

## Understanding the entrepreneurs in the night market business

Nor Khomar Ishak  
University of Management and Technology

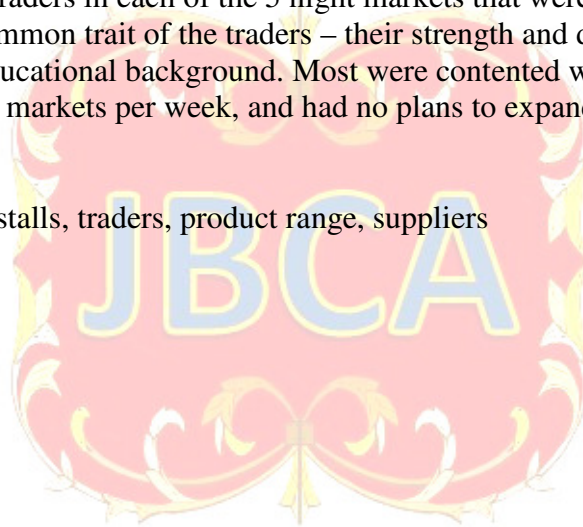
Rohaizah Abdul Latif  
University of Management and Technology

Khursiah Abdul Aziz  
University of Management and Technology

### ABSTRACT

The future growth of the Malaysian economy depends, to a large extent, on the development of entrepreneurs with the ability to develop creative homegrown products. This case examined at least 4 traders in each of the 5 night markets that were investigated. The findings indicated one common trait of the traders – their strength and determination to succeed in spite of the minimal educational background. Most were contented with their business, operating in several night markets per week, and had no plans to expand them to retail outlets with fixed location.

**Keyword:** night market, stalls, traders, product range, suppliers



## INTRODUCTION

One way to strengthen the Malaysian economy is through entrepreneurial development and to create entrepreneurs with the ability to develop creative homegrown product concepts. These budding small retail entrepreneurs' and petty traders' contributions to the nation's informal economy should be recognized and be supported, among others, in the form of financial aids and skill training. According to the Bernama.com, the Malaysian National News Agency report on Business on March 31, 2006; in the Ninth Malaysia Plan, the Bumiputera Entrepreneur in the field of Retailing or, in short, the PROSPER (Projek Usahawan Bumiputera Dalam Bidang Peruncitan) programme was expanded in order to nurture 1,250 new entrepreneurs, as an effort to increase bumiputera participation. The report also added that the Training programmes on the management of modern businesses, especially for small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs), would be intensified to enable them to undertake and implement new approaches in wholesale and retail activities. According to the New Straits Times of August 30<sup>th</sup>. 2008, "the government has introduced various measures to help increase disposable income to mitigate the impact of the higher cost of living, thus demonstrating that it is a caring government ..... enhancing training and skills programmes is a timely move by the government to attract more locals into the industry and avoid being too dependent on foreign labour". For smaller traditional enterprises such as those operating, food courts, farmers markets (*pasar tani*) and night markets (*pasar malam*) the government agency responsible would identify strategic locations. Mohamed Arif, the Executive Director and Shanker Nambiar, Research Fellow of the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research, Malaysia, in their report stated that a pivotal element that makes it possible for entrepreneurship to succeed is the ability to gain access to markets and to develop those markets. They added that the small-scale enterprises and micro-enterprises have far fewer resources at their disposal than do larger companies. The Ministry of Entrepreneur Development which were fully aware of this constraint, had directed its attention to the smaller enterprises through a two-prong efforts: enabling entrepreneurs to obtain the resources (financial and non-financial) they required, and building social capital.

There was a sense of urgency for Malaysia to encourage entrepreneurial development and to intensify the entrepreneurial activities. This was to ensure the future success of Malaysia's regional industry's competitiveness. These petty individual entrepreneurs, in a few years, would formed the backbone of the nation's retail and wholesale business owners since they would have by then, acquired the learning curve required to compete on a regional, if not at a global level.

## PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This case study examined the traders in 5 night markets in Kuala Selangor in order to understand their roles, characteristics, motivations and contributions towards the night markets' dynamism and to investigate the depth of their involvement in the night market business.. Night Market traders were defined as small, petty traders, who participated in the night market selling activities, either as a full time job, or as a side job to supplement their income, or for the purposes of learning business skills.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The case study research design was adopted to identify the entrepreneurial characteristics, and to identify the skills, and the determination of the entrepreneurs to ensure the success in the night market business. This included an investigation of the entrepreneur's family background, the relationships with suppliers and customers, and among other traders. Five night markets in Kuala Selangor were investigated and at least 4 traders were interviewed in-depth to understand the roles, characteristics, motivations and contributions. These interviews were conducted on-site, guided by a semi-structured questionnaire. Observations were also made while they were conducting their business to see how they interact with their customers and with each other. These data collection were carried out twice for each night market with the total time spent of about 8 hours for each period at each night market. Follow-up telephone interviews were also conducted for some respondents in order to get more information.

