



Training Urgency to Bridge the Digital Divide for Social Media Marketing Awareness and Adoption: Case of CBT Rural Homestay Operators Malaysia

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Abstract: Despite the fact that using social media for arranging trips is becoming increasingly important, community-based tourism (CBT) of Malaysian rural homestay operators still heavily rely on traditional marketing platforms and third parties' assistance to gain tourist attraction. Previous studies found a lack of awareness constraining social media marketing adoption in small enterprises. Hence, this study aims at exploring the awareness of homestay operators regarding the use of social media as a marketing tool in CBT of rural homestay operators in Malaysia. A survey study was done by using a semi-structured interview involving nine respondents from nine homestays across Johor, Malaysia. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings show that the community still has low awareness of the digital divide as well as the unavailability of relevant human resources and technical expertise. It also indicated that the homestays' operators still use Malay rather than English on their social media promotion and interaction, which restricts their chances to access global markets. It is critical for operators of homestays to improve their competencies to maintain their businesses and increase their level of market competitiveness. Therefore, this study constitutes an essential call for stakeholders' attention to enhance CBT rural homestay operators' awareness through effective training. Accordingly, it closes the digital gaps that challenge social media marketing awareness and hence encourages technology adoption in the community.

Keywords: Social media marketing, rural homestay operators, awareness, adoption, digital divide, TVET

1. Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) has a big impact on how tourists perceive travel. Hence, digital marketing offers a number of advantages, including attracting more visitors through online booking, featuring the website on search engine results, facilitating communication through the use of social media, and utilizing data to create a customized travel experience (Telle, 2018). Digital marketing modifies tourists' changing behaviours and decision-making processes by utilizing user-generated content on social media. It also turns passive tourists into active co-creators

of tourism. Social media enables travellers to share information to demonstrate their self-actualization and promotion to motivate their peers and other users of social media (Sigala, 2018). Indeed, social media marketing is strongly recommended as a marketing tool for tourism destinations (Appel et al., 2020; Hays et al., 2013).

Numerous nations have successfully utilised ICTs to advance their tourism businesses. Malaysia, for instance, has been incredibly effective in attracting tourists through these methods (Mohsin, 2005). Islamic tourism is one of the most significant tourism industries in Malaysia because it is the country's official religion. The country is home to a wide variety of natural, religious, historical, and cultural tourist destinations. The tourism business in Malaysia primarily relies on ICTs, notably the Internet, as a medium for cross-border communication due to the incorporation of well-designed ICT solutions. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development designated Malaysia's tourist website a benchmark for e-tourism in 2007 (Nation, 2007). Its attractiveness resulted in an average of 12.3 billion hits per month (Nation, 2007) because of the way that marketing graphics and design are presented.

Online tourism, without a doubt, dominates the internet economy in Southeast Asia. With a gross merchandise value (GMV) of 10.2 billion US dollars in 2019, Indonesia had the largest online travel market size among Southeast Asian nations. After Thailand and Singapore, Malaysia had the second-largest proportion with over half of the total GMV of 4.8 billion U.S. (Statista Research Department, 2020). Tourism Malaysia emphasises the urgency of digital marketing, encouraging business providers such as inbound agencies, homestay operators, and tour guides to advertise their products and services via digital platforms such as social media or websites (Chin et al., 2020). Through the 12th Malaysia Plan 2021–2025 (Malaysia Economy Plan Unit, 2021), the Malaysian government strongly encourages the use of digital marketing to enhance tourism product promotion, particularly community-based tourism (CBT). The homestay program created in rural parts of Malaysia is one of the country's promising strategies (Bhuiyan et al., 2013). Rural tourism, one of the most developed sectors of the travel industry in Malaysia, offers locals the chance to participate by hosting tourists and generating income through homestays (Bhuiyan et al., 2013; Othman et al., 2013).

The phrase "homestay" may be used differently across countries. In Malaysia, homestay is considered one of the community-based tourism approaches founded in rural areas (Bhuiyan et al., 2013). As part of the government's efforts for rural development programmes, rural areas are transformed into homestay facilities to help their residents supplement their household income (Othman et al., 2013) and to boost income revitalization for underdeveloped regions in Malaysia (Hummel John et al., 2013). According to Ngah et al. (2010), one of the rural transformations is a homestay, which is expected to promote social and economic welfare for villagers as well as retired and senior citizens. During the years 2016–2020, the trend of homestay revenue was led by Sarawak, Sabah, Pahang, Selangor, and Johor. In the following year, 2021, Johor was placed third in homestay revenue after Sarawak and Sabah. As one of the main entry borders, Johor has become one of the fastest economic growth areas in Malaysia (Hutchinson and Rahman, 2020).

Yet, Osman and Zakaria (2020) discovered that more than 70% of homestay operators in Malaysia were not interested to use social media since they rely on word-of-mouth and other conventional methods to market their business (Kunjuraman and Hussin, 2017). In Malaysia, only a few homestays utilise social media to advertise their locations. These efforts, however, are only partially successful because the website lacks fresh information and active interaction (Cheuk et al., 2017). While Hua et al. (2017) discovered that social media marketing influences travel destination decisions in Penang, Malaysia, Miraz et al. (2015) concluded that there is a substantial preference for offline platforms for promotion, booking, and payment methods for Malaysian homestay. In a similar vein, Ulfy et al. (2021) discover that social media marketing is the primary source of tourism destination information in Malaysia, including ecotourism and tourism destination promotion in Sabah (Goh, 2021; Halim et al., 2019), as well as homestay Malaysia (Abrar, 2020). However, as the Ministry of Tourism, Art, and Culture (MOTAC) reported, not more than 28% of rural homestay providers in Malaysia use social media to conduct their business (MOTAC, 2018).

