

that aims to accelerate Internet infrastructure, propagating technology adoption to achieve a digital-oriented society. Furthermore, the National Digital Economy Strategy developed by the Ministry of Economy is designed to accelerate digitalisation in the business and industrial sectors, create various opportunities for digital development and connectivity, and encourage cross-sector and cross-institutional coordination. The National Digital Economy Strategy also relies on four pillars: human resource development; provision of digital and physical infrastructure needed to enhance economic flow and job opportunities; simplification of bureaucracy and reduced barriers to innovation; and research and digital innovation for economic transformation.

At the practical level, programs such as e-commerce assistance and digital literacy are extensively conducted by the government. With the support of these policies, the Indonesian government expects that the number of digital MSMEs will reach 30 million by 2030 (Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). Additionally, in 2030, the e-commerce sector is estimated to still be dominating the Indonesian digital economy map with a contribution of Rp 1.908 trillion (33%–34 %). This is followed by supply chain and logistics (13%), online travel agents (10%), and corporate services (9%) (Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021).

At the traditional market level, efforts to digitalise merchants in traditional markets have also been extensively carried out by the government in collaboration with various corporations in Indonesia, such as banks. The Ministry of Trade aims to digitalise 1,000 traditional markets within the period of 2022–2024. Concrete forms of traditional market digitalisation include the development of marketplaces and traditional market platforms, the development of non-cash transactions, the implementation of the Quick Response Code Indonesian Standard (QRIS), recording

market turnover through the Trade Facility Information System (*Sistem Informasi Sarana Perdagangan/ SISP*), the application of basic necessity goods price information through the Basic Needs Market Monitoring System (*Sistem Pemantuan Pasar dan Kebutuhan Pokok/ SP2KP*), and the implementation of electronic levy payments through regional and national banking.

For MSMEs, the key takeaway is the importance of strategic innovation, whether driven by cutting-edge technologies, as observed in the United States, or resourceful adaptation, as seen in Africa (Raji et al., 2024). To facilitate the adoption of innovation by MSMEs, several policies need to be implemented. More involvement by the other stakeholders, more investment in digital infrastructure, regulations for the protection of local businesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and improving digital literacy can help reduce the digital divide between large and small businesses, as well as between rural and urban areas (Anshari & Almunawar, 2022). From an internal perspective, this can prompt SMEs to continually innovate to attract consumers, distinguish themselves from competitors, and avoid being marginalised by capital-driven businesses (Paramastri, 2024).

The digitalisation of traditional markets can also increase the attractiveness of the market for all segments and increase the income of traders due to a wider and borderless market network. From the buyer's side, convenience is especially appealing because they do not have to come directly to the market to shop. Thus, through digitalisation, traditional market traders can conduct sales transactions more securely, comfortably, and practically. However, this new technological norm must be dealt with critically. While such convenience can reflect a modernised business model (Song et al., 2022), factors such as poor digital literacy and infrastructure alongside high transaction costs and limited capital can hinder adoption

to clarify a particular instance related to individuals, groups, organisations, or events (Hair et al., 2007), this study focuses on the Sambilegi and Kolombo traditional markets within Condong Catur Village. The markets were chosen to be part of the study for their emerging digitalisation application, albeit being unsuccessful among certain merchants.

Data were collected using in-depth interviews and field observation. First, researchers gained a direct understanding of the real-life conditions from on-site observation. This preliminary phase informed the subsequent selection of informants for in-depth interviews conducted within the context of the Sambilegi and Kolombo traditional markets. Informant selection in this study was done through purposive sampling, which refers to a technique predicated on certain considerations, such as informants' perceived knowledge of the research subject (Sugiyono, 2012).

The Sleman Regency Market Service, market managers, market associations, market merchants, and buyers formed the informants for the Sambilegi Market segment. The Condong Catur village government, market managers, market associations, merchants, and buyers formed the informants for the Kolombo Market segment. Interviews took place between May 2020 and August 2021. Data underwent various analysis processes, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To maintain research objectivity, data were also subjected to a rigorous triangulation process to validate the findings against empirical evidence from the field.

