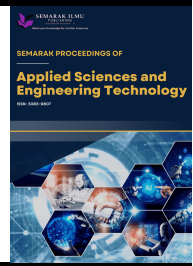




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# College Student as Sellers in the Digital Marketplace: Evaluating Participation, Profitable Platforms, and Market Trends

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### ABSTRACT

Digital marketplace nowadays has improved the growth since the global pandemic phenomena and led to more technological innovation. At the same time, it also shows involvement of students especially those taking diploma or degree as sellers in digital marketplaces. We can notice this trend generally in Southeast Asia, especially in Malaysia and Indonesia. In Malaysia, the adoption of digital marketplaces has grown substantially, with many users engaging in these platforms not only as consumers but also as sellers. Moreover, a considerable number of students have shown a strong inclination toward establishing their own online businesses. This trend highlights the increasing role of digital platforms in promoting entrepreneurial activities among students and reflects the attractiveness of e-marketplaces due to their accessibility and low entry barriers. However, challenges remain, including the underutilization of marketplace features by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and the lack of student-focused digital business platforms. So, student's knowledge on digital business needs to be improved with latest technology, either as a user or as a developer of digital system. Therefore, this study adopts a quantitative descriptive approach through an online survey to: (1) examine the growing participation of students as digital sellers, (2) identify platforms that generate higher income or are most preferred, and (3) determine which products are perceived as highly marketable. The findings will provide valuable information that can motivate students on entrepreneurship, offering practical implications for e-commerce platform providers and informing strategies to better support students entering the digital business landscape.

**Keywords:** Student entrepreneurship; online marketplace components; E-commerce platforms; digital business models; market trends

## 1. Introduction

In Malaysia, digital marketplace usage reached 78.3% in 2022, with 16.7% of users participating as both buyers and sellers [1]. Previous studies have shown that online marketplace platforms are increasingly adopted within university communities, providing opportunities for students to engage in entrepreneurial activities [2]. This growing adoption is largely driven by the minimal infrastructure requirements and low entry costs associated with e-marketplace platforms [3]. The digital world has opened up huge opportunities for students to become entrepreneurs while completing their education. [4]. This trend is happening not just globally, but also right here locally. We can see a

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fundamental connection between students, their social media usage and online enterprises right here in our college community [5]. The modern campus is no longer confined in a lecture hall but it is also acting a launchpad for digital commerce.

The Internet has grown far beyond its original proposed functions and become bustling hub where people start, run, and grow their businesses. Thanks to the sheer number of online platforms, today's students can easily become entrepreneurs, launching and running businesses while juggling lectures and assignments. This reality is clearly seen in local studies, where many students are now stepping up as active e-commerce sellers. [6].

We know these young people are hustling, but we still need more detail where getting these answers is important. These findings provide important information not only for students, but for their academic institutions and the policymakers who shape the future of local and global economies. Strong foundation of understanding already exist:

- The digital marketplaces have become powerful launchpads, helping countless small businesses grow and thrive around the world [7].
- The exist common challenges shown in the studies for young entrepreneurs especially when it comes to getting start-up funds and mastering advanced online marketing [8].
- Most importantly, we know that students today already deeply familiar with the digital tools. They are heavy users of Social Networking Sites (SNS), which means they possess a natural digital fluency that can easily be leveraged and converted into commercial success.

Despite this foundation, here's where the big question mark hangs: What about the students, specifically?

While we know students are definitely jumping into e-commerce as sellers [6], the academic spotlight hasn't truly focused on them. There's still a lot we don't know about this growing trend. We're missing the kind of detailed research that can really answer the practical questions behind it. That why the study aims to find:

- What drives student to start selling through digital commerce and how they actually do it.
- Which from all the available online platform such as Shopee, Lazada or Instagram for shopping, which one them as a seller earn most profit.
- What kind of product they said will derive high selling demand?

