

TAMU: ITS ROLES AS A MEDIUM OF CULTURAL IDENTITY PRESERVATION AMONG SABAH ETHNIC IN THE ERA OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION 4.0

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study the roles and challenges of *Tamu* as a medium of cultural identity preservation among Sabah ethnic groups in the era of industrial revolution 4.0 by focusing on the commercialisation of Kadazandusun's traditional foods *tuhau* and *bambangan*. Thus, the objectives of this paper are to examine the existing and future functions of *Tamu* as well as to study the impact of industrial revolution 4.0 and the advancement of information technology on the role of *Tamu* in the commercialisation of traditional foods and preservation of cultural identity among Kadazandusun people. Both qualitative and quantitative data are gathered through participant observation, interviews, and surveys. The respondents and informants consist of Kadazandusun traditional foods retailers and consumers at various *Tamus* in Sabah. The findings show that the role of *Tamu* institution is still pertinent in commercialising traditional foods and preserving the cultural identity of the Kadazandusun people, particularly in the rural areas. At certain localities, such as those adjacent to the city and tourist attractions, *Tamu* still plays an essential role in commercialising traditional foods, even though some retailers have already utilised various types of social media to promote and expand their sales, specifically those who are operating as part-timers. Media and internet accessibility has been identified as contributing factors towards the change in the marketing approach. Other contributing factors include time and budget constraints and business location. Hence, *Tamu* is still relevant and significant in the context of commercialising traditional foods and preserving cultural identity among the Kadazandusun people in Sabah in the era of the digital revolution.

Keywords: *Tamu*; Commercialisation; Traditional Food; Kadazandusun; Cultural Identity Preservation; The Fourth Industrial Revolution; Information Technology

INTRODUCTION

The post-modern world, which is characterised by industrial digitalisation and information technology, has penetrated and eventually affected various aspects of our lives, especially in the economic sector. The term industrial revolution 4.0, which originates from Germany, can be described as intelligent networking based on the integration between the business and manufacturing processes together with people who are involved in the chain of production that includes both suppliers and customers (Andreja Rojko, 2017). Traditionally, the business landscape is characterised by a traditional business approach through face-to-face encounters or communication, but we are currently living in an ecosystem wherein people, traders, and customers alike, in Asia and around the globe, are scrambling to capitalise on online business opportunities in line with the emergence of the industrial revolution 4.0. However, in certain

corners of the world, the traditional business approach through face-to-face encounters or communication still predominates business landscapes among the community in certain areas.

In Sabah, located on Malaysia's portion of the Borneo Island in South East Asia, there is an institution popularly known as *Tamu* that plays multiple roles within the state and local communities. *Tamu* is not only significant in the economic, political, and social aspects, but it is also very important in the cultural development of a community. *Tamu* in itself can portray an ethnic cultural identity which can be defined as a sense of belonging that is based on value sharing among the community. It covers both material and nonmaterial cultural elements such as history, cosmology, worldview, belief system, values, norms, customs and rituals, social organisation, language and communication patterns, artefacts (technologies, tools, and vehicles), as well as techniques and skills (the ways in which a society utilised their artefacts). Cultural identity can manifest, signify and shape one's behaviour and community's image and provides broad guidelines in dealing with everyday life (Halina Sendera, 2008).

Symbolically, traditional food is synonymous with the cultural identity of a particular community. In this sense, cultural identity can also be portrayed through the community's traditional foods because food is the most basic of all social codes, which simply means that food can signify and identify the identity of an ethnic (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993). For Sabah, the heterogeneity and distinctiveness of the state's ethnic traditional foods are courtesy of its multicultural makeup that consists of the Kadazan-Dusun, Bajau, Murut, Melayu- Brunei, Bisaya, and Bugis, among others. The West Coast Bajaus are well known for their concept of *duang* and foods such as *kalas* and *pinjaram*; whereas the East Coast Bajaus are popular for their *putu* and *sagol*; the Kadazan-Dusun are famous for *hinava* and *nonsom*; the Murut are famed for *linopot* and *umbus*; and the Melayu-Bruneians and Bisayas are synonymous with *ambuyat* and *kolupis* whereas the Bugis are distinguished for their *burasak* and *berobok* (Halina SAndera Mohd. Yakin et.al, 2020). The preparation and production of traditional food are regarded as one of the contributing factors toward cultural identity preservation. More and more people have become aware that by commercialising their traditional food, they are not only contributing to the economic development of their respective communities but simultaneously to their cultural maintenance as well. This paper focuses only on the Kadazandusun's traditional foods, namely *tuhau* and *bambangan*.

