

Indigenous Community Entrepreneurship in the Tourism Industry towards Technopreneurship in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship within indigenous communities has gained increasing attention as a strategic approach to improving socio-economic development. This study aims to explore the factors influencing tourism entrepreneurship among the Orang Asli community and to examine how these activities can evolve towards technopreneurship. In Malaysia, the Orang Asli community possesses unique cultural assets that offer significant potential for tourism entrepreneurship; however, their participation remains limited due to challenges such as inadequate skills, limited access to technology, and restricted market opportunities. A qualitative case study approach was employed, focusing on the Mah Meri and Semai communities. Data was collected from five participants through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, and was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal five key themes: entrepreneurial success factors, capacity development, empowerment, community-based collaboration, and technopreneurship. The results indicate that motivation, skills, family support, and institutional assistance play a crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial engagement. In addition, capacity development and women's empowerment significantly enhance economic participation, while community collaboration strengthens resource sharing and market access. The study also highlights the emerging role of technopreneurship through the gradual adoption of digital technologies such as social media and online platforms, which contribute to increased market reach and business competitiveness. Based on these findings, the study proposes an integrated community-based technopreneurship development model that explains the transformation of tourism entrepreneurship towards sustainable socio-economic outcomes. This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive framework that integrates social, economic, and technological dimensions of indigenous entrepreneurship and offers practical implications for policymakers and stakeholders to support sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Orang Asli, tourism entrepreneurship, capacity building, women's empowerment, Technopreneurship

INTRODUCTION

The Orang Asli community represents an important indigenous group in Malaysia with rich cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and unique identities. Despite these strengths, many Orang Asli communities continue to experience socio-economic challenges, including low income levels, limited access to education, and restricted employment opportunities. These conditions highlight the need for sustainable and culturally appropriate economic development strategies.

In recent years, tourism entrepreneurship has been increasingly recognised as a viable pathway for improving the socio-economic conditions of indigenous communities. Community-based tourism not only generates income but also supports cultural preservation and strengthens local identity. Previous studies have shown that the involvement of indigenous communities in tourism-related activities can enhance economic well-being and create employment opportunities (Jalil et al., 2023; Razali et al., 2024). However, participation in entrepreneurial activities remains uneven due to limitations in skills, resources, and access to markets.

At the same time, the rapid advancement of digital technology has introduced new opportunities through technopreneurship, which emphasises the integration of technology into entrepreneurial practices to improve efficiency and expand market reach (Lasniatin et al., 2024). While technopreneurship has been widely discussed in general entrepreneurship literature, its application within indigenous tourism contexts remains limited and underexplored.

Research Gap

Existing literature tends to examine tourism entrepreneurship, capacity development, women's empowerment, and technology adoption as separate constructs. There is a lack of integrative studies that examine how these elements interact within indigenous communities, particularly in the transition towards technopreneurship. Furthermore, limited empirical research has been conducted to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of Orang Asli communities in developing tourism entrepreneurship within a digital context.

Research Objectives

Therefore, this study aims to:

1. Identify the key factors influencing tourism entrepreneurship among the Orang Asli community.
2. Examine the role of capacity development and women's empowerment in supporting entrepreneurial activities.
3. Explore how tourism entrepreneurship can evolve towards technopreneurship within indigenous communities.
4. Propose an integrated conceptual model for indigenous tourism technopreneurship development.

Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What factors influence the development of tourism entrepreneurship among the Orang Asli community?
2. How do capacity development and women's empowerment contribute to entrepreneurial engagement?
3. In what ways can tourism entrepreneurship among the Orang Asli community transition towards technopreneurship?
4. How can an integrated model explain the relationship between these factors?

This study is positioned within the intersection of tourism entrepreneurship, indigenous studies, and technopreneurship literature. It extends existing research by integrating community-based tourism with digital entrepreneurship and empowerment perspectives. By focusing on the Orang Asli community, this study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of entrepreneurship that incorporates cultural, social, and technological dimensions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial Success Factors

The success of entrepreneurship among indigenous communities is influenced by a combination of individual, social, and economic factors. Previous studies have highlighted that motivation, entrepreneurial skills, education, and family support are among the most important determinants of entrepreneurial success (Amiruddin et al., 2020; Roddin et al., 2023). Individuals who possess strong motivation and a positive attitude are more likely to overcome challenges and sustain their business activities over time (Jamal et al., 2022).

