Exploring Jahut's Views on Using ICT for the Preservation of Cultural Identity in Pahang, Malaysia

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Abstract
This paper aims to explore the views of the Jahut community towards Information and Communication Technology (ICT) adoption in preserving their cultural identity. Despite their substantial contribution to the diversity of human culture and knowledge, the Orang Asli communities persist in experiencing marginalization and the erosion of their traditional lifestyles. This study employed a qualitative approach, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven members of the Jahut community from Pahang, Malaysia. The findings indicated that the Jahut informants hold positive views towards the adoption of ICT for cultural identity preservation. However, the findings also revealed that the concerns of the Jahut informants about the potential misuse of technologies, which could accelerate the loss of indigenous languages, customs, and knowledge. By addressing the importance of incorporating the views of the Jahut community, this study sheds light on the significance of ICT adoption for preserving their unique cultural identity in the face of rapid digital transformations.
Keywords: Cultural Identity, Diversity, ICT, Jahut, Preservation.

Introduction
The concept of cultural identity encompasses a diverse array of components, such as language, customs, religious beliefs, gender, and knowledge systems, and holds significant importance for the social, economic, and political welfare of indigenous societies (Chiriboga, 2006; Fiedeldey-Van Dijk, 2019; Hall, 1990). The preservation of cultural identity among indigenous communities is a multifaceted and intricate process that is closely linked to their histories, traditions, and ways of life (Ford et al., 2020). Globalization has led to the extensive dissemination of Western culture, thereby leading to the incorporation of Western values and technologies into indigenous communities (Resta, 2011). As a result, the emergence of new

practices and habits has resulted in frequent clashes with pre-existing indigenous norms and values (Chisa & Hoskins, 2014; Mustafa, 2006). The acceleration of modernization has brought about modifications to the indigenous lifestyle, which has resulted in the disappearance of traditional practices and knowledge that are vital to the cultural uniqueness of indigenous minorities (Aswani et al., 2018; Doyle, 2021).

In the contemporary age of technological advancements and widespread connectivity, the integration of indigenous communities into the digital realm is an unavoidable reality (Bala et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). The advent of ICT has become a crucial element for the whole society across various domains in the contemporary era of information (Ciurea et al., 2020). The ubiquitous integration of ICT in nearly all aspects of human life has resulted in noteworthy transformations in interpersonal interactions and communication (United Nations, 2020; Wibawa et al., 2022). It is widely accepted that information and knowledge have a significant role to play in empowering indigenous communities from a socio-economic standpoint (Allred et al., 2022; Lyndon et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the potential influence of ICT in facilitating access to information and its dissemination within these communities has become a subject of debate (Ekeanyanwu, 2022; Khong et al., 2021). Advocates of ICT have adopted a sanguine perspective, emphasizing the beneficial impacts of ICT in generating novel economic, social, and political prospects for underprivileged communities within the worldwide community (Palvia et al., 2018). However, critics hold a negative perspective, contending that the utilization of ICT will primarily benefit the privileged segments of society while failing to reach those who are economically and socially marginalized, which could exacerbate existing socioeconomic divides and give rise to additional layers of inequalities (Grace et al., 2004; United Nations, 2020; World Bank, 2016).

The indigenous minority groups in Malaysia, such as the Orang Asli communities, are not exempt from experiencing the threat of losing their cultural identity in the wave of modernization (Abd-Ghani & Lah, 2015; Adam & Yusop, 2020; Lambin et al., 2018). This is evident when the loss of land has a profound impact on indigenous cultural identity, which contribute to the disappearance of traditional customs, languages, and cultural practices (Bala et al., 2020; Masron et al., 2013). The preservation of Orang Asli cultural identity faces increased challenges as a result of assimilation policies and limited support from the respective authorities (Gomes, 2004; Masron et al., 2013; Nah, 2008; Nicholas et al., 2010).

