THE ADOPTION OF DIGITAL CULTURE AS A MECHANISM FOR THE SURVIVAL OF MICRO SCALE BUSINESS INDUSTRY AMONG TRADERS IN EAST MALAYSIA: A LITERATURE REVIEW ANALYSIS

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Abstract - Digital culture has become part of world mainstream reality, and the phenomenon of Covid-19 pandemic has further boosted the importance of digital culture empowerment among the global community. Conventional businesses are affected by the pandemic due to the control of movement and physical encounters causing traders to switch to digital businesses. Due to the importance of digital world, especially in the endemic era, this study has been initiated to analyse the literature review on the adoption of digital culture in the micro scale business industries in East Malaysia. Content/text analysis of some of the scholars' scientific works and participant observations have been utilised for data collection. The study found that there was a lack of literature review on the adoption of digital culture as a mechanism for the sustainability or survival of micro scale business industry among traders in East Malaysia during the Covid-19 pandemic. It also found that there is a diversity in the corpus of knowledge, conceptual aspect as well as trends of the authors' and scholars' approaches. This study is important because 76.6% of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is the micro scale businesses. SMEs makes up 99% of the 920,624 business establishments in Malaysia. Despite being the backbone of the business landscape in Malaysia, SMEs have performed poorly in the digitalisation aspect. It is hoped that this paper will be able to contribute significantly to the academicians and researchers who specialise in the epistemological thought or knowledge.

Keywords - Digital Culture; Micro Scale Business; East Malaysia; Literature Review; Endemic

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital world has affected everybody. It changes the norms of human contemporary life in this endemic era. It is crucial to have the skills to use and possess internet to start off and to improve daily activities. The Covid-19 pandemic, whichhas hit the world since December 2019, has prompted a new norms or culture of digital dependency. The movement control orders that physically restrict human affairs as well as contact or communication has encouraged humans' dependency on digital applications. The pandemic has transformed the conventional culture of communication, learning, working, trading, and doing daily activities. The conventional way of doing businesses has also affected by this pandemic causing businesses to opt to digital platform for survival.

SME covers a large part of the business landscape in Malaysia, and it is the backbone of the country's economic development. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and the movement control order (MCO) have badly affected the SMEs. According to the statistic report, 70% of SMEs reported falling to 50% in just a week (Tong & Gong, 2020). The 'tamu' institution, which is known as the traditional or conventional business centre and meeting among the people of Borneo, including Sabah, has also experiencing the falling caused by the pandemic. Nevertheless, the online businesses have increased to 53% for food ordering, 144% for retail purchases and 61% for food delivery. During the first day of the MCO, Grabfood and Foodpanda have recorded 30% increase in food delivery. Based on this trend, Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) has proposed 20% growth for e-commerce by 2020 (Ibid). This shows that SMEs need to change the business approach from conventional platform to digital economy for survival in this endemic era.

In a nutshell, digital culture, as a new cultural norm, is gaining space and will continue to influence the landscape of the business industry and the life of a contemporary society. The digital culture is a combination of cultural concept and computer or internet. The term digital culture is also known ascyber culture, internet culture, information culture and so on. Matthew, Mahamadou, Sarhan and Omonowo (2017) have conceptualized digital culture as a practice and culture derive from digital technology. Technology does not only a medium or vehicle for human relations, but also an essential element in the exchange and communication process. A culture is a way of life encompassing various aspects of human life, be it material or non-material, such as beliefs, values, norms, customs, language, artifacts, or cultural products and so on. Digital

culture is the expression of life caused by the development, revolution, or evolution in the aspects of computing and digitalization of society. It is among the ways people engage in digital media and technology in their daily lives. Due to the importance of digital world, especially in the endemic era, this study has been initiated to analyse the literature review on the adoption of digital culture in the micro scale business industries in East Malaysia. Content/text analysis of some of the scholars' scientific works and participant observations have been utilised for data collection.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study has employed content/text analysis of some of the scholars' scientific works as the main method to collect data, and the qualitative approach specifically participant observations as the secondarymethodtoobtain additional/supplementary data. Literature reviews focussing on the importance of digitalization in business industry, digital culture, digital poverty and the roles of telecentresor internet centres have been analysed to address the gap in examining the study pertaining to the adoption of digital culture as a mechanism for the survival of microscalebusinessindustry among traders in East Malaysia. Meanwhile,participant observation has been applied to review the surroundings of the research location by taking into account its facilities, infrastructures as well as internet connection through visual recordings in the form of pictures and videos to get real-life scenarios of digital culture adoption among the 'tamu' traders. The participant observation has been conducted at several locations around Sabah which is located on Malaysia's portion of the Borneo island in South East Asia, covering the south west coast zone (KotaBelud, Tamparuli, Kundasang and Ranau), north west coast zone (Kudat, Sikuati and Kota Marudu) and also the upper inland or rural zone (Tambunan, Keningau, Tenom and Nabawan).

