



Rural Community Entrepreneurship: A Case of Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark

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Abstract:

Rural entrepreneurship plays a significant role in promoting sustainable economic growth and improving the socio-economic well-being of local communities, particularly in tourism-based rural destinations. Despite the growing attention given to rural entrepreneurship, limited empirical studies have examined the entrepreneurial characteristics, digital adoption, and business challenges faced by local entrepreneurs in Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark. Therefore, this study aims to describe the entrepreneurial profile, business practices, digital platform utilisation, and challenges encountered by rural entrepreneurs within the study area. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed using convenience sampling involving 82 local entrepreneurs. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. The findings reveal that agriculture and fishing remain the dominant economic activities, while most respondents have limited exposure to entrepreneurship training despite actively using e-commerce platforms. Financial constraints, market competition, and limited business knowledge were identified as the major challenges affecting entrepreneurial development. The study highlights the importance of strengthening entrepreneurship training, digital marketing capabilities, and financial support programmes to enhance the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. The findings provide useful insights for policymakers, tourism agencies, and entrepreneurship development organisations in designing more effective community-based entrepreneurship initiatives within rural tourism destinations.

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INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has long been recognised as one of the core factors of economic growth, employment creation, poverty reduction, and social development across the world. In recent years, the role of entrepreneurship has become increasingly significant in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), which promotes inclusive and sustainable economic development through productive employment and entrepreneurship. Rural entrepreneurship has also gained global attention as an effective mechanism for reducing regional economic

disparities by empowering local communities to utilise natural or homegrown resources, develop innovative products and services, and create sustainable livelihood opportunities (Barbieri et al., 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2023). Furthermore, the rapid advancement of digital technologies and online business platforms has expanded market accessibility, enabling rural entrepreneurs to participate more actively in regional and global economies (Rahmawati, 2025).

In Malaysia, entrepreneurship remains an important national development agenda in supporting economic resilience and inclusive growth. Through the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021–2025) and the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (SPV2030), the government continues to strengthen entrepreneurship development programmes, particularly among micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), to improve household income and reduce socio-economic inequality. Several initiatives such as entrepreneurship training, financial assistance, digitalisation programmes, and business mentoring have been introduced by government agencies to encourage greater participation in entrepreneurial activities, especially among rural communities. These initiatives reflect the government's commitment to creating a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem that enhances community resilience while supporting local economic development.

According to Garrido-Garza et al. (2025), rural entrepreneurship has become increasingly important because rural communities possess unique economic resources that can be transformed into sustainable business opportunities. Agricultural products, fisheries, traditional food, handicrafts, ecotourism, and cultural heritage represent valuable assets that can contribute significantly to local economic development when managed effectively. Besides generating income, rural entrepreneurship creates employment opportunities, reduces rural-to-urban migration, promotes community empowerment, and strengthens local resilience against economic uncertainty. Nevertheless, previous studies consistently report that rural entrepreneurs continue to face numerous challenges, including limited access to financial resources, inadequate entrepreneurial knowledge, weak digital literacy, insufficient marketing capabilities, and restricted access to broader markets (De Klerk & Kroon, 2020; Maheshwari et al., 2021). These constraints often limit business sustainability and reduce entrepreneurs' ability to capitalise on emerging economic opportunities.

Tourism is a big economic opportunity for Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark. The area is internationally recognised for its rich mangrove ecosystem, geological heritage, biodiversity, and ecotourism attractions, making it an attractive destination for both domestic and international visitors. The increasing number of tourists provides opportunities for local communities to diversify their income through tourism-related businesses such as boat services, food and beverage operations, accommodation, handicrafts, fisheries-based products, agricultural products, and community-based tourism activities. However, despite these opportunities, entrepreneurial participation within the local community remains relatively limited, and many entrepreneurs continue to operate small-scale businesses with limited access to entrepreneurship training, digital marketing knowledge, financial resources, and business networking opportunities. Understanding the current entrepreneurial landscape is therefore essential for designing effective development programmes that align with the needs of the local community.

