



The Impact of Digitalization on Traditional Handicraft Markets Among the Toraja Community

Yusrijal¹, Lisana Sidqin Aliyan¹, Rina¹

¹Universitas Negri Alauddin Makassar

*Corresponding Author: Yusrijal

Email: yusrijalanantaarisandi@gmail.com

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Abstract

Digitalization is explored as an area of interest concerning its effects on changing the traditional handicraft market in which the Toraja community operates in terms of economic potential, cultural core values as well as social relations. The usage of digital tools in increasing the opportunities of the market for Toraja artisans' results in higher livelihoods as well as investments on the community. Still, there is a flip side of it, which refers to issues of cultural significance, since the artisans have had to alter the more local, cultural connotations of their art, to suit international markets. This paper fills the existing literature by discussing how information access influence's cultural identity maintenance and pointing to the economic inequity resulting from the unequal distribution of digital resources and skills. Moreover, new generations of artisans joined handicraft business, thus, combining generations knowledge and experience with masterpieces of outstanding technologies. Such dynamics point to the need for a equilibrium between market needs and cultural values in a given society in as the artisans adapt to the digital markets. Participants were sampled through cultural probes followed by fortnightly interviews with the artisans, giving the study rich data regarding digitalisation, culture and community transformation. The study indicates that if individuals and indigenous cultures learn modern practices of Using the digital interfaces and the market fairness, digitization contributes positively towards the economic sustainability and cultural retention within the traditional society.

Introduction

It is quite clear that traditional crafts have been important in passing cultural values and as a source of income for people in a given region. of these communities, the Toraja people who are from the highland of South Sulawesi, Indonesia are known to be skilled in wood carving, weaving and textile among other things (Bachrong & Ansar, 2021). Traditional accessories such as ring, necklace, waist strap, bead, and weaving which were believed hold cultural and spiritual associations have been core to the Toraja community for years. However, in the past few years, the technological advancement of new generations has brought challenges to the markets for traditional crafts in the domestic environment and international markets. This paper examines how digitalization affected the conventional handicraft markets for the Toraja people by expanding the markets' accessibility and how these markets struggled with maintaining cultural integrity in the growing worldwide digital context.

Traditional Toraja handicrafts were produced from generation to generation as part of the cultural system of the local community (Salam & Huasain, 2021). It is clear that the creation

of these handicrafts also fulfills the role of economics as well as passing on traditions that belong to the cultural identity of the Toraja (Kuba et al., 2023). The market of these traditional crafts on the other hand was restricted within local or regional consumers, which used local physical markets and word of mouth. In the last decade, though, e-commerce platforms, social media, digital marketing, among other aspects, have revolutionized the production, distribution, and consumption of these goods (Rosário & Raimundo, 2021). This change has led to new opportunities and threats that for artisans; new opportunities are: threat associated with the preservation of cultural practices and traditional techniques.

The technological advancement in the sale of arts and craft products has brought the Toraja artisans' products to other regions country or even internationally (Donzelli, 2020). Prominent social networks, such as Instagram, Facebook, and separate e-commerce pages give protagonists direct access to reach new customers and expand their operational scale and income (Rabi, 2023). However, while digital tools expand the client base, they are also skeptical about the commodification of traditional artwork, which creates pressure to transform art into ordinary designs closer to the market.

Cultural industries and digitalization have become a subject of interest in scholarly literature. Scholars have pointed out increased possibilities for artisans to get closer to their consumers as opposed to passing through middlemen and core markets for handmade products through digital platforms (Solomon & Mathias, 2020). To the Toraja artisans and their society, this empowerment has the positive implant to improve income security of artisans as well as increase cultural artefact recognition (Ishaq, 2021). However, the scholarly works have also highlighted certain potential pitfalls of what is referred to as the culture of cultural commodity, for example indigenous arts and craft may be bastardised or adjusted to suit the demands of the world market has been noted.