In addition, personal attributes such as self-confidence, resilience, and effective communication skills are crucial in navigating the complexities of business environments. These characteristics enable entrepreneurs to adapt to changing market conditions, manage risks, and maintain long-term business sustainability (Roddin et al., 2023).

Capacity Development

Capacity development refers to the process of enhancing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals and communities to achieve sustainable development. Within the Orang Asli context, capacity building plays a vital role in enabling community members to participate actively in economic activities, particularly in entrepreneurship (Razali et al., 2024).

Training programmes, hands-on business experience, and institutional support are key components of capacity development. These initiatives help individuals acquire essential business skills, improve decision-making capabilities, and build confidence in managing enterprises (Abdullah et al., 2024). As a result, capacity development serves as a foundation for strengthening community resilience and economic independence.

Women's Empowerment

Women play a significant role in the socio-economic development of indigenous communities. In the Orang Asli context, women are increasingly involved in entrepreneurial activities such as handicraft production, small-scale businesses, and tourism-related services. Their participation contributes not only to household income but also to broader community development (Roddin et al., 2023).

Empowering women through access to education, skills training, and financial resources is essential in enhancing their participation in entrepreneurship. Furthermore, strong social networks and institutional support can further strengthen women's roles as economic contributors and community leaders (Zainol & Abd Karim, 2024).

Community-Based Tourism and Technopreneurship

Community-based tourism has been identified as a high-potential sector for improving the socio-economic conditions of indigenous communities. By leveraging cultural heritage, traditional practices, and natural resources, communities can create unique tourism experiences that attract both domestic and international visitors (Jalil et al., 2023; Razali et al., 2024).

In the digital era, the integration of technology into tourism entrepreneurship has become increasingly important. The use of social media, digital marketing, and online booking platforms enables communities to reach wider markets and enhance their competitiveness. Technopreneurship, therefore, represents a strategic approach to modernising traditional businesses and ensuring their sustainability in a rapidly changing economic environment (Lasniatin et al., 2024; Jalil et al., 2023).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore the experiences of the Orang Asli community in tourism entrepreneurship. The research design used is a case study, which focuses on the Orang Asli communities of the Mah Meri and Semai tribes involved in the community tourism industry. Case studies allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial development process, the challenges faced, and the potential use of technology in community business activities.

Selection of Informants

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who are directly involved in tourism-related activities. A total of 5 participants were involved in this study, including community tourism entrepreneurs, handicraft producers, community leaders, and representatives from relevant agencies. This approach ensures data richness and relevance.

Data Collection Method

Research data is collected through several main methods, namely Semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted to obtain informants' views and experiences regarding their involvement in the tourism industry and entrepreneurship. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were audio-recorded with consent. Observation is done to understand the economic activities of the community as well as the social environment that affects the development of entrepreneurship. Documents such as community development reports, tourism promotion materials and related policy documents were also analyzed to support the findings of the study.

Data Validation

To ensure trustworthiness, this study employed triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. These techniques enhance the credibility and reliability of qualitative findings.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from interviews and observations were analysed using thematic analysis. This analysis process involves several stages, namely the data coding process, theme grouping and interpretation of research findings. Thematic analysis allows researchers to identify key themes such as entrepreneurial success factors, community capacity development, women's empowerment and the use of technology in the tourism industry.

Findings

The data obtained from interviews, field observations, and document analysis were systematically analysed using thematic analysis. This method remains one of the most widely used approaches in qualitative research due to its flexibility and systematic process in identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2025).

The data analysis process was conducted in several structured stages to ensure rigour and credibility. Initially, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and accuracy of participants' responses. This was followed by repeated reading of the transcripts to achieve data familiarization, which is a crucial phase in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Subsequently, coding was conducted by identifying meaningful units of data. These codes were grouped into broader categories and later developed into themes through a systematic process aligned with the six-phase framework of thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting (Ahmed et al., 2025).