Results

Responses Towards the COVID-19 Pandemic

The year 2020 was one of the toughest in recent times due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Indonesia began facing a pandemic-related crisis in March 2020, with traditional markets among the most affected sectors.

The rapid spread of the virus among people necessitated a ban on crowds. This impacted traditional markets as centres of trade activities, which became high-risk sites of virus transmission. The situation required various behavioural adaptation policies in traditional markets, which applied to everyone visiting the market, including merchants, customers, and market officials.

The adaptation was necessary for traditional markets as central providers of basic needs; it was not possible to stop people from visiting them (Purnomo et al., 2021). A Nielsen Media Research Indonesia survey showed that 58% of people still chose to visit traditional markets to purchase fresh products, even though these locations were vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, 71% of people went shopping daily to fulfil their need for fresh products; 26% went shopping once a week, and the rest went shopping twice a week or once a month (Yunianto, 2020). Notably, three merchants in several traditional markets in Yogyakarta Province, including two traditional merchants in Bantul Regency, were identified as positive for COVID-19 at the same time; the news coverage heightened the public fear of traditional markets (Yuwono & Aprian, 2020).

The vulnerability of local markets during the pandemic was demonstrated by a decrease in sales at the Sambilegi Market in Sleman District, following the dissemination of information about a large-scale COVID-19 rapid testing event that would take place at the market. The community understood this statement to indicate the potential infection of market merchants, leading to their reluctance to visit the market.

Regardless of protocol directive, Yogyakarta saw a significant spike in transmission instances. It then created apprehension among individuals in visiting public markets, leading to deteriorating revenue for merchants. This stimulated interest

among Indonesian start-ups to capitalise upon the emerging online retail infrastructure. In Yogyakarta, 30% of shopping transactions were facilitated by hail-riding applications. Data showed that users who benefited from online purchasing platforms resided within 3.5 kilometres from traditional marketplaces (Medcom.id, 2020). The rising trend in online shopping due to its convenience has led to a shift in consumer behaviour among those who regularly visit markets. The trend alone should be enough to encourage local governments to facilitate this new norm by implementing necessary modifications in a traditional market context. Several actions were considered as solutions:

- (1) Facilitating the socialisation, education, and promotion of online shopping as an alternative to physical marketplaces to circumvent large gatherings of people (the objective).
- (2) Providing education and support to traditional market merchants to help them achieve digital proficiency.
- (3) Creating health regulations for Internet shopping.
- (4) Developing an online shopping system by creating a marketplace tailored to the specific requirements of each market.
- (5) Forming a WhatsApp group consisting of merchants or an independent collective of merchants.
- (6) Collaborating with emerging companies.
- (7) Enhancing e-commerce capabilities and infrastructure in marketplaces, such as by implementing Wi-Fi connectivity for merchants.

Ironically, the rise of online transactions brought about more challenges and competition for merchants to survive in the traditional market, such as the growing online marketplace and online supermarkets that sell the same goods as traditional markets. Although some online platforms are also dedicated to

traditional markets, the problem emerged when those platforms only benefited merchants with technology and Internet knowledge due to the self-service system between merchants and customers. Merchants had to manage their own pages on the platforms; some could not benefit from such opportunities because of their lack of knowledge. Most merchants with such barriers did not have the privilege to slow down their businesses to learn how to use the Internet. As a result, underprivileged, small merchants were left far behind in this era of Internet adoption.

Another platform for traditional markets emerged, which acted as a customer in the traditional market. Customers only needed to make orders and payments and then wait for them at home. The problem appeared because customers were reluctant to explore the market and tended to buy goods from the closest stalls at the entrance. This caused social tension among the merchants because their sales were heavily dependent on the building's layout. Both systems had the same shortcoming: the added value went to a third party. The traditional market and its merchants became the last and lowest link in the development of the online market.