Hence, to address this gap, this study aims at investigating the awareness of Malaysian homestay operators on social media adoption. Previous studies (Mumtaz, 2019; Munif, Mouakhar, and Jarboui, 2021) have shown that lack of awareness is one of the main reasons that keep people from using new technology like social media marketing. As a result, many Malaysian homestays struggle to remain in business over the long term because their owners lack the branding and marketing expertise, connections, and resources needed to draw in visitors (Balasingam and Bojei, 2019). It is critical to investigate its current level of awareness for adoption since it has been the foundation of behaviour intention to determine technology adoption (Dinev and Hu, 2007); Thus, it becomes the starting point that leads to an attitude towards adoption (Shareef, Kumar, and Dwivedi, 2011), as it reduces the perception of risk that hinders adoption (Mutahar et al., 2018). Hertina et al. (2021) also learn that lack of technology awareness influences the digitalisation readiness of small business enterprises in Indonesia and other developing countries such as Zimbabwe (Makiwa and Steyn, 2020). To help industry players access the global market and develop domestic tourism throughout the coming new normal period after the COVID-19 outbreak, community capacity building in the tourist industry that emphasizes training and digitalization (mainly website improvement) is urged (Hamzah, 2020; Khan and Hashim, 2020).

1.1 The Growing Importance of Digital Marketing and Social Media Marketing

Tourism is one of the first industries to be closely linked to changes in information and communication technologies (ICT). Electronic transactions for tourists have become a global trend and a requirement for providing competitive, high-

quality tourist services in the new global marketing environment. CT technologies are also the basis of the digital economy. They have a huge amount of potential to speed up progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and make people's lives much better (International Telecommunication Union, 2018). One of the most important factors in boosting economic development is the use of ICTs. The primary goal of ICT is to make the internet network more useful by providing a variety of programmes and services that allow users to conduct a variety of transactions over it. It is necessary to create awareness and encourage the use of various ICTs to make them available to tourists. As a result, the use of ICTs has a critical and effective impact on the country's tourism business. We may engage directly with tourists via ICT, present them with information and tourism offers, and provide them the option of booking and paying online.

Digital marketing is the use of digital technologies to create communication that is integrated, targeted, and measurable (Wymbs, 2011). This helps businesses get and keep customers and builds stronger relationships with them. Digital marketing includes search engine optimization (SEO), search engine marketing (SEM), content marketing, influencer marketing, content automation, e-commerce marketing, campaign marketing, social media marketing, social media optimization, e-mail direct marketing, display advertising, e-books, optical disks, and games (Bala & Verma, 2018). Digital marketing has been used a lot in the tourism industry because it gives a lot of options for promoting the location, reaching the target market, and running the business. Buhalis (1998) and Kingsnorth (2016) say that many tourist spots around the world are having trouble with digitalization because their online capabilities and virtual presence aren't as good as they could be. For that reason, how destinations can and should be built and managed in today's digital marketing environment is a big challenge. Tourism business owners should realise that digital marketing applications can help improve business operations (Law, Buhalis, and Cobanoglu, 2014).

Tourists are able to co-design, co-market, co-advertise, co-promote, and co-distribute experiences using user-generated content, customer review media, blogs, and wikis, as well as innovation tests and toolkit participation, according to studies such as Sigala & Gretzel's (2018) and Stephen's (2016). More than that, now tourists can co-fund and assist in the development of festivals, concerts, and excursion experiences by using crowdfunding sites (Sigala, 2018). Online word-of-mouth (WOM) communication acquires its importance in marketing as it facilitates the customer's decision-making process through social media influence (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020).

The growth of ICT (information and communication technology) began in the 1990s with the introduction of Web 1.0, an era characterised by little interactivity. This first online phase included the introduction of banner ads, the first search engine, the establishment of Google, and the introduction of email interaction on mobile devices. Web 2.0, which debuted around 2000, was a more participatory platform that marked the beginning of the development of online social spaces. During this time, applications such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube were developed (Hasan, 2022).

Social media platforms are widely used in the tourism sector to share experiences. They have an impact on visitors' final judgements when it comes to vacation planning, and tourism businesses that have embraced social media technologies have a competitive edge in reputation (Pateli, Mylonas, Spyrou, 2020). Thus, businesses need to comprehend the strategic value of social media for expanding their operations (Walsh & Lipinski, 2009) and improving tourists' interest in visiting the destination (Rosita et al., 2022). Definitely, tourism and hospitality businesses have no choice but to combine the use of traditional marketing approaches with social media in order to increase their visibility as well as the allure of their services to potential customers in order to cope with the ever-increasing external pressure and environmental uncertainty brought on by both evolving market demands and the intensity of competition (Pateli, Mylonas, Spyrou, 2020).

