

## DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS: TOWARDS DIGITAL ECONOMY

Norizan Abdul Razak  
School of Language Studies and Linguistics,  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)  
norjef@ukm.edu.my

Fatin Nadiah Ahmad Pisal  
School of Language Studies and Linguistics,  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper explicates the development of Netpreneur modules and the experience of the researchers while training Muslim women entrepreneurs to become online entrepreneurs for the development social women entrepreneur project. These women entrepreneurs are from Johor and Kelantan. This paper will focus on the enhancement of women entrepreneurs. Their products are advertised online on ewtc.my and www.rasasayang.my. Malay language is used as a suitable instrument for local Malaysian market, while effort on translation into English is being taken progressively. Measures of translating the advertisement into English are being implemented. The efforts facilitate the product marketing to other countries and expand the social entrepreneurs' network to reach international clients. Netpreneur is expected to raise Muslim women entrepreneurs' digital literacy by more than 80%, income increase between 30% to 50%, and entrepreneurship network as well as customer growth, over 50%.*

Keywords: Netpreneur, digital literacy, technology transfer, online payment gateway, digital mall, social Muslim women entrepreneur

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### 1.0 Introduction

The concept of social business and social entrepreneurship has been given multiple meanings. In short, it actually refers to the businesses that have product, service, customer, marketing, expenses and outcome. For example, an entrepreneur needs to be able to survive without continuous financial support from investors (Yunus et al. 2010: 311). Researcher also defines the social entrepreneurship differently because it is not based on profit when it concerned on finding alternative payment strategy or management scheme to create social value (Austin et al 2003).

Meanwhile social entrepreneurship also defined as one of the ways to reduce social problem and acts as a catalyst for social issues (e.g. Alvord et al. 2004). According to Yunus et al. (2010), the definition is created based on two concepts that are close to each other and social business is perceived as a sub set of social entrepreneurship which involves both profit initiatives and non-profit where it can differentiate conventional entrepreneurship according to relative payment priority to social wealth inventor. Besides that, all traders who are directly involved and operated social businesses are considered as social entrepreneurs. However, not all social entrepreneurs involve in social business (Yunus et al. 2010). The main principles of social business underlie by Yunus et al. (2010) are:

1. To overcome poverty problems in society or problems that could directly threaten some areas of national importance such as education, health, technology access and environment.
2. To achieve financial and economic sustainability.
3. Investors regain the investments that have been made.
4. After the repayable investments, corporate profitability will remain with company for expansion and improvement.
5. Environmental awareness.
6. Workers' salary will be paid according to the current market with better working conditions.

In the research of social entrepreneurship, strengthening women participation in digital economy had become major interest for developing countries in bridging the digital gap especially in rural areas. For some countries, this initiative was launched by the government and agency in order to empower women in rural community through information and communication of technology underlies ICT role based on project such as e-commerce and e-business in eradicating poverty and nurturing socio-economic status for rural community (Hafkin & Huyer 2006; Maier & Nair-Reichert 2007).

Malaysia is one of the countries that makes effort to reduce issues related to digital gap between urban and rural areas where the government has made cooperation with private sector to handle digital gap in order to ensure the accessibility of ICT so that it can be achieved by rural folks. The initiative taken before for instances, JEN II or *Jendela Informasi Anda* has been translated as

a window of information that is aimed to reduce or decrease the sense of fear among illiterate women towards ICT (Norizan et al. 2010; Nor Fariza et al. 2011).

Explaining the active involvement and support from society towards the establishment of telecentre is one of the factors or contributor in cutting down or bridging digital gap in Malaysia. Empirical study in strengthening women in rural area of Malaysia looked at the possibility of ICT strengthening the economic status (Musa et al. 2009; Norizan et al. 2010). However, women still face several challenges in using ICT to increase their social business development project. For example, lack in term of economic knowledge, ICT literacy, financial literacy and online business management.

## 2.0 Women's Participation In Digital Economy

Women involvement in digital economy are noteworthy by government including Asian countries particularly Malaysia (Meng et al. 2013). Kashem et al. (2012) claimed that women in rural areas in Bangladesh which is particularly 95% of them interested to use ICT as profession. Goheer (2003) has conducted a research on the use of technology among 150 business women in Pakistan where it shows the low level of technology used among the business women. Some of them do not have any technological knowledge development in business last year; 18% has made a marginal increase; 27% has made a modest increase while 5% claimed to have made a teapfrog.