These conditions raised awareness among merchants in the traditional market that they could potentially fulfil several needs in this matter. First, an online shopping system could facilitate inclusive engagement from a wider variety of merchants to participate in online shopping despite their lack of Internet knowledge. Second, online shopping could bring back the added value of the traditional market, so that merchants could become a more vital link in the online market cloud. This conclusion is derived from empirical data collected from observations conducted at Sambilegi Market. These observations were made by *Sekolah Pasar Rakyat*, a social movement organisation that focuses on providing mentoring programs to merchants operating within traditional markets. It has

been actively involved in the Sambilegi Market community since 2015.

Building a Collective Concept

The initial observation, followed by interviews with merchants in the Sambilegi Market during the early pandemic period, sparked a collective idea to build an online traditional market system managed and owned by merchants of traditional markets through the merchants' association in that market, which was later replicated at the Kolombo Market. During the initiation process, multiple actors participated in the construction of the respective communal online shopping platforms, each with distinct roles and contributions. This cooperation among actors was possible because of past partnership track records.

Utilising Social and Intellectual Capital in the Traditional Market for the Digitalisation Process

The initiation trial was conducted at the Sambilegi and Kolombo traditional markets to offer platforms for online shopping while socialising several agendas for the benefit of traditional markets. Several key agendas to accomplish were:

- (1) Enhancing human resources capabilities among merchants to increase their adaptability towards rising corporate growth in the event of a crisis and their institutional capacity to cooperate with market administrators and village government.
- (2) Raising awareness of transaction protocols and standard operating procedures

Table 1.
Mapping of Actors and their Roles in the Establishment and Sustainability of Online Platforms at the Sambilegi and Kolombo Traditional Markets

Contributions to the Initiation Process		
Actors	Sambilegi Market	Kolombo Market
Merchants' Association	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connecting external actors with merchants. 2. Communicating the platform's existence to the merchants. 3. Recruiting merchants to participate in a capacity-building initiative for platform operation and management. 4. Organising the distribution of work among merchants to manage the platform. 5. Executing the management of an online platform, such as administration tasks, order taking, payment, courier services, business development, and income distribution. 	
Local Government	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Department of Industry and Commerce) Granting formal authorisation for the online platform's initiation and mentorship program. 2. Supervising the initiation and mentoring programs as external actors. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Village government) Funding the establishment and execution of a collective online platform. 2. Granting formal authorisation for the online platform's initiation and mentorship program. 3. Supervising the initiation and mentoring programs as external actors.
University (UGM)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding the establishment and execution of a collective online platform. 2. Assisting in the campaign of the collective Internet platform to gain a larger audience and customer base. 	
Research Institutes (Pusekra UGM and Mubyarto Institute)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing the platform's design. 2. Developing the managerial framework for a collaborative Internet platform. 3. Developing educational content for the purpose of enhancing skills and knowledge. 4. Developing promotional materials to entice a larger audience and consumer base to utilise the platform. 	
Social Organisation (Sekolah Pasar Rakyat)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supervising the creation of the platform. 2. Executing the capacity-building process for merchants to run and manage the online platform. 3. Supervising merchants to do the input process and to gradually update the items and prices on the platform. 4. Assisting with the campaign and marketing for customers to use the platform. 5. Supervising and mentoring merchants as the platform's manager to run maintenance. 	

Source: Observation data

(SOPs) that dictate the provision of items, transaction agreements, payment methods, delivery services, as well as alternative methods to conduct purchases and sales.

- (3) Fostering support and resilience in the event of a crisis by promoting the implementation of online purchasing that involves both merchants and market managers

This initiative specifically targeted merchants at the Kolombo and Sambilegi markets, but the scope was not limited to those markets, since surrounding communities within a 5-kilometre radius might also be affected. The primary objective of this activity was not intended to impact existing markets, having established client bases who resided near the markets. What distinguished the online platform from other third-party services, as understood among the traditional market merchants, was the possible equitable distribution of revenues, since merchants can exercise discretion over their business conduct and decide the method of communication with buyers (i.e., through SMS or WhatsApp). Each platform utilised items curated by the merchants themselves, building the necessary conditions for a single marketplace with direct transactions between merchants and buyers. Buyers were only subjected to one shipping fee with no additional operational cost, unlike common practices in corporate-owned e-commerce. Moreover, due to the inclusivity and communal nature of the traditional markets, those without digital literacy could still engage in trading, given that merchants and market stakeholders in general are way more connected.

