

Case Study: Challenges Facing Kuala Lumpur's *Pasar Seni*

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ABSTRACT

Traditional markets around the world, including *Pasar Seni* (Central Market) in Kuala Lumpur, serve as vital cultural and tourism assets. However, they are increasingly challenged by modern retail formats, leading to a decline in visitor shopping experiences and hindering their potential as authentic cultural hubs. This study aimed to identify the challenges affecting visitor experience at *Pasar Seni*. In qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were employed with nine visitors, five local and four international. Findings reveal that reactive trader engagement, limited opportunities for deeper cultural conversations, inconsistent hospitality standards, concerns regarding pricing consistency and fairness, and environmental discomforts (e.g., crowding, noise) significantly impact visitor experiences. These barriers hinder the meaningful social interactions that such cultural hubs are meant to provide. The study recommends strategic hospitality training for traders, transparent pricing methods, and environmental improvements for Central Market Sdn. Bhd. and similar markets in nature. A notable limitation of this research was the inability to include trader perspectives, as permission for their interviews was not granted. Hence, future research should integrate trader perspectives and conduct comparative studies to ensure *Pasar Seni*'s long-term cultural and economic sustainability.

Keywords: Challenges; *Pasar Seni*; Traditional Market; Visitor Experience

Article Classification: Case Study

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional markets are not only for commercial transactions but also important as social and cultural spaces that represent the community's traditional values (Cahya et al., 2025). This market has unique features that create authentic experiences, distinguishing them from modern retail environments. In Malaysia, traditional markets serve more than just shopping purposes. It's lifeless representations of the country's rich ethnic diversity and long-standing artisanal traditions that need to be preserved. Effective management of these markets presents a significant opportunity to enhance local economic development. Notable examples of these important cultural and economic centers can be found throughout the nation, such as the Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah in Kelantan, Chow Kit Market in Kuala Lumpur, and Kuantan Central Market in Pahang. Among these, Kuala Lumpur's Pasar Seni, also known as Central Market, stands out as a quintessential example found. Indeed, *Pasar Seni* has now emerged as a top tourist spot in Malaysia.

Pasar Seni Kuala Lumpur is an excellent example of a cultural marketplace. In 1888, the British colonial government established a modest wet market to serve locals and tin miners, which was originally bustling with fresh vegetables and everyday essentials. As Kuala Lumpur rapidly urbanized and expanded economically, Pasar Seni diversified its offerings beyond fresh produce to include dry goods and other products, reflecting the city's growth, according to The Malaysian Reserve (2019). Its current recognizable Art Deco-style building, built in 1937, not only increased space and hygiene but also represented Kuala Lumpur's modernization aspirations, establishing Pasar Seni's place as an important commercial and social hub. This new structure was a considerable advancement, creating a more organized and visually appealing trading atmosphere.

However, in the past few years, the activity of traditional marketplaces, including Pasar Seni, has begun to shift significantly as a result of the rise of modern markets. Yaqin et al. (2023) stated that these contemporary rivals, backed by sophisticated management, excellent facilities, and pricing certainty, create a severe competitive challenge to established markets. This external pressure makes the urgent need for traditional markets to utilize their distinctive qualities, notably the authentic cultural experiences, in order to remain competitive in an ever-changing retail marketplace.

Suyanto (2023) emphasizes that traditional markets face challenges such as the rising influence of modern markets on their current state, leading to a declining trend and posing the potential to disrupt the traditional market economy. This competitive pressure is exacerbated by the fact that consumers tend to shift towards modern markets due to their proximity and the provided facilities, which offer greater convenience, as highlighted by research on the impact of modern markets on the existence of traditional markets.

Consequently, despite continuous efforts to revitalize Pasar Seni and increase its appeal as a vibrant cultural tourism destination, a significant internal research issue

remains: studies suggest a decline in visitor shopping experiences (Patwary & Omar, 2020). This drop is attributed to a perceived lack of respectful communication, evidenced by less hospitality and a less welcoming environment highlighted by Kim et al. (2020). This issue is demonstrated by accounts of rushed interactions and insufficient, unclear product information, indicating a potential decline of the authentic social exchange that traditional markets, particularly those catering to niche tourism and special interest tourism, are expected to provide (Wongleedee, 2015). This authentic social exchange offered a real experience in which visitors not only purchase items but also engage in meaningful cultural discussions. The decline in customer experience has a direct impact on tourist satisfaction. Supported by González-Rodríguez et al. (2023), the decline of authentic exchange hinders Malaysia's efforts to promote cultural experiences and to maintain its competitive advantage in the global tourist sector. These are important for attracting niche travellers by providing the visitors with the opportunity to engage with Malaysian culture and create unique memories, leading to more profound and unforgettable experiences.