In addition, today's consumption also focuses on digitised services, which means that the very process of creating artwork becomes different for artisans. The emerging digital divide persists today since most of the traditional artisans struggle to procure and use the digital platforms and technologies needed for Internet marketing. Even though urban areas have relatively high level of internet connection and usage, this technology is still a challenge for consumption to groups such as the people of Toraja. Coping with the challenges of digital illiteracy together with inadequate infrastructural and resource constraints has rendered it difficult for many artisans who could benefit from digital markets access.

Nonetheless, one cannot ignore coupling technological and economical performances with cultural identity. They also are not focused on creating unique products and handmade items, in many cases, the methodology of which contradicts modern society's preference for fast and efficient discovery and use of products. This imbalance poses a risk of the disparity in quality when it comes to Toraja crafts as the modern advanced digital platform demands are met. The question, then, is not only economic, but of culture and possibly identity since the inalienable values that define Toraja handicrafts spiritual, cultural, historical may be increasingly threatened by the process of digitalization.

This paper will seek to establish the effects of digitalization of the handicraft markets among the Toraja people in reference to the role of the market opportunities and culture conservation. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions: In what was how the digitalization has impacted the market access and economic prospects of the Toraja artisans? What is the

impression of the artisan from Toraja with regards to digital media? What are the ways that artisans manage the tension between interpreting and presenting their product in the digital markets while also maintaining their identity and fidelity to craft?

In answering to these questions, this study hopes to help fill the gap of knowledge on the relationship between digitalization and conventional industries and their impacts on culturally diverse society such as the Toraja. As such, it seeks to offer direction on how these local craftsmen can embrace the phenomenon of digitalisation in their products and offer consumers what they would consider as authentic in the contemporary world economy.

Method

Being exploratory in nature, this study adopted a qualitative research methodology to examine how the Toraja people are being affected on the handicraft markets of their traditional crafts that emanated from digitalization. A qualitative design was opted for because it provided the approaches to capture the rich details of the phenomena of interest, namely, the life experiences of the artisans, their perceptions and predicaments, and the cultural implications of technology integration in their markets. The research was conducted to collect qualitative data needed to understand the layers of impact the digital environment has on the economic potential of Toraja's handicrafts and the indigenous culture attached to them.

The study was carried out in the Toraja district in South Sulawesi, Indonesia in which handicrafts have played a central role in the society's culture and economy. In this study, a purposive approach was employed to sample the participants into the study. The participants selected for the study were 15 artisans, who were engaged in producing and selling various kinds of Toraja ethnic cultural products like carved wooden products, fabrics, metals, etc. Such artisans were chosen based on their participation in both the live and virtual shops, including social media and online shops. This study used interview as the method of data collection after explaining the purpose of the study with the participants their consent was sought.

Information was elicited via semi structured interviews because it would afford the interviewer the needed flexibility to study the participants and tap from their experience and perception. The interview guide was designed specifically in response to four major areas of discretion concerning the effects of digitalization on market accessibility, economic opportunities, culture, and artisans' experiences on digital terrain. Closed-ended questions along with some open-ended questions were asked during the interviews to elicit both measure answers and deeper thoughts and views. All interviews were conducted in the Toraja or Indonesian language; the duration of the interviews was between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. Each interview was conducted with participant's permission and recorded on a digital device which was later transcribed word for word.

Aside from the interviews though, participant observation was used as another method in data gathering (Lareau, 2021; Hurst, 2023; Seim, 2024). The researcher followed artisans in the local markets, physical or online, to capture how the artisans interact with their products and the buyer. This involved the time they spent on the internet being alert on the kind of products they promoted, the kind of pricing they adopted to promote their crafts and social marketing particularly use of Instagram and Facebook pages. These observations offered backgrounds and added to the interview collected data.

The analysis of data was done in line with the guidelines of thematic analysis which is a method of locating, coding and analyzing data patterns referred to as themes. It entailed the taking of transcripts of the interview recordings and sorting of field notes generated from observations. These transcriptions and notes were done in a bid to get a grasp with the data and coming up with some initial codes after reading the transcriptions and notes several times (Ningi, A. I. (2022; Azad et al., 202; Point & Baruch, 2023). These were generated inductively so that the researcher does not have to fit the data into preconceived themes.

