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Elevating Malaysia's Intangible Cultural Heritage: Commercialising Batik and Songket for Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Traditional *Songket* and *Batik* handicrafts are important intangible cultural heritages and are facing the threat of extinction due to market constraints, changing lifestyles, and lack of interest from the younger generation. Commercialisation may provide a strategy to link heritage preservation with economic viability, while also encouraging community involvement. However, the small and less competitive size of the craft market is a major challenge, affecting the income of entrepreneurs. Therefore, innovation and digitalisation are needed to support market access and adapt products to modern needs. This study aims to explore commercialisation strategies, assess existing supports including government policies, and identify traditional entrepreneurial actions that have an impact on *Songket* and *Batik* entrepreneurs. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve stakeholders, including handicraft entrepreneurs, craft makers, and representatives from relevant government and non-governmental organisations**.** The findings also show that *Batik* involves greater design and material experimentation, whereas *Songket* is more strongly characterised by specialised weaving skills, labour-intensive production, remuneration, and skills transmission. These aspects may contribute to the cultural sustainability of *Songket* and *Batik* by supporting market access, adaptation, and the continuity of traditional craft practices. This study provides practical insights for institutions and stakeholders involved in developing programmemes for the commercialisation and sustainability of traditional craft heritage.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, commercialisation, intangible heritage, preservation, traditional handicrafts

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is part of human civilisation, encompassing tangible and intangible elements that define the identity and values of a community. Tangible and intangible heritage aspects are essential in fostering a sense of belonging, social cohesion, and identity within a community. Preserving cultural heritage is crucial in ensuring societies maintain their unique historical narratives while adapting to modern changes. Recognising its importance, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) advocates for preserving cultural heritage as part of sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise the importance of cultural heritage, with SDG 11.4 explicitly addressing the preservation of cultural heritage. Each region needs to preserve its unique culture to help its people maintain a sense of identity, understand the continuity of their culture, and promote the importance of cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, the value of local knowledge and skills in traditional craftsmanship is recognized as an important domain of intangible cultural heritage requiring safeguarding (UNESCO, 2023). Intangible cultural heritage encompasses practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills passed down from generation to generation in a society (Ahmad et al., 2022). It involves oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and skills related to traditional crafts that reflect a community's identity (Giovannini et al., 2021; Mathioudakis et al., 2022). In this context, the physical *Batik* and *Songket* textiles are tangible craft products, while the knowledge, skills, techniques, cultural meanings, and practices involved in producing them represent their intangible cultural heritage dimensions.

As part of cultural heritage, traditional handicrafts are produced by the arts and manual skills of local communities, and they embody local wisdom, refinement, and creativity in producing unique craft items. Traditional handicrafts play a role in preserving unique historical heritage and cultural values and shaping the community's identity. Traditional handicrafts therefore involve both tangible and intangible heritage dimensions. Whether tangible or intangible, these heritage dimensions have a role in promoting sustainable economic development, income generation, poverty eradication, and employment opportunities (Shafi, 2020). In addition, their role as a social unification mechanism aims to strengthen relationships between generations and enrich the lives of the community as a whole. Heritage acts as a bridge that connects the old and new generations. Craft heritage is not just a cultural element passed down but also a source of inspiration for social and economic growth (Ubertazzi, 2022). Several studies look at how preserving heritage crafts not only preserves the heritage but also helps local communities with income sources. Local handicrafts can be adapted in form and function to increase economic value. This means that preserving traditional crafts goes beyond conservation as it serves as a

way to foster local economic development and create employment opportunities (David et al., 2023; Permatasari et al., 2021). However, due to technological changes, preserving craft heritage faces challenges such as a lack of training opportunities, skills transfer issues, and small markets. In addition, entrepreneurs and craft makers, such as those involved in *Batik* and *Songket* enterprises, constantly deal with the high costs of business premises and maintenance of workshops or places to produce craft products (Ariffin et al., 2023).

In this context, preserving craft heritage is important as society becomes more modern and lifestyles change, especially when faced with a modern world. Modern lifestyles see how cultural heritage, including local traditional crafts, are beginning to be neglected and seen as irrelevant, putting them at risk of extinction (Jalani & Ramli, 2019). In addition to modernity issues, other issues, including lack of collaboration, business skills, and the absence of networks or platforms, threaten this heritage to remain and be sustainable (Makhitha, 2017). In this regard, these efforts need support and assistance, especially with relevant skills and partnerships to help their businesses, such as basic business skills and knowledge to identify new markets, manage scale, and adjust product use since traditional production and distribution methods are no longer suitable for use in today's technological world. This focus is also consistent with Malaysia's National Cultural Policy (2021), which emphasises the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage, as well as the development of a cultural economy. In this context, the commercialisation of *Batik* and *Songket* can be examined within the broader national agenda of sustaining cultural heritage while supporting its continued economic relevance (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, 2021). *Batik* and *Songket* are examined together in this study because both are prominent Malaysian textile crafts in which commercially produced material objects are closely connected to culturally embedded knowledge, skills, aesthetic values, and craft practices. At the same time, they involve different production processes and forms of innovation. *Batik* allows adaptation through motifs, colouring, blocking techniques, and materials, whereas *Songket* relies more heavily on specialised weaving skills and labour-intensive production. Examining both crafts therefore makes it possible to identify common commercialisation strategies while recognising craft-specific challenges and support requirements. Given the challenges of commercialising heritage crafts, this qualitative study was conducted to evaluate the strategies used in heritage preservation, especially in commercialising *Batik* and *Songket* products that represent local art, knowledge, skills, and cultural values. Although previous studies have discussed issues such as innovation, digitalisation, market development, skills preservation, and institutional support in traditional craft industries, these dimensions are often examined separately. Less attention has

been given to how commercialisation, digitalisation, artisan innovation, and institutional support interact in sustaining Malaysian *Batik* and *Songket*, particularly from the combined perspectives of craft practitioners, entrepreneurs, and supporting institutions. Comparative understanding of whether *Batik* and *Songket* experience similar or different commercialisation challenges and support requirements also remain limited. Accordingly, this study aims to examine how *Batik* and *Songket* are commercialised by craft practitioners, entrepreneurs, and supporting institutions, with particular attention to the roles of digitalisation, institutional support, and artisan-led innovation in shaping their commercialisation. It further investigates how these commercialisation practices may support or constrain cultural sustainability, particularly in relation to the preservation of cultural meaning, artisan agency, and the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge and skills. Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1 : How is *Batik* and *Songket* commercialised by craft practitioners, entrepreneurs, and supporting institutions?

