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Communication Management And Consumer Trust In Traditional Markets: Digital Adaptation Strategies Of Local Traders In Post Pandemic In Solo, Central Java

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Abstract : This study examines communication management and consumer trust in traditional markets through the digital adaptation strategies implemented by local traders in the post-pandemic era in Surakarta. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly transformed consumer behavior by accelerating the use of digital communication and online transaction systems within traditional market environments. This research aims to analyze the challenges faced by traditional traders in adapting to digital communication systems, identify effective communication strategies used to maintain consumer trust, and explore the implications of digital adaptation for the sustainability of traditional markets in the digital era. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study orientation focusing on several traditional markets in Solo, including Pasar Gede and Pasar Klewer. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies involving traders, consumers, and market management representatives. The collected data were analyzed using interactive qualitative analysis techniques consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that traditional traders experienced several challenges during digital adaptation processes, including limited digital literacy, technological infrastructure disparities, competition with e-commerce platforms, and difficulties in maintaining interpersonal communication values within online environments. However, traders who successfully integrated digital communication tools such as WhatsApp Business, Instagram, Facebook, and digital payment systems with culturally embedded interpersonal communication practices were able to strengthen consumer trust and maintain customer loyalty. Communication responsiveness, transparency of information, personalized interaction, and hybrid communication systems emerged as the most influential factors in building trust among consumers. The study concludes that digital adaptation in traditional markets should not be understood merely as technological modernization but also as a socio-cultural communication transformation process. Effective communication management enables traditional traders to preserve local market identity while adapting to contemporary consumer demands. The findings contribute theoretically to communication management and consumer trust studies and practically provide recommendations for strengthening digital communication competence among traditional market traders in Indonesia.

Keywords: Communication Management, Consumer Trust, Traditional Markets, Digital Adaptation, Post-Pandemic Communication, Solo Central Java.

I. Introduction

Traditional markets remain an essential pillar of local economic activity and socio-cultural interaction in Indonesia, particularly in urban areas such as Surakarta. Beyond functioning as centers of economic exchange, traditional markets also represent spaces of social communication, cultural negotiation, and community trust-building between traders and consumers. However, the rapid development of digital technology and the acceleration of online commerce after the COVID-19 pandemic have transformed consumer behavior significantly. Consumers increasingly prioritize convenience, transparency, responsiveness, and digital

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accessibility in their purchasing decisions, forcing traditional traders to adapt their communication patterns and market strategies to survive in a highly competitive digital ecosystem. Recent studies indicate that digital consumer behavior is increasingly shaped by perceived convenience, platform trust, communication responsiveness, and social interaction quality within online environments (Verhoef et al., 2021; Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic became a major turning point in transforming communication practices and consumer interactions in traditional markets. Restrictions on physical mobility and concerns regarding health safety encouraged consumers to shift toward digital transactions, online marketplaces, and social media-based purchasing systems. This phenomenon created serious challenges for local traders in traditional markets, many of whom previously relied on face-to-face communication and conventional trust-building approaches. According to recent studies, the pandemic accelerated digital transformation among micro and small enterprises across Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, particularly in relation to communication management, online promotion, and customer engagement strategies (Soto-Acosta, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021). As a consequence, traditional traders are now required not only to maintain product quality and price competitiveness but also to develop adaptive communication strategies capable of sustaining consumer trust in digital environments.

Communication management plays a crucial role in shaping how traditional traders interact with consumers during periods of market transformation. Effective communication management has become a strategic capability that enables organizations and small businesses to manage stakeholder relationships, reduce uncertainty, and sustain trust during periods of digital disruption (Men & Yue, 2022; Zerfass et al., 2023).Communication management refers to the strategic process of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating communication activities in order to achieve organizational objectives and maintain stakeholder relationships. In the context of traditional markets, communication management involves traders' ability to utilize interpersonal communication, social media platforms, digital messaging applications, and customer service practices to strengthen emotional relationships with consumers. Effective communication management contributes significantly to building consumer confidence, reducing uncertainty, and encouraging long-term purchasing loyalty (Kim & Kim, 2022). In post-pandemic contexts, trust has become one of the most important determinants of consumer behavior because consumers are more sensitive to issues related to hygiene, transaction security, service reliability, and information transparency.