III. LITERATURE REVIEW ANALYSIS

Gong and Tong (2020) have discussed the importance of digitalization among the SMEs especially during the pandemic era. They have stated that the issue of digital consumption among the SMEs is unclear, yet, they have agreed that SMEs will gain advantages from the use of digital technology. This is due to the study conducted by Universiti Malaya Consortium that has found the positive increase in the SMEs productivity when using digital technology. It is found that SMEs that use the social media have experienced increased productivity of 26%, while those involved in e-commerce have experienced increased productivity of 27%. In addition, the use of sophisticated digital technology like data management solutions can increase their SMEs productivity up to 60%. The low level of digital use among the SMEs is related to productivity, efficiency and business operation that is low and less performed during the MCO. Malaysian government has introduced a few initiatives to encourage the SMEs digitalization such as *PakejRangsangan EkonomiPRIHATAN* or the *PRIHATIN* Economic Stimulus Package. MDEC has worked with 237 local technology companies, including network providers, e-commerce platforms and technology service providers, to offer discount to promote the SMEs digitalization. Although the government encourages the SMEs digitalization, there are fundamental challenges hindering such efforts.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020) study on the impacts of economy on digital infrastructures due to Covid-19 pandemic has brought together leading ICT economists to exchange views on the latest research and analysis on the economic impact on digital infrastructure due to the pandemic and its contributions in building social and economic resilience throughout the pandemic. The study has suggested potential initiatives for the digital economy in terms of enhancing social resilience and economic needs to access the digital infrastructures that are believed to be increasingly important, and certain aspects of ICT are critical during the quarantine/isolation period, such as increased ICT opportunities from telework, telemedicine, food delivery and logistics, distance learning online payments and entertainment.

Azizah and Rosmani's (2017) study on Malaysia media ecosystem found that the rapid development of the information and communicationtechnology (ICT) has changed the landscape of the literary ecosystem from a natural mind to a digital mind. Although many believe that the rapid development of media and information technology will cause certain industries and media products to fail, the reality shows the contrary. Technological advancement will continue to accompany human civilization. Therefore, investing in cultural sector is practical because all technological innovations can be appreciated by all groups. Members of the society of this convergent era have creative-innovative creators who can contribute to a society that needs a variety of information and knowledge. Based on Digital News Report 2017, Malaysian internet users are the highest WhatsApp application users in the world. 58% of Malaysian people use Facebook, 26% use YouTube, 13% use WeChat and Instagram. This shows that ancestral heritage wisdom can be preserved and continue to grow dynamically through the existing digital media ecosystem.

Ishak, Mohd Sobhi and Musa (2016) conducted a study on the digital gaps and people's attitude towards the use of digital gadget. They found that the low use of telephone, computer and internet is related

to the elderly's negative attitude that has perceived digital technology as something that is not a necessity in life. Muhammad Zaiamri, Zainal Abidin and Amira Sariyati (2016) also studied the relationship between the use and digital acceptancewith age. Their study focused on the challenges and elderly's adaptation in digital network surroundings. The study has identified three challenges, namely lack of information seeking activities, unnecessarily use of functions, and mistrust or confused perception.

Next, Sarah, Nadirah, Mohamad Kamal and Mohammad Hussin (2019) have discussed the implications of education gaps from the perspectives of digital and poverty on students' academic achievements. They found that increased living standards and economic issues were the factors causing education gaps. The scenario has affected various aspects including digital gaps. Poverty is found to be the main cause for parents to neglect their children's education which means their inability to provide facilities, such as ICT, for their children to study.

Ezmieralda Melissa (?) has discussed how media digitalization has changed the way Indonesian viewers use the media and its limitation. She defines digital culture as continuous cultural texts based on the facts that digital technology enables flexibility and opportunity for users to add or change the media texts. Nevertheless, she finds that this open and continuous text has several limitations. Although digital culture is said to be able to create democracy and generate new creativity, it also opens opportunity to negative effects like the misuse of media texts and credibility issues. On the other hand, Meilani (2014) has raised the issue of preservation of Indonesian culture through digital media. According to her, modern technology plays a significant role in providing understanding and knowledge on culture to the contemporary generation. The preservation of Indonesian culture will grow not only through conventional media but also through the latest digital media.