The main themes identified include entrepreneurial success factors, capacity development, women's empowerment, community-based tourism, and technopreneurship.

Table 4.1: Data Themes Overview

Main Theme	Categories	Brief Description
Entrepreneurial Success Factors	Motivation, skills, family support	Individual and social factors influencing entrepreneurial success
Capacity Development	Training, knowledge, mentoring	Improvement of skills and entrepreneurial capabilities
Women's Empowerment	Income contribution, family roles	Women's involvement in household and community economy
Community-Based Tourism	Culture, local products, employment	Tourism activities based on Orang Asli community resources
Technopreneurship	Social media, digital platforms, online marketing	Use of digital technology to expand business market reach

Interpretation of Key Themes

The findings reveal that the development of tourism entrepreneurship within the Orang Asli community is influenced by multiple interconnected factors at individual, social, and structural levels.

Entrepreneurial Success Factors

The findings indicate that intrinsic motivation and personal interest are central drivers of entrepreneurial engagement among participants. Several participants described how internal motivation sustained their involvement in handicraft activities over time. As one participant explained, “The motivation from myself is what makes me continue to weave” (PS1). Similarly, another participant expressed a strong personal inclination towards the activity, stating, “I like and really have an interest in weaving and this dance” (PS2).

In addition, experiential learning and early exposure were found to influence entrepreneurial development. One participant shared, “First, follow my aunt, see how she does it, after marriage, I myself feel and want to do it” (PS3), indicating the importance of family influence and informal learning. Another participant noted a transition from casual involvement to more serious business engagement, explaining, “I’ve been making it since I was little, but for the past few years I’ve only been interested in making it to sell seriously” (PS4). These findings demonstrate that motivation, skills, and family influence play an important role in sustaining entrepreneurial activities.

Capacity Development

Capacity development is essential in strengthening entrepreneurial competencies. Training, mentoring, and knowledge transfer are crucial in enhancing business skills and adaptability. Continuous learning and experiential-based training approaches are increasingly emphasised in recent entrepreneurship development studies (Suherlan and Purnama, 2025). Capacity development among participants is reflected through continuous learning, practice, and adaptation. Although formal training opportunities are limited, participants develop their skills through experience and peer learning. The progression from informal skills acquisition to structured income-generating activities highlights the importance of ongoing capacity building in strengthening entrepreneurial competence.

Women’s Empowerment

Women’s participation in entrepreneurship contributes significantly to household income and socio-economic development. Recent research emphasizes that women’s empowerment enhances decision-making power, economic independence, and community development (Sen et al., 2023). The findings reveal that women play a significant role in contributing to household income and achieving financial independence. Participants emphasises the importance of self-reliance and personal effort. One participant stated, “I support myself. I’m helping my son and my grandson. Besides that, I really like to earn my own income, not expecting anyone... I have to work on my own even though I am a housewife” (PS1). This reflects a strong sense of independence and empowerment among women participants, who actively engage in economic activities despite domestic responsibilities.

Community-Based Tourism

Community-based tourism (CBT) continues to be recognised as a sustainable approach to rural and indigenous development. It promotes cultural preservation, local economic growth, and community participation (Goodwin, 2022). The findings support the role of CBT in generating employment and strengthening community identity. Community-based practices such as collective production and shared marketing strategies were evident among participants. One participant described a cooperative-like system, stating, “There are many weavers here. We gather things here first and sell them to Gerai Orang Asli. They come once a month. It’s like a cooperative. I help this indirectly” (PK1). This indicates that community collaboration plays an important role in supporting local economic activities and improving market access.