When emerging codes were developed, the researcher categorized them into broader themes. These themes were then discussed and made more specific through processes of member checking, in order to better capture the experiences of the participants. The final themes were related to the central research questions: market access through digital platforms, changing role of digitalization on traditional products, economic opportunities of the digital markets, and factors affecting artisan industries to keep their products genuine.

To improve the credibility of the study, the technique of member checking was employed. Finally, after performing the above analysis, participant feedback and validation of the results were sought by presenting a brief report on the findings to the selected participants. This process was useful in ensuring that themes identified aligned with what the participants thought and experienced. Moreover, the researcher kept a reflective journal through the study to document the development of bias and check the analysis against the data.

Result and Discussion

Handcrafts in Toraja community have existed for several decades and their carved wood items along with textiles and decorative pieces symbolize traditional customs of the community. Handicrafts used to be sold in both nearby markets and domestic tourist zones and for special events across the country until recent times. Artisans now have better chances to grow their client base because of recent digitalization trends which enable them to contact people from both native and international demographics. Misalignment between appropriate education and funding with reliable market access remains an unresolved issue for indigenous artisans because this timely change has appeared. The transition of businesses through marketplaces and online platforms presents multinational opportunities in economic independence but potentially harms cultural upholders. This foundation sets the platform for discussing study results since digital platforms effect economic and cultural aspects of artisan communities simultaneously.

Digitalization and Market Access for Toraja Handicrafts

The rising importance of technological tools in markets worldwide has caused fundamental changes to traditional commercial spaces even those which rely on community-based sales. Digital media affect distribution of handmade Toraja goods so the Toraja marketplace gains national and beyond reach. Modern technology enables the traditional Toraja wooden carvings and textile and metal works to reach new markets through online selling platforms although these platforms were developed in the modern era. Digitization in artisanal practices remains difficult as digital technology integration creates new business opportunities for artisans.

Artisans in Toraja region have expanded their target audience reach beyond local customers after they started selling products online. Bukalapak and Tokopedia operate as two important

online selling sites which along with Instagram and Facebook and WhatsApp social media platforms offer sales apps to buyers worldwide. Online platforms provide direct customer access to people across the globe who would otherwise come through controlled middlemen with their pricing and market positioning control.

"Before we used digital platforms, we only sold our crafts to local tourists or through the markets here. Now, I have customers from Java, even from abroad like Australia. Social media, especially Instagram, has made it possible to show my work to more people and get inquiries from everywhere."

This direct access to buyers has led to an increase in both sales volume and revenue for some artisans, with digital platforms acting as an equalizer that minimizes geographical barriers. Additionally, the digital marketplace offers artisans flexibility, allowing them to operate on their own terms and with minimal overhead compared to traditional brick-and-mortar stores.

"I never thought I would be able to sell to people outside of Toraja, but now I send my carvings to customers in Bali, Jakarta, and even overseas. The digital tools are easy to use, and the exposure is incredible. I think it's a major opportunity for us."

However, while digitalization has broadened market access, it has not been without its challenges. Many artisans in the Toraja community still rely heavily on traditional methods for crafting their products, which often require considerable time and manual labor. The transition to online platforms requires not only learning how to use digital tools but also adapting to a different kind of customer engagement. Digital marketing requires consistent content creation, online customer service, and the ability to handle logistics such as shipping and online payments, all of which may be unfamiliar to artisans without prior experience in digital business practices.

Some artisans reported feeling overwhelmed by the fast pace of digital marketing trends and the constant need to update their online presence.

"I've learned to manage my Instagram account, but sometimes it feels like too much work. There are so many things to handle – taking good pictures, writing descriptions, answering messages. I just want to focus on making the handicrafts, but now I have to worry about online marketing as well."