1.2 Awareness as Strong Determinant for Social Media Adoption

UNCTAD (2019) highlights that digital transformation would increase enterprises' competitiveness. Hence, the investment of resources, skills, and awareness in digital marketing is crucial. Awareness refers to the degree to which a target public is aware of an innovation and has a general understanding of what it includes (Dinev and Hu, 2007). Rogers (1983) defines awareness as "awareness knowledge," which emphasises knowledge of basic philosophy and motivates one to seek out how-to and principled knowledge. At the decision stage, awareness-knowledge is the initial foundation process for continuing further innovation.

Technology awareness studies have been initiated by some researchers, such as Dinev and Hu (2007), who demonstrate the centrality of awareness in behaviour intention formation by employing the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) by Rogers (1962) and Shareef, Kumar, and Dwivedi (2011), which use the diffusion of innovation theory to adopt e-government service. The diffusion of innovation theory (DIT) by Rogers is the most appropriate model to be employed in this study. The steps begin with awareness and continue with interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. DIT (Rogers, 1962) introduced the idea of awareness for the first time (Dinev and Hu, 2007). A study by Mohamad and Kassim (2018) utilises the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), however, they put the awareness variable in to better explain the relationship with technology adoption. Lavidge and Steiner (1961), Barry and Howard (1990), and Belch et al. (2020) clearly explain the relevancy of awareness in the IDT theory as proposed by Rogers (1962). Fig. 1 below shows the comparison of some theories underpinning adoption by employing three stages of the psychological domain, namely the cognitive, affective, and conative domains.

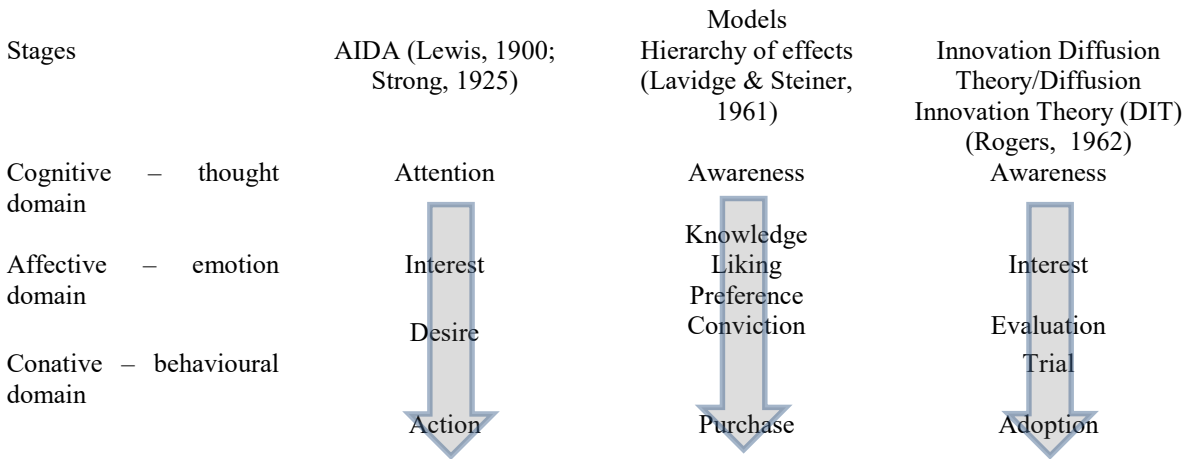


Fig. 1 - Adoption model comparison
(Lavidge & Steiner (1961), Barry & Howard (1990) and Belch et al. (2020))

The AIDA model is one of the predecessors to the hierarchy of effects model, first theorised by St. Elmo Lewis (1900) and then strengthened by Strong (1925) to describe the stages in the sales and advertising effectiveness process to get customers to take action. In today's commercial world, the basic model of adoption, AIDA, plays a significant role in developing marketing strategies. This communication model's primary focus is on the individual's transactions and purchases. The credit of goods or services is frequently given emphasis. In digital marketing, three important stages of communication are involved: creating the existence of goods and services, building excellent relationships, and emphasising the importance of consumers (Rowley, 2002). If used correctly, social media can not only be used to attract potential clients, but it can also provide an effective e-commerce platform for small business owners and entrepreneurs (Small Business Trends, 2018), and in this case, the AIDA model works well in the digital marketing context. The AIDA model focuses on individual transactions and purchases while emphasising awareness and presence (Rowley, 2002).

Later, Lavidge and Steiner (1961) came up with the term "respondent involvement" to describe how emotionally or financially invested a consumer is. The authors say that this would be a very important part of the adoption process once they get to the conception stage. A year later, Rogers also went through a series of steps before adoption, but he added a trial process so that people would be more likely to adopt the product after seeing how well it worked. Dinev and Hu's (2007) diffusion innovation model is the best way to describe the early stages of how people start to use new technologies. The DIT model is the most important theory to Fig. out how innovations spread through a population (Straub, 2009). Furthermore, the Rogers' model offered a thorough framework for comprehending both individual adoption and group dispersion. Many other theories of adoption and spread have been influenced by Rogers' thesis, which makes it particularly significant.