While this initiation was made possible by different actors, the majority of recognition went to the merchants' association in both markets. The participation of merchants and their organisations became foundational to the creation and development of their online platforms. Women also held a prominent role

in this regard since this creation stemmed from their concerns, proving their robust participation in the effort. They were leading actors who acted as administrators in managing each of the platforms.

Failure to Achieve Platform Sustainability

Several challenges, with proposed solutions, occurred during the initiation process, such as:

Table 2.
Challenges and Proposed Solutions During the Initiation Process

Challenge	Executed Solution
Risk of loss of social connection and negotiation between dealers and customers.	The option for customers and merchants to communicate two-way via WhatsApp/SMS/telephone was preserved.
The levels of digital literacy and gadget mastery among dealers were uneven.	Online shopping was managed by merchant associations (<i>paguyuban</i>) or their managers.
Internet costs were considered burdensome for merchants.	Receiving government support for Wi-Fi infrastructure and collaborative procurement among merchants.

Source: Observation data

The difficulties and recommended solutions are applied across the entirety of the platform management systems. This includes web-based applications accessible through the addresses *pasarsambilegi.id* and *pasarkolombo.id*. Their purpose was to enhance the competitiveness of traditional markets in the era of information technology. They aimed to empower merchants and their organisations to effectively utilise information technology and improve their ability to manage platforms.

Ironically, the proposed and agreed-upon solutions that were implemented in the platform management system became weaknesses that hampered the collective platform's survival. Upon further studies after the creation of the platform, it was discovered that:

- (1) There was an absence of motivation to regularly update prices and maintain the

page. The hardest aspect of managing a collective online shopping platform was the task of regularly revising the prices and inventory of items. The traditional market required consistent collaboration and reciprocal comprehension among merchants, which was unfortunately not accomplished in either market. Merchants lacked the necessary collective motivation to effectively collaborate on the task of determining the prices for each item on the platform and updating the agreed-upon prices on the page.

Approximately one month after the platforms were introduced in each market, members of the merchants' associations, who worked as platform managers, began to rethink the complicated task of page maintenance. Management responsibilities were considered in the monetary sense as unprofitable redundancies, given that they were used to managing their own enterprises. They gradually began to abandon their managerial responsibilities altogether.

(2) Such platforms, while serving as 'shop windows' even if not being spaces for real

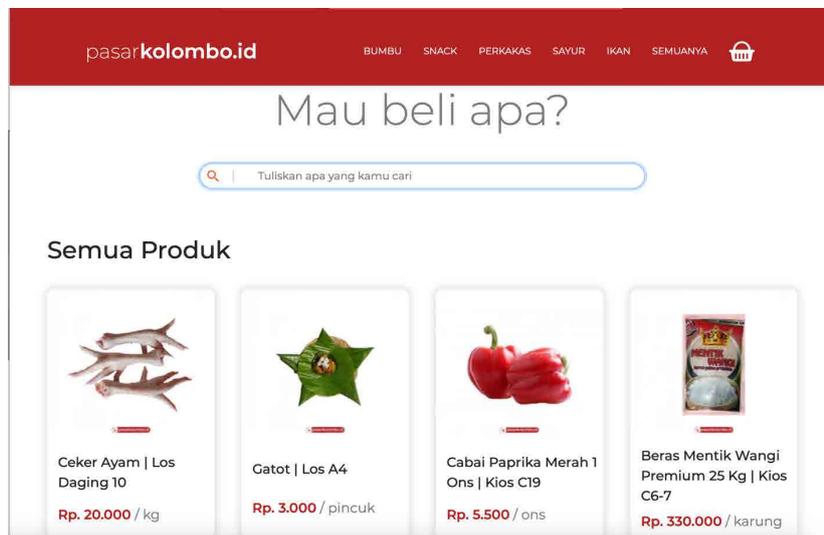


Figure 1. Homepage of the Online Platform of Kolombo Market, *pasarkolombo.id*
Source: <https://pasarkolombo.id>