RQ2 : What roles do digitalisation, institutional support, and artisan-led innovation play in the commercialisation of *Batik* and *Songket*?

RQ3 : How may these commercialisation practices support or constrain the cultural sustainability of *Batik* and *Songket*?

This study extends existing research by bringing together multi-stakeholder evidence on the commercialisation of *Batik* and *Songket* and interpreting these practices through the Cultural Sustainability Framework. Its principal contribution is empirical and policy-oriented, as it identifies both shared and craft-specific commercialisation strategies, challenges, and support requirements that are relevant to craft practitioners and supporting institutions. The originality of the study therefore lies not in proposing a new theory, but in integrating multi-stakeholder evidence, a *Batik-Songket* comparison, and the Cultural Sustainability Framework to understand how commercialisation may create conditions for cultural continuity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The preservation of traditional craft heritage plays an important role in maintaining the community's cultural diversity, utilising local resources, fostering tolerance, and stimulating the creativity of local communities. Along with that, the commercialisation of traditional handicrafts such as *Batik* and *Songket* is an effort that supports the goal of heritage preservation. The commercialisation of craft heritage has received increasing attention in recent years, driven by digital transformation and

government assistance. Digitalisation has emerged as an important strategy, allowing craftspeople to bypass intermediaries and directly access a broader market through e-commerce platforms, thus increasing profitability and sustainability (Koe & Wulandari, 2023). The potential of local resources can be changed in terms of form and function to support economic value (Permatasari et al., 2021). In this regard, people's craft-making skills need to be utilised in the economic sector, which can impact the preservation of heritage handicrafts. Local handicrafts produce something that needs to be appropriately preserved because they symbolise a nation's identity and society's identity. Indigenous or traditional knowledge refers to knowledge systems, creation, innovation, and cultural expression passed from generation to generation. It is considered to be related to a particular society or region, developed non-systematically and continuously in response to a changing environment (Dana, 2007). Various factors affect the preservation of crafts. Many studies have identified separate factors that require specific approaches to overcome issues related to heritage craft preservation. Among the issues receiving attention are individual obstacles, such as lack of training opportunities, problems of inheritance and intergenerational transmission among aging practitioners, loss of skills, particularly following the introduction of new technologies, market limitations including demand for products, supply of raw materials, and small-business challenges including the high costs of business premises and workshops (Ariffin et al., 2023; Shafi et al., 2021). These studies demonstrate that the sustainability of traditional crafts is affected by interconnected cultural, production, market, and institutional factors. However, these factors are frequently discussed individually, making it difficult to understand how they operate together within the commercialisation process.

Innovation can make a traditional handmade product unique and provide a vital attraction factor compared to factory-made items. It can be a factor in the durability of traditional handicraft products in the current market (Shafi et al., 2022). The combination of contemporary innovation and traditional values in handicrafts is also seen as contributing to the preservation of a craft product. However, existing studies tend to examine innovation, digitalisation, market development and institutional support as separate dimensions, providing limited understanding of how these elements interact in the commercialisation of Malaysian *Batik* and *Songket* from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The combination of contemporary innovation and traditional values in handicrafts is also seen as contributing to the preservation of a craft product. In the case of woven cloth in Sri Lanka, innovation is important to ensure that the craft industry remains competitive. Traditional weaving that combines contemporary needs with the latest design is seen to be able to meet consumer needs, thus indirectly creating fierce competition with factory-made

products. Collaboration between designers and weavers indirectly attracts more people to work on weaving, ultimately bringing good to the country (Wanniarachchi et al., 2022). The difficulty of obtaining raw materials is also a factor that can inhibit the potential of traditional handicrafts, so innovation using alternative materials can solve this issue. The problem of getting materials for traditional handicrafts makes handicraft craftsmen more creative by using plastic to replace traditional materials. Innovation with the use of alternative materials is seen to deal with the problem of lack of raw materials, adapt handicrafts to modern lifestyles, and meet the needs of the market while maintaining the identity of handicrafts (Angat & Hassan, 2023). Nevertheless, innovation in heritage crafts involves more than improving market attractiveness. Changes in motifs, materials, techniques, and production technology may also affect how cultural meanings, traditional knowledge, and authenticity are interpreted. Therefore, innovation should be considered in relation to both commercial relevance and cultural continuity rather than assuming that all forms of innovation automatically contribute to heritage preservation. Cultural sustainability encompasses the processes, values, and practices that allow cultural expressions to survive, develop, and remain relevant across generations while maintaining their distinctive identity (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). In heritage crafts like *Batik* and *Songket*, cultural sustainability must ensure that the knowledge, skills, and aesthetic values embedded in these crafts are preserved and adapted to the contemporary context. This effort requires the intervention of various elements, including education, innovation, and commercial viability.

