approach. The findings discovered that individual factors are the most important factors followed by organization factors as the second important factor and government supports and environment factors respectively. This exploratory research aimed at gaining insights into the motivations of selected food street market vendors in Malaysia, their perceptions about the success factors. The future of Malaysian street markets is not predetermined. With strategic interventions and support, the street market can not only survive but thrive. Government should invest in targeting funding for improved infrastructure, sanitation facilities, and vendor training programs. Vendors also need to take the initiative to join business mentorship and training in modern business practices that will also lead to access to microloans. Without consumers or customers, businesses would not survive. Community involvement and engagement is important in the planning and management of markets, ensuring the street market remains relevant and reflective of local needs. All vendors also should embrace innovative technologies that provide solutions such as online platforms for market vendors and digital payment systems. Moreover, focusing on the unique cultural aspects of each market to attract tourists seeking authentic experience. Malaysia should ensure that all stakeholders continue to play a vital role in the nation's vibrant and diverse landscape. It is not just about saving a retail format but about safeguarding a vital part of Malaysia's heritage and collective identity.

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