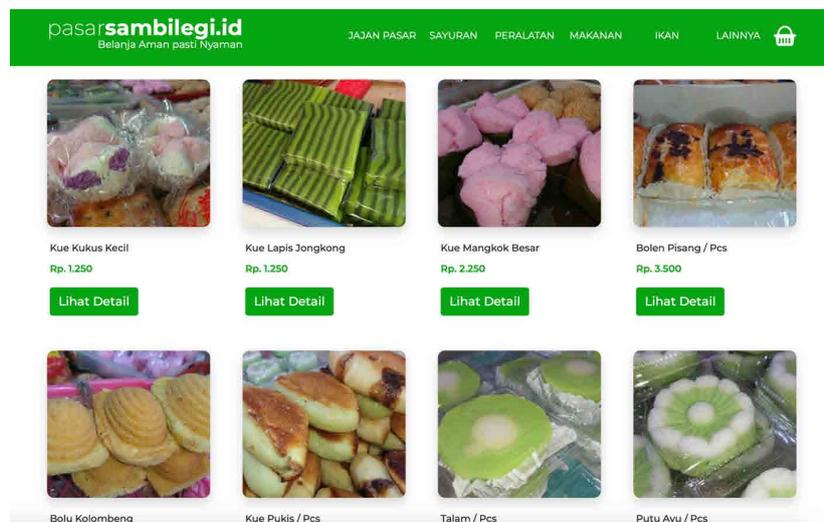


Figure 2. Homepage of the Online Platform of Sambilegi Market, *pasarsambilegi.id*
Source: <https://pasarsambilegi.id>

transactions, were considered redundant; merchants found direct orders from WhatsApp or SMS to be more convenient because buyers can verify the availability of items and/or their pricing. Insufficient incentive to maintain item catalogues also led merchants to abandon this initiative.

- (3) The gradual leniency of pandemic-related social restrictions and weakening obedience towards stay-at-home orders correlated with increased visits to traditional markets, as merchants could resume their trade at the markets. Another factor that contributed to the deterioration of this online platform was the absence of consistent mentorship, as it would rely heavily on volunteers. During the pandemic, however, the volunteering programme itself underwent a decline due to a variety of reasons, such as health or economic conditions.

Discussion

The study indicates that the digitalisation efforts implemented in two market sites faltered due to inadequate deliberation during their development. The initial lack of digital literacy among vendors, albeit an eventual capacity-building process, became the main factor in the platforms' eventual decline. Despite efforts to instil the importance of institutional and social capital, on a collective level, merchants failed to cultivate the ideal institutional character. Stakeholders' temporary engagement was possibly due to their existing collectivistic outlook, which encompassed elements such as trust, norms, values, and networks among themselves.

Even with the collective-based platform, merchants found online shopping, through digitalised versions of their stalls, to be less interactive and even alienating them from their customers. This effort at digitalisation cultivated even more optimism towards on-site shopping activities. Furthermore, extensive responsibilities to manage the online platform,

which was intended to be a collective effort, demoralised some selected merchants. This is possibly due to merchants' high expectations of mutual contribution, due to their understanding that social capital consisted of a collective responsibility towards nurturing and mutual aid. Such an understanding, as a result, undermined itself in this situation (Budiono & Susetiawan, 2023; Coleman, 1999; Goddard, 2003; Putnam, 2001; Robison & Flora, 2003).

Also related to this study is the concept of economic democracy, with its emphasis on fair development, achieved through active involvement in terms of ownership and management resources. However, ensuring it in the first place requires individuals with adequate intellectual capabilities to supervise those resources in a collective manner. In this sense, it was only natural for the digitalisation to falter because actors were not empowered through digital literacy, leading to unequal distribution of burdens among the merchants.

Economic democracy, in this study, refers to active involvement among individuals in the decision-making, ownership, management, and distribution of resources, as well as eventual benefits from managing resources effectively (Suyatna & Yuda, 2024). In the aspect of industrial relations, economic democracy requires a cooperative practice between workers and employers in sharing ownership, which in turn influences the allocation of resources to the betterment of human capital (Guery & Pendleton, 2016).