Barrantes (2014) has studied the analysis framework of the digital poverty concept. He defines the digital poverty concept as the limitation of the ICT system. Individuals who are categorized as digitally poor are those who have limited information and communication enabled by digital technology. The limitations were caused by lack of knowledge about the use and lack of income. In his study, the issues on digital poverty were related to age, education background, infrastructures and the accessibility of functionality. Syahruddin, Siti Nurbayu, Cyril and Aisah (2021) have also conducted a study on the digital poverty issueson virtual teaching, learning and supervision aspects. Their study has linked the term digital poverty with moral support, material existence, internet network accessibility and the availability of conducive locations for the teaching, learning and supervision aspects.

Based on the digital poverty perspective by Barantes (2007), Panagiotis, Sue Hanna and Gemma North (2020) have studied the digital poverty issues on social work learning. They found that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused further digital gaps in society. According to them, the use of technology in social work learning is not a new issue that occurred without debate. However, in dealing with the Covid-19 and related quarantine steps, social works learning has been involved with drastic virtual coordination activities and hybrid learning. Such reflections lead to the arguments that the level of adaptation of an organization is not always consistent with those involved in social work learning. This has caused many students to face digital poverty scenario and disparity gaps that must be addressed with more inclusive curriculum and practical alternative teaching methods.

Manduna (2016) studied the digital poverty among the African students by comparing the readiness and use of communication technology among the privileged and underprivileged students. The study shows direct relationship between low level of education and digital poverty. The study also shows that males have more opportunitie to use ICT than females. The poorer is the family, the lower is the use of digital media. In addition, it is found that settlements in rural areas have further reduced the likelihood of individuals to achieve better level of digital use. The study has also confirmed that poverty, education, geography/location, gender and income affect the accessibility and use of ICT. The study also recommends a coherent, broad, relevant, and comprehensive ICT policy framework that has sustainable structure for implementation, integration, and learning. Community involvement in planning and designing ICT-supported interventions should be encouraged. Th study also suggested that technology infrastructure, technical support, access, and ICT equipment should be provided regardless of a person's social background, economy, and political beliefs. The use of wireless WIFI is also recommended to overcome the problem of high cost and difficulty in reaching most of the rural population.

Studies on digital issues in society are also linked to the role of internet centers. Among the studies were Musa (2005), Ainin, Noor Ismawati and Rohani (2010), Muhamad Sham (2006), Azlizan, Mohd Nazaruddin and Zainal (2017) and Asian Development Bank (2017).Musa (2008) in his book entitled, "Memanfaatteknologimaklumat dan komunikasi ICT untuksemua" (Utilizing ICT information and communication for all) describes the government's efforts in providing facilities and internet access, so that members of the community

can use the ICT optimally. His discussions focus on three main groups, namely individual, family and community. According to him, the effectiveness of ICT can only be achieved when the internal and external challenges of the individual, family and community have been resolved. To ensure the success of an internet-related-program oractivity, both internal and external factors needto complement each other.In addition to fostering awareness of the importance of ICT and internet in all levels, it is also essential to establish external factors such as facilities at the ICT centres, regular ICT programmes and trainings, capable supervisors, funding and hardware support for the telecentre, and strong support from the local agencies.

Ainin, Noor Ismawati and Rohani's (2010) study focuses on the dissemination of ICT by examining the government's initiatives to bridge the digital gaps existing between urban and rural communities. They studied the PID (Pusat Internet Desa/Rural Internet Centre) operation and development. The findings of the study illustrate that the communities show great interest in learning and improving their ICT skills. The centres provide ways for them to achieve their goals, to learn and improve their ICT skills. It is also found that despite operational problems, the Internet Centres perform well. The centres have successfully functioned as useful communication channel, nurturing and building social relationship as well as sharing knowledge and skills among users through activities.

Muhamad Sham (2006) studied the ICT functions and roles in the students' development in rural areas, i.e., *Kampung Tradisi Lembah Keriang* and *Perkampungan Felda Bukit Tangga, Changlun, Kedah.* The study involved 200 students, and it studied the level of participation of rural communities in the field of ICT from the economic, education and social scopes. Generally, the findings identified several factors that have influenced and caused ICT problems among the respondents/villagers. The existing ICT did not able to cater the villagers' needs in future because of the growing population. There was a need to establish new computer centres in each housing area and educational institution due to the growing population in the areas involved. Azlizan, Mohd Nazaruddin and Zainal (2017) have discussed the needs to build new computer centres to overcome the shortage of ICT supplies among the youth of Daerah Kubang Pasu, Kedah. It is said that the computer centres can decrease the negative influence among the youth by acting as the centres to gain knowledge and obtain the latest information and current issues.