Technopreneurship

Technopreneurship reflects the growing importance of digital technology in entrepreneurship. The use of social media, digital platforms, and online marketing enhances market access and competitiveness. However, recent studies highlight that digital inequality, limited infrastructure, and low digital literacy remain major barriers, especially in indigenous communities (Raihan et al., 2025). Although the use of advanced digital technology remains limited, participants highlighted the importance of networking and collaboration across communities. One participant explained, “We have a cooperation network. This year, the cooperation is very good. We used to not know the Semai and Temiar tribes and now we have known them since we got involved in this handicraft. The relationship has become closer” (PK1). This suggests that social networks act as a foundation for future technological integration and broader market expansion.

Overall, the findings indicate that tourism entrepreneurship among the Orang Asli community is shaped by a combination of individual motivation, social support, capacity development, and technological access. These factors are interrelated and form a holistic entrepreneurial ecosystem. The integration of digital technology presents significant opportunities for innovation and business expansion. However, challenges such as limited digital literacy, infrastructure gaps, and insufficient training must be addressed to fully realise the potential of technopreneurship.

In conclusion, thematic analysis provides a comprehensive and systematic approach to understanding the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by the Orang Asli community in developing tourism entrepreneurship towards technopreneurship. The use of updated methodological frameworks further strengthens the credibility and relevance of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2024).

Proposed Conceptual Model

Based on the findings of this study, a new conceptual model is proposed to explain the development of tourism entrepreneurship among the Orang Asli community towards technopreneurship. The model integrates five key themes identified in the analysis, namely entrepreneurial success factors, capacity development, women’s empowerment, community-based collaboration, and technopreneurship. The model is structured into three main components: input factors, development processes, and outcomes.

First, the input factors consist of individual, social, and institutional elements. Individual factors include motivation, interest, and skills, which were found to be essential in sustaining entrepreneurial engagement. Social factors refer to family influence and community support, while institutional factors include training programmes and support from relevant agencies.

Second, these inputs are transformed through key development processes. Capacity development occurs through continuous learning, experiential practices, and informal knowledge transfer within the community. Women’s empowerment is reflected in the increasing participation of women in income-generating activities and their growing financial independence. In addition, community-based collaboration is evident through cooperative practices, shared resources, and social networking among participants.

Third, these processes lead to several important outcomes. At the initial stage, participants engage in tourism entrepreneurship activities such as handicraft production and cultural performances. Over time, these activities evolve towards technopreneurship through the gradual adoption of digital tools, including social media and online marketing platforms. This transformation enhances market reach and business competitiveness. Ultimately, the model contributes to broader socio-economic impacts, including income generation, improved quality of life, and sustainable community development.

This model contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing an integrated framework that links community-based tourism, entrepreneurship, and technopreneurship within an indigenous context. It also highlights the central role of women and community networks as key drivers of sustainable development.