This study employs Rogers' Diffusion Innovation Theory (DIT) to explore the awareness of homestay operators regarding the adoption of social media marketing. Various theories have been developed to study how innovations get adopted. Yet, the DIT model is known as a broad social and psychological theory by identifying adoption patterns and comprehending its structure to anticipate how individuals and organisations will decide whether or not to adopt a new invention (Rogers, 1995; Min, So, & Jeong, 2018). Further, Rogers (1995) concludes that the existence of awareness encourages the demand for adoption. On the other hand, lack of awareness leads to slow adoption (Mohamad & Kassim, 2018). According to Olatokun & Bankole (2011), it is critical to highlight the benefits of social media marketing in order to increase interest in the technology and reduce perceived risk (Alsheikh & Bojej, 2014). Awareness, which implies familiarity with a technology and its benefits, is a crucial aspect of the voluntary adoption of systems. One of the obstacles to acceptance and adoption is a lack of knowledge and comprehension of the advantages that can be gained (Mutahar et al., 2018). Rogers (1983) says that people can only actively look for information about a new idea once they are aware of it.

2. Methodology

Based on the research objective, a case study—a qualitative approach—is employed to take a deeper look at the phenomena at the homestay operators in Johor, Malaysia. This investigation makes use of a qualitative research design, which is ideally suited for research problems in which the variables are unknown, and which require an investigation into the breadth, richness, and complexity that are inherently associated with a phenomenon (Hashim et al., 2021)

2.1 Selection of Participants

The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalise the material (except for certain types of case study research), but rather to shed light on particulars and details that are specific to a certain situation (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The sample size determination is flexible based on availability and appropriateness (Martha and Kresno, 2016). Creswell (2013) argues that in qualitative research, a basic guideline for determining the sample size is not only to investigate a small number of places or individuals but also to collect a significant amount of information about each of the sites or individuals that are studied. As cited in Maxwell's book (2012), most qualitative research uses a sampling technique called "purposeful sampling," rather than the more familiar "probability sampling" or "convenience sampling" (Patton, 1990). While employing this technique, specific places, people, or occurrences are chosen on purpose because of the crucial insight they can bring that cannot be obtained in any other way.

This study aims to investigate Malaysian homestay operators' awareness of social media marketing. The study took place in CBT homestays in Johor. Since there are 27 homestays registered under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC) in Johor, this study interviewed the nine most and least active homestays as chosen by MOTAC, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 - Details of respondents

Code	Name of homestay	Interviewee position	Age
R1	Homestay Smilian Felda Tenang, Labis, Segamat	Chairman	60
R2	Homestay Mukim Serkat (Tanjung Piai)	Secretary	56
R3	Homestay Kg. Parit Bugis, Muar	Chairman	70
R4	Homestay Kg. Sri Gunung Pulai, Kulai Jaya	Promotion manager	38
R5	Homestay Kg. Tanjung Piai Pontian	Chairman assistant	62
R6	Homestay Kg. Temenin Kota Tinggi	Chairman	65
R7	Homestay Kg. Parit Tengah, Rengit Batu Pahat	Chairman assistant	68
R8	Homestay Felda Ayer Hitam, Kluang	Chairman	62
R9	Homestay Kg. Sarang Buaya, Muar	Chairman	65

Malaysia's elderly population is expected to more than double from 5.4% to 11.1% between 1970 and 2020, reaching 19.8% by 2040. The homestay in the village was made up of hosts aged 40 and older (Nor & Kayat, 2010). Locals over 40 years old may constitute one-third of the tourism community population (i.e., at Kinabalu National Park, according to Rasoolimanesh et al., 2018), and even more than 50% (i.e., at Muar, Johor, according to Razzaq et al., 2011). Johor is experiencing most senior citizens (Mutalib, 2020).

2.2 Data Collection

The semi-structured interview sessions lasted for about 30 to 45 minutes each to allow the interviewees to elaborate on the requested information and were tape-recorded with prior consent. Respondents are either the chairman, secretary, chief officer, or promotion manager from nine selected homestays. Table 2 explains the interview guidance used in the studies. The guidance was derived from Rogers (1962), Koohang et al. (2022), Nguyen et al. (2022), and Dinev and Hu (2007) studies, which investigate awareness by investigating its basic knowledge, existence, importance, cost, and benefit. The interview focuses on face validity and content validity, which were performed by expert judgement from the Ministry of Tourism and Arts (MOTAC) in Johor and the Homestay Advisor to clarify, revise, and rewrite the interview questions.

Table 2 - Interview guidance based on previous studies

Variable	Indicators	Sources	Interview questions
Awareness	Awareness - knowledge	Rogers (1962), Koohang et al. (2022), Nguyen et al. (2022) Dinev and Hu (2007)	Do you know about social media marketing's existence?
	Awareness on importance		How familiar is this homestay with social media marketing?
	Awareness on benefits		How visitors know about this homestay?
	Awareness on risk		Do you know the benefits of using social media marketing?
			Do you know any potential risks of using social media marketing?
			Have you ever attended training or gained education for social media marketing?

2.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised to interpret the data by classifying and identifying patterns, linkages, links, and contradictions (Grbich, 2013). When trying to gain a comprehensive understanding of a certain collection of experiences, ideas, or actions throughout a data set, thematic analysis is an effective and useful tool to employ (Braun and Clarke 2012). Mind maps assisted in visualising links and conflicts between topics in order to better comprehend the linkages between themes (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). Themes refers to the "patterned response or meaning" (Braun and Clarke 2006), which is derived from the data that helps answer the research question. After transcription process, the researcher started the procedure of analysing the data acquired from the participants in this study by first becoming familiar with the data. During the second phase of the research project, the researcher will develop and label initial codes that match to the participants' thoughts, experiences, and subjects that are linked to the research study questions. In the third stage, we went through all of the coded data samples and organised them into categories based on the themes that emerged. In the fourth step, the codes and themes were investigated further, and adjustments were made as necessary. The next phase is the process of finalising and identifying the themes, which will take place in this phase. The final phase of the study involves the process of developing a final data analysis as well as a discussion of the study's outcomes.