In this context, commercialisation in the craft sector may provide a practical and strategic opportunity to support the sustainability of traditional crafts in the modern world. However, commercialisation does not automatically result in cultural sustainability, and any steps taken need to consider traditional characteristics, cultural meanings, local wisdom, and the agency of craft practitioners. When digitalisation and innovation elements are introduced with cultural values in mind, they can increase the craft's marketability and elevate the symbolic value of a traditional craft product (Lahdesmaki et al., 2020). For this reason, strong government policies, community-based initiatives, and artisan-driven innovation are the main catalysts for this ecosystem. Cooperation by all parties in providing material and symbolic support to ensure that cultural expressions continue to exist in an increasingly competitive market (Crooke, 2020). Institutional support is therefore relevant not only in providing financial assistance or marketing opportunities but also in facilitating training, digital capabilities, product development, and the transmission of craft knowledge. At the same time, the role of artisans should not be treated as secondary to institutional intervention. Their participation and agency in deciding how designs, techniques, materials, and cultural meanings are adapted are important considerations in determining

whether commercialisation supports cultural sustainability.

Heritage sustainability can only be achieved when preserved, continuously practiced, and relevant to today's society. In this regard, guided by the Cultural Sustainability Framework (CSF), this study examines how well-planned commercialisation strategies can function as a mechanism that potentially supports economic viability and the sustainability of cultural heritage. This approach considers how providing artisans with market access, training, and innovation tools may strengthen the resilience of traditional knowledge and help intangible heritage remain a dynamic element of national identity and community development. In the context of traditional Malaysian crafts, challenges include a lack of youth engagement, declining demand in the local market, and limited exposure to global markets. However, strategic commercialisation, community engagement, and government policy interventions can enhance the resilience of this cultural practice.

Thus, the CSF helps to conceptualise how socio-economic strategies such as digital marketing, government training programmes, and artisan-driven innovation are not simply economic interventions but may serve as mechanisms supporting the long-term viability of cultural knowledge and identity. In this study, the framework is applied through five interrelated dimensions: (i) continuity of cultural practices, (ii) transmission of knowledge and skills across generations, (iii) maintenance of cultural identity and meaning, (iv) adaptation and continued relevance in changing contexts, and (v) socio-economic viability supported by participation and artisan agency. Despite growing research on traditional craft preservation, digitalisation, innovation, and market development, three gaps remain particularly relevant to this study. First, limited attention has been given to how commercialisation, digitalisation, innovation, and institutional support interact rather than operate as separate strategies. Second, existing discussions provide limited multi-stakeholder evidence that incorporates the perspectives of artisans, entrepreneurs, and supporting institutions within the same analysis. Third, comparatively little attention has been given to the shared and craft-specific commercialisation experiences of Malaysian *Batik* and *Songket*. This study addresses these gaps by using the Cultural Sustainability Framework as an analytical lens to examine multi-stakeholder evidence from the Malaysian *Batik* and *Songket* sectors. Rather than treating commercialisation as inherently beneficial or harmful to cultural heritage, the study considers whether and under what conditions commercialisation practices contribute to cultural continuity, knowledge and skills transmission, cultural meaning, adaptation, socio-economic viability, and artisan agency. Accordingly, commercialisation is understood as creating potential conditions for cultural sustainability when market access, digitalisation, innovation, institutional support, and artisan participation remain aligned with the cultural foundations of the crafts.

METHODS

This qualitative study assessed traditional craft products' commercialisation strategies to sustain *Batik* and *Songket*'s heritage. It took the views of individuals and agencies involved in the making and commercialising of these crafts.

Data Collection and Analysis

The qualitative research approach offers an effective way to understand the meanings and experiences of people in their social lives (Fossey et al., 2002) through direct interaction with participants in their natural environments (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative case-study approach was used to examine the commercialisation of Malaysian *Batik* and *Songket* from the perspectives of stakeholders directly involved in these craft sectors. The case was bounded by its focus on the commercialisation and sustainability of *Batik* and *Songket* within the Malaysian craft sector. The participants represented craft practitioners, entrepreneurs, training and supporting organisations, and government-related craft institutions, including stakeholders from Terengganu, Johor, and Perak, as well as representatives of relevant national and non-governmental craft organisations. *Batik* and *Songket* were included within the same case because both represent established Malaysian textile crafts that combine tangible products with culturally embedded knowledge, skills, techniques, and aesthetic values. Examining both crafts also allowed the study to identify shared commercialisation practices as well as craft-specific challenges and forms of support. This case study involved 12 informants who were purposively selected based on their knowledge, participation, and familiarity with the *Batik* and *Songket* craft industries. The participants included a small-scale *Songket* weaver, *Batik* entrepreneurs, officers from the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, officers from Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah (YTNZ), a *Songket* weaving trainer, and an officer from the National Craft Institute (IKN), as shown in Table 1. The inclusion criteria required participants to have direct involvement in, professional responsibility for, or substantial knowledge of *Batik* or *Songket* production, commercialisation, training, development, or institutional support. This selection enabled the study to obtain perspectives from both craft practitioners and organisations involved in supporting the craft sector.

Among those involved in this study were *Songket* weavers, *Batik* painters, individuals involved in sales, and representatives of government institutions involved in commercialising these craft products. Initial information was provided to the informants involved, particularly regarding the objectives and scope of the study, so that the informants better understood the direction of the interview session. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 informants. The interview questions explored the participants' perceptions of the commercialisation strategies implemented in the *Batik* and *Songket* craft sectors. The interviews included questions concerning participants' commercialisation efforts, the

Table 1
Information of the informants

No.	Code	Description
1.	I1	Malaysian Handicraft Officer Terengganu branch
2.	I2	Malaysian Handicraft Officer Terengganu branch
3.	I3	Small-scale *Songket* weaver
4.	I4	Malaysian Handicraft Officer Johor branch
5.	I5	Malaysian Handicraft Officer Johor branch
6.	I6	*Batik* entrepreneur
7.	I7	Tuanku Nur Zahirah Foundation (YTNZ) Officer/ *Songket* weaving trainer
8.	I8	Malaysian Handicraft Officer Perak branch
9.	I9	National Craft Institute (IKN) Officer
10.	I10	Malaysian Handicraft Officer Terengganu branch
11.	I11	Tuanku Nur Zahirah Foundation (YTNZ) Officer
12.	I12	*Batik* entrepreneur

Source: Authors' own work

support available to assist these efforts, obstacles and challenges encountered, and the potential for strengthening the commercialisation and sustainability of *Batik* and *Songket*. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and all personal information about the informants was kept confidential.