There is a call to intervene in Pasar Seni due to a decline in the overall visitor shopping experience, attributed to a generally perceived lack of respectful communication, hospitality, and genuine social exchange (Patwary & Omar, 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Wongleedee, 2015). However, a significant gap exists, as no recent and granular-level study specifically identifies and systematically documents the prevailing, actionable issues faced by visitors. While studies acknowledge the signs (e.g., rushed interactions, disjointed information), research that goes beyond these generic associations to categorize the entire range of distinct operations, interactions, and environmental issues from the visitor's perspective in Pasar Seni does not exist.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides empirical underpinnings for understanding the complicated nature of visitor engagement, as well as the challenges that traditional marketplaces face. It summarizes previous research on visitors' experience, provides the main theoretical lens of Social Exchange Theory, and explains how traditional market factors impact visitor views.

Ahmad et al. (2023) highlight that the Social Exchange Theory (SET) believes that human social behaviour is essentially an exchange process motivated by people's conscious or unconscious attempts to optimise gains and minimise costs in their interactions. According to SET, people weigh potential rewards (it may be both tangible and intangible) against costs (such as time, effort, discomfort, or financial investment). The theory suggests that for a relationship or interaction to be successful and sustained, the outcomes must be positive, meaning the rewards must outweigh the costs, often

generating an anticipation of reciprocal beneficial acts. In the context of your research, the visitor's shopping experience at Pasar Seni is viewed as a series of social and commercial trades where favorable outcomes (positive experiences) depend on the traders providing rewards that meet or exceed the visitors' expenditures.

2.1. Visitor Experience in Traditional Markets

The primary competitive differences of the traditional market from modern retail are fundamentally rooted in the authentic visitor experience through social and cultural interaction. It is a human-centered rather than infrastructure-based approach (Tumanggor et al., 2023). Positive social interaction, especially in communities with strong cultural values, is built on an essential ethical framework (Ali et al., 2022). This quality of engagement is not spontaneous, but is underpinned by local moral values, such as the Malaysian ideal of 'Adab' and related Islamic values of hospitality, honesty, and kindness, which shape trader conduct according to Sohirin (2017) and Syaifudin et al. (2021). Effective communication, which requires kindness, attentive listening, and excellent character, is essential to this exchange (Tankovic, 2021). Udjianto et al., (2021) emphasize that when traders adhere to these standards, they provide favourable experiences for guests because honesty builds credibility, hospitality creates a welcoming environment, and respect creates trust which also supported by Azahar & Jusoh (2019).

Traditional markets captivate visitors through their authenticity and immersive cultural experience, serving as a significant source of Memorable Cultural Tourism Experiences (MCTEs) (Seyfi et al., 2019). It offers a genuine window into local life, fostering rich cultural exchange through direct engagement with community members, emphasized by Aliyah et al. (2020). The lively social atmosphere and direct engagement with traders are essential, as the art of bargaining can transform a simple purchase into a memorable cultural exchange, also highlighted by Syaifudin et al. (2021). Furthermore, the perception of authenticity significantly affects tourists' experience and behavior; while existential authenticity influences satisfaction, constructive authenticity, or shared creation of cultural knowledge, impacts both satisfaction and loyalty (Tian, D., 2022). These markets are also treasure troves of unique products, ranging from handicrafts and artworks to local cuisine.

Not only that, Seyfi et al. (2019) mentioned again that the role of local food is indispensable, offering authentic culinary experiences and opportunities for sensory and cultural immersion, which often involve co-creation activities through interaction and customization. This multi-faceted appeal aligns with the evolving role of traditional markets as leisure destinations and vital social gathering places (Azahar & Jusoh, 2019). Operationally, strategic location and accessibility (Putra & Rudito, 2014) and dynamic events and programming (Kusumawati, 2020) are crucial for attracting visitors

and enhancing their overall experience and willingness to revisit, as emphasized by Buliah et al. (2024). Ultimately, positive social interactions shape positive visitor perceptions and contribute to the overall visitors' experience (Udjianto et al., 2021).