## FINDINGS

### Overview of the Night Markets, the Traders and the Range Of Products

There were a total of 363 traders in the 5 night markets. Tanjung Karang had the most traders with 109, followed by Bandar Baru with 72, Bestari Jaya with 71, Ijok with 66, and Pasir Panjang with only 45 traders. Most of the traders in all the 5 night markets were Malays; with the highest percent in of 93% in Ijok, followed by Tanjung Karang at 84%. The other night markets had a Malay majority trader that ranged between 65% to 76%. Thus, the Malay traders account for 78.5% in all the night markets studied, followed by 16.8% Chinese traders and 4.7% Indian traders. This finding was not surprising since the majority of the population in the 5 areas were also Malays. The following table showed the breakdown of traders by ethnic group in each of the night market.

**TABLE 1. Ethnic Breakdown of Traders**

Ethnic Background	BANDAR BARU		BESTARI JAYA		IJOK		TANJUNG KARANG		PASIR PANJANG	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Malay	55	76	53	75	43	65	92	84	42	93
Chinese	15	21	11	15	20	30	12	11	3	7
Indian	2	3	7	10	3	5	5	5	0	0
Others										
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>

There were 712 total stall lots in the 5 night market with 74 or 10% vacant stall lots. Thus, the overall number occupied stall lots 638 stalls. The Bandar Baru night market had the highest percentage (30%) of vacant stall lots. There were 363 total night market traders therefore; the ratio of stall lots per trader was approximately 2 stall lots per trader.

The products offered for sale at the night markets could be classified into the following group: (1) Cooked Food, (2) Beverages, (3) Meat – chicken and beef, (4) Fish and Seafood, (5) Vegetables, (6) Fruits, (7) Dry Goods , Groceries and Eggs, (8) Clothes, (9) Accessories –

watches, hand phone, books and toys, (10) Household goods, and (11) Others/Miscellaneous. As indicated in the following table, of the total 363 traders, 178 or 49% offered cooked food in a total of 242 stall lots. The ratio of stall lots to traders for Cooked Food was approximately 1.35 stalls to 1 trader. The number of Clothes and Accessories traders was 39 each, with Clothes traders occupying 93 stalls, and Accessories traders occupying 91 stalls. Both occupied 28% of the night markets stall lot space. Each trader therefore, on average occupied 2.4 stall lots. The third highest number of traders was the vegetable traders who represented 6% of total traders and they occupied 22 stall lots. These vegetable traders occupied 56 stalls or 8.6% of the total number of stalls. Each vegetable trader, on average occupied 2.5 stalls.

The Beverage/Drink traders totaled 15 or 4% of the total number of traders. Each trader occupied about 1.7 stall lots. The 14 fruit traders occupied about 2.3 stall lots per trader. Twelve traders offered dry goods, groceries and/or eggs, and they occupied 34 stall lots, thus accounting for the ratio of 2.8 stalls per trader. The fish and seafood traders and the household goods traders accounted for 23 and 18 stall lots respectively. Thus, the dry goods, groceries and/or eggs traders, on average occupied the highest ratio of stall to trader at 2.8 stall lots per trader, followed by the vegetable traders with 2.5 stall lots per trader. The clothes and accessories traders had a ratio of 2.4 stall lots per trader. This was followed by the fruits and fish and seafood traders with 2.3 and 2.1 stall lots per trader. The least space per trader was the cooked food traders with only 1.3 stall lots per trader. The following table showed the breakdown of trader types, the number of stall lots occupied and the percent of stalls occupied by each trader type for the 5 night markets.

**TABLE 2. Traders and Products**

PRODUCTS BREAKDOWN	BANDAR BARU			BESTARI JAYA			IJOK		
	Trade r Type	No. of Lots	%	Trade r Type	No. of Lots	%	Trade r Type	No. of Lots	%
Cooked Food	35	52	36	28	39	34	41	54	51
Beverages				5	9	8	1	2	2
Meat – chicken, beef	1	2	1	3	6	5	2	3	3
Fish and Seafood	2	4	3	4	8	7			
Vegetables	4	9	6	3	6	5	6	14	14
Fruits	4	11	8	3	5	4	2	5	5
Dry Goods , Groceries, Eggs	4	14	10				2	6	6
Clothing	11	26	18	11	17	14	2	5	5
Accessories – watches, handphone, books, toys	9	22	16	10	17	14	4	8	8
Household goods	1	3	2	2	7	6	6	6	6
Others/ Miscellaneous				2	4	3			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

PRODUCTS BREAKDOWN	TANJUNG KARANG			PASIR PANJANG		
	Trade r Type	No. of Lots	%	Trade r Type	No. of Lots	%
Cooked Food	49	68	33	25	29	41
Beverages	6	10	5	3	4	6
Meat – chicken, beef	3	6	3	-	-	-
Fish and Seafood	3	6	3	2	5	7
Vegetables	6	18	8	3	9	12
Fruits	1	2	1	4	9	12
Dry Goods , Groceries, Eggs	6	14	6	-	-	-
Clothing	12	34	16	3	8	11
Accessories – watches, handphone, books, toys	14	39	19	2	5	7
Household goods	1	2	1	-	-	-
Others/ Miscellaneous	8	10	5	3	3	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100</b>

## Overview of Each Night Market and the Traders

### (1) Bandar Baru Night Market

Bandar Baru Night Market was located along Jalan Pendidikan and it extended about 400 meters in length, running parallel to the main North-South trunk road. It operated on Friday from 3:30pm to 10:00 pm. The area was surrounded by single-storey and double-storey terrace houses on both sides of the road. At one end, there was a school; while at the other end was the Telekom and the Magistrate Court House buildings. The stall lots totaled 204 and formed an I-shaped, with two rows of stalls on each side of Jalan Pendidikan. However, on the day of the study, 61 stalls were vacant. This was due to the upcoming long weekend holiday, and some traders had chosen not to do business. Trends had indicated that there would be few customers on such a day.

