

Are the Orang Asli Ready for the Digital Economy?

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Abstract

The world economy is moving forward at a fast pace due to digitalization. New modes of work and production have created different types of jobs and also impacting the way people choose and decide to purchase items in their daily life. Consumption of goods is being influenced by social media. For the digital economy to be effective and have a high impact it requires that people, business, data and processes to be connected online. This is a tall order for the Orang Asli, who are mainly residing in rural areas and have a low data connection. This paper uses document analysis and supplemented with field survey at Pos Legap, Perak. Although only two of the Orang Asli youths interviewed do any online purchases, the majority are active users of social media. About 50 % have own business and all are interested to learn about digital marketing strategies. Distance from the market and the nearby town makes the social media an attractive entertainment and a business tool. Nevertheless, more concerted efforts need to be done regularly to get the Orang Asli to be more aggressively involved in the digital economy and capitalize on the income-generating opportunities that arise from it.

Keywords: digital economy, Orang Asli, online purchase, Pos Legap Perak

Introduction

The effect of the 4th industrial revolution is not only felt by every sector of the economy but also by individuals in every aspect of their lives. In a business environment for example, instead of people moving to get goods and services, it is now the other way around. Online purchase now is not only for items such as clothing and appliance but also for groceries and orders are delivered to consumers. Business strategies, therefore, need to change accordingly.

The current generation of Gen Z is said to be digital natives that are IT savvy and highly connected online. Hence the 4th IR environment is very much suited to their background. This, however, cannot be generalized to the Orang Asli community. The Orang Asli community in Malaysia is found to be left behind in many aspects especially education and economy (reference). The effort to bring Orang Asli to be at par with other communities in Malaysia is faced with many challenges. Factors such as culture and attitude are identified as major obstacles in the effort to

improve their socio-economic. Despite having only a basic education level, the Orang Asli community is also connected to the digital world through the availability of cheap smart-phones and data packages as well as broadband infrastructures provided by the government. The usage of digital facility is however limited to social media and entertainment purposes.

The digital business environment facilitates the marketing and delivery of products from producers to customers. The Orang Asli community is known for their skills in producing good and marketable handicrafts items. The challenges have always been how to market and made it reachable to the outside communities not only locally but more so internationally. The development in digital business is hopefully taken advantaged by the Orang Asli community to improve their socio-economic well-being. Without proper training and skills, however, the Orang Asli may not be able to ride on the technology offered in the 4th industrial revolution. It is therefore important to gauge the level of readiness especially among the youths of Orang Asli to take advantage of the technologies and connectivity offered by the 4th industrial revolution. This study looks at a community of Orang Asli at Pos Legap which has been equipped with connectivity to the outside world with the setting up of community internet centre.

The Orang Asli community of Pos Legap consists of 10 villages with an estimated population of 800 people and the distance to the nearest town of Sungai Siput is about 15km away. The main economic activities are collecting jungle produce, simple farming, jungle trekking, traditional *sewing* dance, and exotic delicacies. They are skilful in bamboo weaving and turn it into products such as baskets and fish traps. These products have the potential to be marketed and provide one source of income to them.

Literature Review

The Internet changed the world rapidly which have revolutionized communication be it for business or individual interactions (Jerry & Alan 2007). In June 2018, 55.1% of world populations (4.21 billion individuals) were listed as users of the internet against 3.61 billion in the year 2016 (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>). According to Thompson (2001) and Thompson and Vivien (1997), four Internet activities can be identified which include browsing, messaging, downloading and purchasing. According to Amir Zal (2009),

the Orang Asli have their attitude in response and approach towards ICT learning which is driven by hedonism and systematic thinking.

A study by Crompton (2004) discovers that internet users vary including the indigenous people or also known as Orang Asli. In Malaysia, the Orang Asli also part of the internet users and their level of usages and familiarities with computers and internet are quite good (Abdul Rahman & Yusri 2011). The Orang Asli, the indigenous people, make up 0.5% of the total population of Malaysia (Tijah, Jerald & Pusat 2003). Malaysia's population is 32 million in 2017, with 178,197 of Orang Asli.

The Canadian survey by Crompton (2004) shows that most their aborigines afford to own personal computers which can be shared by family members. In contrary, a study in Malaysia shows that most of the Orang Asli are not able to purchase own personal computer and subscribe to internet facilities since they are in the low-income bracket (Abdul Rahman & Yusri 2011).

