

The Effect of Cultural Product Attractiveness on Sabah Local Handicraft Product Performance: The Mediating Effect of Product Innovation

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Abstract

Craft producers in Sabah have unique product quality from time to time in producing new products. Nonetheless, they face challenges on cultural product appeal and their impact on the handicraft performance of the product. This paper clarifies the effects of cultural product attractiveness on Sabah's local handicraft product performance and product innovation as the mediator to the relationship. Thus, this study seeks to further understand the Sabah local handicraft products regional cultural attractiveness. This paper mainly uses secondary sources, references, and articles from selected periodicals to provide information on the performance of handcrafted products. This paper highlights prior research on the relationship between the two primary components of cultural product attraction and their influences on the product's craftsmanship performance. In addition, the assessments identify gaps in past studies. This paper contains references to previously published materials. It intends to improve knowledge by adjusting and analysing the mediating influence of product innovation on the relationship between the attractiveness of cultural products and the performance of Sabah local handicrafts. Specifically, this paper proposes a new dimension for measuring the performance of Sabah handcrafted products.

Keywords: Cultural Product Attractiveness, Product Innovation, Handicraft Product Performance, Sabah

Introduction

The increasing commercialization of Sabah's traditional handicraft products represents the craft industries' movement and aligns with changing markets. The unpredictability of handmade craft markets encourages innovation to reach global consumers. Craft sector is one of the sectors of the Cultural and Creative Industry in Malaysia and as a sister industry of tourism (Cendana Report, 2018).

In recent years, the government's understanding of expanding rural tourism, combined with a significant move to promote local crafts, has drawn private traders' attention to this industry. The growing market awareness of traditional products encouraged private traders to open shops in rural tourist areas. Private merchants revolutionized the handmade product industry with fake, low-cost crafts, gaining a larger share of Sabah markets.

Imported crafts have impacted the production and marketing of traditional handmade products in Sabah. Most craft entrepreneurs struggled to place their products using traditional marketing methods because they were unaware of current market realities. This paper investigates the performance realities of traditional craft products in the current market in Sabah. This study examines the competitive threat to local handmade traditional products by using craft entrepreneurs as an example. Business strategies change the environment due to incompetence, business units, applying, implementing, and increasing efficiency while improving the consumer economy (Qureshi, 2017). Good handicraft products require talented and competent resources by proactive and innovative entrepreneurs.

Innovation is a key driver of business in sustainable processes in a competitive business environment with the ability to transfer new ideas for the future (Luiz & Marinho, 2018), which focuses on the changing business environment, the future, the present pandemic, and elements of the public economy. Innovation in creative endeavours is measured by indicators of product attributes and product functions that are carried out to be sustainable and beneficial (Bauer & Auer-Srnka, 2012). Furthermore, this study changes the value of innovation capability as a novelty by supporting the ability of innovation to implement core-based business strategies in providing value to support the superiority of product attributes and the superiority of product function attributes (Ferdinand & Fitriani, 2015). Mediating the value of innovation capabilities includes innovation offered for business, improvement, value, products, which have the potential for cultural, aesthetic, and iconic products (Sugiyarti et al., 2018).

The RBV states that marketing dynamics is the dynamic capability of the system on dynamic marketing capabilities that addresses resources in small businesses. There are different forms of resources in a good business unit, namely: Must be valuable, rare, cannot be imitated, and cannot be substituted in the management of managed businesses (Barney, 1991; Teece, 2010). Effective and efficient resources are the basis of a business that can survive under challenging conditions, based on the theory of Resources Based View (RBV). Craft product innovation is needed for the handicraft industry's existence to increase sales. As a sub-sector of the creative industry, handicraft is an applied art that is something between art and design, derived from the traditional heritage or contemporary ideas that produce the final product in artwork, functional products, or ornament objects or decorative (BEKRAF, 2017).

To win the market competition, craft entrepreneurs must constantly strive to provide new handicraft products to improve the attractiveness of products offered to the market and strengthen product distinctiveness or innovation. Research by Shan, Song, and Ju (2016) found evidence that the pace of innovation is one of the critical determinants of performance. This is in line with the argument that having a strategy enables craft entrepreneurs to determine the opportunities to make available valued products to customers and deliver those products for higher profits gain in the marketplace (Al-Ansaari et al., 2015). Hence this study seeks to critically examine the effect of the main dimension on independent variables, namely cultural product attractiveness and one mediator variable, namely the mediating effect of product innovation in the relationship between cultural product attractiveness and handicraft product performance and the direct effect of cultural product attractiveness and handicraft product performance, respectively.