The prime issue that the authors aim to highlight here is, in today's era of the fourth industrial revolution, where people seem to be invaded or dominated by gadgets and advanced technologies, including in trading and business transaction, does *Tamu* still relevant and significant in playing its roles as a medium of cultural identity preservation particularly pertaining to the promotion and commercialisation of traditional foods among the Kadazandusun people in Sabah? This is because nowadays, e-commerce activities have become popular means of shopping in which people can buy and get many things from consumer electronics and appliances to household goods and groceries with just a click away. Thus, the specific objectives of this paper are i. to examine the existing and future functions of *Tamu*; and ii. to study the impact of the fourth industrial revolution and the advancement of information technology on the role of *Tamu* in the commercialisation of traditional foods and preservation of cultural identity among the Kadazandusun people in Sabah.

This paper contemplates offering significant contributions to the epistemological aspects of cultural heritage, particularly in the area of the cultural institution as well as cultural identity preservation. It is hoped that this study will be able to contribute toward sociocultural promotion and socioeconomic enhancement among the Sabahan people, especially the

Kadazandusun. This contribution is significant in the effort to promote local knowledge through the documentation of traditional foods and *Tamu* in Sabah.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The significance behind traditional food, particularly in Sabah, is not universal but culture-specific and arbitrary. Preliminary literature reviews that have been conducted show that comprehensive research pertaining to the roles of *Tamu* and the relationship between cultural identity among Sabah ethnic through traditional food with commercialisation issues is quite limited. Research that focuses on the preservation and transformation of traditional food in acculturation and assimilation contexts among sojourners has been conducted by Rosmaliza et al. (2016). The research which has been done using Malaysian respondents in the United Kingdom found that the difficulties in preserving the authenticity of traditional food are due to the lack of resources in getting the original ingredients. This eventually causes them to make modifications in order to survive in a foreign land. Contrastingly, a study related to the communication field, particularly in advertising, was done by Andreas and Halina Sendera (2016). Their research focuses on the relationship between advertising and food choice patterns among children in Sabah. The study showed that advertising contributes to the health problem, i.e., obesity among children.

Previous studies on Sabah's ethnic traditional foods have been conducted by several researchers. Ng (2006) focused on the Kadazandsusun's, Suraya (2007) centered on Bugis's, whereas Halina Sendera (2018) and Halina Sendera & Saidatul Nornis (2008) concentrated on Bajau's ethnic traditional foods. Ng (2006) discussed the fermentation of *bambangan* and also highlighted the community's perception of the production, preparation quality, commercialisation, and marketing strategy of *bambangan*. Ng found that the unproductive promotion and unattractive packaging quality have contributed towards the decline of the market expansion of *bambangan*. Meanwhile, Suraya (2007) focussed on the importance of traditional food in the belief system and culture among the Bugis people. Although there were similarities with Suraya's in terms of food as cultural identity, Halina Sendera & Saidatul Nornis (2008), on the other hand, concentrated on a different ethnic group. The latter studied the Bajau people, who are well known for the concept of *duang* dan *ngeduang* during death custom ceremonies. The study showed that traditional foods in *duang* have implicit meanings that are related to the cultural life of the Bajaus. Similarly, Halina Sendera (2013; 2018) has conducted a thorough study pertaining to the relationship between traditional food and the cosmology and worldview in her thesis on semiotics in Bajau death custom. Apart from highlighting the significance of symbols, her study also discusses the transformation and modification of *duang* preparation due to the modernisation and the needs of contemporary society.

The study on the impact of modernisation and commercialisation on the authenticity of traditional food as well as the preservation of cultural identity and to identify the level and method of commercialisation, especially pertaining to traditional food among the Kadazandusun has been conducted by Halina Sendera, Chiew Tung Moi, Totu, Suraya & Yasmin (2020). The study also focuses on the traditional food of the Kadazandusun ethnic group in Sabah, especially *tuhau* and *bambangan*. Participant observation, interviews, and surveys were conducted at several locations in the Kadazandusun ethnic settlement. Based on the quantitative and qualitative data analyses, the findings found that commercialisation and

modernisation do influence the authenticity of traditional food but do not diminish the ethnic or cultural identity. The commercialisation level of traditional food is varied in nature depending on the location or the zone. Social media and Internet accessibility have been identified as significant contributing factors toward changes in the marketing approach. Other contributing factors include time, budget constraints, business location or tourist attraction, and also the existence of intercultural contact among the social circles.