Internet access is often a challenge especially associated with the Orang Asli. The Orang Asli have not been able to use ICT due to the low internet accessibility in their remote settlements compared to other ethnic minorities. Sarjit Singh (2015)'s study found that the Orang Asli was receptive towards improving their lot in life and development, especially in ICT. But poverty, limited education and the lack of ICT facilities in their rural villages had rendered many of them ICT illiterate. The study on the Orang Asli village at Pulau Carey in Selangor revealed that those in the community especially its youth had shown a genuine interest in ICT. They spent a good chunk of their free time in cyber cafes to seek information and entertainment through ICT.

Prof. Dr Sarjit Singh, who is also the National Professors Council National Unity Cluster secretary, said the research in general, showed that ethnic minorities were of the view that ICT played an important role in sustaining their cultural identity. The Orang Asli found it easy to adapt to ICT innovations. Nevertheless, before utilizing the ICT to preserving their identity and bring their culture forward, they need to be given equal opportunities in terms of facilities like broadband, to be ICT-educated. The Education Ministry needs to ensure that schools with Orang Asli children are equipped with ICT facilities as it is integral in realizing the nation's digital aspir.

Methodology

The Orang Asli's readiness to embrace the digital economy is reflection through their usage of the digital platform, either for communications, seeking information or doing e-commerce. Therefore, to collect information leading towards their keenness for the digital economy, the mixed-method study design is used in this study. This method starts with document analysis and the data and assumptions derived at are verified through field survey data collection using a set of the closed and open-ended questionnaire as the study instrument. The field survey was conducted at Pos Legap, Perak. Content and face validation is done within the circle of researchers to ensure that the set of questions can cover all the aspects that need to be examined.

Informal face-to-face sessions were held with members of the Orang Asli community at Pos Legap, Perak to get responses on the issues being studied. As the Orang Asli are relatively shy and take time to understand the questions asked, they were gathered in small groups of three to four people and asked the questions. Enumerators were trained at the Faculty of Economics and Management on how to use field instrument questionnaires during the field survey. The sessions were conducted between entrepreneurial workshops and e-Entrepreneurs delivered by several strategic partners of the Faculty of Economics and Management, namely, MCM GreenMan Group Sdn. Bhd. and MDEC. The data were collected from 23 Orang Asli youths who attended the courses provided by UKM-UCTC together with the Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The data collected is entered into the Excel program before it was analyzed.

Research Results and Discussion

The 23 respondents interviewed were from the Temiar ethnic group of the Orang Asli community residing at Pos Legap, Perak. They were all from the villages of Rengkeh, Santeh, Penjek, and Kuala Legap. There were six male respondents and the majority 17 were female. Their age group is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents Age Group

Age	Total
13-18	8
19-23	11
24-28	1
29-33	1
34-38	1
39-43	1

Source: Field Survey, 6-7 Oct 2018

Table 1 above shows that the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 19-23 years (11 persons) and 13-18 (8 persons). This is a nice youthful age to analyze their digital experiences. All respondents said they were healthy. Among the 4 respondents who were already married, 2 have 4 dependents, one has 2 dependents and one has 1 dependent. All young couples are having small families. The level of income per month based on the respondents' jobs is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Level of Average Income per Month Based on the Respondents' Jobs

	Average Income Per Month	
	100-300	301-600
Respondents Jobs		
Gardening	1	
Housewives	1	1
Tapping Rubber	1	
Own Farming	1	
Plantation sector	1	
Cook	1	
Self-employed at village work	1	
Palm Oil Plantation	1	
Islamic Religious Teacher (<i>kaafa</i>)	1	
Village Head (<i>Tok Batin</i>)		1
No Job	12	

Source: Field Survey, 6-7 Oct 2018

Online Activity Experience

A total of 5 respondents agree that they use the internet to play online games. Meanwhile, a majority of 7 respondents did not give an opinion on the internet because they were not exposed to the internet and their uses and 3 respondents disagreed to use the internet to play online games because they did not use gadgets with sophisticated technology.

A total of 7 respondents agreed that they use the internet to find information to make a decision. Meanwhile, the majority of 8 respondents did not give an opinion on the internet because they were not exposed to the internet and their uses and 3 respondents disagreed on using the internet to find information to make decisions because they did not use any technology.

Three respondents agree that their child is using the internet to do school work. Meanwhile, a majority of 10 respondents did not give an opinion on the internet because they were not exposed to the internals and their use and were still single and 5 respondents disagreed that my Child was using the internet to do schoolwork because they did not use any technological gadgets and are still single.