Theoretical background

The theory that will use in this study is the Resources Based View (RBV) theory. The RBV approach was initiated by Penrose (1959) and has been popularized by Barney (1991) because most scholars consider Jay Barney as the father of the modern RBV of the Firm. According to this idea, there may be heterogeneity or firm-level distinctions among companies that enable some to maintain a competitive edge over their competitors over time. It is an organizational framework used to determine a firm's strategic resources to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. RBV emphasizes an inside-out approach for organizational analysis as a theory that considers an organization a bundle of resources. It underscores that organizational difference exists because of these resources and the manner to combine them. This theory, thus, stipulates that the analysis of the organization starts from its internal environment.

Local handicraft entrepreneurs arguably find it challenging to compete with industrial production due to their small size and lack of resources. Therefore, they must improve their innovation capabilities to seek and utilize external resources for higher performance and to improve competitiveness (Teece et al., 1997) so that they can effectively and efficiently compete in the market (Keskin, 2006; Lawson and Samson, 2001; Shou and Shao, 2017). In this study, the theory indicates that product design, motif, style, and culture are engaged in adaptation for innovation to improve product performance. To some extent, this study holds this theory would expect that independent variables Cultural Product Attractiveness to influence the dependant variable Local Handicraft (Sabah) Product Performance because it would affect local community to become entrepreneurs that could change society's perception of opportunities to generate income. The improvement of innovative performance will significantly improve product performance and ultimately improve all handicraft entrepreneurs' financial understanding. These studies hoped to contribute to the establishment of local handicrafts in Sabah.

Literature review

Handicrafts are those products produced by hand or with the help of hand-tools and sometimes using mechanical means as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product (UNESCO, 1997). The Sabah State economy recognized that entrepreneurs' craft development could significantly impact regional economic development in this urban era. However, several problems limit growth in a wide range of possible technical cooperation areas to enhance product performance. For example, lack of promotional and preservation policies, supporting institutions, innovation craft quality, craft producers' inability to access the opportunities to upgrade their skills, access business information technology, and lack of capable craft development coordinators and designers. Therefore, this study will focus on three main variables that will be tested in this research.

The previous study makes two contributions to knowledge in this important domain. First, factors and interrelationships important in understanding new product success in local markets are identified and are verified empirically. The previous results provide new insights concerning how product innovation are needed and connected in the product performance of handicraft in Sabah. Second, and more generally, the appeal of cultural products has been recognized as an essential cultural resource linked with the development of new craft products. According to this, the resource-based view (RBV) and organizational theory assertions about the potential usefulness of companies' cultural resources in allowing

organizations to act in ways that enable them to adapt to their environment effectively are supported.

The RBV provides theoretical foundation in placing innovation as the internal sources of competitive advantage in handicraft sector. For the purpose of this research, Sabah's handicraft product performance will be defined as product innovation in cultural product attractiveness to have better local craft product than competitors.

This study's literature showed that there is some variables important to enhance the product performance in handicraft. For example, the cultural handicraft product needed to provide a new design to attract the market movement. Product innovation was necessary for the performance of handicrafts. According to Thompson (1965) in Larso & Samir (2011), innovation is the generation, acceptance, and implementation of new ideas, processes, products, or services.

Product innovation and handicraft product performance

The capacity to innovate is believed to determine local craft producer capability to develop craft products that match with customers' needs (Rosenbusch, et al., 2011). Innovation has been acknowledged as important capability for craft entrepreneurs to compete domestically and internationally (Ren, et al., 2015). O'Cass and Sok (2012) describe that innovation capability is a bundle of interrelated processes in the firm to facilitate development, evolution and execution of product innovation. According to Rosenbusch, et al (2011), small craft industry could achieve higher competitive advantage when having strong innovation capability since they always strive for superior performance relative to their competitors. Even though entrepreneurs commonly face resource scarcity, they have possibility to survive as successful innovators (Rosenbusch, et al., 2011). The reasons is because craft entrepreneurs in Sabah are majority small or so called SME type, thus enabling them to be flexible and responding quicker to the marketplace. Greater flexibilities enable them to be more innovative and perform better, as they respond faster to the market change (Sok. et al., 2013).

Based on the review of literature on product innovation and handicraft performance above, it is proposed that:

Preposition 1: There is positive and significant relationship effect between product innovation and product performance.

Cultural Product Attractiveness and Product Innovation

The classic view in marketing strategy so far explains the importance of product design as the primary driver of product success to enter the market still appears in the current marketing literature (Bloch, 1995; Liu & Atuahene-Gima, 2018). A good design for a product is not only crucial for the appearance of the product but also for attracting potential consumers to see and try the product. The product design process starts by understanding consumer needs and sometimes involving consumers in the design process. In Sabah, the cultural handicraft product built with ethnic attributes derived from the interaction between location and culture where it's located. By integrating multi-ethnicity and culture, a company or entrepreneur can sort and choose various elements of local motif and domestic culture (Celenk, & Van de Vijver, 2011), and combine these attributes to be embedded in their products, produce a product with some attractiveness attributes conceptualized in this study as cultural product attractiveness.