3. Results

Based on the data, the final themes of the survey data are presented in the following table 3. This table includes an explanation of each code as well as its frequency within the data.

Table 3 - Thematic analysis of interview data

Themes	Codes	Frequency	Description of code
Traditional marketing	Flyer	18 counts	Refers to the usage of traditional promotion tools
	Direct cash		
	Phone call		
Social media marketing awareness	Knowledge	3 counts	Refers to the knowledge of social media marketing existence and usage
	Usage		
Social media marketing benefits	Popularity	9 counts	Refers to social media marketing benefits
	Help business		
	No youths		
Social media marketing barriers	Comfort zone	20 counts	Refers to social media marketing barriers
	Concern on security and safeness		
	No content		
Travel agency assistance	No expert	5 counts	Refers to the reliance with travel agencies
	Visitors		
	Funding		
Government assistance	Training	27 counts	Refers to the reliance with government
	Visitors		
	Visitors		

Traditional marketing methods used up to this point are one of the nine respondents' top choices and amounted to 18 counts based on 3 codes. In spite of the obvious advantages of social media marketing (9 counts made up of 2 codes), its use is still very uncommon due to the barriers (20 counts made up of 5 codes). Evidence pertinent to study questions is also supported by reliance on travel agencies (5 counts) and the government (27 counts).

4. Discussion

The following discussion reveals from several themes shown above that are relevant to the research question regarding the awareness of homestay CBT operators towards social media marketing. It can be inferred that traditional marketing platforms are still being used due to several factors, including the digital divide, the reliance on travel agencies, and government assistance. Additionally, homestay CBT operators' familiarity with social media marketing is limited due to a lack of education and training.

4.1 Awareness On Social Media Marketing Existence, Familiarity of Use, and Benefits

Respondents were asked if they were familiar with the fundamentals of digital marketing, such as its existence and usage. It is worth to note that 8 out of 9 homestay operators are still using traditional marketing strategies and transaction. For instance, direct booking call and cash payment are more convenient for them to proceed the transaction deals. Regarding social media marketing existence nowadays, below are some responses with the same tone.

I know it exists, but I don't familiar to use it. I am too old to operate it. (R9)

I realise that social media marketing can make better promotion especially in this Covid, but I cannot use it. (R6)

To me, villagers are happier to receive direct cash from tourists, so I think social media will not suitable. (R5)

They confirmed that they are unable to adopt the technologies or keep them updated with the appropriate content. Also, printed brochures and cash payments are more popular than online fees and digital marketing.

We used to have a homestay promotion flyer, but it is no longer available. (R4)

Table 4 - Social media ownership

No	Name of Homestay	Facebook (FB) account	Instagram account	Language used
1	Homestay Smilian Felda Tenang, Labis, Segamat	FB available until 2022 but no admin posts	Not available	Melayu
2	Homestay Mukim Serkat (Tanjung Piai)	FB available until 2021	Not available	Melayu
3	Homestay Kg. Parit Bugis, Muar	FB available until 2020	Not available	Melayu
4	Homestay Kg. Sri Gunung Pulai, Kulai Jaya	FB available until 2020	Not available	Melayu
5	Homestay Kg. Tanjung Piai Pontian	FB active until 2017	Private mode IG	Melayu
6	Homestay Kg. Temenin Kota Tinggi	FB available until 2017	Not available	Melayu
7	Homestay Kg. Parit Tengah, Rengit Batu Pahat	FB active until 2017	Not available	Melayu
8	Homestay Felda Ayer Hitam, Kluang	Not available	Not available	Not available
9	Homestay Kg. Sarang Buaya Muar	Not available	Not available	Not available

Table 4 above illustrates the social media technology employed by the homestays. A variety of circumstances take place in the homestay which implies a deeper concern about social media marketing adoption. The table below shows that Facebook accounts are the most commonly used social media. Instagram, on the other hand, receives no attention from homestay operators.

Interestingly, the Facebook accounts owned by the homestays were not made by the operators. Instead, someone else made it for them.

Firstly, I got that Facebook account because I have a young man staying in this village. He made the account, and that's it. Now, I couldn't open it since I don't remember the password and have no idea how to use it. (R6)

Few of them realise that social media is now playing a significant role in changing the tourism industry. They also learned that other tourism providers use social media as one of their strongest marketing tools to reach travellers. Furthermore, the homestay operators agreed that social media marketing is important to promote their product, be recognised around the world, gain a competitive advantage, and sustain the homestay business. This can be seen from the following responses.

We have plans to set up that social media, but we have no content on what to post and offer (R 9), though we understand that social media will let the world know that our homestay exists. (R 6)

Social media marketing adoption was believed to require a huge investment in terms of infrastructure, devices, and capabilities. Thus, they are resistant to change from their current comfort zone. As rural homestay operators run the programme assigned by the government, they see it as an alternative income generation method that requires the least amount of effort to be competitive in the market.

Most of us here are already retired or having another primary source of income such as agriculture or oil palm plantation, so operating homestay is just secondary job. We aren't worried when we have no tourists. (R3)

Several of them are still unaware of the extent and promotional possibilities of social networking platforms for businesses. Lack of awareness becomes an obstacle in the organisation to implement e-tourism, which is consistent with the results of other studies on technology adoption in the tourism industry in Nepal (Lama et al., 2018). Technology awareness also challenges the usage of social media tools for business in Jordan (Al-adaileh et al., 2022).