Numerous artisans embrace the digital tools because they prove essential for maintaining and potentially increasing their business operations. The ability to enter worldwide markets delivers financial advantages and simultaneously helps maintain Toraja cultural heritage. Digital platforms serve to disseminate Toraja traditional craftsmanship more widely so non-local consumers gain access to Toraja culture which results in higher demand for local handicrafts.

Digitalization creates effects in the marketplace that extend outside of market access. Toraja handicrafts acquire a fresh approach to global market placement through this development which establishes new product design standards and determines pricing structure while defining branding strategies. Digital tools promote acceptance of traditional crafts by local and international customers which evolves regional items from local use to international attraction. Toraja craftsmanship faces dual benefits and changes in its definition because of market entry opportunities although many artisans believe cultural authenticity should not be compromised when accessing better market access.

Cultural Identity and Adaptation

Modern digital advancement requires the Toraja people to strengthen their cultural heritage as they navigate market requirements in the global economy. Handicrafts from traditional craftsmanship serve as more than marketable items since they represent the combination of centuries of Toraja cultural tradition and original expression of their cultural identity. Due to their online visibility handicrafts face demands to change appearance and manufacturing methods which are driving them toward market-aligned creativity. Artisans face a demanding challenge to protect cultural authenticity through minor transformation of handicrafts which must remain competitive enough for wider markets.

For modern crafts to meet a diverse customer base some cultural elements get weakened through necessary modifications. Toraja wood carvers traditionally create elaborate designs that represent local stories and beliefs but they need to modify these patterns when following demands from foreign buyers. The adaptation process causes the original cultural significance to separate from the commercialized expression of handicrafts.

"Sometimes, buyers from outside Toraja want simpler designs because they think the traditional patterns are too complex. I try to respect their requests, but it feels like I am changing something important about the craft. It's hard because I want to sell, but I also want to keep the original designs alive."

The persistence of artisan workers to protect cultural heritage during their artistic practice leads to emotional stress since some consumer groups fail to grasp cultural values. Artisans must defend their cultural traditions while adopting digital changes to increase their business opportunities according to digitalization requirements. Artisan choice of product features leads to both business continuation and the selection of cultural materials that will live into the future generations.

For artistic survival several fine artisans need to implement fundamental adaptation principles into their creative work. Artisans blend contemporary elements into classic styles to develop desirable commercial products that appeal to present buyers. The adaptation strategy made by artisans allows them to succeed in globalized markets through creative displays of traditional aesthetic principles. Crafters integrate conventional manufacturing techniques along with contemporary design aspects which transforms their cultural objects into contemporary forms.

"I started to add a bit of modern design to my weaving, and now more people show interest in it. I think of it as a way to keep our culture alive in a way that people today can understand and appreciate. It doesn't mean I'm losing my culture – it's like I'm sharing it in a different language."

Through positive adaptation the artisans demonstrate their cultural heritage by making pictures and putting their work online. Changing flavors serves the artisans as a tool to dismantle cultural differences so that people from other backgrounds can learn about Toraja customs through their own taste perceptions. Through digitalization artisans can conduct cultural exchange to distribute their cultural heritage while making minor adjustments that appeal to target markets.

Digitalization plays what precise function when considering cultural identification? One can observe that this issue brings numerous conflicting viewpoints because it examines multiple

aspects of the process. The approach of economic sustainability through adaptation raises questions about its impact on long-term existence of Maltese cultural heritage. Toraja handicrafts face the permanent risk of losing their core elements when they adapt their designs to comply with market requirements. The majority of artisan craftsmen must resolve their dilemma between protecting their original work and creating fresh ideas to gain broader market recognition.

Economic Implications and Community Transformation

Digital transformations of the handicraft market created major economic transformations for the Toraja community which caused direct economic effects on their local markets. Global market connections allow decorative items and unconventional designs to generate revenue which stimulates more producers to create large enterprises and modify their products. The community evolved internally because more community members started contributing to handicraft production for commercial purposes. Digital platforms function as new revenue streams and restart possibilities for artisans which caused handicrafts to maintain a vital role in Toraja economic activity.