A total of 72 traders occupied 143 stall lots in the Bandar Baru night market. The dry good traders had, on average, 3.5 stall lots per trader. The household good traders occupied 3 stall lots each, and the fruits traders had on average, 2.8 stall lot spaces. The estimated total earnings for all the traders combined for the night market was RM15,000. That would mean that on average, a trader could earn about RM205.

An in-depth interviewed was directed at 4 traders to get an insight on the traders' behavior and profiles. All the 4 traders interviewed were Malays, ranging in age from 24 to 51 years old. The



first trader interviewed was Mr. Rabani bin Bustam. Prior to becoming a night market trader, he worked as a contractor in Tanjung Karang. He had 3 children, with 2 still studying at the primary school level. He quitted his contractor job to be his own boss. He knew that he could earn more by running business at night market. He had experimented various ways of making satay and ayam percik during his off days then. After getting rave reviews from his friends and family members on the taste of the two dishes and with his wife's encouragement, he applied for and was granted night stall operation permit by the local authority, the Kuala Selangor Town Council. He was required to attend a day course on food sanitation and hygiene organized by the local authority. Later on, Mr. Rubani expanded his business and operated in 4 other night markets (Bukit Rotan, Sg. Sirih, Bestari Jaya, and Tanjung Karang) during a week. He took a break from business every Monday. On other days he would be busy collecting the raw materials from the Supplier in Tanjung Karang Market and preparing the satay and ayam percik. He had 4 suppliers who would deliver all his orders to his home also in Tanjung Karang. Thus far, he had maintained good working relationships with the suppliers, and they did provide good discounts for bulk purchase. Mr. Rubani modestly indicated that he earned about RM1,000 revenue a night, and his profit was about 50%. On a good day with good weather, he could earned 20% higher.

Mr. Rubani would usually arrive at the night market at 3 pm. It would take him and his family about 15 minutes to set up the barbeque pits and the other necessary items. He drove to the night market in a van from his home located about 20 minutes away. When he first started, he offered only satay and ayam percik, but since then, he had included fish balls and chicken balls. To supplement his income, he would also do catering services with his satay business. He would go to the customer's requested location for the catering business on days when he did not have any night market business.

The second trader interviewed was Madam Marini binti Ismail. She had five children, four girls and one boy, and all were still schooling at either the primary or secondary schools. Her husband was a fireman whose fire station was based in Kuala Selangor. Mdm. Marini worked as a school clerk in Ijok during the day, where she earned a salary of RM1,700 per month. She started her night market business 3 years ago offering hijab/headscaves and blouses for sale. She had started the business with RM1500. She was helped by her daughter. The night market was located about 30 minutes drive from her home in Taman Melawati. She also ran her business 3 other locations - Bukit Belimbing, Paya Jaras, and Pantai Remis, all in the Kuala Selangor district. She purchased her supplies from the Persona Boutique located at Chow Kit Market in Kuala Lumpur. Initially, she had some problems with the supplier since she could not made sufficient income to get the supplies that she wanted, but now she had no difficulty paying for them. She could earned a profit of RM300 on nights when the weather was good and during school holidays. Other challenges that she faced were related to the customers' preference on the colour and style of headscaves and blouses. She would carefully noted the customers' requests and preference and would try to get them from the suppliers. She would give up to 15% discounts for quantity purchase and also if they are repeat customers.

The third trader interviewed was Mr. Azam, an enterprising 24-year old youngster. Upon completing his secondary education, he helped his family business at the night market selling meat. Other than working at night market, he reared cows for additional income. For this, he had built a cowshed behind his family house. He would get quite good return on selling his cows, especially during the Haj period when the Muslims wished to do korban/slaughtering for religious reason. He had been doing that and the night market business for the last 8 years. His family helped him at the night market. He also did business at two other night markets - Ijok and

Bukit Badung. Mr. Azam would usually arrived at the Bandar Baru night market at 3.30 pm. It would take him about 15 minute by truck from his house in Bukit Badung. He purchased the meat supply from Pasar Borong Selayang, twice a week. In Bandar Baru night market, Mr. Saiful could earned up to RM1,700 profits. In other markets, on a good day he would get a profit of RM1,400, but on an average night he would earned about RM1,000 per night. On his days off from the night market business, he would do odd jobs at the nearby plantations.