The informants involved in this study were selected based on their knowledge, participation, and familiarity with the *Batik* and *Songket* craft industries. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis provides an effective approach for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Alhojailan, 2012; Thorne, 2000). The analysis involved familiarisation with the interview transcripts, identification of relevant segments of data, coding of recurring ideas, comparison of codes across participants, and organisation of related codes into broader themes corresponding to the study objectives and research questions. Themes were then reviewed in relation to the interview data before being interpreted in the context of *Batik* and *Songket* commercialisation and cultural sustainability. To strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from participants occupying different roles within the craft sector. This allowed the researchers to examine similarities and differences across stakeholder perspectives and reduce dependence on a single source of evidence (Marlina et al., 2024). Reliability and trustworthiness were established through interview transcripts, field notes, and a carefully documented coding scheme.

Data saturation was also considered during the analysis. Saturation was understood as the point at which additional interviews no longer generated substantially

new themes relevant to the study objectives. By the 12th interview, similar patterns and responses were recurring across the data, indicating thematic saturation within the scope of the participant groups included in this study. The claim of saturation is therefore limited to the themes generated within this specific qualitative sample and should not be interpreted as representing all *Batik* and *Songket* practitioners or institutions in Malaysia. Throughout the analysis, attention was given to maintaining consistency between the participants' accounts, the coding process, and the interpretation of the findings. Interpretations were compared against the original interview transcripts to ensure that the reported themes remained grounded in participants' accounts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Commercialisation of *Batik* and *Songket*

Preservation of traditional handicrafts among the community requires a more strategic approach, primarily through planned commercialisation efforts, so that it can contribute to the socio-economic progress of the local community. To face the risks and challenges of the extinction of handicraft heritage, which is the identity and reflection of local communities, every step-in commercialisation efforts must be sensitive to various complex factors that are obstacles to the preservation of crafts. In the context of textile craft heritage, such as *Batik* and *Songket*, using less attractive colors, not contemporary motifs, and using products no longer relevant in the current world are significant obstacles. These factors cause traditional handicrafts to be less popular and less used by the community, especially the young. So, to overcome this problem, commercialisation must consider several aspects such as innovation, digitalisation, and agency involvement to ensure that this effort is successful. This study explored how commercialisation has been implemented in the local traditional craft industry. The findings identified three closely related strategies digitalisation, government and institutional support, and artisan-led innovation while artisan agency cuts across these strategies by shaping how commercialisation and adaptation are undertaken. These findings describe the commercialisation practices and support mechanisms identified by participants. They should not be interpreted as evidence that these strategies necessarily increase income, sales, or international competitiveness, as the study did not collect quantitative market-performance data.

Figure 1 summarises the analytical relationship identified in the findings. Digitalisation of products facilitates alternative channels for market access; Government support provides training, infrastructure, marketing assistance, and opportunities for skills development; and Craftsmen's innovation enables products and production practices to respond to changing contexts. Craftsmen remain important factors in determining how cultural knowledge, designs, techniques, and products are adapted. These mechanisms may create conditions that support cultural sustainability, but the relationship is not assumed to be automatic.

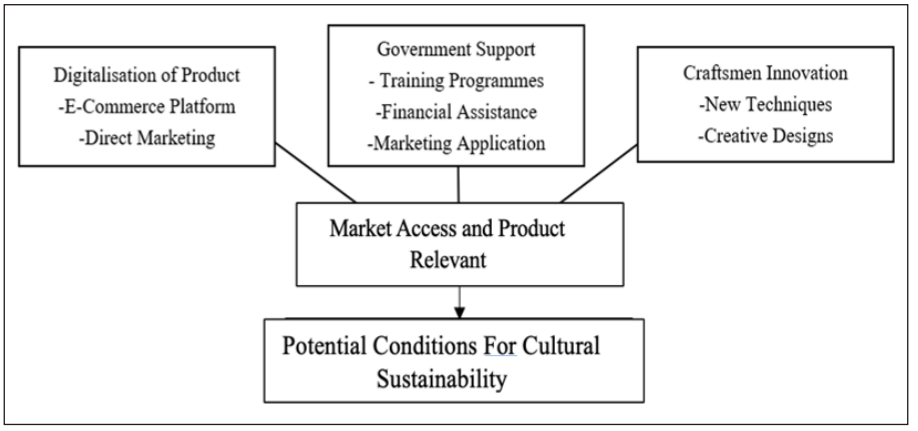


Figure 1. Traditional craft commercialisation for cultural heritage sustainability
Source: Authors' own work

Digitalisation of Product

The digital revolution has driven the advancement of communication by opening new opportunities and increasing the efficiency of digital services, thus bridging social interactions and expanding global networks. This development has also facilitated the search and sharing of information, impacting various sectors, including cultural heritage (Chai-Arayalert et al., 2020). Digitisation opens up new spaces for preserving and promoting traditional crafts as cultural heritage and encourages optimal community engagement to ensure sustainability and expand heritage promotion platforms. In the business context, digitalisation helps entrepreneurs cope with uncertainty and build confidence in the future (Nambisan, 2017). Entrepreneurs and craftsmen are now using digital approaches as a marketing alternative, especially after the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, several key issues, such as intermediaries, low levels of digital literacy, and the need for more effective marketing strategies, still need to be addressed.