This focus on the student experience is a crucial gap in the current literature [2]. This the gap that we try to fill with the goal of alignment between the busy student schedules and fast-growth digital commerce ecosystem.

Therefore, in the following section the roadmap of the study is explain where we'll first take the deep dive at all the research that came before us, explain in step-by-step exactly how we'll run this study—the surveys used, the data collected and the science behind our approach. Then we'll present the result using survey finding that reveals what the most profitable platforms and popular products truly are. Finally, we'll discuss what all this information actually means for students, universities, and the future of entrepreneurship, complete with actionable recommendations.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Students in Digital Marketplaces as Sellers*

A new generation of student business founder who actively participate in online business has been created by the growing reach of digital technologies in daily life. The Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2021–2025 and the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 give highlight on developing

entrepreneurial mindsets in young people with the goal of generating job creators rather than job seekers [9].

Studies show low entry barriers, flexibility, and greater digital literacy have all been linked to significant increases in student involvement in technology competence, according to research [10, 11]. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend, as online business became a sustainable income replacement during lockdowns [12]. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission [1] 16.7% of e-commerce users were both buyers and sellers, and 73.5% of university students expressed an interest in starting an online business.

Apart from that, according to studies by Hashim and Yusof [13] and Jalaludin *et al.*, [11], students see digital entrepreneurship as a way to develop important digital and business skills rather than just as a way to supplement their income. Therefore, data from Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) Batu Pahat also shows that nearly one-third of students have experience selling products online, though most are still beginners working part-time or occasionally.

A growing socioeconomic trend, student participation in digital marketplaces is continues to grow due to opportunity, necessity, and familiarity with technology. In addition, beyond providing financial benefits, this method supports Malaysia's objective of developing a youthful, enterprising populace with digital skills

## 2.2 Determining the Platforms that Generate Higher Income

The platform selection has an important impact on the sustainability and profitability of student-led e-commerce. The accessibility, visibility, and earning capability of various digital marketplaces vary.

Due to their intuitive user interfaces, integrated marketing tools, and social media integration, Shopee and TikTok Shop are frequently cited as the platforms of choice for student entrepreneurs in Malaysia [14]. While Shopee's cashback and logistics systems provide convenience and trust to both buyers and sellers, TikTok's data-based exposure allows students to market their products effectively with little funding [15].

In Indonesia, Tokopedia remains holding top and leading marketplace in terms of digital selling activities [16]. Meanwhile, in Thailand, Lazada and Line Shopping are widely used by student entrepreneurs due to strong logistics networks and early market presence [17]. However, in Malaysia, students tend to love socially engaging and mobile-first platforms like Shopee and TikTok Shop, this app emphasize community interaction and visibility rather than formal business structures. The view of authenticity and long-term success of digital platforms are vital features influencing long-term engagement and financial success [18].

## 2.3 Identifying Products with High Marketability

The type of product sold greatly influences the profitability of student-run online businesses. According to research, among Malaysian youth business founder, the most popular products sold online are those related to fashion, food, and beauty [10,19]. These items are affordable to produce or resell and synchronize with social media trends and youth consumer.

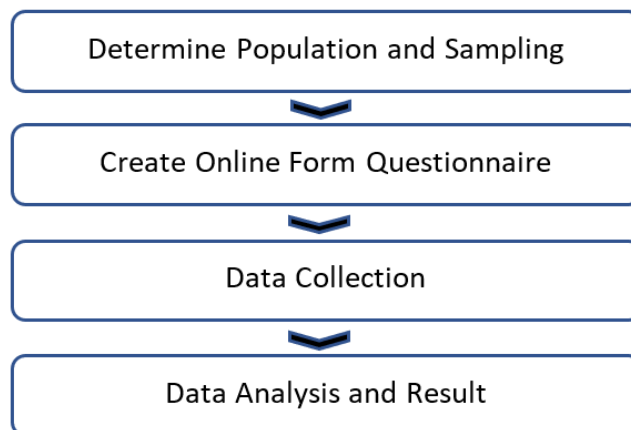
Food-based microbusinesses, such as those selling homemade snacks, drinks, and desserts, these products often generate the highest profits due to steady demand and low production costs [13]. Furthermore, this food-based small business is supported by KPTM Batu Pahat's research, which reveals that 47% of student sellers' total profit came from selling homemade food, with fashion items coming in at 18%, technology at 16%, and cosmetics at 2%.