The Jahut community, situated within the geographical boundaries of Malaysia, represents a distinctive sub-ethnic group among the Orang Asli communities. The population of the Jahut community is estimated to be around 6,383 individuals, predominantly concentrated within the Temerloh and Jerantut districts of Pahang, Malaysia (JAKOA, 2020). The Jahut community can be considered relatively obscure in its recognition by the outside world (Diffloth, 1976). According to Linehan (1973), it is postulated that the Jahut community traces its origins back to Pagar Ruyung. In the past, it was observed that the Jahut community engaged in a nomadic lifestyle. However, in the present era, they have transitioned to a more settled existence, residing in villages located on the periphery of the Krau River in Pahang (Couillard, 1980). Besides the national language, *Bahasa Malaysia*, the language spoken by the Jahut community is commonly referred to as the "Jahut language," constituting a constituent of the Mon-Khmer language, which in turn represents a derivative of the Austro-Asian language family. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that the Jahut language, despite its significance, has regrettably not been documented in written form nor comprehensively

described. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the compilation of lexical items in word lists pertaining to this language is estimated to be rather limited, with a conservative estimate suggesting that the total number of entries does not surpass two hundred (Diffloth, 1976). The Jahut community demonstrates a propensity for adopting animism, a belief system that posits the existence of guardians for novel locations and peculiar entities, such as rocks, caves, and trees (Adam & Yusop, 2020). The Jahut community partakes in a ceremonial practice of male circumcision, which is performed on individuals who have reached the stage of puberty, often occurring within the age range of 12 to 13 years. Some villages within the Jahut tribe still employ conventional techniques during the circumcision procedures (Adam & Yusop, 2020).

The Jahut community has embraced modernity in recent decades and has been extensively exposed to various mass media (Adam et al., 2018; Teoh, 1986). Although the Jahut children have grown up with knowledge of their traditions, these traditions are fast disappearing (Ghani et al., 2020; Teoh, 1986). Consequently, the preservation of the Jahut community's cultural identity is at risk. Recognizing the pressing nature of the matter, this study aims to explore Jahut's views on the adoption of ICT as a potential tool for cultural identity preservation. By examining the views of the Jahut community towards ICT, this study aims to shed light on the viability and effectiveness of utilizing modern technology to safeguard their unique traditions and heritage.

Methodology

A qualitative case study approach was employed to explore Jahut's views on the ICT adoption for the preservation of cultural identity. The inclusion criteria were: (i) Jahut members residing in Kuala Krau, Pahang, ii) possess or experience in using the ICT. The study involved a total of eleven informants (six males and five females) who aged 16 to 62 years old, were selected using the purposive sampling technique, ensuring that individuals with relevant knowledge and experience were included. To gather data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the informants, allowing for in-depth exploration of their views and insights. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy during the analysis phase. Thematic analysis was employed to organize and interpret the extensive dataset of the study. The researcher conducted a comprehensive analysis of the transcripts, reviewing them numerous times to familiarize with the data. A coding procedure was utilized to extract salient statements from the interview transcripts during the analysis. The codes were subsequently organized to establish the main themes. The analysis continued until data saturation was achieved, indicating that no new significant themes were emerging from the collected data. This rigorous process ensured a comprehensive exploration of the informants' views and provided valuable insights into the potential benefits and challenges of adopting ICT for preserving cultural identity within the Jahut community.

Ethical Consideration

This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee for Research involving Human Subject Universiti Putra Malaysia and the Department of Orang Asli Development Malaysia. Prior to gathering any data, every source was given an overview of the study's objectives and methodology through an information sheet. The information sheet stressed that involvement in the study was entirely voluntary, while outlining the measures taken to safeguard confidentiality. A consent form was provided alongside the information sheet and signed by the informants.

Findings

Indigenous communities around the world face unique challenges when it comes to preserving their cultural identities in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world (Kaul, 2012). As ICT become more prevalent, questions arise about their compatibility with traditional cultural practices and the preservation of indigenous knowledge (Gill et al., 2016). While some view adoption of ICT as a potential threat to cultural identity, others see it as a tool for cultural revitalization (Ekeanyanwu, 2010; Resta, 2011). Understanding the diverse views and experiences of indigenous people towards the adoption of ICT is crucial for promoting culturally sensitive technology development and ensuring the preservation of indigenous knowledge and traditions (Zort et al., 2023). Three main themes emerged from the data: (1) ICT facilitating cultural exchange and access, (ii) cultural misrepresentation in ICT, and (3) challenges in using ICT for cultural learning and transmission.

ICT Facilitating Cultural Exchange and Access

The advent of digital technologies presents an opportunity to enable and facilitate the development of indigenous communities' culturally appropriate educational resources and environments (Watson, 2013). The use of digital technologies can enable indigenous communities to document and preserve their traditional knowledge, languages, and practices in a more efficient and accessible way (Azubuike & Aji, 2021). ICT can also provide a platform for cultural exchange and collaboration between different indigenous communities, as well as with the wider global community (Adeeko et al., 2022; Grace et al., 2004). Nonetheless, the degree to which ICT might be successfully utilized would depend on how the indigenous groups views the advantages of ICT (Ashraf et al., 2015; Li et al., 2021).