The findings identified intermediaries as one concern in the commercialisation of craft products. In the case of the small-scale *Songket* weaver interviewed, the participant perceived the payment received for weaving as low in relation to the workload and linked the difficulty of obtaining a higher payment to problems in product sales. The existence of intermediaries in this business will affect the cost of making craft products, which ultimately causes the price of craft products to be high due to price manipulation set by intermediaries. So, the wage rate for producing craft products is also affected. According to informants hired as *Songket* weavers on a small scale, the wage rate for producing a piece of *Songket* is low compared to the workload they have to face.

> I received a salary of RM1000 to produce this *Songket*. This salary has been going on for 20 years and has never increased. Other workers

> have also had their salaries increased. However, my friends and I who are paid to weave this *Songket*, our salaries have never changed. If I ask for a salary increase, they will refuse because there is a problem with sales. So, they cannot increase their salaries.
>
> (I3, T1)

This account indicates that the participant receives RM1,000 for each completed piece of *Songket* rather than as a monthly salary. Producing a high-quality piece of *Songket* may take approximately three to four weeks, reflecting the labour-intensive and time-consuming nature of traditional *Songket* weaving. Despite the specialised skills and substantial production time required, the participants reported that the payment rate for a completed piece had remained unchanged for many years. However, there are also a few small-scale *Songket* weavers who prefer to sell their products to intermediaries because they do not dare to bear the risk of loss and do not have the time and convenience of channels to sell directly to customers even though they know the market price is much higher than the price sold to the public. This finding highlights an important commercialisation challenge specific to *Songket* where the economic value assigned to skilled craft labour may not necessarily correspond with the time, effort, and specialised knowledge required for production. The participant also associated the difficulty of increasing the weaving payment with limitations in product sales. This suggests that the sustainability of *Songket* involves not only expanding market access but also ensuring the economic viability of skilled weaving as a livelihood.

Therefore, in addressing this issue, the digitisation of handicraft products, including *Songket* weaving, can also provide an opportunity for craft entrepreneurs to market their goods according to market prices. Customers also have optimal purchasing power when comparing prices offered by sellers more quickly and widely. Craft entrepreneurs can expand the marketing and sales of their products to new markets through this method. In digitising the process of marketing products, craft makers are not alone because, in this regard, the role and support of the government are very helpful. The government is paying due attention to this issue and seriously considering digitalisation in the craft industry.

Government Support- Marketing Application, Training Programmes and Financial Assistance

In terms of traditional handicraft marketing, Kraftangan Malaysia assists handicraft entrepreneurs in further expanding the handicraft market through its digital platforms. Among these platforms are MyCraftShoppe, E-Kraf Bazar, and the CraftOnTheGo smartphone application. Efforts are being made through the Malaysian Craft Development Corporation (Kraftangan Malaysia), which has taken the initiative to strengthen digital programmes in the development plan for the Malaysian craft industry. The initiative developed focuses on the needs and convenience of entrepreneurs

and considers the comfort and interests of local craft buyers and enthusiasts.

Studies have found that most craft entrepreneurs need help managing and finding markets for their craft products. Traditional craft entrepreneurs and artisans, especially in textiles such as *Batik* and *Songket*, must explore the right marketing strategies to compete with many other industry products. Therefore, skills and knowledge of basic information technology knowledge are the foundation for ensuring marketing strategies, especially those involving digitalisation. The government is also sensitive to literacy efforts in managing digital marketing methods by involving basic applications and software in digital marketing. Therefore, several initiatives have been taken to overcome this, such as providing digital marketing platforms, training and exposure to IT skills for entrepreneurs, and other support services to improve the quality of online product advertising.

> Another thing, our entrepreneurs who live in rural areas are not IT literate, which is a challenge for us; the product needs to be exposed to the public to market it. A few do not know what Facebook is, so we need to teach them the basics before introducing them to digitalise their product marketing.
>
> (I4, T1)

This account indicates that providing digital platforms alone may not be sufficient. Digital literacy and practical training are also necessary if craft entrepreneurs are to make use of these platforms effectively. Craft entrepreneurs are also helping to improve the quality of advertising with expertise in IT to help entrepreneurs produce quality product advertisements.

> We will teach you to take pictures and enter information into the system. Our staff will come in and create attractive advertisements. They must ensure that the goods are available and ready to be posted to customers.
>
> (I5, T1)

The government's determination to ensure that digital marketing strategies are implemented well has provided an opportunity for a surge in digital culture in the craft industry and helped many craft entrepreneurs. Registered Malaysian Craft Entrepreneurs receive special privileges and attention in product marketing.

> The promotional unit makes the entrepreneur's product not sloppy; we don't tell the entrepreneur to take pictures if the pictures meet the standards; we have our studio where there is lighting to help with this, the product is more attractive.
>
> (I1, T1)

In addition to providing e-commerce platforms, digitalisation efforts therefore include product photography assistance, uploading information to digital platforms, and technical support. These forms of assistance may reduce some of the digital-marketing barriers faced by craft entrepreneurs and improve their ability to

present products through online channels. Among the important initiatives is the CraftOnTheGo application, which allows users to access complete information about craft entrepreneurs, such as product types, photos, locations, and social media. This application connects users directly to entrepreneurs without intermediaries, thus helping maintain quality and affordable prices. Figure 2 illustrates digital platforms that support the online promotion and marketing of traditional Malaysian crafts, including MyCraftShoppe and E-Kraf Bazar.

This application not only lists handicraft entrepreneurs but also provides a directory of Kraf Malaysia branches, email information, social media links (Instagram, YouTube), the Kraf Malaysia portal, the National Craft Institute (IKN), as well as access to MyCraftShoppe for online sales. New entrepreneurs can also register with Kraf Malaysia through this application, making it easier for them to receive initiative information and get involved in the digitalisation of handicraft businesses. This application helps users find products quickly and supports entrepreneurs through a complete product gallery display. Meanwhile, E-Kraf Bazar is an online bazaar via a Facebook Group that was created on 8 April 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is attended by more than 18,000 members, including entrepreneurs, buyers, and craft enthusiasts, allowing for buying and selling activities, interaction, and live viewing of the craft-making process, thus expanding the market reach of entrepreneurs.