Apart from that, youth like Gen Z consumers are particularly influenced by short duration video content, influencer marketing, and peer recommendations, especially on TikTok and Instagram [19]. According to the AnyMind Group Malaysia Digital Landscape 2025 report, 54% of Malaysian consumers say short videos featuring influencers are the most engaging way to discover new brands, and 63% find TikTok social videos more useful and entertaining than other content formats that signalling the rising influence of short-form, creator-led formats in brand engagement [20]. Beyond consumer goods, many students are branching into service-based businesses such as digital marketing, graphic design, printing, tutoring, and event management [21]. This service reflects a shift toward skill-based business founder, aligning with the broader freelance work and the increasing importance of digital skills in modern business ecosystems.

This research adopts a quantitative data analysis to explore how students use digital marketplaces, what products they sell, and how these choices affect their income. However, by analysis statistical data collected from a student population, the study aims to provide insights into how platform preferences and product selection relate to the profitability of student-led online businesses.

### 3. Research Methodology

The correlation between the digital marketplace platform usage, income generation, and product's marketability is measured through quantitative descriptive research. Figure 1 shows the research framework.



**Fig. 1.** Research framework

This study design was used to determine the extent to which college students are involved in digital selling, the platforms with the highest earnings and the trends affecting the performance of platforms in the digital marketplace. Quantitative descriptive research was chosen because it focuses on gathering numerical data and recognizing patterns. The descriptive design allowed the researcher to describe current practices, behaviours, and attitudes of college student sellers without manipulating any variables. This design provided the researcher with a systematic, objective, and reproducible approach to understanding these phenomena in the natural setting.

### *3.1 Determine Population and Sampling*

Defining population and sampling of study was the first step. The study included students at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) Batu Pahat. It involved students that are interested in selling or any students who use e-commerce platforms similar to Shopee, TikTok Shop, Instagram and Facebook Marketplace to sell.

This study is aimed at choosing a specific population for the sample. There is an increasing number of students who use digital marketplaces and are entrepreneurs in digital marketplaces. The population of the study should then be students who have experience in selling products online and understand digital marketplace functions.

### *3.2 Create Online Form Questionnaire*

The main instrument used for data collection was a structured online questionnaire designed by the researcher base on the idea presented according to Kothari [22] and Creswell and Creswell [27]. All the questions designed are aligned with the research objectives, which is to examine the extent of student participation in e-commerce, identify platforms that yield higher profitability, and explore the categories of products with high marketability.

There are two sections of the questionnaire. The first section collects demographic data, including age, gender, academic program, and year of study. The second section explores into the respondents' level of participation in e-commerce, including whether they are involved in online selling, the duration and frequency of their selling activities, the platform that they engage, the product that they sell and their motivations for engaging in such entrepreneurial ventures. The study also captured students' suggestions for future institutional support, including proposed training, mentorship, or platform enhancements that could facilitate better sales outcomes.

### *3.3 Data Collection*

All data is gathered online using digital communication platforms that are popular among students. The link to the Google Form is shared via internal academic portals, student email lists, and Telegram and WhatsApp groups. The participant who answered the questionnaire was entirely volunteer and gathered anonymously. With this approach, we hope that it will reduces biases, the result is purely genuine and also hope it will be expediting the data collection process. Prior to being imported into SPSS for analysis, every response was automatically captured and collate in Google Sheets.

### *3.4 Data Analysis and Results*

Upon completion of data collection, the responses are subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. Percentages and frequencies are calculated to create a brief summary of the participant responses for every questionnaire category. Bar charts, pie charts, and data tables are applied to display platform usage, income generation, product types, and other interest indicators in a readily readable form.