The fourth trader interviewed was Mr. Daud Zambri. He had 4 children, 2 were already workin, while the other two were in secondary school. Before venturing into the night market business, he was an army personnel based at the Port Dickson camp. He opted for optional retirement from the army and started the kebab business at the night market. He had learned kebab making from Chef Din cooking classes that he attended in Taman Melawati, Kuala Selangor. He paid RM280 per session for a 3-session class. He did some modification to the original kebab recipe until he felt that it would be good enough to sell. He also offered kebab for sale at 3 other night markets - Tanjung Karang on Sunday, Bukit Cherakah on Thursday, and Kapar on Friday). He had been doing that for 10 years, and he managed his kebab business without any helper. He purchased his supplies from Kuala Selangor Market. On his off days which were Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, he would spend time making the kebab sauce and marinating the beef and chicken meat. He started the business with RM2,500 which went towards buying the kebab machine which cost RM2,000. On an average night, he could earn RM200 profits, and he double that amount on a good day. He hoped to secure permits to start his kebab business at 2 additional night markets.

## **(2) Bestari Jaya Night Market**

Bestari Jaya Night Market was located at Jalan Bukit Badong, next to the main road to Ijok town. It was situated in the midst of the bustling town close to a heavy traffic intersection. Nearby was the Batang Berjuntai National Secondary School and a sprawling rubber glove factory. The night market operated on Saturdays from 2:30 pm to 10:00 pm. Within walking distance were the Taman Suria, Taman Seri Bestari and Taman Sentosa 2 residential areas. The night market was of medium size with 124 stall lots occupied and 6 vacant lots. The night market layout was an awkward P-shaped where customers would need to do some backtracking to cover all parts of the market.

There were 71 traders occupying 118 stall lots at the Bestari Jaya night market. Thus, on average, each trader occupied 1.7 stalls. The widest stall lot spaces occupied by a trader were the 2 traders selling household goods who occupied 3.5 stall lots each. The total estimated earnings of the night market per night was RM63,350 This meant that on average each trader earned RM537. There were 4 traders interviewed, 3 were Malays, and 1 was an Indian.

The first trader interviewed was Puan Noni who, in her 40's was working alongside her husband Mr. Jalal, selling ice cream and drinks. She and her husband started their night market business since 1993, thus they had over 17 years of experience making and selling ice cream and drinks. They came from Sekinchan and had 3 children. She had learned ice cream making at an IKS course that she had attended. For the beverages that they sell, they used reverse osmosis water which gave the distinctive taste to their beverage products. Their startup capital was RM6,000 mainly for the ice cream making machine, the beverage containers and other supplies. They had managed to generate an income of between RM700 and RM800 per night. Over the years, from their income, they had managed to acquire a van which they used for transporting the things

from their home to the night markets. They got their supplies from the Chow Kit market in Kuala Lumpur. Besides the night market in Bestari Jaya, they also operated at 3 other night market locations – Tanjung Karang, Sekinchan and Kuala Selangor. On average they earned monthly income of RM11,000.

The next person interviewed was Mr. Kassim who was in his late 60's. Together with his wife, they offered a type of fried dough called 'Kuih Cakoi'. He would mix the dough at their home in Kuala Selangor and would transport the dough in two large containers in his minivan. Upon arrival at their stall at the night market, he and his wife would light up the stove and placed a very large wok or 'kuali' that was half filled with cooking oil. He would set a table next to the stove, where he would knead and cut the dough into thin 6 inches long parts. When the oil had heated up, he would fry the dough, and the dough would be light and fluffy. As they turned golden brown, he would lift them up in strainers and placed them on a tray lined with greaseproof papers. Each Kuih Cakoi cost 50 sen. Mr. Kassim was a member of the Royal Malaysian Navy until his retirement in 1990, where upon he set up the kuih cakor business for the simple reason, he loved Kuih Cakoi. Besides doing business at the Bestari Jaya night market, they also had a stall at the Bukit Rotan night market. He purchased his supplies from a mini market near his home. His food cost for a night amounted to about RM20 only, but he could generate as much as RM500 in revenue. Thus, for a month, he could earned about RM4,000. That, together with the monthly pension that he received, he and his wife had live comfortably.

The third trader interviewed was Mr. Zahir and at 26 years old, he was the youngest trader interviewed at that night market. He sold bundle clothes such as jeans, t-shirts, cotton and polyester shirts, blouses, socks and man's under garments. He had been doing that since 2005 and he planned to go on doing that. He was a cheerful and guy and he had managed to attract customers by his constant calling out to them to stop and had a look in his stall. He did not pressured sell, allowing the customers to browse through without closing in on them. He had this big budging small bag hanging from his waist from where he placed the collected cash and returned change to the customers. His customers were mainly teenagers or college students. His drove to the night market his minivan which he used for transportation from his home in Sekinchan. He had stall lots in three other night markets -Tanjung Karang, Sekinchan, and at the Shah Alam market near the stadium. He started the business with RM30,000 which he used mainly to buy stocks. On a good, clear night he could earn a profit of RM800, thus on average monthly, his net income would be about RM9,600.

The last person interviewed at Bestari Jaya night market was an Indian trader, Mr. Murthy who was 29 years old. He hailed from Taman Sinaran, a short distance from the night market site. He started the business in 2004 selling groceries and dry goods. He enjoyed working at the night market and this was the only night market that he participated in. During most days, his worked part time at a palm oil plantation which is also located in the town. He had started the night market business with his hard earned money of RM5,000 which he had saved for 10 years working fulltime at the same plantation. He could get RM1,200 a night. He would took off one day in a week to get his supplies from Pasar Borong Selayang, which was about an hour drive from his home.