In another instance, economic democracy means allowing workers to access and obtain profits from companies that are controlled solely by capital owners or employers. This view is the absolute opposite of the idea of capital owners' supremacy, which often views labour as a passive instrument of production, akin to energy, land, or other forms of capital. In this view, capital owners are released from any responsibility towards the workforce under their payroll (FitzRoy & Nolan, 2020). Participation in economic democracy, in

the scope of enterprise management, expects all stakeholders to aspire towards exemplary performance. For that, they must acquire aptitude in business skills and socio-emotional abilities. In economic democracy, an effective power-sharing arrangement between employees and employers requires both to possess various capabilities, including prerequisite business skills such as accounting, understanding profit-sharing schemes, and formulating strategic plans contingent on business development (Summers & Chillias, 2021).

The literature of economic democracy further enforces the arguments favoured by this study regarding the important roles of intellectual capacity and essential managerial skills to sustain a business or manage a collective resource. The study contributes to a growing literature of digitalisation in the effort to empower actors in the traditional market sector and increase their competitiveness in an increasingly digital economic landscape. Recent scholarship in the field highlights a shared understanding that digitalisation is necessary for traditional markets to remain relevant and thriving. However, what is even more essential to ensure the sustainability of this digitalisation is a comprehensive and collaborative revitalisation effort to tackle challenges, including limited digital literacy, inadequate Internet infrastructure, and a shrinking number of customers. Government initiatives were insufficient to deal with this issue, needing strategic private partnerships with satisfactory resources to accomplish ideal and sustainable solutions. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) may become a viable collaborator to empower and ensure the resilience of traditional market ecosystems through its resources in technology, training, and infrastructure (Kafaa, 2020).

Traditional markets, in this context, are often affected and marginalised by the expansion of retail chains and digital commerce platforms that can meet modern society's

aspirations towards a lifestyle that is fulfilled by convenience. This study found that the pandemic revealed not only what traditional markets could innovate by way of operational efficiency and service delivery, but also institutional obstacles that threaten their existence, such as poor management systems, lack of digital infrastructure, and limited capacity for innovation (Azis et al., 2024). As online shopping becomes more prevalent, traditional markets suffer the loss of their consumer bases and the eventual decline in traditional merchants. As previously remarked, adaptability ensures survival and growth in an ever-dynamic market environment. Therefore, mentoring holds a central role in assisting merchants' adaptation towards rapid socio-economic changes, helping to ensure their resilience into the future.

With digital information becoming more imperative to economic productivity, conditioning new social structures and global economies (Lupton, 2014), knowledge-based information technology habituates society to an interconnected reality at an unprecedented scale. Traditional markets can capitalise upon this moment to their advantage. This is especially useful for those with exceptional entrepreneurial mindsets, who are willing to work on a hybrid basis—modern on the one hand, yet traditional on the other hand. As Song et al. (2022) show, online-based operations among business owners could benefit from the reduction of operational expenses and the use of intermediaries, as well as an increased customer coverage area, which can create more innovative opportunities for them. Business owners who are willing to adopt Big Data and algorithms are more likely to be exposed to different patterns of client preferences and thus possibilities to enhance their service quality.

Conclusion

The success and sustainability of online platform implementations in traditional

markets depend on several elements related to institutional readiness, human resource capabilities, and mentoring systems for merchants and other stakeholders alike. Equally important is for economic democracy principles to work in parallel with this adoption of online norms to facilitate inclusive and equitable participation among relevant stakeholders.

This study also shows that while social capital may be advantageous to nurture strong interpersonal and community relationships based on a shared sense of collective identity, it can sometimes be a constraint to realising a progressive, digital transformation in the context of traditional markets. However, it remains a superior and dependable strategic tool to promote digital trust and cooperative engagement among stakeholders on online platforms. As traditional markets are the beacon of trust-based networks, stakeholders can encourage and facilitate digital adoption and collaborative problem-solving among themselves.

A digital-based lifestyle requires digital literacy. Stakeholders need that type of knowledge to usher traditional markets into a modern and digital society, expanding their function as important socio-economic institutions and shifting the values of social inclusivity that aspire towards equitable development.

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