Meanwhile, thorough studies on Sabah's *Tamu* have been conducted by quite a small number of researchers, such as Chong Han San & Low Ai Fuah (2008), Yamamoto (2002), and Rimmer (1999). Chong Han San & Low Ai Fuah have supplied the historical aspect and general knowledge regarding *Tamu*, particularly around the west coast of Sabah, including Kota Belud, Tuaran, Tamparuli, Papar, Donggongon, and Kudat, in their book entitled "The *Tamu*: Sabah's native market" whereas Rimmer only covered some basic documentation about the Tamparuli *Tamu* scenario through her published drawings and illustrations based on her experiences while staying at Sabah during the 1970s and 1980s. On the contrary, Yamamoto centered his study on the formation of the Kadazandusun identity in the 1950s by focusing on the harvest festivals, which also contained knowledge pertaining to the roles and significance of Sabah's *Tamu* during the middle of the 20th century. Apart from that, a study pertaining to the *Tamu* trade system on other Borneon continents has been done by Langub (2013). The study centered on the historical landscape of *Tamu* among the Penan of Sarawak and their encounter. Apart from that, it also examined the policies attached to the subject and the people during the Brooke government, as well as the later colonial and post-colonial governments.

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

Based on those literature reviews, it can be concluded that a study pertaining to Sabah's native market or cultural institution, particularly *Tamu*, in relation to cultural identity preservation and commercialisation through ethnic traditional food has not been covered widely among researchers. Thus, this paper was initiated to fill in the gap by researching both cultural and economic landscapes, which specifically focuses on Sabah's ethnic traditional foods, namely *tuhau* and *bambangan*, in the era of the fourth industrial revolution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research combines both qualitative (as a primary method) and quantitative (as a secondary method). Qualitatively, participant observation, as well as in-depth interviews, have been applied to collect primary data. The participant observation has been carried out at several *Tamu* locations around Sabah which covers the south west coast zone (Kota Kinabalu, Penampang, Tuaran, Tamparuli, Kundasang and Ranau), north west coast zone (Kudat, Sikuati and Kota Marudu) and also upper inland or rural zone (Tambunan, Keningau, Tenom, Nabawan and Sook). Data have been obtained through visual recordings in the form of pictures and videos to get the real scenarios of *Tamus* and the commercialisation landscape of traditional foods among the Kadazandusun, particularly *tuhau* and *bambangan*. In-depth interviews have also been implemented involving 20 informants from various districts, which consists of both retailers and consumers, to get more information, particularly pertaining to their experiences, knowledge, and perceptions of traditional foods, Kadazandusun identity, business or marketing strategy, as well as the significance of *Tamu*. In terms of the quantitative method, only covers a small part of the data collection in which a simple quantification procedure (to get the percentage) has been utilized using the survey technique, which basically gathered the general information regarding the business landscape and the roles of *Tamu*. Thus, survey forms were distributed and collected among respondents during the fieldwork.

THE SUBJECT AND LOCATION SETTING: KADAZANDUSUN AND SABAH

Sabah is one of the 13 states in Malaysia, which is located in Borneo, the third-largest island in the world. Sabah is not only famous for its beautiful and breath-taking flora and fauna, but it is also known for its cultural diversity with various ethnic languages, dialects, and sub-dialects. In fact, it has the highest number of indigenous ethnic groups in Malaysia. Sabah has more than 40 different ethnics and sub-ethnics, and its population is dominated by the Kadazandusuns, which appear to be the largest indigenous ethnic group in Sabah, followed by the Bajaus, Brunei-Malays, Muruts, and other non-Bumiputera groups such as the local Chinese as can be seen from Table 1 below. Each ethnic group has its own distinctive ways of life, language and dialect, norms and moral values, beliefs, and religions, as well as customs and traditions, which contribute to the development of their cultural identities. Apart from those main ethnic groups, Sabah is also occupied by various immigrants from all over the world, especially from the Philippines, Indonesia, and other Asian countries. Every ethnic group has its own cultural uniqueness.

Table 1: Statistics of Sabah Population 2010

Kadazan/ Dusun	Bajau	Malay (Brunei)	Murut	Other Bumiputras (native)	Cina	Others
568,575 17.7%	450,279 14%	184,197 5.8%	102,393 3.2%	659,865 20.6%	295,674 9.2%	55,980 1.7%

Source: Yearbook of Statistics Sabah, 2015.