### **(3) Ijok Night Market**

Ijok Night Market was located alongside the town only main road and near a busy intersection. At one end was the National Chinese Secondary School, a Petronas Gas Station, the



Main Bus Terminal, and at the other was the Caltex Station gas Station. The night market opened on Sundays from 1:30 noon to 7:30 pm. There were 103 stall lots in total and 7 were unoccupied at the time of the study. The stall lots formed a T-shaped with one elongated arm.

There were only 66 traders working in the 103 stall lots at this night market, thus making it the smallest of the 5 night market in the study. The majority of them, about 51%, offered cooked food. The first trader interviewed was Puan Som, a 50 years old lady, sold only one type of cooked food, the Ambeng Rice (Nasi Ambeng). Her stall was quite popular for there would be at least three customers waiting to get their Ambeng Rice. She had been selling Nasi Ambeng at Ijok and 2 other night markets (Bestari Jaya and Bukit Badung) for the past 3 years. Prior to that, she worked as a Kindergarten teacher for she had a diploma in preschool teaching. She could communicate well in both the English and Malay languages. She had learned to cook the special dish from her late mother. Her late mother had migrated here from the Java Island some 60 years ago. She had brought with her the special Ambeng Rice recipe and had been selling that to bring up her daughter, Puan Som. Puan Som decided to quit her teaching job so as to have more time bringing up her two children. She started the business with RM2,000 which was used mainly to buy a stove, a large cooking pot and the raw ingredients to make the Ambeng Rice. Initially she started selling only 150 packets a night. Currently, she could earned about RM1,500 per night and for a month she could make about RM18,000. She had almost 300 repeat customers and she could tell when teach one would arrive to buy the Nasi Ambeng. She would get her supplies for the Nasi Ambeng at any grovery stores in Ijok. On her off days from selling at another 3 night markets, she and her husband would operate a traditional massage and spa business from their home at Batu 26 in Ijok.

The next person approached for the interview was Mr. Zuhdi, a 26-year old guy who sold clothes. He home was Paya Jaras in Sungai Buluh about 15 kilometers away. He had been selling clothes in the night market for the past 5 years that was since he had completed his secondary education. He had decided not to continue his tertiary education, even though he had the opportunity to do the matriculation program at one of the public colleges, because he wanted to support his family who was very poor. He had two friends working with him initially, but now he worked on his own. He had always wanted to be his own boss because that gave him more freedom to select clothes that he thought customers would prefer. He had his sister, Hasimah working with him..He started on his own with a capital of RM4,000 and per night he could get between RM300-400 in net income. He could get on average of 100 customers per night. He had been toying with the idea of starting a restaurant business, but he had to wait until he had accumulated sufficient savings and also acquired some cooking skills. He had always admired his good friend who was a hotel chef who had been telling him about the interesting recipes that he had concocted.

Puan Sharifah and her husband were the next two people interviewed. They had been vegetable traders for the past 6 years at the Ijok night market. Before that, Puan Sharifah had a school canteen business, selling light meals and snacks to the primary school children. That was hard work, so she decided to start her night market business because she believed that she could earn more money with the same effort. She had selected to sell at Ijok night market because she had known a few friends who had been trading here and they had told her about the opportunities to make money here. She applied and was granted a perm by the Kuala Selangor authority, so she and her husband started the business with a RM7,000. After 3 years, she applied for another night market permit from the Shah Alam local council to get a stall at a Shah Alam night market. So now they were operating at two night markets. They travelled back and forth from their home

in Tanjung Karang. All their vegetable and fresh produce supplies were bought from farmers and markets in and around Tanjung Karang. On average, a night they could earned about RM400 from the Ijok night market and from the Shah Alam night market they could get RM1,000. Another trader interviewed was Mr. Munir bin Sofi who was in early 40's. He completed his secondary education about 20 years ago and had decided to go into business. He had started his business at the Ijok night market since 2002. Prior to the current business, he had been selling drinks and beverages. He had decided to look for something he could sell that could bring him more money. So he surveyed other night markets in Kuala Lumpur and Klang and he observed that the traders selling spring potatoes were getting a lot of customers. So he discontinued selling drinks and beverages and went into the spring potato business. He spent RM7,000 of his savings to buy the machine to make the spring potato. It was a very good decision because since then his income had almost doubled to RM1,000 per night from the average of 100 customers he received per night. This night market business was his only source of income. His unmarried elder sister helped him as the cashier. They both stayed at a terrace house in Ijok.

#### **(4) Tanjung Karang Night Market**

Tanjung Karang Night Market was located adjacent to the main North-South trunk road, amidst the busy town of Tanjung Karang. There were at least 5 rows of 3- and 4-storey shophouses around the night market. Within its vicinity was the Pilgrimage Board building, a children playground and a food court. This night market was unique since the local authority allowed the cooked food traders to set up dining areas in front of their stalls. There were a total of 209 stall lots and all were occupied. The stalls were arranged in 3 I-shaped formation. There were 109 traders with 209 stall lots at the Tanjung Karang night market. Therefore, the average stall space occupied by each trader was 1.9 stall. The vegetable traders occupied the most stall lot spaces with an average of 3 stall lots per trader. The night market generated an earning between RM53,650 and RM88,900, thus on average each trader earned an estimated RM492 to RM816.