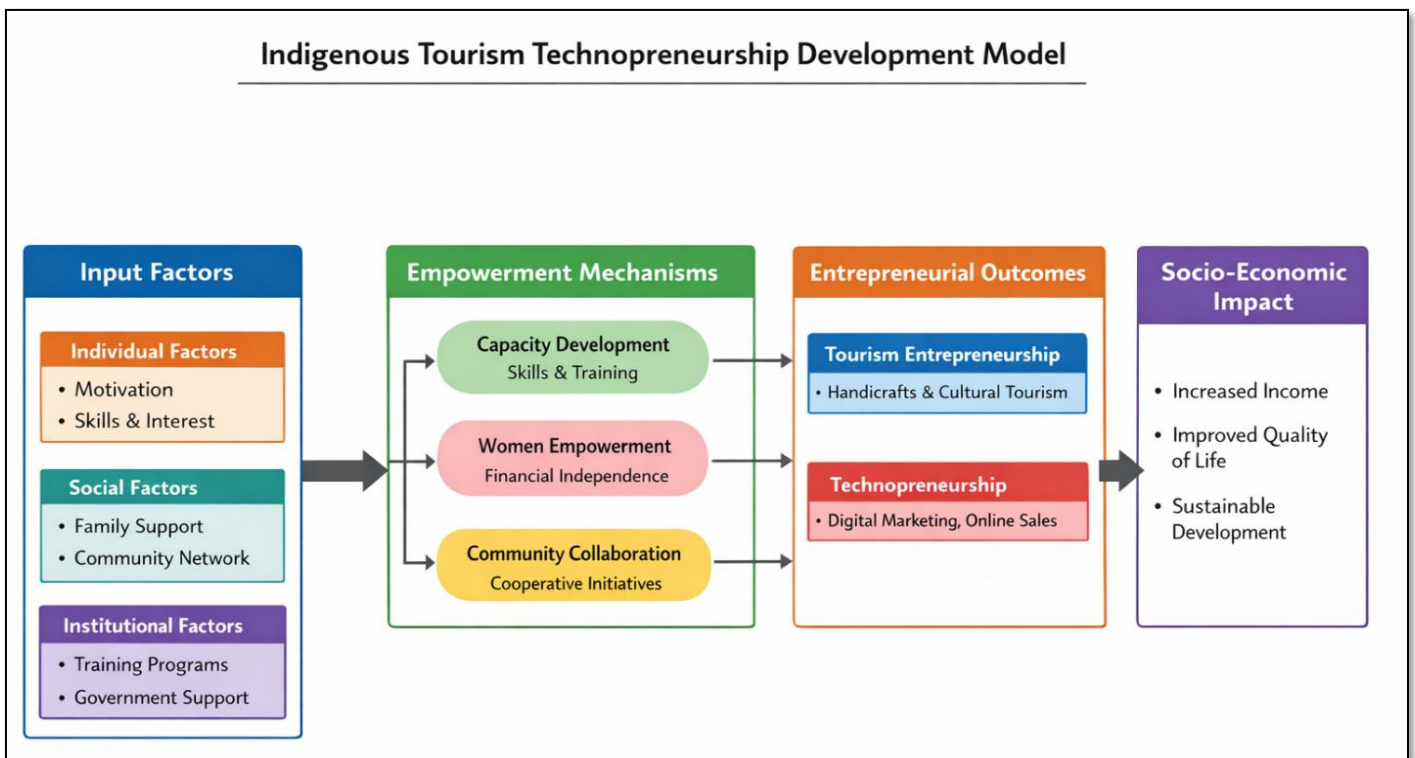


Figure 4.1 Indigenous Tourism Technopreneurship Development

Figure 1 illustrates the Indigenous Tourism Technopreneurship Development Model developed based on the findings of this study. The model visually represents the relationship between input factors, empowerment mechanisms, entrepreneurial outcomes, and socio-economic impact.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant potential of tourism entrepreneurship as a strategic pathway for improving the socio-economic conditions of the Orang Asli community in Malaysia. The findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial development within indigenous communities is not solely dependent on individual effort, but rather influenced by a combination of interrelated factors, including motivation, skills, social support, institutional assistance, and access to knowledge.

The study further reveals that capacity development, women’s empowerment, and community-based collaboration serve as critical mechanisms in strengthening entrepreneurial capabilities. In particular, women play a vital role as active economic contributors, reflecting the importance of empowerment in enhancing household income and community resilience. In addition, strong social networks within and across communities facilitate cooperation, knowledge sharing, and collective economic activities.

Importantly, this study emphasises the emerging role of technopreneurship in transforming traditional tourism entrepreneurship into a more competitive and sustainable model. Although the adoption of digital technology remains at an early stage, it presents significant opportunities for expanding market access, improving business efficiency, and increasing economic competitiveness.

The proposed conceptual model provides a comprehensive framework that integrates input factors, empowerment mechanisms, and entrepreneurial outcomes leading to broader socio-economic impact. This model contributes to the literature by bridging the gap between community-based tourism and technopreneurship within an indigenous context. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that policymakers and relevant stakeholders should focus on enhancing training programmes, strengthening digital literacy, and supporting community-based initiatives to promote sustainable entrepreneurship among the Orang Asli community. Continuous efforts in empowering women and strengthening social capital are also essential in ensuring long-term development.

In conclusion, the transition towards technopreneurship represents a promising direction for indigenous tourism entrepreneurship in Malaysia, offering a pathway towards inclusive growth, cultural preservation, and sustainable socio-economic development.

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