The government has implemented various initiatives to strengthen the heritage of handicrafts, such as exhibitions, design competitions, training courses, financial assistance, and marketing support. These efforts open up opportunities for youth to venture into traditional craft enterprises. Through programmes such as National Craft Day and statecraft festivals, the marketing of handicrafts can be expanded, tourists can be attracted, and the socio-economic status of local communities can be improved. Handicrafts also have potential as a tourism product because they better reflect local cultural values than other souvenirs. High demand for craft products ensures the industry's survival, creates job opportunities, and expands businesses in both urban and

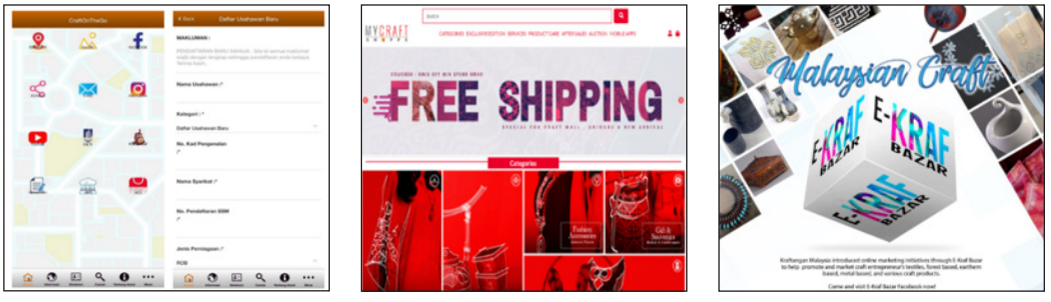


Figure 2. Display of the CraftOnTheGo, MyCraftShoppe and E-Craft Bazaar websites

rural areas. Government support was not limited to marketing. Participants also described programmemes intended to develop new practitioners and transfer craft skills, which is particularly relevant to the intergenerational continuity dimension of cultural sustainability.

> We aid with young entrepreneurs; they don't have capital (yet), so we will provide an incubator for them to use it for six months for free; they need to pay for utilities and materials only
>
> (I10, I1)

> In 'Craft Attachment Programme', we attach anyone who is interested in joining the craft making with a craft entrepreneur, and they will have the training and get allowance for 6 months. We do this to encourage youth to be involved in craft heritage.
>
> (I5, I1)

These programmes illustrate two functions of institutional support. The first concerns the commercial viability of new craft entrepreneurs through access to facilities, training, and business support. The second concerns cultural continuity through opportunities for new practitioners, including younger people, to learn craft skills from experienced practitioners. Malaysian Crafts has designed and implemented various initiatives to help craft entrepreneurs and encourage those who want to enter this field. In addition to the incubator, Malaysian Crafts also provides a Craft Apprentice programme where those interested in joining the craft industry will be placed under the care of experienced craft entrepreneurs for six months. This mentor-based programme targets guidance and training for entrepreneurs who are just starting in the craft field. Malaysian Crafts will provide them with a training allowance throughout the programme. This programme targets youth who are interested in the handicraft field. In addition to assistance in the form of skills training, Malaysian Crafts also provides workshop and machine repair assistance to entrepreneurs in need on a 'one-off' basis. This kind of assistance is important for handicraft entrepreneurs; craft workshops must be comfortable to ensure safety while working. The steps taken by the government show a strong commitment to making traditional handicrafts suitable for today's contemporary times so that they remain relevant and able to face the challenges of the current world. In addition, handicraft entrepreneurs and those involved in this industry can no longer remain stagnant by closing all doors to innovation because today's demands of the market, lifestyle, and economy always demand change.

Craftsmen Innovation- New Techniques and Creative Designs

In addition to product empowerment through digitalisation, innovation also plays an important role as a potential approach to ensure the preservation of handicraft heritage. Innovation can occur in various aspects of handicrafts, including manufacturing, design, and marketing

strategies. Innovation implemented in traditional handicrafts is a proactive step to address the extinction factors facing handicrafts. Handicraft production is now greatly influenced by modern technology that has been introduced to increase the production of handicraft products compared to using hands. Crafts that reflect local culture and heritage can increase tourism development and socio-economic status, and entrepreneurs can play an important role in developing the handicraft industry (Hasliza, 2017).

Studies on the relationship and influence of innovation in the handicraft sector have been conducted for a long time. Studies have found that innovation triggered by the presence of technology in traditional crafts is an important meeting point where tradition and modernity merge. Among the reasons why innovation is needed in the handicraft industry is that production costs can be reduced, handling can be simplified, and manufacturing time can be shortened. Incorporating digital tools can increase accuracy, speed up production, diversify craft products, and foster collaboration among craftsmen. The collaboration of innovation, technology, and traditional skills can enrich the craft-making process and ensure the sustainability and continued relevance of traditional crafts in a technology-driven world. Based on the study findings summarised in Table 2, *Batik* and *Songket* textile crafts are still catching up in facing the innovation phase to continue competing with other products. Some of the innovations identified in this study are categorised into hybrids, motifs, techniques, materials, and uses. Innovations are seen as new motif renewal in *Batik* textile patterns, the mixture of modern motifs in *Songket* weaving, the color-blocking *Batik's* making process, and modern technology to speed up the *Songket* weaving process.