Most of the informants viewed that ICT are useful in storing the cultural information which is important to maintain the cultural identity of the Jahut community, as expressed by one informant, "It is easier because it's permanent... if it's verbal like from one person to another it's like... the story will change little by little..." (Ema, female). Based on personal experience, another informant commented, "The important thing is multimedia... very, very important... when we have an event, we post it to other friends... that thing will remain... we will see...wow, we do this and that... we see that thing... ICT is very necessary and very important to maintain cultural identity..." (Ney, male). Ney reaffirmed, "ICT is very necessary... to inform practices, culture, customs through ICT... it is very, very necessary... if there is no ICT, it is difficult for us to go from house to house... it's far... if there is ICT, all of them just a fingertip... faster..." (Ney, male).

Another informant highlighted that ICT is regarded as a means of not just learning about one's own culture, but also of gaining insight into the practices and beliefs of people from diverse backgrounds, "For me it is very important... I mean apart from learning one's culture through face-to-face, information like this is also very necessary for us to understand the culture... it doesn't matter if it is our own culture or the culture of other races... at least we can get some information or sharing from all races... that's what I think it is very necessary..." (Lus, male).

Cultural Misrepresentation in ICT

The proliferation of ICT poses a potential threat to the preservation of indigenous communities' languages, customs, and knowledge, if not appropriately regulated (Resta, 2011). Certain informants exhibited doubt regarding the potential of ICT to be effectively employed in the preservation of cultural identity. Several informants conveyed

apprehensions about the genuineness of the Jahut culture as depicted through ICT. These concerns can be observed in some informants, "I'm definitely encourage it... but my concern is if it becomes a mistake... for example, the real culture of Jahut is like this, but what it is being showed is like that... that's what we're worried about..." (Yus, male). This is echoed by another informant, "Sometimes there are something in the video that makes other people confused... for example, in my video about Jahut circumcision, the *mudim* wear a *songkok*... maybe some people will question, that is not Orang Asli... Orang Asli don't wear like this... in the old days they already wore it... not just the *mudim*, some old people will also wear *songkok* too... It's just that nowadays it is not practiced..." (Dini, male).

Challenges in Using ICT for Cultural Learning and Transmission
One informant raised his concern about the effectiveness of preserving the Jahut culture using ICT, noting that there is still a dearth of Jahut culture-related information, "What I stress about learning culture with ICT is the limited information... for example, about Jahut culture right, if it's about funerals... about circumcision event... medical treatment... it's kind of incomplete... it's just explanation... it doesn't have full information... just brief..." (Izad, male). Another informant explained, "For me, it's not enough... but for the younger generation, it is a starting point... a good start for them to understand the culture, right... but overall, in terms of depth, it's lacking..." (Lus, male). When asked about their views on learning Jahut culture facilitated by ICT, some informants highlighted that despite the advancements in technology, they still maintain a preference for the traditional face-to-face learning approach.

> "It depends on the individual to understand... I think through verbally it's easier... because we see what they do... if ICT, we just watch the video, so we don't see what we should be doing... for example if ICT it just explains... it's like not so real..." (Izad, male)
> "As for me, it's more to face-to-face... because if we go through this mobile phone, we can't go deep... we know it's like this, that's all... it's just surface level... for example, what we see, that's it... but for deeper meaning, we don't know..." (Lus, male)

The informants were asked about their views on whether the adoption of ICT conflicted with the values held by the Jahut community, and they expressed their viewpoints.

> "No... no... there is absolutely no... customs is custom, culture is culture, ICT is ICT... it has its platform... it will not influence any..." (Ney, male)
> "No... the important thing is not to misuse it..." (Jar, female)
> "No... actually ICT does not have a bad influence on Jahut... what I see, is the awareness..." (Dini, male)

Meanwhile, another informant share his views, "I think this is more about the things that we have to keep secret... so it's up to us whether we want to disclose it or not... if we disclose that secret thing, then it will be a contradiction... if we don't disclose it, for me that is not a problem... for example, there are traditional medicines that some people won't disclose... because later people will go find them and commercialize them... and make that as his knowledge and copyrights..." (Yus, male).