Thus, the relationship between cultural product attractiveness and product innovation has been proposed that

Preposition 2: There is positive and significant relationship effect between cultural product attractiveness and product innovation.

Cultural product attractiveness and product performance

When it comes to product design, it is critical for the product's look and enticing prospective customers to view and test the product. Understanding customer requirements and, in some instances, engaging consumers in the design process are the first steps in the product design process. According to Sri Suresh Tulshiram Salunke and Srivastava (2013), core products serve as the foundation for generating marketing performance. The product design process provides something more appealing to the market to enrich customers' specific interests (Hisarciklilar & Boujut, 2009). Handicraft items that are based on local culture are seen to have benefits over imported goods from other countries. First and foremost, the object would elicit a strong emotional response from the user since it symbolizes the identity of cultural origins.

Therefore, it is proposed that

Mediator effect of product innovation in the relationship between cultural product attractiveness and handicraft product performance.

Preposition 3: Product innovation positively and significantly mediate the relationship effect between cultural product attractiveness and product performance.

Innovation handicraft product performance

Handicrafts were originally produced to satisfy the requirements of local people in Sabah, and these goods may be described as the outcome of craftsmen's efforts to create items using locally sourced natural resources. As a result, handicrafts characterize places, populations, and cultures of which they are a part (Igwe et al., 2018). Traditionally, handicraft companies in Sabah are family-owned, which means that the craftsmen or craft entrepreneurs control all of the means of production and collaborate with their relatives throughout the whole production process. These products were usually sold within the region where they are produced or in surrounding areas as, traditionally, artisans do not seek to sell their products abroad (Ratten and Tajeddini, 2017).

Depending on the field, innovation may have several components. Some elements have previously been recognized in earlier tourism studies, although they are not always applicable to handicrafts. Nonetheless, many components of innovation have been recognized as boosters of rural handicraft enterprise. Some of these components are discussed briefly in the subsections that follow.

Value Added Products

The incremental improvements in products and services that result from innovation are characterized as the value provided by innovation (Hipp and Grupp, 2005). According to the referenced authors, the handicraft industry is one of the most innovative or inventive industries in the world. Until recently, few research on this subject had been conducted, and the bulk of them concluded that the handmade industry lacked originality and new concepts

that might add value to these traditional products (e.g. Conti and Mancini, 2014; Grobar, 2017; Nagori and Saxena, 2012).

Development of New Products

This component is concerned with the process of developing, testing, and introducing new products to the market (Pujari et al., 2003). Few previous studies have looked at how innovative handicrafts may be used to foster rural artisan entrepreneurship, and this is a gap in the literature. (e.g., Ciftci and Walker, 2017; Girón et al., 2007; Naidu et al., 2014; Rogerson and Sithole, 2001).

Design Uniqueness

This component is concerned with a company's ability to differentiate itself from competitors by developing distinctive designs (Dhingra and Dhingra, 2012; Wu et al., 2017). According to some of the few studies conducted on the topic, nations must differentiate their products via the use of unique designs (e.g. Hassan et al., 2017; Hegarty and Przezborska, 2005). Underdeveloped countries may be able to create one-of-a-kind cultural products (e.g., Ezeuduji, 2015; Novelli et al., 2006). The handicraft industry has the potential to be one of the most important areas contributing to the growth of rural tourism (e.g. Gupta and Mukherjee, 2006; Hassan et al., 2017).

Craft Producers' Experience

This component in the handicraft business refers to the influence that the owners' previous expertise may have on the design of handicrafts (Naidu et al., 2014; Rutashobya and Jaensson, 2004). Several studies have examined the importance of owners' prior involvement in the handicraft sector, and it has been shown that experience in micro and small businesses significantly improves their ability to be creative and innovative. It is also necessary for the internationalisation of handicraft businesses to have this knowledge. (e.g. Ammar, 2017; Arte, 2017; Hjalager, 2010; Naidu et al., 2014).

Craft Producers' Ability

This component takes into consideration the ability of craft producers to react to market needs. It is essential for those who sell handicrafts to have something that appeals to the wants and expectations of their customers (Krasae-in, 2017; Nayak and Bhalla, 2016; Taylor and Owusu, 2012).