2.2 Challenges and Opportunities in Traditional Markets

Traditional markets have unique cultural value; they face severe competition from modern retail forms that provide better facilities and more efficient operations (Yaqin et al., 2023). This external pressure emphasizes the pressing need for traditional markets to improve internal operations and visitor experiences. The key problem is conditional or reactive engagement from traders. This approach is consistent with "reactive customer service," which is described as responding to client enquiries or issues only after they occur, highlighted by Radius Global Solutions (2023). Kim et al. (2020) also mentioned that even though many traders are naturally friendly, further contact typically requires visitors to start the conversation. This reactive position creates an unexpected burden on the visitor, who needs to make extra effort to obtain attention rather than being greeted with spontaneous warmth. As highlighted by customer service best practices, such a purely reactive approach often leads to a poor customer experience because it places the responsibility for engagement (Radius Global Solutions, 2023). This reduces the welcoming atmosphere, leading to perceived "rushed interactions" where conversations feel transactional and lacking genuine interest or eye contact. In the end, visitors might feel like an imposition rather than valued guests, and the market itself risks appearing disinterested in their overall experience.

Furthermore, there are constraints in deeper cultural interactions that present a substantial barrier. Overall tourist satisfaction is negatively influenced by limiting factors such as limited time, unfamiliarity, limited communication, and limited involvement according to Patwary (2020). Many visitors visit traditional markets not only to shop, but also to learn about the local culture and interact with the community. Even when basic English is available, opportunities for meaningful and engaging cultural exchanges can be limited. This linguistic barrier is a substantial barrier for travelers who seek meaningful social learning (Aliyah et al., 2020). When traders are unable to participate in fuller talks about the crafts, local traditions and so on, genuine relationships and a richer social exchange are lost, leaving tourists with a less authentic and less gratifying cultural experience.

The disparity in hospitality consistency among traders and stalls presents a challenge. Given the diverse of independence market traders, the application of hospitality standards is not always consistent. Some conversations may be quite polite and welcoming, while others may appear apathetic, rushed, or devoid of any evident engagement (Kim et al., 2020). This discrepancy makes unpredictable situation for

visitors, who cannot predict the interaction. This reduces the visitor's perception of being constantly appreciated as a guest. Concerns about pricing consistency and fairness contribute to an unfavorable visitor experience. Issues such as sudden, unexplained price increases at food stalls or a general perception that tourists are charged higher prices than locals, even if not explicitly a hospitality issue, implicitly affect trust and a fundamental sense of fairness (Helmi & Pius, 2018). Such pricing disparities could generate negative word-of-mouth, discouraging future visits.

Finally, the physical environment itself frequently causes environmental and operational distress. Conditions such as pervasive crowding, especially during peak hours, can significantly restrict comfortable movement, invade personal space, and make browsing goods difficult. According to Hakim and Kristiyanto (2020), high noise levels further contribute to sensory overload, making communication challenging and the overall atmosphere feel "overwhelming" or "chaotic". These environmental issues cause discomfort to visitors, reducing it significantly from a perfectly comfortable shopping experience. Even if social interactions are favorable, these physical limitations can reduce a visitor's tendency to stay for longer, investigate, or return, reducing their overall enjoyment of the market. Despite the challenges, traditional markets offer distinctive features that provide a great opportunity to improve visitor experiences and maintain long-term viability. These markets include a variety of product offers, such as handicrafts, local artworks, and real cuisine, that differ from modern stores. Azahar and Jusoh (2019) also mentioned besides business, traditional markets frequently function as important leisure and social meeting places, which can be enhanced through strategic initiatives

Crucially, strategic management and revitalization activities are essential. This involves designing exciting events and programming that attract more tourists and increase expenditure, in line with modern tourism trends that prioritize experience services (Kusumawati, 2020). By prioritizing a framework of cultural sensitivity built on recognition, respect, and reciprocity, tourism in the market can shift from being solely about "trade and profit" to acknowledging cultural difference emphasize by Viken (2021). Directly resolving recognized challenges, such as strengthening communication skills among traders and others, can turn into opportunities for competitive advantage. Finally, optimizing social interchange by eliminating perceived negative consequences could increase Pasar Seni's appeal and assure its sustainability as an economic hub in Kuala Lumpur's tourism environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used in the study, which was focused on Pasar Seni (Central Market). Additionally, nine visitors (N=9)—both domestic (local) and

international—are chosen using a purposive sample technique. This non-probability targeting was justified to blend "insider" perspectives on cultural expectations with "outsider" observations on the cross-cultural application of ethical values, focusing on visitors who had spent at least one hour at the market within the last year.