4.2 Awareness of Social Media Marketing Potential Risks and Costs

Homestay operators must be convinced and have a strong belief that the social media platform they will use to conduct their businesses is safe and secure. The operators of homestays must be assured that their investment in the use of social media platforms will yield greater financial returns than the conventional means of conducting business. Homestay operators in Malaysia are unable to use social media technology properly as a marketing tool (Miraz, et al., 2015) due to a lack of awareness and education (Adeyinka-Ojo and Abdullah, 2021).

As the majority of respondents are elderly, their knowledge of social media marketing may be limited. Hence, the younger generation in the homestay is important to help homestay online promotion, as reflected in the following responses.

We do not engage in digital marketing. We allow each homestay member to promote their own homestays on Facebook. We get assistance from youth who are teachers to utilise the internet in the internet community centre. (R8)
I am worried about using online marketing... because we need to have digital devices that I cannot guarantee security and safety. (R5)

Even if social media has been a very effective and practical marketing approach, most firms are not very aware of the notion or do not pay any attention to it due to the low knowledge and intricacy involved in it (Yong & Hassan, 2019). The foundation of human behaviour is awareness. It raises consciousness and brings appreciation (Dinev & Hu, 2007), influencing behaviour formation and adoption (Billanes & Enevoldsen, 2021; Mohamad & Kassim, 2018; Mutahar et al., 2018; Rahman & Sloan, 2017; Daabes & Adballa, 2016). Further, Alkhatib & Bayouq (2021) suggest that raising consciousness will improve the technology's perceived usefulness and benefit (performance expectancy), ease of use, enjoyment, and contentment, which will have a beneficial impact on users' trust and attitudes toward it. Technology awareness also drives continued usage (Koohang et al., 2022). Limited exposure to technology awareness has proven to inhibit e-commerce adoption (Kurnia, Choudrie, Mahbubur, & Alzogool, 2015; Lacovou et al., 2005).

The findings above indicate that the CBT homestay operators in Johor still need some technical assistance and a supportive environment to voluntarily adopt social media marketing technology. This is because their understanding of the benefits of social media marketing is still limited. In fact, to stay competitive, this tourism business needs to expand customer engagement worldwide through this internet technology. A multidimensional strategy addressing awareness, providing access, developing ICT skills, and lowering costs is needed to increase the acceptability of ICT and therefore close the digital divide.

4.3 Awareness Inhibitors

4.3.1 Digital Divide

The "digital divide" refers to the disparity between those who use and have access to digital media and those who do not (van Dijk, 2020); some of the factors that contribute to this disparity include physical access, age, gender, education, and skill. The "digital divide" is the discrepancy between people, households, businesses, and geographic regions at various socioeconomic levels in terms of both their access to ICTs and their use of the internet for a variety of purposes (OECD, 2001). Van Dijk (2020) also concluded that age and educational background has a significant impact on digital skill levels. This recent study found the most influential factor for technology awareness among rural homestay operators is age. The youth's availability to work in the village is limited. Youths in rural areas prefer to move to cities for their daily needs because managing homestays do not provide them with an adequate income. It is worth saying that this research reveals the availability of a few young generations. However, they can only master technical and operational skills. In fact, social media marketing requires content-related skills to engage with the market. These youths are actually aware of the role social media plays in marketing the homestay, yet a lack of skills restrains their ability to use the technology. Poor physical access was also found in some rural homestays observed in the study, including the unavailability of computers and internet connections. Having good physical access, however, is rendered useless due to the inability to use the device or a lack of relevant skills.

This rural area has limited line (for internet). Strong connection can be found in some certain spots only. We need to install the wi-fi at home by our own but not every homestay operator is willing to have it (R6).

Minghetti and Buhalis (2010) learn that a digital divide is common in rural communities. The age groups in the Malaysian community were not evenly distributed (Nor and Kayat, 2010). Notably, eight states, including Perlis, Kedah,

Pulau Pinang, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, and Johor, experience senior citizen concentration (Mutalib, 2020). The homestay community also experienced a youth migration problem due to its distant location. The majority of youths moved to neighbouring towns in search of work, leaving the seniors behind (Nor and Kayat, 2010; Ngah et al., 2010). The ageing effect is also used because people are retiring in the village (Mutalib, 2020). Therefore, the number of youths who took part in the homestay programme was limited.

Yes, we realise that social media is important. But since there is no young generation that can help create our website and other online stuff, we will not be able to make it. (R9)

The “digital divide,” the inequalities in access and usage of ICT, can prohibit certain groups from exploring these prospects, fully engaging in society, and thus creating a new group of disadvantaged people (Zhang, 2017). As the term “ICT” implies, it encompasses more than just computers and the web (Selwyn & Facer, 2007). Therefore, the availability of digital skills in addition to basic reading and writing capabilities is required to make full use of these technologies, which include sophisticated services and the use of various media (van Dijk, 2006).