The Dusunic cluster comprises of 13 primer languages and scattered around the inland, north and west coast of Sabah (Pugh-Kitingan, 2016). They can be categorized into several different

sub-ethnic groups based on the names of tree, river and hill such as Dumpas at Labuk; Lotud at Tuaran; Tatana and Bundu at Kuala Penyu; Tanggara and Kadazan at Penampang and Papar; Tambanuo and Paitan at Sungai Paitan; Tebilug, Garo and Kimaragang at Kota Marudu; Lingkabau at Sugut; Bonggi at Pulau Banggi; Sarayo, Sonsogon, Panansawa, Tingaras and Lobou at Ranau, Kudat and Kota Marudu; Tutong at Brunei; Minokok, Mangkaak, Luba, Lingkabau, Tobilung, Nulu, Talantang at Kinabatangan; Tagahas, Tuhawon and Liwan at Tambunan (Suraya, 2013; Dayu 2008). Nowadays, most of the Kadazandusun are Christians although some of them have embraced Islam while a small number of them remains as Pagan.

THE TRADITIONAL FOOD OF THE KADAZANDUSUN: TUHAU AND BAMBANGAN

The Sabahan traditional foods are not only consumed to provide nutritional support and serve as decorations during social events or gatherings, but they can also portray an ethnic cultural identity. The passage of time and globalisation that hit our post-modernism world is apparently unable to eliminate the traditional foods, particularly among the Kadazandusun, which are abundant and can be easily found at shops, markets, countryside stalls, cultural events, and of course *Tamu*. Among the famous traditional foods of Kadazandusun are *hinava*, *nonsom*, *pinaasakan*, *lihing* chicken soup, *bambangan* and *tuhau*. This paper focuses only on *tuhau* and *bambangan* because these are among the popular foods which can be found at *Tamu* and have undergone a certain degree of modification processes for the sake of commercialisation.

Tuhau and *bambangan* are both plants and fruit, respectively. *Tuhau* is scientifically termed as *etlingera coccinea*. It is categorised as a wild ginger plant that has a sharp-tasting and distinctive smell and can be found mainly at the edges of Borneo jungles. *Tuhau* can be prepared in various cooking methods and is normally served as a condiment or pickle and eaten with rice. Traditionally, the soft inner stem is either minced and mixed with chilies, onions and/or garlic, salt, and lime juice or fried with salted fish or stewed with braised fish, popularly known as *pinasakan* among the Kadazandusun. *Tuhau* is believed to have medicinal properties associated with high blood pressure reduction and blood purification. Similarly, *bambangan* or scientifically named as *mangifera pajang* can also be found in Borneo, but unlike *tuhau*, which can be found all year round, *bambangan*, on the other hand, is a seasonal fruit that is categorised as a wild mango. Because of that, it can be eaten just like mango when it ripens. *Bambangan* can also be served in multiple ways. Traditionally, the unripe flesh *bambangan* is made as a pickle mixed with its grated seed as well as chilies and salt or cooked with fish, whereas the ripe *bambangan* is normally fried with salted fish.

Nowadays, in order to promote, commercialise and expand the sales of both traditional foods, the method of preparing or serving *tuhau* and *bambangan* has been diversified and modified to make them more appealing or interesting to others, especially the non-local or Kadazandusun. Due to the intercultural influence of the Malays, the locals also make spicy *sambal tuhau* and *sambal bambangan*¹ that can last for months if kept in the fridge. Apart from that, *tuhau* is also modified into dried *tuhau* floss or famously known in Malay as *serunding*.

¹ Sambal tuhau or bambangan is basically a fried chili sauce or paste made with either red, white, or/and green chillies, onions, garlic, and other ingredients such as salted fish, shrimp, and anchovy.

THE SABAHAN TAMU: ITS FUNCTIONS AND CHALLENGES IN CULTURAL IDENTITY PRESERVATION AND TRADITIONAL FOOD COMMERCIALISATION

Terminologically, the word ‘Tamu’ derives from the Malay word ‘temu,’ which literally means ‘meet.’ *Tamu* is Sabah’s traditional native market which is held periodically in various towns and districts. Basically, it is known as a meeting place in which people gather at a designated place to buy and sell (or exchange) local products. In Sabah, the concept of *Tamu* has come into existence for centuries. It is claimed that *Tamu* already existed before the legacy of the British administration ruled Sabah (Sabah Museum, 2007) or before the emergence of European power at the beginning of the 19th century (Chong Hai San & Low Ai Fuah, 2008)². The *Tamu* of the past was characterized by the barter trade concept in which local people exchange goods (land, rainforest, and sea products) such as rice, fruits, herbs, woven baskets, tobacco, meats, and fish as well as services (massages and traditional treatments) among them for the fulfilment of needs and sustenance. The term *Tamu* as a native market or a place to do trading is not only popular in Sabah, but other places in Borneo also use the same term³.