The study exclusively employed semi-structured interviews to gather rich, context-specific insights into social interactions and ethical considerations that impact the visitor experience. The data collection was structured into two distinct modes:

- i) Physical (Face-to-Face): A group discussion involving five participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6) was conducted primarily in Bahasa Melayu. This setting fostered a spontaneous and interactive environment, enabling the researcher to gather culturally-specific data on shared experiences and expectations from both local and international participants.
- ii) Online (Virtual): The remaining four participants were interviewed online in English (P7, P8, P9) and one in Bahasa Melayu (P1). Within this virtual mode, two participants (P8 and P9) engaged in an online group discussion to leverage collective insights on common challenges.

The research adhered strictly to ethical guidelines for informed consent and confidentiality, with the pre-tested semi-structured interview guide adapted for virtual use due to access restrictions. Finally, the interview data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, as adopted by Braun & Clarke (2006). The overarching themes and sub-themes were initially conceptualized with the assistance of a large language model (Gemini). Then, their application, coding, and interpretation are conducted independently by the researcher.

3.2 Participants Profile

This study investigated visitor challenges by interviewing five local visitors and four international visitors. This careful selection allowed for a comprehensive analysis from diverse perspectives. Local visitors helped us understand how cultural expectations shape perceived challenges in trader encounters, while international visitors provided insight into specific barriers they faced. This varied participant group ensured a complete picture of the difficulties affecting visitor's experience with traders, capturing both insider and outsider views.

All selected participants met specific criteria (1) the visitors had visited Pasar Seni within the last year, and (2) the visitors had stayed for at least one hour during their visit.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Profile

This section presents the demographic profile of the study participants. Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of the nine visitors (five local and four international) who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

Table 1. Profile and Demographics of Local Participants (N=5)

Participants	Age	Gender	State/ Country Origin	Frequency of Visit to Pasar Seni	Occupation
P1	23	Female	Sabah	Occasionally	Student
P2	23	Male	Gombak	Occasionally	Engineer
P3	24	Female	Bangi	Occasionally	Financial Consultant
P4	24	Male	Kedah	Rarely	Teacher
P5	23	Female	Perlis	Rarely	Student
P6	25	Male	Pakistan	First time	Engineer
P7	20	Female	Myanmar	Occasionally	Student
P8	26	Female	Brunei	Rarely	Accountant
P9	28	Female	Indonesia	Rarely	Human Resources

Table 2. Profile and Demographics of International Participants (N=4)

Participants	Age	Gender	State/ Country Origin	Frequency of Visit to Pasar Seni	Occupation	Duration of Stay in Malaysia (International)
P6	25	Male	Pakistan	First time	Engineer	More than 10 years
P7	20	Female	Myanmar	Occasionally	Student	1 year
P8	26	Female	Brunei	Rarely	Accountant	5 years
P9	28	Female	Indonesia	Rarely	Human Resources	3 years

4.2 The challenges encountered by visitors at Pasar Seni Kuala Lumpur

Based on the interview findings, this study manages to identify five themes related to the challenges encountered by visitors at Pasar Seni, Kuala Lumpur. The themes are as follows;

4.2.1 Reactive Engagement

A significant finding was that the depth of engagement from traders is often conditional or reactive. While visitors generally perceive traders as welcoming, deeper interaction typically only occurs once a visitor actively initiates it or shows explicit interest, for example, by touching merchandise. As mentioned by P2, the traders warmly entertain and welcome the visitors.

Some other participants (P3 and P5) observed that traders might not attend to them if they are merely looking around, but engagement begins once items are handled. This suggests that while traders are responsive, the onus is often on the visitor to trigger more in-depth interactions.

Table 3. Findings on Reactive Engagement at Pasar Seni

VERBATIM	
P2	"...if [they] see you at that time, it looks welcoming. But, once we ask, they will attend [to us]."
P3	"...for me, if we just look around, they don't attend [to us] ... but once we start touching things, then they start to explain."
P5	"...when we show that we're interested, then they come."

4.2 Limitations in Deeper Cultural Conversations

International visitors frequently reported that language proficiency was a significant challenge, often constraining opportunities for more enriching cultural exchanges. Several participants, including P2 and P3, indicated that their interactions with traders often remained at a professional or observational level, primarily focusing on product-related discussions rather than broader cultural conversation.