Although previous studies have contributed substantially to understanding rural entrepreneurship and tourism development, empirical evidence on entrepreneurship among rural communities in geopark destinations in Malaysia remains limited. Most previous studies have focused on entrepreneurial performance, business success and economic contribution (Sagita et al., 2025; Taleb et al., 2023; Wan et al., 2024), whereas limited attention has been given to describing entrepreneurs' business characteristics, digital adoption, entrepreneurial challenges, and support needs in community-based tourism destinations. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence from Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship has long been recognised as a catalyst for economic growth and development, particularly in rural settings where traditional employment opportunities are limited (Popa et al., 2024; Samsudin et al., 2024; Suprapti & Muhtadi, 2026). Studies by Hasmawati et al. (2025) and Mukul and Sheeri (2024) highlight how entrepreneurial activities in rural areas lead to job creation, improved infrastructure, and increased community engagement.

Rural entrepreneurship enables communities to leverage local resources, cultural assets, and niche markets to drive economic diversification and sustainability (Shao et al., 2024; Subrahmanyam, 2025; Thukral, 2025). Digital tools and government support have further expanded entrepreneurial opportunities, allowing rural entrepreneurs to overcome geographic isolation and access broader markets (Barbieri et al., 2022; James, 2025; Paimen et al., 2023). The growth and long-term viability of such enterprises depend on multiple factors, including the availability of financial support, access to entrepreneurial training, business education, market linkages, and technological advancements. A notable characteristic of rural community entrepreneurship is its reliance on small and micro enterprises (SMEs), which are typically embedded in sectors such as agriculture, traditional crafts, ecotourism, and local food production. According to Hans et al. (2025), rural Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a critical role in fostering innovation and local value creation. However, their growth and sustainability are frequently constrained by limited access to capital, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient business education (Agrawal et al., 2025; De Klerk & Kroon, 2020).

Effective market linkages and digital integration are increasingly recognised as essential components for rural enterprises to compete beyond local markets (Carter et al., 2021; Kumar & Ahmaed, 2025). Entrepreneurial training and technological advancements contribute significantly to enhancing rural entrepreneurs' capabilities and resilience in an evolving economic landscape. Rural entrepreneurs often encounter several challenges, including restricted access to funding, insufficient infrastructure, and limited opportunities for formal business education. Additionally, many face difficulties in promoting their products and services beyond their immediate communities. As a result, digital literacy and the effective use of online business platforms have become increasingly vital for expanding market reach and supporting business growth.

More recent studies highlight that the effectiveness of tourism-based entrepreneurship hinges on the preparedness, innovation capacity, and business acumen of local entrepreneurs (Deka & Goswami, 2025; Gannon et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2023). Digital marketing, experiential tourism trends, and public-private partnerships have also been identified as critical factors in the success of rural tourism ventures. Thus, enabling local entrepreneurs to engage effectively with tourism markets is essential for achieving both economic and sustainable development goals in rural areas. Access to financial capital and market opportunities remains central to the success and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. More recent research highlights that the role of opportunity recognition and institutional support, a persistent gap in financing and market reach continues to constrain rural entrepreneurial growth (Ebewo et al., 2025; Neumeyer & Santos, 2020). Microfinance initiatives and targeted government programmes have shown promise in expanding capital availability, especially for women and first-time rural entrepreneurs (Maheshwari et al., 2021). Moreover, digital financial tools such as mobile banking and crowdfunding have enabled rural entrepreneurs to overcome traditional banking barriers and secure seed capital for small enterprises (Camacho et al., 2022).

On the market access front, digital marketing platforms and e-commerce tools are proving instrumental in allowing rural businesses to reach broader, often urban, consumer bases. Recent studies suggest that rural entrepreneurs who are equipped with digital literacy are in a better position to leverage online marketplaces and

social media for business visibility and sales (Ratten, 2022). However, disparities in internet connectivity and technological adoption remain significant hurdles in many developing and remote rural areas (Barbieri et al., 2022).