A majority of 11 respondents agreed to use the internet for downloading videos and songs. 4 respondents did not use the internet to download videos and songs because they were not exposed to the internals and their uses and only one respondent disagreed with using the internet to download videos and songs because they did not use any technology-based gadgets.

A respondent agreed to use the internet to pay the bill. Meanwhile, 6 respondents did not use the internet to pay their bills as they were not exposed to the internals and their uses and only 4 respondents disagreed on using the internet to pay bills because they did not use any technology gadgets.

It can conclude that a majority of 10 respondents agreed to use the internet to communicate on social media sites. Meanwhile, 5 respondents did not provide internet access to communicate on social media sites as they were not exposed to the internals and their uses and only one respondent disagreed that using the internet to communicate on their social media sites did not use any technology gadgets.

Some respondents have had exposure to using the internet in their lives even though they did not seek knowledge. They use their mobile phones to access information on various issues. Among them access information through the internet

for business. A total of 10 people rarely used the internet to search for business information while there are also 13 respondents, most of whom have never used the internet to obtain business information. It seems that most of them are not interested in accessing the internet for business information.

Only 4 people use the internet to find sports information. It seems that most of them are not interested in accessing the internet for information on sports. 12 of the majority of respondents have never used the internet to obtain information on technology as well as no internet use regularly to search for information technology. Most of them are not interested in accessing the Internet for information on technology.

A total of 10 people rarely used the internet to search health information while 6 respondents never used the internet to get health information and only 5 people use the internet to find sports information. It appears that most of them are not interested in accessing the internet for information on health.

A total of 10 people rarely used the internet to find information on education while 8 respondents never used the internet to get health information and only 3 people use the internet to find information on education. It seems that most of them are not interested in accessing the Internet to get information about education that is interested in just school students.

A total of 7 people sometimes used the internet to find information on personal care while 5 respondents never used the internet to get information on personal care and only 5 people use the internet for personal information. It seems that most of them are quite interested in accessing the internet for information on personal care. The majority of the 18 people specifically the women either sometimes or rarely use the internet to find information on recipes for cooking. It seems that most of them are less interested in accessing the Internet for information on politics. Only 4 persons reported on accessing political issues.

A majority of 7 people sometimes use the Internet to find information about religion. A majority of 11 people sometimes use the internet to find information on interests/hobbies.

A total of 10 people had not used the Internet to find information on jobs while there are also 8 respondents sometimes using the internet to get information about the job and only one often uses the internet to find job information. It seems, most are less interested in accessing the internet for information about the job.

The majority of the 9 people have never used the Internet to find information on family matters while there are also 7 respondents sometimes using the internet to get information on family matters and only 4 people use the internet to find information on family matters. It seems that most of them are a little interested in accessing the Internet for information on family matters.

A total of 7 people rarely used the internet to find information about entertainment while 4 respondents never use the internet to get information about entertainment and only 6 people use the internet for entertainment information. It seems that most of them are quite interested in accessing the internet for entertainment information.

The majority of the 11 people have never used the internet to find information about community news while there are also 2 respondents sometimes using the internet to get information on community news and only 2 people use the internet to find community news information. It seems that most of them are less interested in accessing the Internet for information on community news.

A majority of the 15 people have never used the Internet to seek information about the ADUN Information while there are also no respondents sometimes using the Internet to obtain information about the ADUN Information and only 1 person regularly use the internet to search information of ADUN Information. It seems that most of them are less interested in accessing the Internet for information on ADUN Information.

A majority of the 11 people have never and rarely used the internet to find information about banking while there are also several respondents sometimes using the internet to get information about banking and no one often uses the internet to find banking information. It appears that most of them are less interested in accessing the Internet for information on banking.

A total of 7 people had never used the internet to find information on Interior Design while there are also 6 respondents sometimes using the Internet to get information on Interior Decoration and only 4 people use the Internet to find Interior Decoration information. It seems that most of them are interested in accessing the Internet for information on Interior Decoration.

A total of 12 people had never used the internet to find information about marriage while there are also 4 respondents sometimes using the internet to get married information and only one person is using the internet to find wedding

information. It seems that most of them are less interested in accessing the Internet for information about marriage.

The majority of the 11 people rarely use the internet to find information about photography while 5 respondents never used the internet to get information on the photography and only 3 people use the internet to find photographic information. It seems that most of them are interested in accessing the internet for information on photography.