Based on the study findings summarised in Table 2, several forms of innovation were identified in *Batik* and *Songket*. These included motif innovation in *Batik*, the integration of contemporary motifs

Table 2
Identified innovations in batik and songket textile crafts

Type of Innovation	Description	Purpose/Impact
Motif Innovation	Renewal of new motifs in *Batik* textile patterns	Respond to contemporary aesthetic preferences while retaining culturally recognisable elements
Hybrid Motif	Integration of modern motifs into traditional Terengganu *Songket* weaving	To maintain cultural relevance while appealing to younger and global markets
Technical Innovation	Use of colour-blocking technique in *Batik* making	To introduce contemporary visual effects and diversify design options
Technological Innovation	Adoption of modern technology (e.g. automated looms) in *Songket* weaving	To reduce production time, labour intensity, and operational costs

Source: Authors' own work

in *Songket*, technical innovation in *Batik* production, and technological adaptation in *Songket* weaving. Table 2 also demonstrates that innovation does not occur exactly the same way across the two crafts. The *Batik* findings emphasise experimentation with motifs, materials, colour, and blocking techniques, whereas the *Songket* findings emphasise motif adaptation and changes associated with the weaving process. This distinction is important because the commercialisation and innovation requirements of the two crafts should not be treated as identical. Motifs are one of the things that craftsmen pay attention to and innovate. Malaysian *Batik* motifs are always loaded with meaning and philosophy, often related to the beliefs and traditions of Malaysian society. The main inspiration for traditional motifs lies in the elements of flora and nature, which are abundant in traditional Malaysian handicrafts (Abdullah & Samin, 2020; Kamarudin et al., 2021). Studies show a tendency to maintain natural elements in new motifs that continue to be produced by *Batik* entrepreneurs. Many natural elements are integrated and updated according to current needs and trends. For example, elements such as pineapple and black pepper in *Batik* patterns and local cultural arts such as Ghazal are introduced as motifs.

Hybrid innovation in the Malaysian handicraft industry can be seen through the creative approach of *Batik* entrepreneurs who integrate the 'Shibori tie dye' technique from Japan with local *Batik* stamp motifs. This Shibori tie-dye technique originated in Japan and involves tying and dyeing textiles to create unique motifs. The uniqueness and artistry of *Batik* resulting from this combination of techniques is an added value to *Batik* craft, especially in attracting the younger generation to wear *Batik*. As illustrated in Figure 3, this hybrid innovation demonstrates how traditional *Batik* craftsmanship can be enhanced by combining Japanese Shibori techniques with local *Batik* motifs.

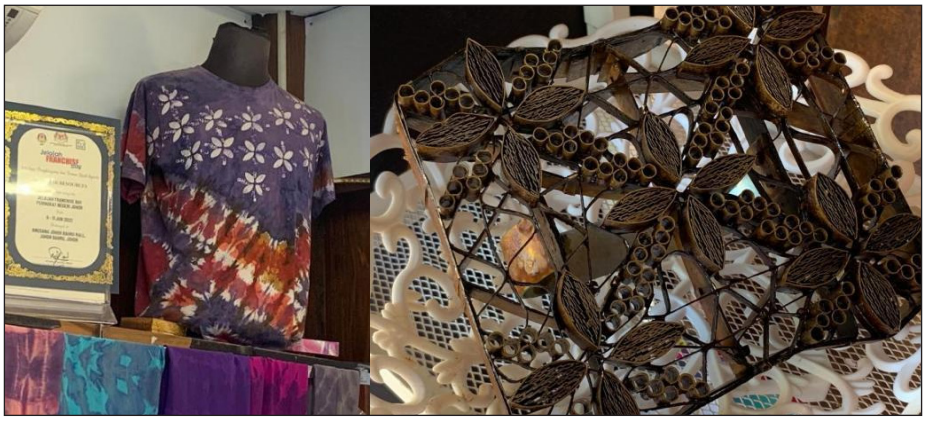


Figure 3. Batik crafts produced with a combination of tie die shibori techniques. (right picture: blocks used in the production of *Batik* with the new motifs)
Source: Authors' own work

The innovation of motifs in *Batik* and *Songket* have is important in promoting local cultural identity and strengthening the position of traditional handicrafts as a symbol of national heritage. Introducing new motifs is not to replace traditional motifs' uniqueness but to add value and enhance aesthetic appeal. *Batik* motifs are often inspired by flora and natural elements that are laden with meaning and philosophy closely related to community beliefs (Abdullah & Samin, 2020; Hussin, 2012; Kamarudin et al., 2021), and this element is still maintained in several new motifs. For *Songket*, especially in Terengganu, entrepreneurs have introduced modern and contemporary motifs that combine traditional elements, making *Songket* still relevant to current fashion while maintaining its cultural value. This innovation is important to ensure that the appeal of this textile art continues to remain among the younger generation and thus ensure the continuity of this heritage.

Innovation through technical and technological means is also one initiative of craftsmen to ensure that their craft products remain viable in the market. Changes in manufacturing methods, designs, and materials used to produce handicrafts need to be made according to the times so that handicraft entrepreneurs are no longer stuck in the same old rut. At the same time, it can simplify and speed up the process of producing handicrafts and increase quantity and quality to meet market demand. Innovation in function or use involves changing the function of crafts.

In *Batik* crafts, for example, *Batik* blocks, which are synonymous with their function in making *Batik*, are now used as decorative crafts. In addition to changing their function, making *Batik* blocks also experience changes in the materials used; instead of using copper entirely, a mixture of zinc and yellow copper sheets is now used to produce *Batik* blocks. In addition to preserving them, the innovation has given value to *Batik* blocks, which can now be kept by *Batik* makers and used by others as home decorations. This existing innovation, whether in the form of use, technique, or raw materials, is intended to preserve the sustainability of handicrafts. It prevents them from getting lost until they are considered modern.