These findings reinforce the need for integrated strategies that combine financial inclusion, digital infrastructure, and entrepreneurial capacity-building to support robust rural enterprise ecosystems. The literature emphasizes that targeted entrepreneurial support in rural areas can serve as a powerful instrument for inclusive economic development and long-term social transformation. By synthesising insights from existing research, this study aims to develop a localised strategy for fostering entrepreneurship development in Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark. It focuses on empowering local business owners to effectively tap into tourism prospects and capitalise on tourism opportunities while addressing prevalent entrepreneurial challenges associated with rural entrepreneurship.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to describe the entrepreneurial characteristics, business involvement, digital platform utilisation, and entrepreneurial challenges among rural entrepreneurs in Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark. A descriptive design was considered appropriate because the study focused on describing the respondents' current conditions rather than examining causal relationships between variables.

The respondents consisted of 82 rural entrepreneurs operating in Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark. A convenience sampling technique was adopted due to the accessibility of respondents within the study area.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising four sections. Section A collected respondents' demographic information, while Sections B, C and D gathered information on entrepreneurship involvement, digital platform utilisation and entrepreneurship knowledge.

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were employed to summarise the characteristics of the respondents and describe the entrepreneurial landscape within the study area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results presented in Table 1 show the demographic profile of the local community. The majority of respondents involved in this study are between the ages of 31 to 35 years old (68.6%), followed by those aged 26 to 30 years (18.8%) and a smaller portion aged 36 years and above (12.6%). This distribution suggests that the surveyed community primarily consists of individuals in their early to mid-thirties, who are likely to be involved in the entrepreneurial sector. In terms of gender, female respondents slightly outnumber males, comprising 53.1% of the sample compared to 46.9% male, indicating a balanced gender representation.

Income levels among the respondents reveal a significant concentration within the lower income bracket. A substantial majority, 70%, earn less than RM1000 monthly, while 20% fall within the RM1001 to RM2000 range, and only 10% report earning between RM2001 and RM3000. This suggests that the local community experiences relatively low economic standing, which may influence their entrepreneurial motivations and

limitations. Regarding education, half of the respondents (50%) have attained the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) qualification, 30% completed their *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR), and 20% ended their formal education at the *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR) level. This indicates a moderate level of educational attainment, with most respondents having at least a secondary school background.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Demography Category		Percentage (%)
Age	26 – 30 years old	18.8
	31-35 years old	68.6
	36 years old and above	12.6
Gender	Male	46.9
	Female	53.1
Income	Less than RM1000	70.0
	RM1001 – RM2000	20.0
	RM2001 – RM3000	10.0
Education	UPSR	20.0
	PMR	30.0
	SPM	50.0
Sector involvement in entrepreneurship	Fishing	20.8
	Agriculture	38.0
	Food	14.0
	Business	20.0
	Others	7.2

In terms of entrepreneurial sector involvement, the highest participation is observed in the agriculture sector, which accounts for 38% of the respondents. This is followed by fishing (20.8%), general business activities (20%), food-related ventures (14%), and other sectors (7.2%). These findings reflect a strong reliance on traditional economic activities such as agriculture and fishing, which are likely influenced by the community's rural context and resource availability.

Table 2 shows the local community involvement in entrepreneurship. The analysis of respondents' business backgrounds indicates a relatively experienced entrepreneurial community, with 40.8% having been involved in business for four years and above. This suggests a considerable level of business maturity and potential resilience among local entrepreneurs. However, a notable proportion of respondents (33.0%) are relatively new to entrepreneurship, having less than one year of experience, indicating ongoing interest and entry into the entrepreneurial sector. This entry on new entrepreneurs highlights the dynamic nature of the local business landscape and suggests the need for tailored support strategies catering to both beginner and experienced business owners.