There were 4 traders interviewed at the Tanjung Karang night market. The first trader interviewed was Mr. Zaini who, at 50 years old, was busy setting up his stall at about 3:30. He had his 4 children and two workers helping him pitching up the tents and laying out the tables. Mr. Zaini, who lived with his family Tanjung Karang, was the son of an Indonesian immigrant from Pekan Baru, Indonesia. His mother was a Malaysian from Selangor. His parents and grandparents had earned their living through the food business. They had developed their own special recipe for mini Pancake Turnover (Apam Balik) with a variety of fillings such as chocolate, 'Pulut Hitam' or 'Pandan' flavour. They had started the Pancake Turnover and Fish Sausage ('Keropok Lekor') business about 18 years ago after he quit his job at UMW Toyota Factory in Shah Alam. He had worked there for 10 years before he decided to do something that could earned him a better living. He and his wife decided to start a small business with the little savings that he had accumulated over the 10 years. His wife had some experience in small business since she had been accommodating to their neighbours' request for her to make some afternoon tea cakes for them. In between looking after her young kids, she had managed to earn some money for her own expenses. Mr. Zaini said that his wife had always encouraged him to start the business at the night market, so both of them were contented with their business then. Other than the night market in Tanjung Karang, he had stalls in 4 other night markets (Bestari Jaya, Bandar Baru, Sekinchan, and Saujana Putra). The family worked very hard, but they spend

time together not only during business, but also on their off days.

Puan Limah, a very shy 54-year old lady selling mixed vegetable with special sauce called 'Pecal Jawa', was the next person that consented to be interviewed. She arrived with her husband Mr. Jomo from Parit Satu in Tanjung Karang to open their stall at 3:30 pm. Initially, she started the business on her own to help supplement her husband's income. Her husband worked as a labourer and his income was insufficient to support the family of eight including their children, 3 boys and 3 girls. Prior to the night market business, she had worked as a helper at a vegetable farm near her house. She felt indebted to her Chinese employer for he had often helped advanced her wages and gave her time off to cater to her children's needs while her husband was away on his shift work. She was sad to leave his employment, but she had to earn more to meet the needs of her growing up children. Streams of customers were seen queuing to get her 'Pecal Jawa' which she sold at RM2.50 per pack. Rice cake (Nasi Impit) and some prawn crackers were added to make her pecal special. The 'Pecal Jawa' had 2 different gravies, the peanut and spicy gravies that she had developed herself. She used banana leaves to line the pecal container for, according to her, that provided the unique pleasant aroma for her pecal. It also reduced her cost since there were a few banana trees at her backyard. She would only start preparing the vegetables at about 11.00 am so that they remained crispy and fresh for her customers, who would start coming in at 4:00 pm. Her husband bought all the supplies from the Tanjung Karang Market, located very close to the night market site. They started their business about 25 years ago with only RM1,500. Now, they could earn a profit of between RM300 to RM500 per night. They also had stalls at two other night markets - Pasar Sungai Sireh and Parit 1 Batu 11 Simpang Sungai Sireh. Their children were all grown up now, and 3 of them had their own families. In fact, all of them could support themselves and had insisted that Puan Limah and Mr. Jomo retired from the business and stayed with them in the city. parents. But, according to Mr. Jomo, they would continue the business for that was the only thing that they do best, and also they enjoyed the friends they had made at the night market over the years.

The third trader interviewed was Puan Azlin who was 34 years old. She and her family of 4 daughters had stayed at a house in Jalan Adam, Tanjung Karang. She and her husband, Mr. Kamarul, sold coffee powder, chili paste and some traditional cake such as Sweet Glutinous Rice cake called 'Dodol'. She had started in business by selling homemade chili paste from her house because that did not require a large capital. But then, it was not easy to get customers. So, after 4 years of doing that she decided to start the night market business. She applied for a stall permit and was told by the authority that she had to specify the type of products that she intended to sell. The authority had a policy to encourage diversity in the type of products that were sold at the night markets. She discussed with her husband and decided to sell coffee powder as their main product. With a startup capital of RM10,000, she paid RM4,600 for the coffee bean grinding machine, and the stock of coffee beans. They had a small truck which opened up at 3-sides. On the upper side of the truck, they had inscribed the sentence 'Agriculture is business' and they had placed several newspaper cuttings on their business on the side of the opened compartment. The coffee grinding machine and other utensils were placed in the truck and they were within easy reach. The variety of coffee beans was placed in transparent plastic containers with openings at the base. The coffee powder was sold for RM5 for 360 gram and customers were given free samples to help them select the one that they preferred. Mr. Kamarul would go north to Baling, in the state of Kedah, once a week, to get their coffee bean supply. The supplier sold 10 kilogram for RM90. They could earn a profit of at least RM500 per night.

