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Predicting the adoption of "Buku Kedai": a digital book-keeping application among Malaysian micro-entrepreneurs

Wan Noraswaniaty Wan Ahmad[1], Rabaatul Azira Hassan[1], Maheran Zakaria[1], Saifful Nazri Md Nazir[2], Dwi Suhartini[3]
[1]Faculty of Accountancy, UiTM Cawangan Kelantan, Kelantan, Malaysia
[2]Department of Bursary, UiTM Cawangan Kelantan, Kelantan, Malaysia
[3]Department of Accounting, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur, Surabaya, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of digital economies has led to the diffusion of digital innovation in business activities. A book-keeping digital application known as "Buku Kedai" is among the innovations invented by researchers to optimise entrepreneurial business performance. Despite offering tremendous benefits, its adoption is low. The intriguing phenomenon triggers the researchers to study the factors accelerating its adoption. Emulating the factors proposed by the theory of acceptance model (TAM), the researchers predict that adopting "Buku Kedai" is related to perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and subjective norms. The researchers distributed 300 questionnaires to Malaysian micro-entrepreneurs. However, only 248 data proceeded for further analysis. Employing SPSS 27 and partial least square-structural equation model (PLS-SEM) 3, the results indicated that all three variables, namely perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and subjective norms, are significant predictors of "Buku Kedai" adoption. The discoveries shed insights for policymakers, governments, and academia to formulate development programs for empowering entrepreneurs through digital and capability upscaling. Besides, the programs should encourage the involvement of social contacts to support microentrepreneurs in adopting "Buku Kedai". Adopting the "Buku Kedai" application is crucial in enhancing microentrepreneurs' quality, viability, resilience, and competitiveness in pursuing success and sustainability.

Corresponding Author:

Maheran Zakaria
Faculty of Accountancy, UiTM Cawangan Kelantan
Machang 18500, Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: maher835@uitm.edu.my

1. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the digital revolution, all businesses should seize every digital opportunity to reap the benefits and proliferation of digitalisation. Amongst the digitalisation is a digital book-keeping application [1], which stresses that manual book-keeping inflicts various challenges, such as being tedious, cumbersome, human error, time-consuming, difficulty in analysis, limited accessibility, and lack of security. Automated digital applications offer numerous advantages over traditional manual methods, for instance, increased accuracy, real-time insights, efficiency, scalability, accessibility, cost saving, and improved data analysis capabilities. Additionally, the application fosters better financial management, decision-making, and compliance, besides reducing the administrative burden. Many entrepreneurs have transitioned to digital bookkeeping systems, adopting various accounting software to optimise their business performance.

Although big businesses have extensively adopted and harnessed digitalisation, small businesses still struggle due to various barriers. Some barriers are a lack of talent, the perception that digitalisation is challenging to operate and the least significant lack of support from social groups [2]. Even worse, many people are sceptical about new technologies due to the lack of resources, both financial and non-financial, particularly in the beginning [3], [4]. Hence, to gain a competitive edge and remain sustainable in the ecosystem, adopting new technology is crucial, specifically for micro-entrepreneurs.

Micro-entrepreneurs are the pillar of the global economy [5], whereby in Malaysia, they contribute up to 70% of the local gross domestic product (GDP) [6]. Deterioration in microentrepreneurs' businesses would tremendously jeopardise the national economy, and hence, they must make a more significant effort to pivot to digitalisation. Inventors have invented many applications to enhance microentrepreneurs' business performance. Amongst the applications is "Buku Kedai", a digital book-keeping application created by researchers to assist entrepreneurs in recording their daily cash transactions, stocks, capital, revenue, and liabilities.

Indeed, the "Buku Kedai" application would enhance the efficiency of record keeping and, hence, effectively improve entrepreneurial business performance. Furthermore, the application would compensate for the system's flaws and form a more integrated entrepreneurial network. Although the application offers tremendous benefits, adopting digital solutions is still low [2], [7]. Many resists adopting new digital applications and prefer the traditional method [8]. They encounter difficulties and do not foresee the benefits of the application. If the issue continues, the survival of microentrepreneurs will be at stake; they will no longer be in the ecosystem.

According to the theory of acceptance model (TAM), users will adopt new technology due to three factors, namely perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and subjective norms [9]. TAM is amongst the prevalent theories explaining the adoption of new technologies, specifically among micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). To date, prior studies on MSMEs have investigated technology's adoption in various forms, for instance, e-government service [10], [11], mobile banking [12], [13], e-commerce platforms [14], [15], mobile payment [16], [17], enterprise system [18], [19] and social media [20], [21].