In relation to entrepreneurship education and capacity-building efforts, the majority (75.2%) of respondents reported that they had never attended any entrepreneurship training or workshop. This limited exposure to formal entrepreneurial development programs could potentially hinder their ability to apply skills such as digital marketing or financial planning practices effectively in their ventures.

Table 2: Local community involvement in entrepreneurship

Item		Percentage (%)
Period of involvement in business	Less than 1 year	33.0
	1-3 years	26.2
	4 years and above	40.8
Attendance in any entrepreneurship training/workshop	Yes	24.8
	No	75.2
Social media usage platform	Facebook	33.3
	TikTok	9.0
	Instagram	9.0
	WhatsApp	41.0
	Do not use social media	7.7
Use social media for business promotion	Yes	31.3
	No	68.7
Use e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, Lazada or TikTok Shop	Yes	70.0
	No	30.0
Problem encountered during running the business	Not enough capital	30.9
	Failure to compete	27.1
	No customer	23.2
	Weather	5.8
	Others	13.0
Means to encourage local community participation in entrepreneurship	Attitude	11.0
	Government effort	14.7
	Financial support	25.3
	Find knowledge	23.0
	Find opportunity	17.6
	Others	8.4

Regarding digital engagement, the data show that WhatsApp (41.0%) and Facebook (33.3%) are the dominant social media platforms among respondents, reflecting current communication preferences within the local context. The relatively lower usage of TikTok and Instagram (each at 9.0%) may suggest either unfamiliarity with or perceived irrelevance of these platforms for business activities among respondents. Interestingly, a small segment (7.7%) reported not using social media at all, which may indicate digital exclusion or a lack of perceived benefits. However, the findings show that only 31.3% of respondents use social media for business promotion. This implies a significant underutilization of potentially powerful and cost-effective digital marketing tools. Enhancing awareness and digital marketing skills could empower entrepreneurs to reach broader markets and improve business visibility.

In contrast to social media use, e-commerce adoption appears relatively strong, with 70.0% of respondents utilizing platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, or TikTok Shop. This trend indicates a growing recognition of online marketplaces as viable channels for business expansion. The higher engagement with e-commerce platforms compared to social media promotion may reflect entrepreneurs' preference for transaction-oriented digital tools rather than branding or engagement-focused platforms.

When exploring the challenges faced by respondents in managing their businesses, insufficient capital emerged as the most significant issue (30.9%), aligning with existing literature that frequently cites financial limitations as a primary constraint for micro and small enterprises. Competition-related challenges (27.1%) and the lack of customers (23.2%) further emphasize the difficulties entrepreneurs face in achieving market differentiation and

customer acquisition. Weather-related issues (5.8%) were less prominent but may affect specific industries such as agriculture or outdoor services. Additionally, (13.0%) of respondents reported other unspecified challenges, which could range from regulatory burdens to operational inefficiencies.

Lastly, respondents were asked to identify the most effective means of fostering greater entrepreneurial participation within the local community. Financial support was deemed the most critical factor (25.3%), reinforcing the need for accessible funding schemes or microcredit initiatives. Knowledge acquisition (23.0%) and the ability to identify business opportunities (17.6%) were also highlighted, pointing to the importance of education, mentorship, and access to market intelligence. Government efforts (14.7%) and individual attitudes (11.0%) were acknowledged as supporting factors, suggesting that while institutional and personal motivations are important, structural support remains a primary concern. A small percentage (8.4%) pointed to other means, potentially encompassing peer support, infrastructure improvements, or community engagement initiatives.