Historically, *Tamu* serves economic, social, and political functions among the Sabahan community. It plays a vital role in undertaking business transactions among consumers and retailers or traders. It helps the community to improve their living standards in an appropriate and acceptable manner which in the long run can benefit the government and country as a whole. Nowadays, *Tamu* has become a tourist attraction where they can buy local products, handicrafts as well as souvenirs and at the same time experience the local culture. Apart from its economic function, *Tamu* also has a social role due to the fact that it is a hustle and bustle place where people of all ages and walks of life can encounter and mingle around. Interestingly, some people perceived it as a venue to promote and inculcate social equilibrium as well as social unity in the multi-ethnic Sabah society (Yamamoto 2002; Budianto 2011). In this way, *Tamu* develops a rendezvous setting, which eventually promotes intercultural relations through various activities such as business dealings, sporting events, beauty pageants, and cultural performances. Previously, *Tamu* was also regarded as an important meeting place where people of different ethnic groups could meet and undertake barter trade in peace and harmony. It was claimed that during the colonial era, the chiefs and headmen of different ethnic groups assembled and did their negotiation activities to bring about peace among them at *Tamu* by carrying out rituals, sacrifices, and oaths which were later sealed by erecting a stone known as *batu sumpah*. It was believed that violating the oaths or the peace within the *Tamu* grounds would ultimately bring harm or misfortune (Chong Han San & Low Ai Fuah 2008; Sabah Museum 2007). Besides these two aspects, *Tamu* also has a significant meaning in the political aspect. During the British administration, *Tamu* was used to attract local people to join various activities in conjunction with state ceremonies such as the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1937 and 1953. *Tamu* festivals were also used as a ground to give away social recognition and acknowledgments. In this understanding, the locals or the natives took part in those activities such as sporting competitions and beauty contests in order to be recognized or acknowledged not only among the locals but also among the government credentials.

² It was stated that a British anthropologist, Ivor H.N. Evans had explicated the Tamu scene in the Tempasuk district back in 1915 (Chong Han San & Low Ai Fuah, 2008: 29).

³ According to Langub (2013), who has studied the trade system among the Penan in Sarawak, the word *tamu* also refers to the institutionalized barter trade.

Besides these three essential functions, *Tamu* is perceived to serve a cultural function as well, specifically in the promotion and preservation of cultural identity among the Sabah ethnic groups. As mentioned before, the ethnic cultural identity can be identified simply through their traditional foods. *Tuhau* and *bambangan* are among Kadazandusun's traditional foods, which can be found abundantly and sold domestically at various *Tamus* in Sabah, especially those areas or districts dominated by Kadazandusun people. However, in order to suit and meet the current demand due to the influence of information technology, especially in the era of industrial revolution 4.0 that we are facing nowadays, some retailers have already stepped forward in modifying and diversifying their marketing strategies by utilising several types of social media as a new approach to attract buyers as well as to promote and expand their sales. Among the famous social media recorded are *WhatsApp*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram*. Quite surprisingly, *tuhau* and *bambangan* are also available online at various shopping sites or marketplaces. The most popular e-commerce platforms used are *Lazada* and *Shopee*. The main reason is to target wide coverage of consumers from all over the world. Moreover, both products can last for months and are suitable for extended shipping periods if handled properly. Most of the informants and respondents who use social media are those who are operating as part-timers. Meaning to say, they have permanent jobs but involve themselves in this business to get extra income.

Nevertheless, up to this day, based on participant observation, in-depth interviews, and surveys conducted at various *Tamu* around Sabah, it can be concluded that *Tamu* still plays an important role in commercialising traditional foods not only in remote places far from town areas such as *Tambunan*, *Nabawan*, *Sook*, *Tenom*, *Keningau*, *Kota Marudu*, and *Kudat* but also to those locations adjacent to the city centre and known as tourist attractions such as *Kundasang*, *Ranau*, *Kota Kinabalu*, *Penampang*, *Tuaran*, and *Tamparuli*. But in certain localities which are apparently far from the city or crowded communities, such as *Tambunan*, *Sook*, *Nabawan*, and *Sikuati*, most of the retailers of traditional foods, particularly *tuhau* and *bambangan*, are operating domestically or use the traditional ways of doing business.