4.3.2 Lack of Education and Expertise

Hamzah and Khalifah (2009) strongly argue that host communities have the propensity to rely too heavily on tour operators since they lack the knowledge and experience to deal with the growing number of tourists and shifting visitor demand. This overdependence is likely when there are no youths in charge of the homestay operation, as in the following statements:

We would like to offer our homestay handicraft products via social media, but we haven't assigned the young staff. Yet, this young staff also doesn't know how to start the promotion through social media. Until recently, the homestay products were sold directly to the buyers. (R1)

Our homestay has used social media in the past but is no longer active due to the unavailability of the younger generation and a lack of technical expertise. (R5)

On the other hand, a few homestays enjoy the benefits of utilising social media marketing in their promotion tools. These particular homestay operators have a more positive perspective on social media marketing, as indicated by the following statements:

Yes, we encourage social media to market for a homestay, but we have limited staff to handle it. We used to communicate with travellers via email or WhatsApp. So, I believe social media plays an important role. With social media, we can compete fairly with others because our strengths can be seen publicly by travellers around the world. (R6)

According to Giotopoulos et al. (2017) study, relevant expertise is one of the ICT adoption drivers of small businesses in Greece and it increases the likelihood of any type of ICT adoption.

4.3.3 Reliance On Third Parties

Lack of marketing expertise in the community causes ineffective promotion (Bhuiyan et al., 2013). The lack of marketing know-how prevents the community from engaging in its own market accessibility and reputation. This, in turn, allows third-party travel agencies to rule and control activities while also instilling a sense of community reliance. The digital divide, limited education and technical expertise on this technology, and over-reliance on other parties such as travel agents and government agencies make homestay Malaysia less sustainable since they are not powerful enough to promote themselves or improve the destination's competitiveness. Dodds et al. (2018) conclude that its fundamental limitations include a lack of local capability, a lack of leadership and management, a poor grasp of the visitors, and an over-reliance on other parties, such as financial aid from the government. Furthermore, Lee & Wicks (2010) also found that excessive dependence on outside development agencies, including Western experts and development agencies as well as the private sector, NGOs, and government (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016), restricts sustainability.

We wait for tourists to be brought to us by the government or a travel agent. We do not worry about tourist arrivals since our destination has been well-known for years. We also allow any host in this homestay to promote their own homestay. (R5).

We don't offer social media promotion for homestays as we get booking orders from travel agents. They gave us Singaporean and Japanese tourists. For locals? We do not create our own offering for locals because we cannot offer different prices to the host for locals and foreigners. Consequently, locals will see the price as expensive. Lowering the

price for locals will dissatisfy the host. Aside from that, we only follow the government-initiated promotion programme (R4).

We don't have our own Facebook because the government (MOTAC) already provides an online media platform such as Hoocay.com. Other than that, we gain visitors through travel agents. (R9)

Here, we depend on the travel agent or some immigration officers who can deliver the travellers to us. When they (travel agents and immigration officers) have tourists for us, they will notify us in advance. (R7)

As for homestay operations, we rely on an outside travel agent who brings visitors or walk-in guests. (R8)

The over-reliance of homestay operators in Malaysia on other parties, including the government and travel agents, has made them resistant to market competition. Consequently, it increases homestay vulnerability (Nor & Kayat, 2010). Moreover, communities need to follow some particular procedures to obtain cash from tourists since the payments were made to third-party agencies Nor & Kayat (2010). Indeed, Malaysia faces some significant challenges, including a lack of market access, being overly dependent on third parties such as the government, industry, or NGO (Hamzah & Khalifah, 2009), and limited community participation (Kim et al., 2014; Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017). Due to the existence of the digital divide, over-reliance on other parties, a lack of marketing expertise, and limited training, Malaysia has been shown to be less aware of the potential of digital marketing, particularly social media marketing, to promote the destination (Chin et al., 2020; Cheuk et al., 2017; Miraz et al., 2015; Osman & Zakaria, 2020; Yong & Hassan, 2019; Asan, 2003). Again, the urgency of community capacity building that focuses on training and digitization, primarily website improvement, in the tourism industry is mostly encouraged to support the industry players reach the international market and promote domestic tourism in 2020 (Khan & Hashim, 2020).

4.4 Urgency for Effective Training

ICT skills are a significant determinant of ICT use behaviour. Training is deemed necessary in order to improve abilities and promote ICT use. It is true that the government facilitates some training on digital marketing. However, the shortage of human resources in the homestays constrains the relevant staff from joining the training. Moreover, some chairmen who are of the majority older generation involved in the training admitted that they gained limited benefit, as described in the statement below.

Actually, I attended some digital marketing training provided by MOTAC. However, because I am unfamiliar with it, I am unsure how to approach the technologies. Hence, the training has no significant effect. (R8)

MOTAC has delivered digital marketing training for creating packages but they let us decide how much the package costs. They have this training but there is no manual guidance so we found this difficult. (R4)

MOTAC Tourism Johor should decide what type of training program is suitable for us based on our own circumstances because one type of training doesn't fit all. (R1)

Oo yes there is training from MOTAC but not too useful and impactful. We need to study more to be fluent in digital marketing applications. (R9)

Few homestay operators admitted that they employ teenagers live around the area to create and manage the social media marketing application.

We just use our resources, because we cannot pay the administrative officer so the youths living nearby are voluntary helping us. (R6)

To use digital marketing needs ICT experts. We are elderly aged 60s so we cannot stand in front of the computer screen, so we wait for youths to help. (R7)

Those who attend the training from MOTAC was youths, or we need to bring them along. Otherwise, we alone will be useless. (R3)

These findings support Damanpour & Schneider's (2009) study that highlights the resistance of senior leaders to commit and change because they are more sociologically used to organisational routines. Hence, a leader's characteristics are crucial in the innovation adoption and acceptance process (Molino, Cortese, & Ghislieri, 2021).