The objective of analysis is to identify patterns in accordance with the purpose of research. First, trends in students' participation in e-commerce are examined to estimate entrepreneurial activity. Second, profitability on the platforms is gauged to determine which online marketplaces produce more revenues for student sellers. Third, product marketability is gauged by assessing what types of

products achieve improved sales performance. These results collectively contribute to broader understanding of college students' digital entrepreneurial ecosystem and inform educational institution strategy that they are able to draw on in order to empower and enable student-led e-commerce ventures.

## 4 Results and Discussions

### 4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey was conducted among 156 students from Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) Batu Pahat. The demographic analysis reveals that the majority of the respondents were female, comprising approximately 58% of the sample, while the remaining 40% were male and prefer not to say in 2%. The 89% of the participants fell within the age range of 18 to 20 years old, which is typical of diploma-level students. When categorized by academic program, a large portion were enrolled in the Diploma in Human Resource Management, followed by those in the Diploma in Information Technology and the Diploma in Computer Graphic Design. In terms of academic year, 45% respondents were in their second year of study. These demographic distributions are illustrated in Figure 2, which presents a pie chart summarizing gender, age range and academic year of program participation.

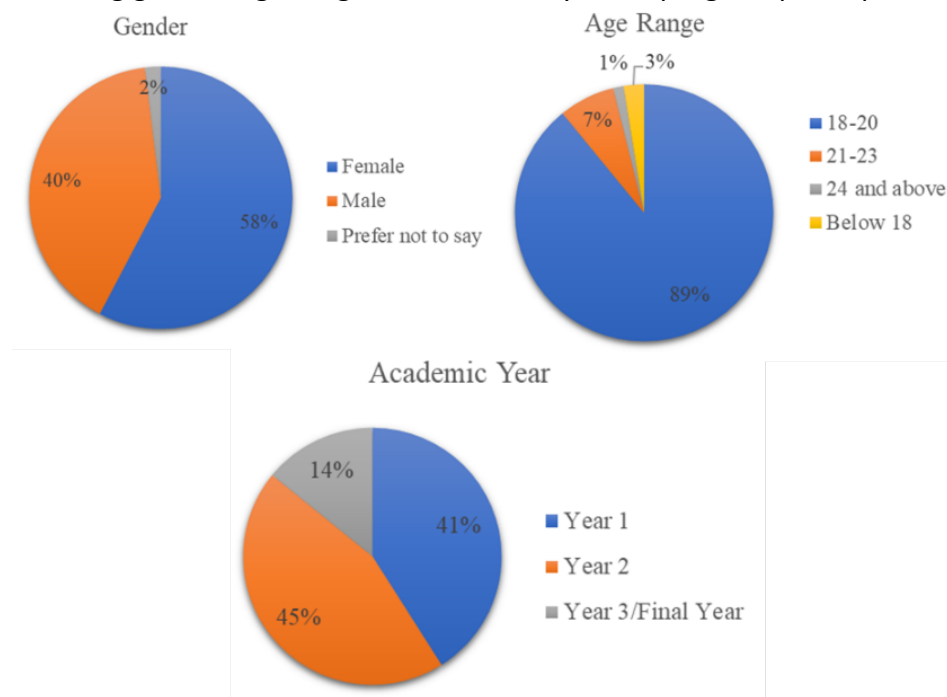


Fig. 2. Summary of gender, age range and academic year of program participation

### 4.2 Student Participation in the Digital Marketplace

An important finding from the study is that out of all respondents, 45 students (29 %) reported having experience selling products via online platforms, whereas 111 students (71 %) had never participated in digital marketplaces. Among those who had sold online, 20 students (44 %) had been active for less than three months, 15 students (33 %) for three to six months, 2 students (4 %) for seven to twelve months, and 8 students (18 %) for more than one year. This pattern suggests that student engagement in e-commerce is relatively recent and largely dominated by beginners with limited experience. Regarding frequency of sales, many of these student sellers indicated that their activity occurs on a monthly or occasional basis rather than daily or weekly, pointing to a casual

approach to digital entrepreneurship. Figure 3 and 4 presents a bar graph illustrating the breakdown of participation frequency in online selling activities.