A total of 12 people rarely used the internet to find information on travel while 9 respondents never used the internet to get information about travellers and only one person used the internet to search for tourist information. It seems that most of them are less interested in accessing the internet for information on tourism. A majority of 14 people have never used the Internet to find information on real estate.

All the above analysis is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Pattern of Internet Usage

Information accessed through the internet	Frequency			
	1 None	2 Seldom	3 Always	4 Frequently
1. Business	13	10	0	0
2. Sports	4	10	7	2
3. Technology	12	10	1	0
4. Health	6	10	5	5
5. Education	8	10	2	3
6. Personal Care	5	6	7	5
7. Recipes	5	9	9	0
8. Politics	8	11	4	0
9. Religion	12	4	6	2
10. Hobbies	4	6	11	2
11. Work	10	4	8	1
12. Family Matters	9	3	7	4
13. Entertainment	4	7	6	6
14. Community News	11	8	2	2
15. ADUN Information	12	10	0	1

16. Banking	11	11	1	0
17. Interior Decorations	7	6	6	4
18. Marriage	12	6	4	1
19. Photography	5	11	4	3
20. Travels	9	12	1	1
21. Property	14	9	0	0

Source: Field Survey, 6-7 Oct 2018

Broadband Access

Table 4 shows the types of broadband service providers subscribed by the Orang Asli at Pos Legap.

Table 4: Broadband Service Provider

Broadband Service Provider	Total
DIGI	4
Maxis	10
Celcom	3
Celcom & Maxis	1
None	5

Source: Field Survey, 6-7 Oct 2018

The majority of the networks used by the Pos Legap residents were Maxis (10 respondents) because the line in the area was good and faster than the Celcom network, which was only 3 respondents using it as a telephone network.

Online Purchase Pattern

Through this questionnaire, it was found that only 2 respondents had bought online items such as makeup and soap while the remaining 21 respondents never used online services to buy goods.

ICT Usage

Among the 9 respondents, there are no views on computer usage as they do not have high levels of education. Meanwhile, only 2 respondents have agreed that they have used computers for educational purposes. In conclusion, most

respondents have no exposure to computers because they are not allowed to learn basic computer.

Of the 12 respondents, the majority of respondents did not have any views on encouraging children to use computers for learning. In the meantime, only 3 respondents have agreed that they are encouraging children to use computers for learning and there is a disagreement with that view. In conclusion, most respondents did not have any information about computers because they were not allowed to learn basic computer and are still single.

Among the 14 respondents, the majority of respondents did not have any views on allowing their children to learn computer skills because they were single and did not have computer exposure. Meanwhile, only 4 respondents have agreed that they are allowing their children to learn computer skills and there is someone who disagrees with that view. In conclusion, most respondents have no exposure to computers because they are not allowed to learn the basics of computers and are still single.

Among the 6 respondents, there is no view of spending money on buying computers for learning purposes because they have no computer-to-computer detection. Meanwhile, only 2 respondents have agreed that they are spending money on buying computers for learning purposes and there is a person who disagrees with that view. In conclusion, most respondents want to learn about computer usage because they are not allowed to learn basic computer. Only one respondent has agreed that they are giving their child the internet to find learning materials. This is reflected in Table 5.

Table 5: Use of Computers in the Orang Asli Household

No.	Statement	1*	2*	3*	4*	5*
1.	I know how to use computers for educational purposes	4	1	9	7	2
2.	I encourage my child to use the computer for learning	1	0	12	7	3
3.	I give my child the opportunity to learn computer skills	1	0	14	4	4
4.	I will spend money on buying a computer for learning purposes	1	2	6	11	2
5.	My child uses the internet to find learning materials	0	1	14	5	1

*Note 1= Most disagreeable; 2= Disagree; 3 = Most agreeable; 4 = Agree; 5 = Most agreeable