Puan Norhana Hashim was the fourth trader interviewed at the Tanjung Karang night



Market. She was 50 years old who originally was from Sungai Nibong in Penang. She had stayed in Sekinchan after she married her husband who was from there. Her husband who was the sole breadwinner, passed away from stroke 10 years ago. She had to find ways of supporting her 6 children who were still schooling then. Unfortunately, one of her children, a 12-year old died from the dengue fever 2 years ago. Her husband had started the night market business 22 years ago selling dry goods and groceries, but she was not involved in it at all. After her husband passed away, she decided to carry on the business, helped by her children and her son-in-law. Her supplier, also in Tanjung Karang, would deliver to her home, the supplies that she ordered once a week. She could earn between RM800 to RM1,500 per night. Her late husband started the business with only RM800. Over the years, she had acquired a van and a small lorry to transport the goods from her house to the night markets. Her son-in-law would drive the lorry while she drove the van. The lorry carried almost all the goods and small goods such as cooking oil, onions and packet spices would be carried in the van. Other than the Tanjung Karang night market, she had stalls in 4 other night markets - Pasir Panjang, Andelas, Sungai Buluh and Saujana Putra. Puan Norhana wanted to open a mini market in the near future. But, her children wanted her to retire and passed on the business to Mr. Kuza, her trusted son-in-law. Her second child who was teaching at a school in Sabah had wanted her to stay with her in Sabah.

#### **(5) Pasir Panjang Night Market**

Pasir Panjang Night Market ran parallel to the main North-South trunk road, alongside the one and only row of shop lots in Ijok town. It operated every Saturday from 3:30 pm to 9:00 pm. The Pasir Panjang night market was small with only 45 stall lots of which none were vacant. There was a mosque, and green paddy fields with fruit trees nearby. On the other side of the shop lots were several rows of newly constructed single storey linked houses. The stall lots were arranged in an L-shaped.

The Pasir Panjang night market was the smallest among the night market studied. There were only 45 traders and 72 stalls. Forty-one percent of the stall lots were occupied by traders selling cooked food. The total estimated earnings for a night from the night market was RM9,450. Therefore, on average, each trader earned RM210.

The first trader interviewed was Puan Mazuin who was 55 years old. She was originally from Masjid Tanah in the state of Melaka. She married Mr. Zulkifli in 1991 and moved with her husband to Pasir Panjang. Before she started the night market business, she had taken care of her two young sons. Now that they were grown up and had their own life, she decided to start a business to fill her time. Her husband had always complimented on her great tasting 'Nasi Lemak' which she had frequently sent to be sold at a nearby coffee stall. She did that, not because they needed the money, but her close friend was running the coffee stall and she had wanted her to help out by supplying the Nasi lemak. Determined to look for something more challenging, she applied for a night market stall permit and began her business selling Nasi Lemak and some fresh vegetables especially spinach which she had planted at a nearby paddy field. Her friends had placed in various mini cake or 'kuih' such as Sago cake, 'Kuih Cucur Badak', Yam Doughnut, and some other tea cakes. She sold the kuih at RM1 for 3 pieces and she earned a commission of 30% for every piece that was sold. The unsold kuih would be taken back by her friends, the suppliers. Mr. Zulkifli had not been well lately, but he would accompany her at the stall.

The second person interviewed was a young trader named Razif Sulaiman. He had a



friend named Mohd. Isa who worked with him. Both of them were 21 years old. Razif had just graduated with a certificate in Electronic engineering course from Giat Mara at Sungai Panjang. Both of them live in Sabak Bernam. Their specialties were making Bahulu . a kind of steamed mini sponge cake called Bahulu Kukus' and steamed bun called 'Pau' with a variety of fillings – maung beans, egg yolks with coconut milk, chicken and beef curry and shredded coconut. The Bahulu Kukus looked very attractive with multicoloured layers, and were very soft. They would taste great with tea or coffee in the afternoon or evening. The profit that they earned for the night would be divided equally between them and with some put aside for the following rolling capital. They also had a stall at the Bagan Nakhoda Omar Market. They rented a van from Aswat Enterprise for transportation. They had enjoy doing business because they would have ample leisure time during the day to hang out with their friends. These two fast friends were very ambitious and they would always be looking for ways to expand the business. They were then experimenting on ways to make frozen pau and frozen bahulu because they were hoping to penetrate the big players by supplying hypermarkets and supermarkets with their frozen products. They had a friend who worked in the frozen division of a major food supplier company who had been helping them with the experimentation during his off days.