Cultural Uniqueness

This component is defined as the ability of handicraft designers to incorporate unique cultural aspects into their handmade works in the handicraft industry (Dasgupta and Chandra, 2016; Hassan et al., 2017; Marwick, 2001). Locals should be engaged in the handicraft sector in order for designers to be able to capture cultural designs more readily and quickly (e.g. Mitchell and Eagles, 2001; Pritchard and Morgan, 2001; Pudjihardjo and Nama, 2012; Torabian and Arai, 2016) using natural and cultural resources found in the area (e.g. Mitchell and Eagles, 2001; Pritchard and Morgan, 2001; Pudjihardjo and Nama, 2012; Torabian and Arai, 2016). (Lordkipandize et al., 2005; Vitasurya, 2016).

This study will focus on the examination of effectiveness innovation dimensions effect on handicraft product performance as defined by Lita et al (2018); Astuti et al (2018); Ruan & Chen 2017 (2017), as summarized below

Table 1

The summary of the innovation towards product performance

Author	Title	Dimension / Situation	Elements and Definition of Innovation Towards performance
Lita et al 2018	SME's Innovative Performance in Indonesia: The Linkage between Innovation Culture and Production Performance	SME's performance Indonesia	The influence of innovation culture on product innovation and process innovation, the influence of product innovation on innovative performance, the influence of innovation process on innovative performance, and the effect of innovative performance on production performance.
Astuti et al 2018	The Eco-Innovation Variables which Influence the Performance of Creative Industries Center of Natural Stone Crafts	Eco-innovation performance in creative industry centre Indonesia	The eco-innovation variables which significantly effect on innovative performance are eco-organizational innovation and eco-product innovation. Eco-process innovation and eco-marketing innovation don't directly effect on innovative performance, but its significant effect on eco-product innovation may influence innovative performance
Ruan & Chen 2017	Does formal knowledge search depth benefit Chinese firms' innovation performance? Effects of network centrality, structural holes, and knowledge tacitness	Knowledge innovation performance Chinese firms	The formal knowledge search depth affects innovation performance from the perspective of formal or informal knowledge search. through; i. Interactive effects of network centrality ii. Structural holes iii. Knowledge tacitness

Proposed Conceptual Framework

In this study, a conceptual model that defines how the connection between the variable dimension of cultural product attractiveness impacts handicraft product performance is created, in accordance with the above-mentioned literature studies. The focus is on product innovation. Thus, the present study specifically examined the effect of the relationship between cultural product attractiveness to handicraft product performance. Hence, in line with the resource-based view theory, the present study examined the relationship effect of the innovation dimension to the product performance. In addition, the present study revealed that innovation and handicraft products have a significant influence on the development and performance of craft producers. Nevertheless, much is still unknown about the nature of these influences, which highlights various opportunities for future research.

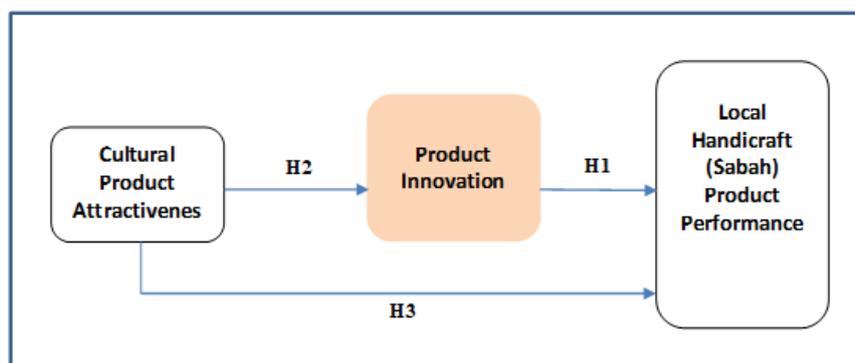


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Methods

The paper mainly uses secondary sources, references, and articles from chosen publications to provide information about handicraft product performance.

Discussion

The handicraft industry should create a long-term plan for new product design and development to manage the whole design and development process (Peter et al., 1999). Thus, the handicraft industry must spend considerable effort on innovative design and development to improve its processes' efficiency. To highly achieve product handicraft performance, product innovation should have to provide a most profound understanding of the design of the handicrafts products, consisting of types of cultural product attractiveness for the Sabah handicraft industry.

Conclusions

This study will assist the government in reviving the handicraft industry in Sabah that was affected during this pandemic. Nevertheless, initiatives must be taken by the government to encourage the local community to become entrepreneurs could change society's perception of opportunities to generate income. The improvement of product innovation will significantly improve handicraft product performance and ultimately improve all handicraft entrepreneurs' financial understanding. These studies hoped to contribute to the establishment of local handicrafts in Sabah.

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