Table 4. Findings on Limitations in Deeper Cultural Conversations at Pasar Seni

VERBATIM	
P2	"...for me, I don't chat much with them unless it's about the product. Just professional conversation"

P3	"Well, it's part of experiencing culture too, but I wasn't really in depth. Just observing."
P9	"I think if like for me when I'm like communicating with the traders I just feel like motivated to like communicate in Bahasa Melayu more like the cultures itself..."

4.3 Variability in Hospitality Consistency

Despite the majority of interactions being positive, the diverse nature of independent traders at Pasar Seni inherently leads to some variability in the consistent application of hospitality principles. Some visitors noted that traders' willingness to engage could be "50-50" if a visitor was merely browsing without a clear intent to purchase. It means that a visitor who is merely browsing (looking without showing a clear, immediate intent to buy) has only a **fifty percent chance** of receiving friendly, proactive attention or service from a trader. This finding illustrates a **critical lack of standardized welcoming behavior** within the market. Instead of proactively greeting or assisting every visitor as a potential guest, the traders' willingness to interact is **conditional**.

Table 5. Findings on Variability in Hospitality Consistency at Pasar Seni

VERBATIM

P3	"...if we're looking, they attend 50-50, whether they want to attend or not."
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4.4 Pricing Consistency and Fairness Concerns

There is evident in experiences with sudden price increases at food stalls, implicitly affecting trust and a sense of fairness. For the local visitors, the perceived higher price can lead to feelings of being undervalued or unfairly treated, and inconsistent pricing can add the cost of uncertainty and potential exploitation. For instance, P3, with a background

in handmade crafts, found prices for items like crochet to be "not fair" for local Malaysians, even if those prices seemed reasonable for tourists with stronger currencies.

Table 6. Findings on Pricing Consistency and Fairness Concerns at Pasar Seni

VERBATIM

P3	“...with a background in handmade crafts, items like crochet, considering it "not fair" for local Malaysians, even if reasonable for tourists with stronger currencies.”
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4.5 Environmental and Operational Discomforts

Many visitors found Pasar Seni Kuala Lumpur generally comfortable and easy to navigate, but the market's crowded nature was a consistent point of feedback, often leading to environmental and operational discomfort. Some participants described the space as feeling "narrow" or potentially "overwhelming" due to the constant presence of people, vehicles, and active stall promotions. Consequently, the noise level was perceived as high, attributed both to the sheer volume of visitors and the presence of street performers, which could be a source of frustration for some. For example, P1 noted that while the noise level affected the overall experience, it was primarily due to the crowd rather than trader activity. P9 articulated that the environment could be "a little bit too much" for sensitive individuals, citing the concentration of vehicles, people, and promotional activities. Despite this, P9 also mentioned a degree of preparedness for the noise upon arrival.

Table 7. Findings on Environmental and Operational Discomforts at Pasar Seni

VERBATIM

P1	"The noise level does affect the experience a bit, but usually it's because there are so many people, not because the traders are noisy."
P9	<p>"I couldn't, I feel like if you are very, how do you say it, very sensitive person that is kind of like easily overwhelmed, it's kind of like a little bit too much for you to go there. Because there are a lot of vehicles, people, cars, stalls, you know. Yeah, and the stalls promoting their products.</p> <p>"...when I go out from LRT or MRT, I was like very prepared with the noises."</p>

5. DISCUSSION

The trader interaction in Pasar Seni is predominantly conditional or reactive, which the visitor has to initiate in order to interact (P3, P5). This approach puts the responsibility of hospitality firmly on the guest, even though traders are perceived as nice once they are approached. This conduct would be in line with Radius Global Solutions (2023) definition of "reactive customer service", which states that a response should only be given in reaction to a client's request or obvious show of interest. This undermines the market's competitive power—its basis in a human-centered ideology and has the direct effect of creating the perceived shortage of engaged hospitality referred to in the problem statement (Kim et al., 2020; Tumanggor et al., 2023). Theoretically, this reactive behavior disqualifies the perceived reward of the social exchange, because tourists must spend unplanned effort in order to be attended to.