The third trader interviewed was Mr. Matnor who was 43 years old. He was selling his own special ice cream and there was always a large crowd at his stall. He had started the night market ice cream business since 1997. Prior to that, he had been selling clothes for almost 8 years. He was doing well in the clothing business until the recession of 1997. He was badly affected by the economic downturn, so he decided to switch to selling ice cream instead. This decision was made after he had made numerous observations on the products and selling activities at several night markets in Kuala Lumpur. His facts finding venture indicated that there were very few homemade ice cream vendors, so he decided to sell ice cream. After several more trips, he found out that the machine for making ice cream, the kind that he wanted, was only available in Bangkok. He contacted the supplier, travelled to Bangkok bought the stainless steel machine for RM800 and the recipe for making ice cream. It required only a few steps to make the 'magic ice cream' as he named his ice cream. The first step was to place some milk, carbonate water and ice cubes into moulds and sticks were placed in the center for ease in lifting and licking. Next, the top of the ice cream machine is given a hard shake, and the ice cream is pulled out via the sticks. He mixed ice cube with some salt water to quick freeze the ice cream. He had also developed his own unique ice cream flavours. Mr. Matnor spent about RM31 a day for the supplies. The minimum profit that he could earn per night was RM80. According to him, most of his customers were children; therefore he could only sell his single flavour ice cream at a very low price of RM0.50 each. Additional price would be charged for additional flavours. However, his customers were not limited to children only, for he did get quite a few adult customers who were also attracted to the different coloured ice creams. His ice cream tasted very different from the other well known ice cream brands.

The last trader interviewed was Mr. Sanusi. He sold perishable products like mushroom, vegetables, lemon grass and other root vegetables, and some fresh and dried fish or 'ikan kering', and fresh seafood. He had been selling at the Pasir Panjang night market for almost 8 years. Prior to that, he worked at an architectural company after completing a certificate course in electrical engineering from a Kelantan Polytechnic. He quit the job because he wanted to go into business and had some free time for his family and friends. He would prepare the dried fish himself. After cleaning the fish, he marinated and dried them off in the sun. He had learned the art of preparing the dried fish from his mother. The local community here, who were mainly farmers and

fishermen, had also placed their products to be sold at his stalls and for which they paid him a commission of 10% of sales. He got his seafood and fish supplies from the Fishermen Association which was housed in a building near Sungai Besar. The prices that he was charged were very reasonable but he would had to get there at about 4:00 am. The Fishermen Association building was where the fish and shellfish that were just brought in by the fishermen, were sorted and divided according to size and quality. They were sold mainly to wholesale traders and restaurant operators. Mr. Sanusi was a very friendly person and he volunteered substantial information on the night market operations. He also operated in two other night markets – Sabak Bernam and Sekinchan. He stated that this was a lucrative business which he could earned about RM1,200 a night, but it was a ‘smelly’ business.

## CONCLUSIONS

Individually, the night markets’ traders had developed their own personal management style and their own way of dealing with customers and suppliers. These individual traders’ characteristics and attitude were one main component that accounted for the vibrant, colours, and dynamism of the night market environment. For the elderly traders who depended on the night market for their main income source, they did not have any plans to enlarge their business, they had the necessary skills to survive and continued on doing well, by their standards, in the night market business. They had developed the skills to accommodate to the variety of customers’ needs, and since most were repeat customers, the approach had almost become a repertoire. Their approached in business cannot be easily learned or replicated. There was no available business textbooks that could prescribed the ways on how the informal business should be conducted. At best, it could be described as the layback approached with the pull factors and service orientations that could only be understood through the combination of business, culture, and human psychology knowledge. To suggest that they should, as prescribed by the business textbooks, designed proper packaging and labeling, laid out their products in attractive displays, learned sales, marketing or promotion principles; would sound vain, ignorant and inappropriate. For them, the ways that they had been conducting their business had worked and it would be a grave mistake to suggest otherwise. Their learning curves had been invaluable for the sustainability of the night market business.

For the young entrepreneurs who had just venture into the night market business, the hands-on experiences, the trials and tribulations faced thus far, and the skill learned at the night market would form the basis of their strength, characters, and the integrity to face the onslaught of challenges ahead. The lessons learned could not be derived through the education systems, or inherited from their parents. Each trader interviewed had their own unique experience and their own reasons for venturing into the night market business. For some, it was not their choice and they were thrown into it due to circumstances. For others, it was the promise of more earnings, and improved quality of life. Whatever the reasons, the central theme common to all traders was the need to have a unique product.

It might be inappropriate to suggest that traders should be more ‘professional’ in managing their business. This orientation might alter the course of the night market’s organic growth and change the ‘atmosphere’ of the night markets. It might thus, loose the special characteristics of the night market itself. For instance, a requirement for proper counters, utensils and stall set up might pushed prices up and the night markets would lose their competitiveness to the supermarket. To enforce proper packaging and product labeling might

discouraged new entrants, and destabilized the elder traders and caused them undue stress. However, minor adjustments or improvements could be made without major repercussions on traders' and customers' wellbeing. Improvements such as attractive products display, proper packaging with easily handle, attractive containers/boxes, and queuing system to minimize crowding and waiting could be instituted with minimum disruption. Other aspects that could be improved included the hygiene, sanitation and cleanliness of the traders and the entire night markets. Perhaps, one of the ways to implement these improvements would be to provide free consultation on-site.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the major issue of the case? Why?
2. Identify the major problems faced by the Night Markets traders. Why?
3. Describe the diversity of traders and explain the advantages and disadvantages of having diverse traders at the Night Markets.
4. Discuss the contributions of the Night Markets to the local economy.
5. Suggest on improvements to be made for the night markets and indicate the reasons why they have to be made.
6. If you intend to start a night market business, explain the steps that you will take to ensure your success in the business.