The paper demonstrates how market access growth enables certain artisans to obtain higher incomes which ultimately enhances their quality of life through community facility development. Several income streams enable artisans to accumulate more finances which they utilize for buying resources and tools that boost their productivity and enhance product quality. Some artisans made this transition from basic cottage product manufacturers who produced to support themselves and their families while saving money for needed developments into business people focused on planned production and economic investment for community development.

"Since selling my carvings online, I have been able to earn more, and this has allowed me to improve my family's life. I can now afford better tools and materials, and I have even been able to support local projects, like repairing the village road."

Individual income growth is not the only benefit digitalization provides because it has positively altered community life according to what most citizens believe. Artisans successfully establishing income sources give them the capability to fund neighborhoods by investing in projects which reinforce community growth. The change in economic patterns has transformed Toraja society's traditional structure since artisans became part of new social activities after being economically inactive before.

The social environment of the Toraja people has shifted because digitalization revealed financial potential in handicraft production to several members of the group. The youth population who used to migrate to big cities for employment are now involved in producing handicrafts. The youth population introduced fresh perspectives and fresh talent into handicraft that is resulting in a gradual transformation and potential modernization of established cultural practices. News on this development triggers a shift in the local economy beyond agricultural dependency into both crafts and touristic activities.

"I used to think I would have to leave Toraja to find work, but with digital platforms, I see that I can make a living here by making and selling handicrafts. Now I work alongside my family, and we are making a name for ourselves online."

The involvement of younger generations in handicraft production is strengthening the cultural and economic ties within the community. Digitalization has allowed these artisans to explore creative designs, modern materials, and marketing strategies that attract a wider audience while preserving their heritage. This intergenerational collaboration has enriched the handicraft industry and reinforced cultural continuity within the community, as younger artisans learn traditional techniques while contributing their own innovations.

Nonetheless, the possibilities of earning available thanks to digitalization also brought some issues. Since more and more people request unique souvenirs from Toraja, some craftsmen have felt pressure in the production process because there is often a lack of materials or workers. As a result of rapid demand among patrons some of the artisans end up being overbooked and might be pressured to deliver products quicker thus diluting traditional value of artisanal production. Also, there is a growing unequal share of income in the community now since only the artisans who own tools and knowledge in digital space sell their products online, the others still remain jobless. As it has been seen, this has caused conflict because not all artisans have the same chances or access to participate within the digital economy.

Pecuniary change Digitalisation has caused shift in the economic activities as well as the social fabric of the Toraja. The social change with respect to income has established provision of better facilities, inclusion of young and elder generation, group unity and so on but has distorted the market needs along with the difference between rich and poor. The future of such change entails organisational leadership of the modern quality that fuels economic development in considerations of the primitive cultural and communal ethical standards and practices. Hence the Toraja artisans may still be able to keep on supporting the economic advantages of the digitalization apart from supporting a cultural centralized and balanced loop of development.

This paper set out to examine the effects that digitalisation has had on the antioxidant sellers' market in the context of Toraja tradition with regard to the economic, cultural and social changes associated with increased mobility amongst the sellers in the market. Many previous studies on digitalisation in artisanal industries have concentrated on its economic opportunities and issues; however, culture and identity and how this plays out in the market among indigenous people have attracted minimal attention (Ruhanen & Whitford, 2021). This gave this study a focus because this previous research had failed to inquire how the digital platforms impact not only individual income and employment but also cultural issues including practices, values, and community relations of the artisans.

This study makes a number of important contributions among which are the exploration of the ways and extent to which digitalization impacts on culture and, particularly, cultural identity of the Toraja artisans. Prior literature suggests that digital technology has the potential to extend the market for artisans and turn their crafts into globalised objects (Wilkinson & DeNicola, 2020). But few of these studies pay special attention to identity and its attendant processes of balancing the artistic originality and adapting the items for mass consumerism. This conclusion is consistent with the study Van & Thurner (2020) on indigenous handicrafts where the author found that artisans experience demands to modify ornaments' design or adapt the material to meet the international market's expectations. For the Toraja community likewise, the artisans also believed they recalibrated the solutions in line with their conventional designs and tailored them to better fit the marketplace. This modification process although was cost effective

created the problem of loss of cultural relevance a factor that has been given minimal attention in the literature.