Based on the analyses, social media and Internet accessibility have been identified as significant contributing factors towards the change in the marketing approach. Other contributing factors include time, budget constraints, and business location. Geographically, Sabah is known for its mountainous nature, and some remote areas have no Internet access. In places with no available Internet access or slow coverage and high Internet subscription fees, *Tamu* has become an important venue to sell and buy products, including traditional foods. In tourist attraction areas such as *Kundasang* and *Ranau*, which are known for their cold climate and beautiful scenery, and also *Kota Kinabalu* as the city centre, *Tamu* has become more important because it is considered one of the tourist spots in which tourists can get local produce as well as souvenirs and are able to experience local culture and atmosphere. From the local consumers' point of view, *Tamu* is regarded as a place to socialize, catch up with friends and relatives and get stuff they need quite conveniently with reasonable prices and a very good bargain. *Tamu* is also perceived as a leisure spot or a routine pastime in which people, friends, or family members can gather and enjoy their activities or weekend together.

In a nutshell, the concept of *Tamu* as a physical and business meeting centre has become a cultural norm among the local community. However, the *Tamu* function was quite affected when the country was hit by the covid-19 pandemic phenomenon. It changes the norms of human life in contemporary times, especially in this endemic era. The phenomenon has affected the business industry, especially small-scale traders, due to new cultural norms that do

not allow or limit conventional meetings and business dealings. It is crucial to have the skills to use and possess the internet to start off and improve daily activities. The pandemic, which has hit the world since December 2019, has prompted a new norm or culture of digital dependency. The movement control orders that physically restrict human affairs, as well as contact or communication, have encouraged humans' dependency on digital applications. The pandemic has transformed the conventional culture of communication, learning, working, trading, and undertaking daily activities. The conventional way of doing business has also been affected by this pandemic, causing businesses to opt for digital platforms for survival.

Eventually, digital culture as a new cultural norm is gaining more space and popularity among traders and will continue to influence the landscape of the business industry and the life of contemporary society. For the survival of *Tamu* as part of the small-scale business industry that also contributes to the country's economy, digital culture among traders, especially those who are selling in rural stalls and *Tamu* in Sabah, needs to be emphasised and empowered. However, there may be constraints to implementing digital culture due to the concept of *Tamu* itself, which is deeply rooted to exist based on conventional meetings and business.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that *Tamu* has various functions economically, socially, and politically. Apart from that, *Tamu* also has a cultural function. Up to this day, *Tamu* remains among the great cultural institutions of Sabah and has continued to be an integral mechanism in portraying the image of Sabah's cultural diversity. Even though the world nowadays is tremendously driven by global competition and influenced by the fourth industrial revolution, which has affected the business landscape of many countries, in certain parts of the world, the traditional business approach that basically characterised by face-to-face encounters or meeting remains unchanged and still popular among the community. This is the reality of Sabah's traditional native market, which is broadly and prominently known as *Tamu*. Indeed, *Tamu* still plays an essential role in supporting the Sabah people in commercialising their local products, such as traditional foods, particularly in the rural areas. At certain localities, such as those adjacent to the city and tourist attractions, *Tamu* still plays an important role in commercialising traditional foods, although some retailers have already utilised various types of social media as a method to promote and expand their sales, specifically those who are operating as part-timers. Media and Internet accessibility have been identified as contributing factors towards the change in the marketing approach. Other contributing factors include time, budget constraints, and geographical location.

This study offers both sociocultural and socioeconomic significance, which is surrounded by the concept of the interconnected relationship between cultural identity preservation and commercialisation that focuses on Kadazandusun traditional foods and the roles of *Tamu*. From this perspective, an ethnic cultural identity is portrayed through the signification of their traditional foods by commercialising the cultural products. Indirectly, the commercialisation of traditional foods and the documentation pertaining to this aspect also help to expand the cultural knowledge of others beyond the cultural horizon and, at the same time, elevate the image and uniqueness of Sabah *Tamu* in the eyes of the world. Suffice to say, *Tamu* is still relevant and significant in the context of commercialising traditional foods and preserving cultural identity among the Kadazandusun people in Sabah in the era of digital revolution or industry 4.0.

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