Consumer trust itself is a fundamental element in maintaining the sustainability of traditional markets amidst increasing digital competition. Trust remains one of the strongest predictors of consumer loyalty and repurchase intention in both offline and online marketplaces, particularly within digitally mediated transaction environments (Chaudhuri et al., 2022; Oliveira et al., 2024). Trust can be understood as consumers' belief that traders are honest, reliable, and capable of fulfilling expectations during exchange processes. Recent studies indicate that digital trust is strongly influenced by communication responsiveness, consistency of information, online interaction quality, and perceived authenticity of sellers (Al-Adwan & Al-Horani, 2023). Traditional traders who successfully integrate digital communication with culturally embedded interpersonal approaches tend to maintain stronger emotional connections with local consumers. This condition demonstrates that digital adaptation does not necessarily eliminate traditional values; rather, it can strengthen local identity when managed strategically through appropriate communication approaches.

In Indonesia, particularly in Surakarta, traditional markets possess unique cultural and social characteristics that distinguish them from modern retail systems. Markets such as Pasar Gede and Pasar Klewer continue to attract consumers because of their social intimacy, bargaining culture, and localized communication patterns. Nevertheless, the expansion of e-commerce platforms and digital payment systems has challenged these markets to modernize without losing their cultural authenticity. Several traders have begun utilizing WhatsApp Business, Facebook Marketplace, Instagram promotion, and digital payment applications to maintain customer relationships and expand market reach. Such adaptations illustrate how communication management strategies are becoming increasingly important in preserving market competitiveness and consumer trust within hybrid offline-online trading environments.

Previous research regarding digital transformation in traditional markets has primarily focused on economic resilience, technological adoption, and small business sustainability. However, limited studies specifically examine how communication management strategies influence consumer trust during post-pandemic digital adaptation processes, particularly within the socio-cultural context of traditional markets in Central Java. Most studies also tend to emphasize technological infrastructure rather than relational communication practices between traders and consumers. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this gap by exploring how local traders in Surakarta manage communication strategies to maintain and strengthen consumer trust amid digital transformation after the pandemic.

This study aims to analyze the relationship between communication management and consumer trust in traditional markets through the examination of digital adaptation strategies implemented by local traders in Solo, Central Java. Specifically, the research investigates the challenges faced by traders in adapting to digital communication systems, identifies effective communication strategies used to maintain customer trust, and explores the implications of digital adaptation for the sustainability of traditional markets in post-pandemic society. The findings of this research are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the fields of communication management, consumer behavior, and digital transformation studies, particularly in relation to local economic resilience and culturally grounded market communication practices.

II. Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the dynamics of communication management and consumer trust in traditional markets during the post-pandemic digital transformation era. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research aimed to understand social interactions, communication practices, and adaptation experiences among local traders in traditional markets in depth and contextually. According to Qualitative Research, qualitative research enables researchers to investigate social realities through participants' perspectives, behaviors, and lived experiences within natural settings. In this research, the qualitative design was used to examine how local traders in Surakarta adapted their communication strategies to maintain consumer trust after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study adopted a case study orientation focusing on selected traditional markets in Solo, Central Java, such as Pasar Gede and Pasar Klewer. These markets were selected because they represent culturally rooted trading spaces that continue to survive amidst rapid digital transformation and the expansion of modern retail systems. The research focused on traders who had implemented digital adaptation practices, including the use of social media, digital payment systems, online ordering services, and messaging applications such as WhatsApp Business to communicate with consumers.

This study also used a communication management perspective to analyze how traders strategically planned, organized, and implemented communication activities in digital environments. The research emphasized how interpersonal communication, digital interaction, and trust-building practices were integrated into traders' daily business operations. By employing this approach, the study sought to generate contextual understanding regarding the relationship between digital adaptation strategies and consumer trust sustainability in traditional markets.

a. Data Collection Methods

Data collection was conducted using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. The combination of these methods was intended to strengthen data validity through methodological triangulation. In-depth interviews were conducted with selected traders, consumers, and market management representatives in several traditional markets in Solo. The interviews explored participants' experiences regarding digital communication adaptation, customer interaction patterns, trust-building strategies, and challenges encountered during post-pandemic market transformation.

The interview process used semi-structured interview guidelines to allow flexibility in exploring participants' responses while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. Informants were selected purposively based on several criteria, including active involvement in traditional market trading activities, experience using digital communication platforms for business purposes, and regular interaction with consumers during and after the pandemic period. Consumers were also selected to understand perceptions of trust, service quality, and communication effectiveness among digitally adaptive traditional traders.

Participant observation was conducted directly in traditional market environments to examine communication practices between traders and consumers. Observations focused on interpersonal interaction patterns, digital transaction practices, promotional communication activities, and the integration of online-offline communication systems in daily trading activities. Through observation, the researcher was able to identify how communication management strategies were implemented practically in natural market situations.