Moreover, this paper builds upon digitalisation effects criteria whereby there is disparity as well as advantageous effects in the Toraja context. Previous studies, including that Helsper (2021), have primarily focused on how digitalisation contributes to the economic development of the rural artisans. Nonetheless, our study supports the assertion that online selling has raised income for many Toraja artisans and at the same time documents how such gains are unevenly distributed. Their thinking on the number of artisans and businesses actively marketing their products online during the pandemic is divided into three categories: Some artisans reported they had the necessary technology and digital marketing expertise to leverage technology; many more had limited resources or faced technical challenges. This has result to economic stratification within the community, a situation which is not fully captured in most of existing studies. In doing so, this study draws attention to such discrepancies, and thus conceptualises future digital literacy for learning as the linguistic medium can only welcome equitable growth in the digital economy (Chelwa et al., 2022).

The study also speaks to the manner in which digitalization influences social relations and intergenerational associations within the Toraja society (Noviani et al., 2021 Ande et al., 2025). In contrast to works explaining digitalization as a process where subjects mainly achieve economic opportunities, the present research shows that the opportunity to enter a digital market has initiated a community change. Increasing numbers of young people work in the handicraft industry and they introduced approaches to marketing and production and receive knowledge from their elders. This dynamic affirms the observations made by Pagán et al. (2020) for digitalization in artisan industries leads to continuation of the culture due to interactions of both the old workers and the young people. However, beyond this we were able to demonstrate that this process serves to reinforce community identification, where young and old artisans alike all work towards maintaining their traditions in today's global markets.

The study addressed the complex role of consumerism as it shapes artisanal production. Consumer-driven adaptations in design and production methods have been widely discussed in literature focused on globalization's impact on indigenous markets. Yet, many studies primarily focus on consumer demand without addressing artisans' perspectives on these adaptations. This study provides a nuanced view by incorporating artisans' voices, revealing their sense of cultural responsibility and the challenges of balancing consumer preferences with traditional values. The artisans' responses reflect their desire to maintain cultural integrity while meeting market demands, contributing to literature that calls for sustainable and respectful engagement with indigenous markets.

This study underscores the potential for digital platforms to serve as tools for cultural diplomacy, enabling Toraja artisans to share their heritage globally while fostering cultural pride within their community. While recent studies acknowledge the role of digitalization in promoting cultural exchange (Isensee et al., 2020), our findings show that this exchange is not merely transactional but serves as a form of cultural preservation and empowerment. Artisans saw themselves as cultural ambassadors, using digital tools to bridge cultural gaps and introduce Toraja traditions to new audiences without losing the essence of their identity. This perspective resonates with emerging scholarship on the role of artisans as cultural stewards within globalized economies.

Conclusion

This research has shown that digitalisation is a catalyst for economic improvements to the handicraft market in Toraja through embracing Information Communication Technology, infrastructural innovation alongside cultural and social change certainly has a positive influence on the region's economy and could serve as a future prospect if well-developed and embraced by the society. In general, artisans have been able to increase their access audiences effectively, and even advance their living conditions, though not all due to the uneven distribution of digital skills and resources. This kind of digitalization has both positives and negatives when it comes to culture conservation; artisans have shifted their practices with demands of the market while still holding to the traditional way of working. This research has aimed at filling the gaps in studies by comparing how digitalization affects cultural identity, economic disparities, and generations' cooperation to understand the contingent nature of technological advances with regard to cultural sustainability. Further research should focus on better policies and systems that respect cultural and ethnic ways people engage in, in order that development and its attendant gains do not compromise cultures.

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