Fig. 3. Duration of online selling experience

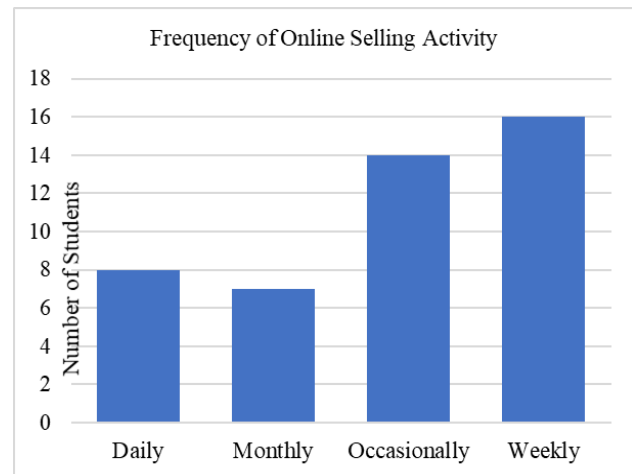


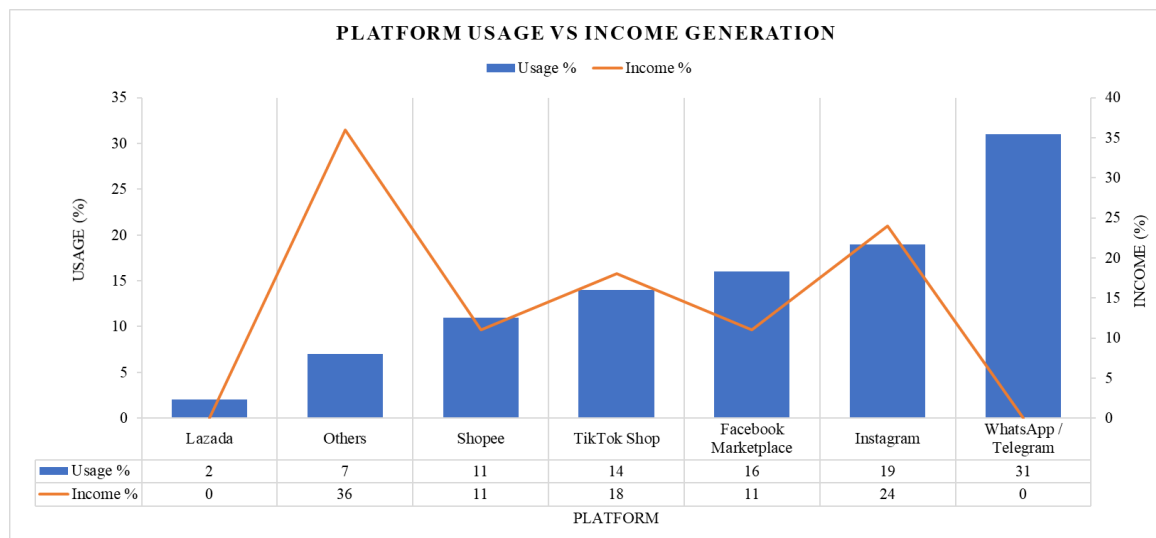
Fig. 4. Frequency of online selling activity

#### 4.3 Platforms Used and Income Generated

The study also examined which online platforms were most commonly used by student sellers and the extent of income generated from these activities. Based on the results, WhatsApp/Telegram (31%) emerged as the most frequently used platform, followed by Instagram (19%), Facebook Marketplace (16%), TikTok Shop (14%), Shopee (11%), Others (7%), and Lazada (2%). This distribution suggests that student sellers favoured platforms that are easily accessible and support strong peer-to-peer communication features, particularly WhatsApp and Telegram.