In addition, documentation studies were used to support primary data collection. Documentation included social media content, promotional materials, digital transaction records, online customer reviews, photographs, and market-related policy documents concerning digital adaptation after the pandemic. These documents provided additional contextual information regarding the transformation of communication patterns and consumer engagement strategies in traditional markets.

b. Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using interactive qualitative data analysis techniques developed by Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, which consist of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process began with data organization through transcription of interview recordings, field note compilation, and categorization of documentation materials. Afterward, the researcher conducted data reduction by identifying relevant themes related to communication management, digital adaptation, and consumer trust.

Thematic coding techniques were applied to classify findings into several analytical categories, including digital communication practices, trust-building strategies, consumer response patterns, technological adaptation challenges, and hybrid communication systems in traditional markets. Data were then presented in descriptive narrative forms, thematic matrices, and interpretative explanations to facilitate comprehensive understanding of emerging patterns and relationships between variables.

To ensure research credibility and validity, the study employed triangulation techniques involving source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from traders, consumers, and market managers. Method triangulation involved comparing interview findings with observation and documentation data. Meanwhile, member checking was conducted by reconfirming several findings with participants to ensure interpretative accuracy. Through these procedures, the research sought to produce trustworthy and academically rigorous findings regarding communication management and consumer trust in traditional markets during the post-pandemic digital adaptation era.

III. Result and Discussion

a. Challenges Faced by Traditional Markets in Adapting to Digital Communication

The findings of this study indicate that traditional markets in Solo, Central Java, experienced significant challenges during the process of digital communication adaptation in the post-pandemic era. Based on in-depth interviews and participant observations conducted in several traditional markets such as Pasar Gede and Pasar Klewer, traders generally acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the necessity of adopting digital communication technologies to maintain customer relationships and sustain economic activities.

Prior to the pandemic, communication practices between traders and consumers were predominantly interpersonal and face-to-face. Bargaining culture, emotional closeness, and verbal trust-building became the primary characteristics of market transactions. However, mobility restrictions and changing consumer behavior forced traders to shift toward hybrid communication systems involving social media, messaging applications, and digital transaction platforms.

Despite these changes, many traders experienced difficulties related to technological literacy, limited digital infrastructure, and uncertainty regarding online consumer interaction patterns. Elderly traders, in particular, often struggled to operate digital applications independently and depended on family members to manage online communication. Additionally, several traders expressed concerns regarding consumer fraud, fake orders, and declining trust in online transaction systems.

The findings also reveal that digital adaptation was not solely a technological issue but also a cultural communication challenge. Traditional traders had to balance modern communication efficiency with local cultural values emphasizing friendliness,

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personal interaction, and emotional engagement. Consumers still valued personal trust and social familiarity even when transactions occurred through digital platforms.

Figure 1. Digital Communication Adaptation Flow in Traditional Markets

COVID-19 Pandemic

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Changes in Consumer Behavior

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Decline in Physical Transactions

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Digital Communication Adaptation
(Social Media, WhatsApp Business,
Online Promotion, Digital Payment)

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Transformation of Trader–Consumer Interaction

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Consumer Trust Reinforcement

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Market Sustainability in Post-Pandemic Era

Table 1. Main Challenges of Digital Adaptation Among Traditional Traders

No	Identified Challenge	Description of Findings	Impact on Communication Process
1	Low Digital Literacy	Traders experienced difficulty operating digital applications and online platforms	Slow communication response and limited online interaction
2	Limited Technological Infrastructure	Internet access and digital devices were not equally available among traders	Unequal adaptation capability
3	Fear of Online Fraud	Concerns regarding fake transactions and scams	Reduced confidence in digital systems
4	Cultural Communication Shift	Traders struggled to maintain interpersonal communication values online	Reduced emotional closeness with consumers
5	Competition with E-Commerce Platforms	Consumers increasingly preferred digital marketplaces	Declining customer visits to traditional markets

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The findings above demonstrate that communication adaptation in traditional markets involves multidimensional challenges encompassing technological, cultural, economic, and social aspects. These findings support the argument of digital transformation theory that successful technological adaptation requires not only infrastructure readiness but also communication competence and cultural flexibility.

b. Successful Strategies for Building and Maintaining Consumer Trust in the Digital Age

The study found that several traditional traders in Solo successfully developed adaptive communication management strategies to maintain consumer trust during the digital transformation period. These strategies primarily emphasized responsiveness, communication transparency, interpersonal closeness, and integration between online and offline interaction patterns.