Overall, the findings reflect both the promise and the limitations within the current entrepreneurial ecosystem. While there is notable engagement with digital platforms and a mix of experienced and new entrepreneurs, there remain critical gaps in training, capital access, and digital strategy deployment that must be addressed to enhance the sustainability and growth potential of local businesses.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal both the potential and the constraints of rural entrepreneurship in Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark. The demographic profile, with the majority of respondents aged between 31 to 35 years and possessing at least secondary-level education, suggests a workforce in its productive years with a moderate educational foundation. This demographic structure aligns with prior research indicating that entrepreneurial activity is often concentrated among working-age adults with basic educational qualifications, enabling them to adapt to market needs while leveraging local resources (Deller et al., 2019; Malecki, 2018; Zhang et al., 2022).

The economic profile of respondents, with 70% earn less than RM1000 monthly, highlights the community's reliance on low-income, resource-based sectors such as agriculture (38%) and fishing (20.8%). This dependence reflects the traditional economic base of rural Malaysia, which, while culturally significant, may not provide sufficient income stability without diversification into higher-value activities (Korsgaard et al., 2015). Tourism entrepreneurship, given the Geopark's ecological appeal, offers a potential avenue for such diversification, echoing studies that emphasize the role of tourism in rural regeneration (Gannon et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2023).

However, a notable barrier is the limited participation in formal entrepreneurship training, with 75.2% of respondents never having attended workshops or courses. This gap in structured skill-building limits the community's capacity to effectively manage business operations, adopt innovative practices, and integrate digital marketing strategies, factors deemed essential for sustainable rural entrepreneurship (Barbieri et al., 2022; De Klerk & Kroon, 2020). While e-commerce adoption is relatively high (70%), the underutilization of social media for business promotion (31.3%) suggests a disconnect between access to digital platforms and the ability to leverage them strategically, supporting Ratten's (2022) argument on the critical role of digital literacy in rural enterprise growth.

Financial constraints emerged as the most significant challenge, consistent with global evidence that micro and small rural enterprises often face barriers in accessing affordable capital (Neumeyer & Santos, 2020;

Maheshwari et al., 2021). Respondents' emphasis on financial support, knowledge acquisition, and opportunity recognition as key enablers further reinforces the need for integrated interventions that combine microfinance schemes, entrepreneurial education, and mentorship. Such strategies have been shown to enhance rural resilience by enabling entrepreneurs to transition from subsistence-level operations to more competitive market participation (Camacho et al., 2022).

The findings also point to the importance of localised policy support. Government-led initiatives, such as the One District, One Industry program, could be adapted to strengthen tourism-linked entrepreneurship in the Geopark, integrating capacity-building workshops, infrastructure development, and digital access. The synergy between community-driven innovation and institutional support is well-documented in rural entrepreneurship literature, where successful models often involve multi-stakeholder collaboration (Carter et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the dual reality facing rural entrepreneurs in Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark: while the community possesses latent potential driven by a productive-age workforce, rich natural assets, and growing engagement with e-commerce, significant barriers to training, capital access, and digital marketing proficiency constrain business growth. The predominance of traditional economic activities and the relatively low-income levels indicate an urgent need for targeted interventions to enhance competitiveness in the tourism sector.

The results suggest three priority areas for action. First, structured entrepreneurship training tailored to the local tourism context is essential to improve business management, innovation capacity, and digital engagement (Barbieri et al., 2022; Ratten, 2022). Second, financial inclusion strategies, including microcredit schemes and digital financing tools, could address the persistent capital shortage (Maheshwari et al., 2021; Camacho et al., 2022). Third, strengthening market linkages through coordinated digital marketing campaigns and participation in tourism networks could expand market reach and revenue opportunities (Gannon et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2023).

In line with the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, fostering rural entrepreneurship in Kampung Sungai Kubang Badak Mangrove Langkawi Geopark can contribute to sustainable economic growth, job creation, and community empowerment. Achieving this requires a holistic approach that blends skills development, financial accessibility, and digital transformation, supported by robust public-private partnerships. With strategic support, the community can transform its ecological and cultural assets into a sustainable economic engine, ensuring both environmental stewardship and socio-economic resilience.

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