Discussion

Indigenous knowledge is susceptible to fast change since it is mostly kept in people's minds without being properly documented and conveyed orally from generation to generation (Azubuike & Aji, 2021; Cunha et al., 2019). In response to this challenge, the utilization of ICT has emerged as a pivotal instrument in the preservation of indigenous cultures (Renganathan & Kral, 2018; Resta, 2011). The findings of this study demonstrated the importance of ICT in preserving the Jahut culture through digitization of cultural information that can secure its durability and consistency. The reason for this is that the inclusion of ICT features contributes to enhancing the accuracy and reliability of cultural information. Oral transmission, while valuable, may inadvertently lead to omissions or missing details, resulting in different interpretations and practices of the same customs. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the introduction of new technologies may challenge traditional cultural practices and beliefs (Combi, 2016). Indigenous communities, such as the Jahut community, may need to negotiate their sense of identity as they incorporate these technologies into their daily lives (Campbell & Evolvi, 2019). The assertion underscores the perceived benefits of ICT with regards to its durability and capacity to uphold the accuracy of the conveyed data, in contrast to oral conveyance, which could be susceptible to alterations or misrepresentations over time. Dlamini (2020) argued that the advent of ICT seems to offer a potential remedy in averting the imminent demise of indigenous knowledge.

The increasing prevalence of digital technology for documenting and archiving cultural artefacts, along with the immense worth of these assets, highlights the critical importance of safeguarding the cultural information for future generations (Boboc et al., 2022). Due to the improving processing power and decreasing cost of archival media, digital preservation gradually replaces physical preservation as the preferred method of keeping important data accessible for future generations (Syah et al., 2017).

In the context of the Jahut community, the informants in this study emphasized the essential role of ICT in dissemination of information on Jahut customs, traditions, and cultural practices. It eliminates the arduous task of physically traveling from house to house due to long distances. With ICT, cultural information becomes readily accessible with just a fingertip, enabling the Jahut communities to communicate and connect regardless of geographical barriers. ICT provides indigenous communities with digital platforms such as social media, online forums, and instant messaging apps that enable them to communicate with each other and overcome geographical and time constraints (Guccio et al., 2016; Rice et al., 2016). Intangible cultural heritage can indeed be documented, transmitted, and revitalized via digital technologies (Dlamini & Ocholla, 2018; UNESCO, 2020). The findings showed that the Jahut community values the need to balance modern technology with traditional practices to preserve their cultural identity. They believe that the adoption of ICT should not compromise traditional cultural practices.

The informants of the study indicated that information accessed via ICT is crucial for the Jahut community to learn the culture, complementing the in-person cultural education they have received, whether it be their own culture or the culture of another race. This means that people of all backgrounds are open to sharing and receiving cultural information. In many cases, digitizing data facilitates long-term storage, easy retrieval, widespread dissemination, and secure protection of a community's historical records (Alivizatou-Barakou et al., 2017). If a historical document is digitized, it can be made available to people globally, rather than only

those who can travel to a certain area to view it in person (Plockey, 2014). Despite the concerns that ICT may not be capable of conveying the deeper meaning of Jahut culture, the informants of the study acknowledged that ICT can be a useful beginning point for attracting the younger generation to learn their culture.

The recommendation for the adoption of ICT stems from the belief that multimedia plays a vital role in the storage and dissemination of cultural information within social circles (Ashraf et al., 2015; Taylor, 2012). The significance of storing information lies in its potential to function as a keepsake and a resource for future consultation, thereby playing a crucial role in safeguarding the cultural heritage of a particular community (Khan et al., 2018; Zoannos et al., 2023). The provided explanation posits that the integration of ICT is perceived as distinct from the prevailing values within the community. The interviewed informants argued that ICT is not inherently contradictory to the principles of the community but emphasized the need for caution to prevent its misuse. Likewise, the informants underscored the importance of awareness in order to fully harness the potential of ICT, while acknowledging that it does not inherently yield negative consequences. These perspectives suggest that the Jahut informants do not view ICT as contradictory to their values and are open to its utilization. This is in line with a study by Fang et al (2022) who found that despite facing limitations in resources, the indigenous communities exhibited a receptive and enthusiastic attitude towards the adoption of ICT to facilitate their daily activities. Hence, the fallacy that indigenous populations exhibit resistance towards change and advancement is considered unsubstantiated.