One of the most dominant strategies identified was the utilization of WhatsApp Business as a personalized communication medium. Traders used WhatsApp not only for transactional purposes but also for maintaining emotional relationships with consumers. Traders regularly informed customers about product availability, prices, delivery schedules, and market conditions through direct messaging systems. This communication style created a sense of familiarity and strengthened relational trust between traders and consumers.

In addition, social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook were utilized to display product quality, cleanliness, and market activities visually. During the post-pandemic period, consumers became increasingly concerned about hygiene and safety standards. Therefore, traders who actively shared visual evidence of product freshness, sanitation practices, and customer testimonials gained higher levels of consumer confidence.

Another important finding concerns the implementation of hybrid communication systems combining digital interaction with traditional interpersonal approaches. Consumers appreciated traders who remained communicative, polite, and flexible during online transactions. Although technology mediated communication processes, consumers still expected human-centered interaction patterns reflecting local cultural values.

Figure 2. Communication Management Strategy Model in Traditional Markets

Communication Planning

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Selection of Digital Platforms
(WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook)

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Interactive Communication Process

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Consumer Feedback and Responsiveness

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Trust Building Process

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Consumer Loyalty and Repeat Transactions

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Table 2. Communication Strategies Used by Traditional Traders

No	Communication Strategy	Implementation Practice	Consumer Response
1	Personalized Messaging	Traders contacted customers directly via WhatsApp	Consumers felt more valued and trusted sellers
2	Visual Product Promotion	Uploading product photos and videos on social media	Increased consumer confidence regarding quality
3	Fast Response Communication	Immediate replies to customer inquiries	Improved customer satisfaction
4	Hybrid Communication	Combining online ordering with face-to-face interaction	Strengthened emotional connection
5	Digital Payment Integration	Using QRIS and mobile banking services	Increased transaction convenience

The findings suggest that consumer trust in digital environments is highly dependent on communication quality rather than technological sophistication alone. Traders who maintained consistent communication, transparency, and emotional engagement were more successful in retaining customers despite the growing influence of modern e-commerce platforms.

These findings are consistent with communication management theory emphasizing that trust is formed through continuous interaction, responsiveness, and relational communication practices. In the context of traditional markets, digital adaptation becomes effective when technology supports — rather than replaces — interpersonal communication values embedded within local market culture.

c. Case Studies of Traders Implementing Effective Digital Adaptation Strategies

This study identified several local traders who successfully implemented digital communication adaptation strategies in traditional markets in Solo. These cases illustrate how communication management practices contribute significantly to sustaining consumer trust and market resilience.

1) Case Study 1: Vegetable Trader at Pasar Gede

A vegetable trader at Pasar Gede began utilizing WhatsApp Business during the pandemic to receive customer orders from residential consumers. The trader created customer contact groups and distributed daily product catalogs accompanied by updated pricing information. Consumers appreciated the communication transparency and delivery flexibility offered by the trader.

The trader also maintained interpersonal communication practices by using personalized greetings, informal conversational styles, and regular customer follow-ups. As a result, several consumers continued purchasing products online even after physical restrictions ended.

2) Case Study 2: Batik Seller at Pasar Klewer

A batik trader at Pasar Klewer adapted digital communication through Instagram and Facebook promotion strategies. The trader uploaded product photos, customer testimonials, and live-selling sessions to attract broader audiences. In addition, the trader integrated QRIS payment systems and collaborated with local delivery services.

Consumers stated that visual communication content increased their trust because they could directly observe product quality before purchasing. The trader's active communication style and responsiveness also contributed positively to customer satisfaction.

Table 3. Summary of Case Study Findings

Case	Digital Strategy Used	Communication Characteristics	Consumer Trust Outcome
Vegetable Trader – Pasar Gede	WhatsApp Business, delivery services	Personalized and relational communication	Increased repeat purchases
Batik Seller – Pasar Klewer	Instagram promotion, QRIS payment	Visual communication and fast responsiveness	Expanded consumer network

The case studies demonstrate that successful digital adaptation in traditional markets depends largely on communication flexibility and the ability to preserve social trust values within technological environments. Traders who strategically combined local communication culture with digital tools achieved stronger consumer engagement and business sustainability.

d. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that communication management has become a central component in maintaining consumer trust within traditional markets during post-pandemic digital transformation. Traditional traders in Solo no longer rely solely on conventional face-to-face interaction but increasingly integrate digital communication technologies into daily market activities.

One of the most significant findings concerns the transformation of communication patterns from purely interpersonal interaction toward hybrid communication systems. Although digital technology provides efficiency and broader market access, consumers still prioritize relational communication values such as friendliness, responsiveness, honesty, and emotional closeness. This finding reinforces the perspective of relationship management theory, which argues that trust is developed through consistent and meaningful communication practices rather than transactional exchange alone.