While traders generally employed clear and considerate language for basic communication and readily used English for transactional purposes, the depth of these interactions frequently remained at a functional level. This practical restriction may unintentionally prevent the full expression of hospitality, especially for international

visitors seeking genuinely immersive experiences beyond mere commercial exchanges. However, some visitors, like P9, expressed a motivation to bridge this gap by attempting to communicate more in Bahasa Melayu, signaling a desire for a deeper cultural connection. According to Aliyah et al. (2020), language constraints greatly restrict genuine social interaction in conventional marketplaces. It prevents the communication of sincere reciprocity and recognition (Viken, A., 2021) which are necessary to be able to turn a business visit into a truly meaningful cultural experience.

Inconsistency of independent traders results in an unstable Consistency Variability in Hospitality, described by one of the respondents as a "50-50" chance of interacting while merely browsing (P3). Its means, that hospitality and willingness of a Pasar Seni trader to interact with a potential visitor is very unstable and unreliable. Inconsistency creates an unstable setting for the visitors, making them avoid feeling always valued as guests. This finding validates Kim et al. (2020) observations on the wide variation in the application of service among independent market traders. The variation has a direct bearing on the research problem's observation of "less hospitality and a less welcoming environment," illustrating how the lack of a standardized service takes away from the overall positive image of the market.

Pricing Consistency and Fairness Issues—like surprise price increases and differential pricing found to favor locals—implicitly affect visitor's trust and perceptions of being treated fairly. This problem is particularly relevant to local visitors, who may perceive themselves as being undervalued (P3). As Helmi and Pius (2018) discovered, such pricing inconsistency, even if not necessarily a hospitality issue, erodes visitor trust and calls forth negative affective responses and word-of-mouth. This ambiguity directly takes away from the consumers' visitor experience, and thus open pricing becomes crucial to instill and maintain the long-term trust required for sustainability in markets.

Finally, respondents consistently referring to over-crowding, undue noise (from masses and street performers), and the atmosphere feeling "overwhelming" or "chaotic" (P9). These empirical observations agree with concerns identified by Hakim and Kristiyanto (2020) elsewhere in other traditional marketplace settings. Although infrastructural and managerial issues rather than ethical trading issues, they are critical because these physical barriers restrict easy mobility and discovery, in turn reducing a visitor's propensity to stay, engage, or return. These physical matters therefore place a stringent cap on the maximum effectiveness of beneficial social contact in creating sustained visitation and repeat business.

The challenges identified in Pasar Seni Kuala Lumpur offer crucial insights for its enhancement, leading to several vital recommendations for immediate action and areas for future academic inquiry. Theoretically, these findings underscore how specific hindrances, such as predominantly transactional communication and inconsistent

service, directly diminish the perceived rewards within the Social Exchange Theory framework. This highlights a critical insight: functional communication alone is often insufficient for achieving deep cultural immersion, especially in multicultural market settings like Pasar Seni.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The qualitative nature of the study, based on interviews with a specific group of participants, means the findings reflect in-depth perceptions but may not be broadly generalizable to all visitor demographics or other traditional markets. The focus on a single location, Pasar Seni, also limits wider applicability without further comparative research. Additionally, while the study aimed to incorporate the direct opinions of traders through interviews, permission was not obtained, resulting in the reliance solely on visitor perspectives during the data collection phase.

Despite these limitations, the identified challenges provide actionable insights for enhancing the visitor experience. For Central Market Sdn Bhd (Management), key recommendations include developing comprehensive, structured hospitality and customer service training programs for all traders to ensure proactive engagement and consistent service quality across the market. This should be coupled with efforts to implement clearer pricing transparency and consistency policies to build visitor trust. Investments in environmental improvements are also crucial, focusing on effective crowd management, noise reduction strategies, and enhancing general amenities like seating and ventilation to address physical discomfort. Crucially, active collaboration with traders, including incorporating their opinions and feedback through regular dialogues or surveys, is vital for the successful implementation and adoption of these initiatives. Traders themselves are encouraged to embrace a more proactive and culturally engaging approach, initiating greetings, offering assistance, and sharing more nuanced stories about their products and local culture.

Building on the current study, future research should first specifically investigate traders' opinions on the identified challenges, including their perceived barriers to proactive engagement and deep cultural dialogue, as well as their views on proposed training or policy changes, which would crucially complement the current visitor-centric findings. Additionally, expanding the scope through comparative studies would be beneficial, allowing for the comparison of visitor experiences and challenges across different traditional markets within Malaysia or other multicultural contexts, to identify both commonalities and unique aspects.

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