According to the informants' response, the adoption of ICT for preserving cultural identity is seen as not conflicting with the values of Jahut community. However, it was acknowledged that other members of the Jahut community may have reservations about this change. This hesitation stems from concerns that outsiders may copyright their culturally significant information, which they consider to be a closely guarded secret. Previous studies have highlighted the negative consequences of unjustified commercial exploitation of traditional cultural expressions by intermediaries who have no affiliation with the rightful owners (Ismail & Azmi, 2015). This exploitation deprives indigenous people, the rightful custodians of these expressions, from reaping fair economic benefits from their resources without their consent (Adeeko et al., 2022).

The findings demonstrated a paradox that the Jahut community members may encounter. The Jahut informants in this study expressed great interest in the latest technological developments and were optimistic that they would assist in safeguarding the Jahut cultural heritage. However, the informants also expressed their apprehension that the ICT could be exploited and distort the authentic Jahut culture. Misrepresentations can occur when inaccurate narratives or visuals are shared online, leading to confusion among viewers. For instance, the *mudim* (traditional circumciser) wearing a *songkok* (a round, flat cap that commonly worn by Muslim men, often comes in black or dark colours, which is an important item of traditional dress and commonly worn during religious and formal occasions) in videos may be misinterpreted, as it is not typical of Orang Asli attire. However, the informants explain that in the past, both the *mudim* and some older individuals, despite not being Muslims, wore songkoks. Therefore, accurate representation is crucial to ensure a proper understanding of the Jahut identity. ICT features that facilitate, amplify, expedite, or provide a platform or medium for these interactions, have significantly contributed to ICT's increased role in generating identity threats (Macharia, 2018).

The availability of cultural resources online is also highlighted as an area that requires improvement. The informants familiar with Jahut customs express that the existing online resources provide only a cursory explanation, lacking in detail, particularly concerning topics such as funerals, circumcision events, and medical treatment. The informants' excerpts indicated that there is variation in individuals' comprehension abilities. Verbal communication is commonly perceived as a comparatively straightforward mode of interaction, primarily due to its capacity to enable community members to observe the actions and behaviors of others. ICT is commonly regarded as primarily serving an explanatory function rather than offering an authentic experience (Nikonova & Biryukova, 2017). This raises concerns regarding the efficacy of ICT in promoting active engagement and fostering meaningful learning experiences. The utilization of electronic methods for cultural learning, such as online platforms or virtual experiences, can pose difficulties in achieving a complete immersion in the complexities and subtleties of a specific Jahut culture. This is because the absence of physical presence and sensory engagement is considered to impede the attainment of a comprehensive comprehension and appreciation of the Jahut culture.

Therefore, it is important for indigenous communities to play a primary role in determining and sharing their digital culture, to fully utilize technology's potential to reinforce and preserve both tangible and intangible aspects of their cultural heritage (Adeeko et al., 2022; Goulding et al., 2020). The adoption of ICT for preserving cultural identity among the Jahut community is not inherently conflicting with their values. However, cautious implementation and protection of indigenous rights are essential. Addressing concerns about exploitation, striving for accurate representation, and empowering communities to actively shape their digital culture will enhance the preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge for future generations.

Conclusion
In summary, this study underscores the noteworthy contribution of ICT in the preservation of the cultural identity of indigenous communities, with a particular focus on the Jahut community. The findings of the study emphasize the significance of digitizing cultural information in order to guarantee its long-lasting preservation, uniformity, and precision. Although oral transmission possesses inherent merits, it is susceptible to the potential drawbacks of omitting crucial information and allowing for subjective interpretations that may deviate from the original customs. The integration of ICT into the daily lives of indigenous communities necessitates a delicate negotiation of their cultural identity, as they strive to strike a balance between embracing modern technological advancements and preserving their traditional practices. The implementation of ICT offers indigenous communities access to digital platforms that surpass geographical limitations, thereby enabling enhanced communication and the exchange of knowledge. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge and address the apprehensions surrounding the exploitation and misrepresentation of cultural knowledge facilitated by ICT. This study is essential as it underscores the importance of exercising caution, fostering awareness, and granting indigenous communities the authority to govern their digital cultural heritage. Hence, it is crucial for the respective authorities to offer consistent training and technical assistance in utilizing ICT to safeguard the indigenous culture, capturing elements like language, rituals, dances, and more. This will enable the younger generation to acquire and understand their cultural heritage. It is hoped that through active engagement in the process of shaping and disseminating their digital heritage, indigenous communities can effectively harness the

capabilities of technology to strengthen and safeguard both tangible and intangible facets of their cultural identity, which will be valuable for assessing National Culture Policy. This endeavour guarantees the perpetuation of indigenous knowledge for forthcoming generations.

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