However, when analysing income generation, a different pattern emerged. The "Others" category (36%), which included less mainstream platforms, contributed the highest proportion of reported earnings. This was followed by Instagram (24%), TikTok Shop (18%), Shopee (11%), and Facebook Marketplace (11%), while Lazada (0%) and WhatsApp/Telegram (0%) recorded no reported income. These findings indicate that although WhatsApp and Telegram are the most commonly used platforms, they serve primarily for communication and customer engagement rather than direct sales. In contrast, platforms like Instagram and TikTok Shop are more effective in generating income.

Overall, the results imply that for most student sellers, online selling functions more as a supplementary source of income rather than a primary livelihood. The comparative breakdown of platform usage and income distribution, as presented in Figure 4, illustrates the contrast between platform popularity and profitability among student sellers.



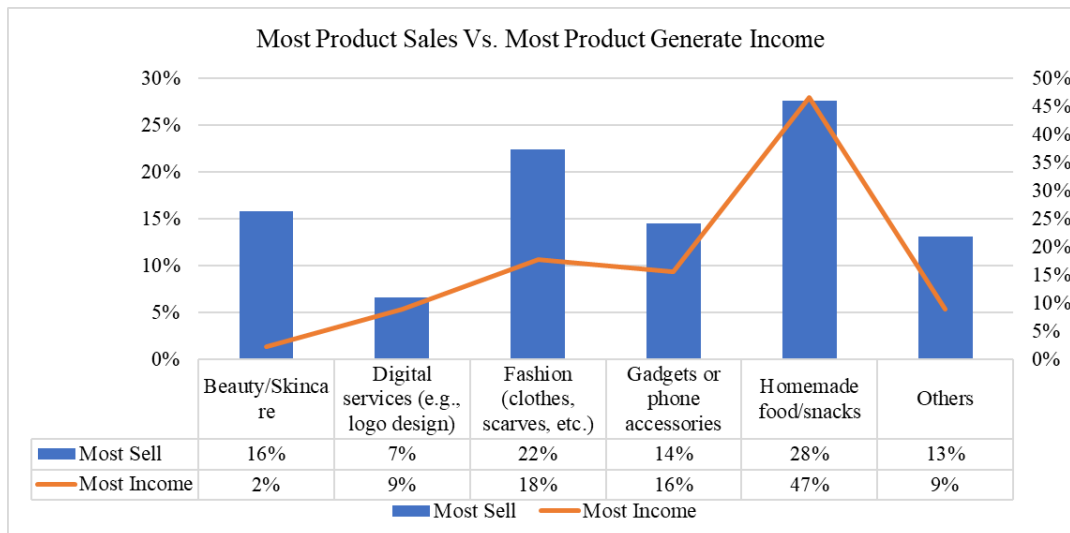
**Fig. 5.** Most platform usage and most platform generate income in digital marketplace

#### 4.4 Product Categories and Market Trends

The survey findings revealed clear differences between the types of products most frequently sold by student sellers and those generating the highest income. As shown in Figure 5, homemade food and snacks (28%) were the most frequently sold products, followed by fashion items such as clothes and scarves (22%), beauty or skincare products (16%), gadgets or phone accessories (14%), others (13%), and digital services such as logo design (7%). This trend suggests that students preferred selling tangible, consumable items that are easy to produce or resell within their social circles.

However, when examining income generation, the pattern shifted. Homemade food and snacks (47%) contributed the highest proportion of income among all product categories, indicating strong profitability in this segment. This was followed by fashion products (18%), gadgets or phone accessories (16%), others (9%), digital services (9%), and beauty/skincare products (2%). These findings highlight that although fashion and beauty items are popular choices for selling, food-based businesses provide greater income opportunities, likely due to consistent demand and higher turnover rates.