Source: Field Survey, 6-7 Oct 2018

The above Table 5 shows that among the 9 respondents, there are no views on computer usage as they do not have high levels of education. Meanwhile, only 2 respondents have agreed that they have used computers for educational purposes. Most respondents have no exposure to computers because they are not allowed to learn basic computer. Of the 12 respondents, the majority of respondents did not have any views on encouraging children to use computers for learning. In the meantime, only 3 respondents have agreed that they are encouraging children to use computers for learning and there is a disagreement with that view. Most respondents did not have any information about computers because they were not allowed to learn basic computer and bachelor. Among the 14 respondents, the majority of respondents did not have the viewpoint in allowing their children to learn computer skills because they were still on the computer and did not reveal the computer. Meanwhile, only 4 respondents have agreed that they are allowing their children to learn computer skills and there is someone who disagrees with that view. In conclusion, most of the respondents did not have any disclosures about computers because they were not allowed to learn basic computer and still single. Among the 6 respondents, there is no view of spending money on buying computers for learning purposes because they have no computer-to-computer detection. Meanwhile, only 2 respondents have agreed that they are spending money on

buying computers for learning purposes and there is a person who disagrees with that view. In conclusion, most respondents want to learn about computer usage because they are not allowed to learn basic computer. Of the 14 respondents, the majority of respondents did not have views on their children using the internet to find learning materials because they were single and did not have computers. Meanwhile, only one respondent has stated that they are giving their child the internet to find learning materials. In conclusion, most of the respondents did not have any disclosures about computers because they were not allowed to learn basic computer and still single.

Table 6: Role of Skills in the Orang Asli Household

No.	Statement	1*	2*	3*	4*	5*
1.	I have the skills to increase family income	1	0	7	10	5
2.	My children have the skills to increase family income	0	0	15	4	3
3.	I use my skills to increase family income	0	2	6	9	6
4.	My children use the skills to increase family income	0	2	14	4	1
5.	I strive to increase existing skills to increase family income	0	3	4	9	7
6.	I encourage my children to increase their existing skills to increase their income	0	0	14	6	3
7.	I encourage my children to take technical and vocational skills courses	0	1	13	4	5

*Note 1= Most disagreeable; 2= Disagree; 3 = Most agreeable; 4 = Agree; 5 = Most agreeable

Source: Field Survey, 6-7 Oct 2018

The above Table 6 shows that respondents from Pos Legap have had the inspiration in their skills to increase their income. A total of 10 respondents agreed that their skills will assist in increasing their income. While only one who disagrees with the statement of their skills helps in increasing their income. They also are inspired by their children to have the skills to increase family income. A total of 3 respondents agreed that their skills will help in increasing their income. While only a majority of 15 people who do not have any views with statements that put their

children's skills to help increase their income as they are single. They also have the inspiration to use their skills to supplement the family income. The majority of 9 respondents agreed that using their skills to assist in increasing their income. While only 2 people disagree with the statement showing their use of skills helps in increasing their income and 6 respondents have no opinion on the statement.

The respondents also have inspiration in using their child skills to supplement the family income. A total of 4 respondents agreed that using their child's skills to help increase their family income. While only 2 people disagree with the statement that their child's use of skills helps in increasing their income and there are a majority of 14 respondents who have no opinion on the statement as they are single. They have had the inspiration in their skills to increase their income. The majority of 9 respondents agreed to work to improve existing skills to increase family income. While only 3 people disagree with the statement of their efforts to increase existing skills to increase family income and 4 respondents have no opinion on the statement. They also have inspiration in encouraging their children to increase their existing skills to increase their income. The majority of 14 respondents did not have a view to encouraging their children to improve their children's skills to increase income because most of the respondents were still single. While 6 people have agreed to encourage their children to increase their existing skills to increase their income. They also encourage their children to take technical and vocational skills courses. A majority of 13 respondents did not have any views on the statement because they were single but five people agreed to encourage their children to take technical and vocational skills courses. Besides, 2 people disagree with the statement as they are still single and school students.

Summary and Conclusion

The digital business environment facilitates the marketing and delivery of products from producers to customers. The Orang Asli community is known for their skills in producing good and marketable handicrafts items. The challenges have always been how to market and made it reachable to the outside communities not only locally but more so internationally. The development in digital business needs to be taken advantage by the Orang Asli community to improve their socio-economic well-being. Nevertheless, this cannot happen without proper training and skills. The Orang Asli may not be able to ride on the technology offered in the 4th industrial

revolution immediately, but consistent training and handholding can help facilitate this faster. This also has to be embedded in the school curriculum especially for the Orang Asli children to have a long-term sustainable impact.

Several agencies have begun to take the lead to educate the Orang Asli on e-commerce. The study has evidenced that the Orang Asli are readily using the handphone for communication. They are also active in social media to be well-informed about a social and political issue. Nevertheless, for now, their participation in e-commerce is minimal.

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