> We recently made an innovation in clay blocking. That's one of the innovations we made. The effect is really beautiful, because clay *Batik* has an artistic effect.
>
> (I9, T1)

> We want a material that is cheap and easy for people to make, the clay one, the block *Batik* one uses wax to stamp on the cloth, so we use clay to stamp, it looks like it when blocking the color, its function is the same as wax, if wax has gone up in price, the stove, you need gas, so to stamp cloth, you need to look at the temperature, mix the clay and stamp.
>
> (I1, T1)

These show that innovation can be motivated by practical considerations such as

material cost and ease of production, as well as by aesthetic experimentation. The findings do not establish that such innovations necessarily preserve or damage authenticity. Instead, they show that practitioners and supporting institutions negotiate adaptation while retaining elements of established craft knowledge and practice. The findings suggest that existing innovations may allow certain traditional aesthetic values and craft skills to be maintained while accommodating contemporary adaptations. Such innovations may add aesthetic value, respond to contemporary preferences, and simplify aspects of the production process while retaining elements of traditional skills and techniques. However, the findings do not establish that innovation has no effect on authenticity or originality, as these aspects were not directly evaluated in this study. The relationship between innovation and authenticity should therefore be understood as conditional, depending on how new designs, materials, and techniques are negotiated while maintaining the craft's culturally meaningful elements.

Batik and *Songket* Comparison

Although *Batik* and *Songket* share several commercialisation challenges, the findings indicate meaningful differences between the two crafts. Both require market access, institutional support, skills development, and adaptation to changing consumer preferences. However, the form these requirements take differs according to their production characteristics. For *Batik*, the findings show greater emphasis on design and material experimentation. Innovation includes new motifs, colour-blocking, combinations with other textile techniques, alternative materials such as clay, and changes to the materials and uses of *Batik* blocks. This suggests relatively broad opportunities for product and technique adaptation. For *Songket*, the findings place greater emphasis on specialised weaving skills, labour requirements, remuneration, skills transmission, and adaptations to motifs and weaving technology. The account of the small-scale *Songket* weaver also highlights the relationship between skilled labour, intermediaries, and commercial arrangements. Institutional and digital support are relevant to both crafts, but their support requirements may therefore differ. *Batik* practitioners may particularly benefit from design development, product presentation, digital marketing, and material or technical experimentation, whereas *Songket* sustainability also requires attention to specialised weaving skills, production time, knowledge transmission, and the viability of skilled craft labour. The comparison demonstrates why *Batik* and *Songket* can be analysed together without treating them as a homogeneous craft category. Their shared position as Malaysian textile heritage enables identification of common commercialisation strategies, while their different production processes reveal craft-specific challenges and support requirements.

Integrating the Findings Through the Cultural Sustainability Framework

The findings are interpreted through the Cultural Sustainability Framework to explain how the commercialisation of *Batik* and *Songket* relates to the continuity of traditional craft practices. The framework views culture not only as heritage to be preserved but as a dynamic system sustained through relationships, identity, adaptation, and transmission between generations (Dessein et al., 2021; Soini & Dessein, 2016). The sustainability of traditional crafts such as *Batik* and *Songket* depends on their ability to adapt, remain meaningful to local communities, and contribute to socio-economic resilience. The Cultural Sustainability Framework (Dessein et al., 2015; Soini & Birkeland, 2014) is used to emphasise the intrinsic value of cultural heritage and its function in sustainable development. Cultural sustainability focuses on maintaining cultural practices, expressions, and identities across generations. In this study, *Batik* and *Songket* are positioned not only as economic products but also as cultural expressions that carry symbolic, historical, and societal meanings. In this context, cultural sustainability also requires attention to community ownership and artisan control over the cultural knowledge, motifs, and skills associated with *Batik* and *Songket*. Intellectual property protection may therefore be important in commercialisation to safeguard culturally significant designs and knowledge while ensuring that artisans and communities retain recognition and agency over their heritage. It is essential for traditional crafts to survive in the face of modernisation and globalisation, they must remain meaningful to society, adapt to changing contexts, and be able to attract younger generations. Therefore, commercialisation may support cultural sustainability by improving market access, encouraging adaptation, supporting skills transmission, and maintaining the relevance of *Batik* and *Songket*. However, these benefits are not automatic, as commercialisation may also create tensions relating to authenticity, artisan control, and the valuation of traditional knowledge and skilled labour. Its contribution to cultural sustainability therefore depends on how commercial practices are balanced with cultural continuity, artisan agency, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and skills.

CONCLUSION

These findings therefore do not suggest that commercialisation is inherently beneficial or harmful to the authenticity of *Batik* and *Songket*. Instead, commercialisation may create conditions for cultural sustainability when innovation, digitalisation, and institutional support remain connected to cultural meaning, skills transmission, and artisan participation. Conversely, commercial adaptation that prioritises marketability without attention to these cultural dimensions may not necessarily support long-term cultural sustainability. These traditional crafts reflect the community's heritage, increasing economic potential while preserving the skills and

knowledge of generations amid modern lifestyles. This heritage carries the local community's identity and the cultural values of a society that need to be passed down to the younger generation, not just traditional skills and knowledge, but also continuing the identity and wisdom of previous generations. Therefore, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage is important to ensure the continuity of heritage craft forms such as *Batik* and *Songket*. Like other intangible heritage items, these two crafts depend on transferring skills and knowledge from generation to generation to remain relevant in modernity. Efforts to preserve traditional crafts must consistently protect cultural heritage by ensuring that craft skills continue to be passed down.

To maintain the creation and appreciation of *Batik* and *Songket* crafts, strategic initiatives must be implemented in the community, focusing on fostering craftsmanship skills and innovation in various forms. Research findings show that the success of commercialising *Batik* and *Songket* depends on the integration of digital technology and creative innovation. Craft entrepreneurs must embrace technological advances in the ever-evolving industry to ensure this tradition remains sustainable. However, this evolution largely depends on two main factors: the government's active involvement and the artisans' commitment. In addition, the awareness of the wider community and their role as consumers plays a supporting role in promoting and maintaining craft heritage. When supported by government support and artist engagement, the synergy between innovation and digitalisation increases production capabilities and helps traditional crafts remain relevant in today's market.

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