Overall, the results imply that while students tend to engage in selling familiar and accessible products, those who venture into food-related businesses achieve more substantial income returns. Figure 5 clearly illustrates this contrast between sales frequency and income generation across product categories.

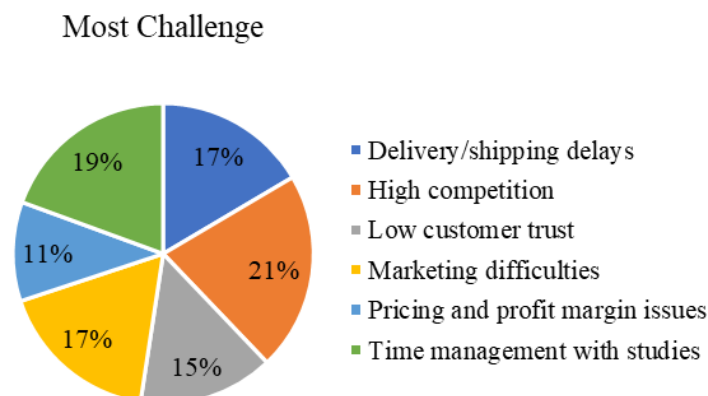


**Fig. 6.** Most product sales and most product generate income in digital marketplace

#### 4.5 Challenges Encountered by Student Sellers

Despite their enthusiasm, student sellers encountered several challenges while operating in the digital marketplace. The most frequently reported issue was high competition (21%), particularly against established or full-time sellers who offered lower prices and had stronger online visibility. This was followed by time management with studies (19%), as many students struggled to balance academic responsibilities with the demands of running an online business. Delivery and shipping delays (17%) and marketing difficulties (17%) were also common concerns, especially for those relying on third-party couriers or lacking promotional experience. Additionally, low customer trust (15%) and pricing and profit margin issues (11%) were identified as barriers to sustaining consistent sales and profitability.

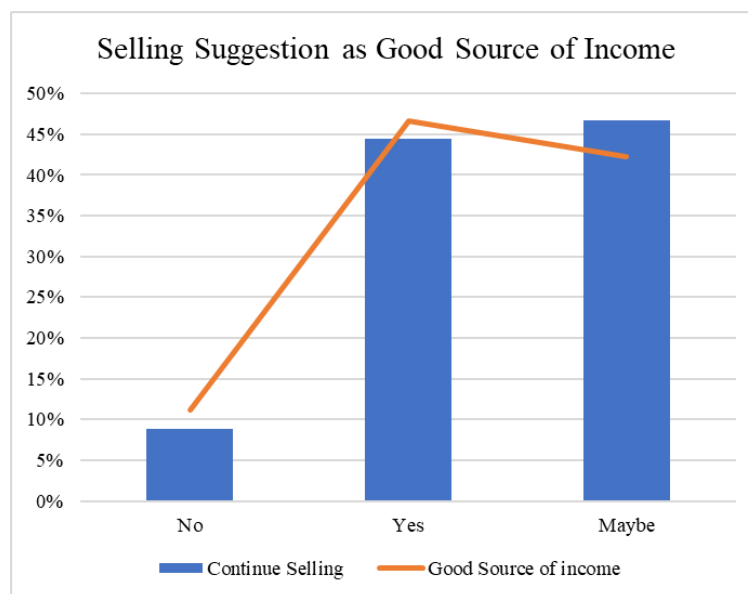
Overall, these findings indicate that while students are eager to participate in online selling, they face significant obstacles in competition, time management, and marketing. A summary of these challenges and their respective frequencies is presented in Figure 6, which illustrates the top six issues encountered by student entrepreneurs in a stacked bar chart format.