In realizing the importance of knowledge, Malaysian government has developed a series of initiatives in order to prepare and provide *telecenter* and *e-center* for rural communities which are underserved communities such as 'Medan Info Desa' (MID), 'Community Broadband Center' and 'Rural Internet Center' (Salman & Hasim 2009; Meng et al. 2013). eWA Malaysia, an association for Malaysian women to do business online which was set up in 2011 showed that women are so much interested to venture into the online business with the initiatives from the government they have set up their own digital mall, ewtc.my. This initiative had spurred the interest and products of Muslim women in Malaysia has successfully penetrate the cyber world.

Computer technology allows people to change their experiences in terms of time, space and power (Mosco, 2015). The use of ICT is described as a solution to improve the social and economy status of the less fortunate women, such as women in the rural areas (Hafkin & Huyer, 2006; Maier & Nair-Reichert, 2007). Haque and Quader (2014) via their study proved the positive side of using online platforms when 5 bakery shops own by Muslim women entrepreneurs successfully using online platforms and social networks to exchange the information, doing the promotions of their products and expand customers' needs.

## 3.0 Factors Which Influence Women Participation

Researches proved some factors which influence women participations in digital economy. Haque and Quader (2014) determined society's perceptions, role and stereotypes towards women are the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. Mat and Mansor (2010) found that psychology and environmental dimensions affecting Islamic women (Muslimah) participations in online business in Malaysia. Norizan (2012) found that internet access, limited financial literacy, low understanding of e-commerce, lack of skills and trust issues are the main reasons why Muslim women are avoiding online business.

Musa et al. (2009) found out that agriculture entrepreneurs did not use ICT because they are not aware positive sides of using ICT. Lack of knowledge in using ICT made them feel afraid to use ICT in their businesses. Low literacy and needs of ICT among women influence the ICT pattern in Malaysia. Azmi et. al (2014) in his study showed that 250 Muslim women entrepreneurs faced many difficulties such as personal skills, family supports, suppliers, government and their rights as Muslim women.

## 4.0 Digital Economy Development Among Islamic Women Social Entrepreneurs

Thus, in order to assist and develop more Muslim women as social entrepreneurs and doing business online, a training program is created and offered to Malaysian women. 200 women entrepreneurs from Johor and Kelantan are invited to attend and learn about e-commerce. The program is in collaboration with MOSTI and JPNIN. The objectives of this training program are:

- 1) To increase ICT awareness among the women entrepreneurs
- 2) To help developing the local products to be more flexible and increasing the customers to 50 till 80%.
- 3) To push up their economic level (30 till 50%)
- 4) To help women entrepreneurs venture to online business without depending on the premises/ shops to sell their products or services.
- 5) To widen the commercial prospects and values such as the labelling, packaging and price tagging.

The modules offered are:

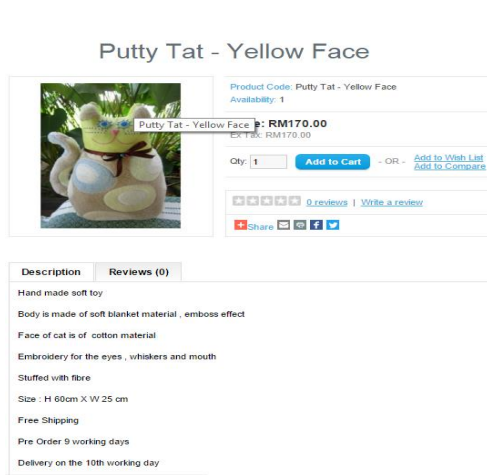
- 1) Business Modal Canvas



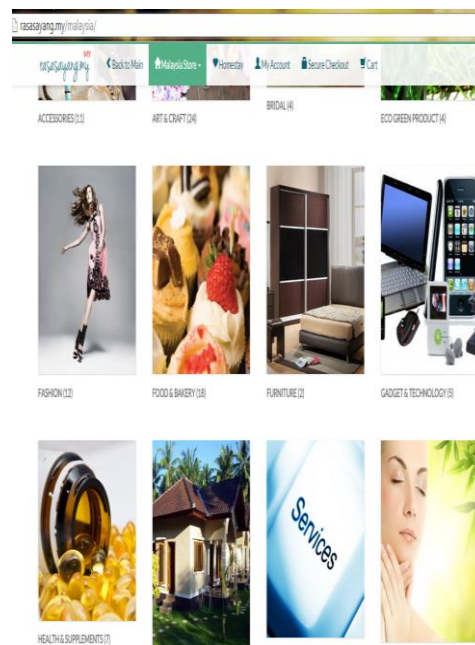
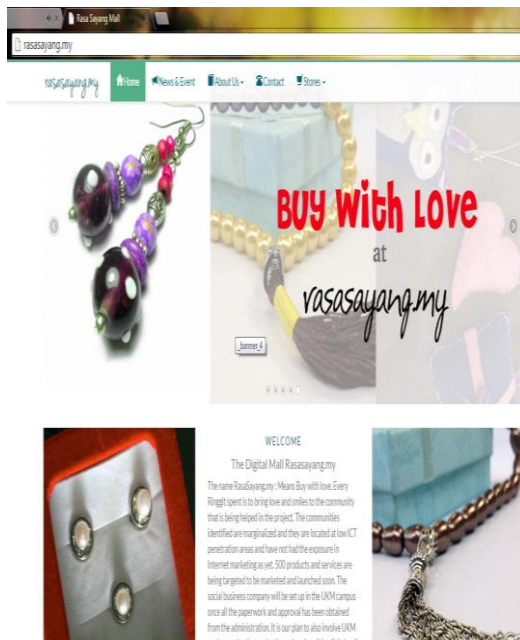
2) Effective Photography for Products or Services



- 3) Designing Business Website .my
- 4) Effective Product Description



5) Uploading and registering products at ewtc.my and rasayang.my



5.0\_Development Of Netpreneur At Johor And Kelantan: Impacts Of The Training Program

Netpreneur is seen as the ideal approach to give the entrepreneurs opportunities to build their business empire from home with minimal cost and at the same time increasing entrepreneur participation in digital economy. The higher inclusion of women in digital economy will boost the country’s socio-economy and society.

However, women entrepreneurs who are running their Micro and Small and Medium Industry (SMME) at Johor are limited in terms of skills, knowledge on digital economy and strategies on effective online advertisements. Training in these two areas helped them to manage the business and to sell their products via online platforms. 200 women entrepreneurs and SMME entrepreneurs were guided to market their products via online platforms and digital malls. Their products and services are marketed in rasayang.my that is developed from the research grant, Laureate-2013-006 (Smart Marketing Services for Small Scale Producers). 200 women and SMME entrepreneurs from Mersing, Johor Bharu, Endau, Kulai Jaya dan Kota Tinggi successfully trained under this program in 2015. The hand to hand efforts between UKM, e-Entrepreneurs Women Association Malaysia (eWA), Angkatan Kerjasama Kebangsaan Malaysia Berhad (ANGKASA) Johor, Koperasi Usahawan Nita Tenggara and .my Domain Registry successfully helped the women entrepreneurs built 150 .my websites. Similar effort is done in Kelantan with 50 other women entrepreneurs.

Impact study after 6 months showed that those women benefitted from this program. Their digital literacy increased up to 80% from the first day of training. Their monthly sales also increase from 30% to 50%. 75% participants of this program successfully uploaded their products or services on the online platforms and digital malls. Those who have higher literacy tend to be more



successful after training as they are able to update their websites and platform ewtc.my and rasasayang.my on their own. Some products sold as listed in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1: Products Sold and Online Business Platform

	Types of Business	Online Platforms, Digital Mall, Business Website
1	Workshop	Facebook Marketing, Website, ewtc.my
2	Beauty Products	Facebook Marketing, Website, ewtc.my, rasasayang.my
3	Mobile Spa	Facebook Marketing, Website, ewtc.my
4	Tailoring	Facebook Marketing, Website, ewtc.my, .mywebsite
5	Catering, food services	Facebook Marketing, Website, ewtc.my, .mywebsite
6	Bakery	Facebook Marketing, Website, ewtc.my, .mywebsite
7	Restaurant	Facebook Marketing, ewtc.my, .mywebsite
8	Raw mushrooms	Facebook Marketing, ewtc.my, .mywebsite
9	Traditional snacks	Facebook Marketing & ewtc.my
10	Salted fishes	Facebook Marketing & ewtc.my

An online payment gateway is also provided for them. However, many preferred to use the platform as their catalogues and a reference for their products. Majority use bank transfer when they receive order and purchase

## 6.0 Conclusion

The journey for Muslim women to sell their products online is still very far away. We are just at the beginning stage, which more awareness and trainings are needed to upgrade the women's skills using ICT to achieve the value added in economy and lifelong learning. Robust marketing needs to be done because majority of Muslim women have good product but lack of advertising skills especially via online platform. Some successful models are already there such as Zawara.com, Sugarcraft.com and reduceit.com. They are young and from the urban areas and have been exposed to ICT since young. But, much efforts still needed to help marginalised women.

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