Zurinah, Jalaluddin and Mohd Asruladlyi (2016) have also discussed about the role of telecentre in the construction of smart ICT among the rural communities. They found that through smart ICT programmes in the process of urbanization of rural locality, telecentre plays a positive role. The study shows holistic development that nurtures a generation of technology savvy. The telecentres provide opportunities and facilities relating to economic management, increased academic performance and the handling of day-to-day routine of rural communities. It is important for all parties including the government, private sectors, statutory bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local people to collaborate to achieve the goals.

Jalaluddin (2012) has also studied the roles of telecentres as the digital bridge to increase human capital, social capital and economic capital among the remote communities. According to him, rural telecentres in the 21st century need to be able to improve the living standard and quality of life of the rural population. This is because the rural telecentres of the 21st century plays a bigger role in developing the political, administrative aspects, economy, social and cultural aspects, technology, education, laws as well as regulations of the rural communities. The role of telecentres in 'urbanizing the countryside through cyberspace' has now evolved to be more on the development of multipurpose telecentres (MTC). In conclusion, a symbiotic process involving various aspects is needed to ensure the sustainability of the multi-functional telecentres that can achieve the desired goals, which are to develop the rural communities from various aspects involving the digital world.

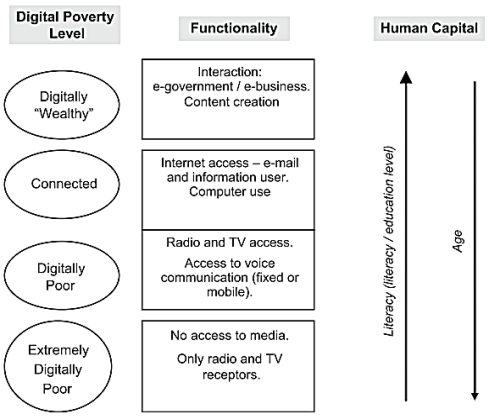
Jalaluddin, Abdul Razaq, Mohd Mahzan and Alfitri (2014) focused on a symbiotic relationship between the telecentre and a lifelong learning for the development of rural communities. In the 21st century, telecentres can improve the life status, quality of life and knowledge stability of the rural communities. The symbiotic relationship between the telecentre and lifelong learning has enable the achievement of the Malaysia's aspiration to establish a thriving, independent and competitive rural community. The digital gaps and socioeconomic differences between the rural and urban communities can be minimized through multi-stakeholders collaboration.

Apart from Malaysia, other Asian countries like Sri Lanka have also highlighted the issue of digital gaps among the rural communities as the main national development agenda. A study conducted by Asian Development Bank (2017) on the rural communities in Sri Lanka has shown the impact, sustainability and inclusion of public ICT centers or telecentres on the rural communities. The rural ICT centers are capable to achieve the agenda planned by the Sustainable Development Goals. These centers should be seen as the technology hubs that enable rural children to learn

ICT skills and be able to learn on their own. It should be seen as the catalyst for digital inclusion in rural localities.

IV. THE THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS: THE CONCEPT OF THE DIGITAL CONSUMPTION LEVEL AND POVERTY

The following proposed study will apply the concept of digital consumption among the small-scale traders in Sabah based on the conceptual framework introduced by Barrantes (2014) regarding the level of digital poverty. Based on the theory, there are four levels of digital poverty, namely 1. 'Digitally Wealthy', 2. 'Connected', 3. 'Digitally Poor' dan 4) 'Extremely Digitally Poor'. The classifications are shown in the following figure.



The concept of digital poverty by Barrantes will be adapted in the conceptualizing the level of digital use among the rural traders/vendors in Sabah. Barrantes has linked the level of literacy and age indicators to determine the digital poverty level. In the future study, the researchers will relate the level of digital consumption among the traders with several variables or factors, namely personal/psychology, economy, physical and social/administration.

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the studies have shown that the issue of digitalization culture has begun to gain attention among scholars, not only during the pandemic era, but also during the pre and post Covid-19. The literature review has illustrated the gaps on the issues of digitalization culture among the small-scale traders especially the 'tamu' and stalls in Sabah. In addition, the literature review analysis has identified diversity in the corpus of knowledge, conceptual aspect as well as trends of the authors' and scholars' approaches.The study also found that there was a lack of literature review on the adoption of digital culture as a mechanism for the sustainability or survival of micro scale business industry among traders in East Malaysia during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study is important because 76.6% of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is the micro scale businesses. SMEs makes up 99% of the 920,624 business establishments in Malaysia. Despite being the backbone of the business landscape in Malaysia, SMEs have performed poorly in the digitalisation aspect. It is hoped that this paper will be able to contribute significantly to the academicians and researchers who specialise in the related discipline or corpus of knowledge.

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