**Fig. 7.** Most challenging factor in digital business

#### 4.6 Future Plans and Institutional Support Needs

Looking ahead as shown in Figure 8, the findings revealed that a considerable proportion of students intended to continue their online selling activities. As shown in the Figure 8, 44% of respondents expressed a definite intention to continue selling, while 47% indicated that they might continue depending on circumstances. Only 9% reported no intention to pursue online selling further. In terms of perceived benefits, nearly half (47%) of the respondents considered online selling a good source of income, while 42% were uncertain, and 11% disagreed. These results suggest that although most students view e-commerce positively, many remain cautious about its long-term sustainability.



**Fig. 8.** Students' future interest in digital selling and views on its income potential

When asked about the types of support they would like to receive from their institution, students highlighted several key areas. The most requested form of assistance was better digital marketing knowledge (28%), followed by training or workshops (20%), platform or website support provided by the college (18%), financial assistance (17%), and mentorship from experienced sellers (15%). Only 3% indicated that they did not require any institutional support. These findings emphasize the importance of equipping student entrepreneurs with both technical and business-related competencies to thrive in the digital economy. This finding shown in Figure 9.

A summary of these preferences is presented in Figure 8 and Figure 9, which visualizes the distribution of desired support services among respondents. Overall, the study highlights a growing interest in online entrepreneurship among students, driven by the potential for income generation and skill development. With adequate institutional support through training, marketing guidance, and infrastructure, student-led digital businesses could evolve into more sustainable and impactful ventures.

## Support

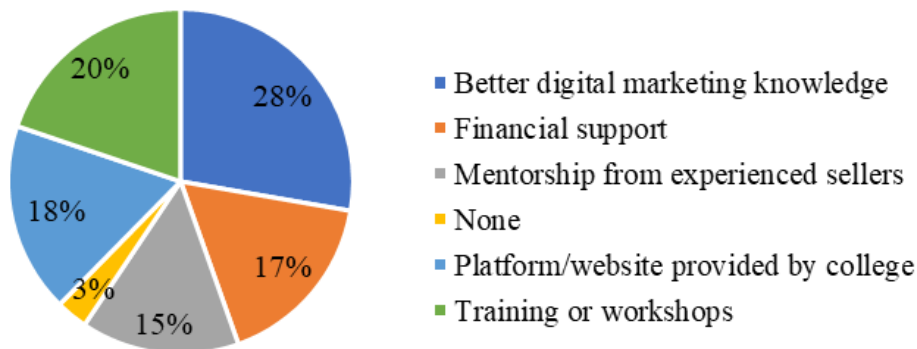


Fig. 9. Support need to improve online selling

## 5. Conclusion

This study presents compelling evidence of a growing entrepreneurial mindset among diploma students at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) Batu Pahat, particularly in the digital marketplace. With 29% of respondents reporting experience in online selling, the data indicate that e-commerce has growing to become an accessible and attractive income-generating activity for students [6]. The preference for platforms such as Facebook Marketplace, Shopee, TikTok Shop, and Instagram reflects current youth engagement trends and the appeal of low-barrier digital entry points [28,29].

The findings also show that homemade food/snack, fashion and gadget and phone accessories are the most popular product categories, chosen for their demand and profit potential. However, student entrepreneurship remains casual in nature often constrained by competition, time management between study and work, marketing, delivery issues, and with full-time sellers [30]. Income levels remain modest, with most students (47%) earning between RM50.00 to RM150.00 monthly, reinforcing the role of e-commerce as a supplementary income stream rather than a primary livelihood.

Despite these limitations, students demonstrated a strong desire to continue their entrepreneurial efforts. Only 9% of students has no intention to continue sales. Other are willing to continue. The survey results highlight a clear need for institutional support in the form of digital marketing knowledge, training or workshop, platform or website support provided by the college, financial assistance and mentorship from experienced sellers. Addressing these needs could transform student-led e-commerce from ad hoc side ventures into structured, skill-building economic activities that align with national digital economy goals [9]. These insights emphasize the importance of educational institutions taking a more active role in nurturing student entrepreneurship by integrating relevant support systems and curriculum components aimed at sustainable digital business development.

## Acknowledgement

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