The study also found that social media owned by homestays is still in Malay instead of English, which restricts global market accessibility. This is in line with Gan, Inversini, & Rega (2016), whose study concluded that English is one of the information and communication technology (ICT) adoption barriers in homestay Malaysia. In general, host community incapability, including lack of language skills (Ebrahimi & Khalifah, 2014; Gan et al., 2016), difficulties in digital marketing adoption (Marzuki, Hay, & James, 2012; Cheuk et al., 2017; Nugraheni & Nurhaeni, 2018), and poor education levels and limited tourism knowledge (Kim et al., 2014), are the most local participation constraints in technology adoption and hence threaten their sustainability.

However, there is a homestay operator who has an advanced awareness on social media marketing, as shown below.

For me, social media marketing training is important and useful, while others see it differently. This is because I have a plan of expanding the market and improving the homestay business in the future...so we need to think about it. (R2)

Indeed, training is seen as important by all homestay operators. Education and training can help to accelerate technology adoption by raising awareness and thus influencing adoption (Mumtaz, 2019; Giotopoulos, Kontolaimu, Korra, & Tsakanikas, 2017; Top, Yukselturk, & Cakir, 2011). Interestingly, Harrison & Rainer (1992) and Gallivan Spitler & Koufaris (2005) found that users' prior computer experience and age were found to be more significant drivers of technology adoption and use than user training. Additionally, training participants' views, values, and intentions to use technology will be more strongly influenced by their peer group than in a training environment that is different from the actual work environment, such as a classroom (Gallivan Spitler & Koufaris, 2005). Therefore, more practical and hands-on training is preferable to a theoretical workshop (Kim, Park, & Phandanouvong, 2014). In order to guarantee the sustainability of the homestay programme in Malaysia, it is necessary to maintain positive relationships not only with the visitors but also with all of the program's other stakeholders (Mutalib et al., 2019).

This is in line with Matikiti et al. (2018) study that suggests local governments and business associations in South Africa may play a significant role in helping small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) benefit from social media marketing by spreading awareness about the topic and providing practical assistance to SMEs. In order to help its members, make the most of social media marketing, Matikiti et al. (2018) advise the Association of South African Travel Agents (ASATA) to offer training on the topic. To help employees and management in the tourism industry understand the value of this innovative marketing tool, governments can also host workshops on social media marketing and its benefits. Indeed, there is a need for serious attention to design an effective training program to foster the homestay operators' awareness towards social media marketing adoption. The above findings can be summarized in table 5 below.

Table 5 - Summary of findings

Item	Summary of findings
Awareness state	Awareness is limited to passively informed of social media marketing existence.
Knowledge on social media marketing benefits	Realize the advantages of social media marketing Unknown ownership of social media Un-updated post
Social media marketing utilised by rural homestay	Updated post by outsiders i.e., visitors. Irrelevant content posts International language limitation Digital divide
Awareness constraints	Lack of capable human resources Reliance on the third parties including
Implications	Improve the homestay operators' consciousness to leave the comfort zone Urgency for effective training

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Currently, the use of social media marketing has transformed consumer behaviour as well as the ways businesses conduct their operations (Gvaramadze, 2022). Organizations can benefit from social and digital marketing by lowering costs, increasing brand awareness, and increasing sales. As a matter of fact, tourists' significant usage of social media to plan, arrange, evaluate, gain experience, and share reviews in travel calls for an immediate response from tourists' operators to also utilise this technology. This study confirmed previous findings regarding the factors that inhibit and support technology adoption in Malaysia and worldwide. Take note that those factors are most likely related to each other. The age gap and limited young generation explain the unavailability of expertise in employing social media; hence, it also leads to a lack of awareness, which constrains adoption. Diffusion Innovation Theory (DIT) used in this study showed that, as a critical starting point of behaviour intention, awareness drives an agent of change toward adopting the innovative

technology (Rogers, 1983). This research reveals the state of homestay operators' awareness and unravels the triggers towards it.

These findings will stimulate an effective training programme to cope with the awareness constraints. As a result of increased awareness, social media adoption may increase, reducing reliance on third parties. The tourism industry's sustainability is dependent on adapting to interactive communications in order to meet the needs and expectations of consumers. In other words, homestay operators that fail to adapt to the new world through processes and strategies will face more difficulties in the future. It is urgent for homestay operators to upgrade their capabilities in order to sustain their homestay operations and gain competitiveness in the market.

Awareness is important in influencing attitude and intention, and then taking the next step toward adoption. The familiarity of using social media technology to promote the homestay will raise awareness. Exposure to the benefits of social media marketing will lead to a positive attitude toward adopting the technology. As a result, it is critical for Malaysia's tourism government to implement awareness initiatives, including a specific policy to facilitate adoption. The policy can be used as a tool to increase awareness through training programmes to enhance the homestay operators' skills and improve their perceived usefulness and ease of use. The government can also motivate them by offering incentives and providing technical assistance throughout the adoption process in order to lower the perceived risk. Raising awareness and knowledge about current environmental conditions could be an appropriate political measure to increase individuals' acceptance and adoption of technology.

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