The research also demonstrates that digital adaptation among traditional traders is influenced by socio-cultural contexts. Unlike modern retail systems that emphasize automation and efficiency, traditional markets in Solo maintain strong cultural interaction characteristics rooted in Javanese social values. Therefore, digital communication strategies become more effective when they preserve local communication ethics and interpersonal engagement.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that consumer trust in digital environments is closely associated with transparency and communication responsiveness. Consumers increasingly evaluate traders based on communication speed, information consistency, visual evidence of product quality, and online interaction experiences. Traders who successfully implemented transparent communication practices through WhatsApp and social media platforms gained stronger customer loyalty.

Another important implication relates to digital inequality among traders. Not all traders possess equal technological capabilities or access to digital infrastructure. Elderly traders and small-scale sellers remain vulnerable to exclusion from digital market transformation processes. Consequently, local governments and market management institutions need to provide digital literacy programs, communication training, and technological assistance to ensure inclusive adaptation processes.

Figure 3. Integrated Model of Communication Management and Consumer Trust

Digital Communication Adaptation

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Communication Responsiveness

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Transparency and Interaction Quality

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Consumer Trust Formation

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Customer Loyalty

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Traditional Market Sustainability

Table 4. Data Categorization Based on Thematic Analysis

Main Theme	**Subtheme**	**Data Source**	**Interpretation**
Digital Adaptation	Social media utilization	Interviews and observations	Traders increasingly rely on digital platforms
Consumer Trust	Communication transparency	Consumer interviews	Trust strengthened through consistent information
Hybrid Communication	Combination of online and offline interaction	Field observation	Consumers still value interpersonal communication
Market Sustainability	Customer loyalty	Trader interviews	Effective communication maintains repeat transactions
Communication Challenges	Technological limitations	Interviews with elderly traders	Digital inequality affects adaptation capability

The findings contribute theoretically to communication management studies by demonstrating that digital transformation in traditional markets should be understood not only as technological modernization but also as a socio-cultural communication process. Practically, the study emphasizes the importance of communication competence development for traditional traders in maintaining competitiveness in the digital economy era.

In conclusion, this study reveals that successful digital adaptation strategies in traditional markets are strongly dependent on communication quality, cultural flexibility, and relational trust-building practices. Traditional markets that are capable of integrating digital technologies with local interpersonal communication values possess greater opportunities to survive and remain relevant within rapidly evolving consumer environments.

IV. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that communication management plays a fundamental role in maintaining consumer trust within traditional markets during the post-pandemic digital transformation era. The findings reveal that traditional traders in Solo, Central Java, have gradually adapted to digital communication systems by integrating social media platforms, messaging applications, and digital payment technologies into their daily business activities. Nevertheless, the adaptation process was not free from challenges. Traders encountered obstacles related to limited digital literacy, technological infrastructure disparities, online transaction insecurity, and the difficulty of preserving interpersonal communication values within digital environments.

Despite these limitations, the research found that traditional traders who successfully combined digital communication technologies with culturally rooted interpersonal interaction practices were more capable of sustaining consumer trust and maintaining business continuity. Communication responsiveness, transparency of information, personalized interaction, and emotional closeness emerged as the most influential factors in strengthening consumer confidence in digital market environments. Consumers continued to value honesty, friendliness, and relational communication even when transactions occurred through online platforms.

The findings also indicate that digital transformation in traditional markets should be understood not only as an economic or technological process but also as a communication and cultural adaptation process. Traditional markets in Solo possess unique socio-cultural characteristics that differentiate them from modern retail systems. Therefore, digital adaptation strategies become more effective when traders preserve local communication ethics and community-oriented interaction patterns while utilizing contemporary digital tools.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of communication management and consumer trust studies by emphasizing the importance of relational communication approaches within digital transformation contexts. The research expands understanding regarding how traditional economic actors negotiate technological modernization while maintaining local cultural identities and trust-building practices.

Practically, the study highlights the importance of communication competence development among traditional traders. Local governments, market authorities, and community institutions are encouraged to provide digital literacy training, communication management workshops, and technological assistance programs to support inclusive digital adaptation processes in traditional markets.

Finally, this study confirms that the sustainability of traditional markets in the digital age depends not solely on technological adoption but also on the ability of traders to maintain meaningful communication relationships with consumers. Traditional markets that successfully integrate digital innovation with interpersonal trust values possess stronger opportunities to remain competitive, culturally relevant, and economically sustainable in contemporary society.

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