Despite that, an abundance of studies has adopted TAM to investigate the adoption of new technology among micro-entrepreneurs [22], [23], but little prior research has focused on digital book-keeping application [7], [24], [25], specifically "Buku Kedai". Intrigued by this phenomenon, the researchers aim to investigate the factors that accelerate the adoption of "Buku Kedai". Emulating the factors posited by TAM [26], this study examines the relationship between "Buku Kedai" adoption concerning perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and subjective norms among Malaysian micro-entrepreneurs. The researchers organised the study as follows:

a) It starts with an introduction and problem statement.
b) It highlights the underpinning theory before reviewing the literature.
c) It describes the methodology before discussing the findings.
d) It concludes by including theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Phenomenon of interest: a digital book-keeping application "Buku Kedai"

The researchers have invented a digital book-keeping application known as "Buku Kedai" to assist the micro-entrepreneur in recording their business transactions in digital form. This new application can update cash transactions, expenses, liabilities, revenue, stock, and capital in real-time. The application can process more transactions and thus enhance the efficiency of business performance. Before this, most entrepreneurs recorded the transactions manually; even worse, some did not maintain a proper book-recording system and therefore failed to evaluate their business performance. As such, micro-entrepreneurs must adapt and keep pace with new technology to achieve success and sustainability [27]. TAM is one of the prevalent theories that posit users will adopt new technology due to three factors, namely perceived usefulness, perceived use, and subjective norms [26].

2.2. Theory of acceptance model

The TAM is the most prevalent and influential model to explain factors that lead users to accept new technology. The model is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA) that predicts an individual's behavioural intention is due to attitude and subjective norms [28]. TAM replaces attitude with two technology acceptance measures, which are perceived use, and perceived usefulness but remains subjective norms [26].

Perceived usefulness (PU) refers to how users perceive that new technology helps enhance performance [26]. Meanwhile, perceived ease of use (PEOU) denotes the degree to which users perceive that

new technology would ease them and be effortless [29]. On the other hand, subjective norms signify users' perceptions that social contacts who are significant to them would expect them to perform the behaviour [30]. The social connections consisted of family members and friends. In the context of this study, the behaviour is the adoption of a digital book-keeping application, namely "Buku Kedai". The selection of TAM as the overarching theoretical framework for this research is underpinned by its robust utility in understanding the factors influencing the adoption of new technology. Despite critiques that have been raised regarding its applicability in various contexts, TAM provides a valuable and well-established framework that aligns with numerous studies examining the determinants of technology adoption [31].

2.3. Literature review and hypothesis development

According to Matlay and Westhead [32], entrepreneurs who aim for success would invest in digitalization and always be involved in the innovative entrepreneurial process. The trend of digital innovation in entrepreneurship is encouraging [4], [33]. Indeed, the new technology is appealing to many due to its economic benefits, product quality and product availability [27]. Studies have examined the adoption of new technologies among entrepreneurs in various contexts. Amongst the technologies investigated were e-government in South Africa [34], mobile banking in Jordan [34], e-commerce website in Ghana [15], mobile payment in China [35], enterprise system in Iran [36], social media in Zambia [21] and internet of things in Indonesia [37]. Additionally, many claim that digital book-keeping is trailblazing for presumption, innovation, and entrepreneurship [38], [39]. The resemblance between digital book-keeping enthusiasts, micro business owners, and managers justifies its combination with TAM [7].

2.3.1. Studies of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, subjective norms and a new technology adoption

Many studies have supported the relationship between perceived usefulness and user adoption of new technology [40]–[42]. In other words, the higher users perceive the usefulness of the technology, the higher the likelihood they will adopt it. Emulating TAM [26] and prior studies [39]–[41], the researchers propose the following hypothesis:

- H1: There is a relationship between perceived usefulness and "Buku Kedai" adoption among microentrepreneurs. Likewise, many studies have also proven the relationship between perceived ease of use and the adoption of new technology among micro-entrepreneurs across different contexts [43], [44]. Thus, the easier users perceive that they can easily manoeuvre the technology, the more likely they would adopt it. As such, the researchers formulate the following hypothesis.
- H2: There is a relationship between perceived ease of use and "Buku Kedai" adoption among microentrepreneurs. Subjective norms significantly influence the adoption of new technologies by users [42], [44], [45] discovered that subjective norms expressed by peer pressure and significant others' opinions affect business owners in China to adopt Internet business. Li *et al*. [45] articulated that subjective norms have affected users' mobile learning adoption. In this study context, subjective norms denote the extent to which users perceive that influential members in their social environment (such as family, friends, coworkers, or experts) believe whether or not they should adopt the new technology known as "Buku Kedai". Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated for this study.
- H3: There is a relationship between subjective norms and "Buku Kedai" adoption among microentrepreneurs.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research design

The researchers adopted a positive, analytical, descriptive, and quantitative approach to investigate their research questions. To gather data, they employed a cross-sectional research technique through a survey. Questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents, allowing the researchers to collect data simultaneously and gain insights into the variables of interest. This method provided a snapshot of the research phenomenon and allowed for the analysis of relationships between variables quantitatively.

3.2. Population and sample

The population of this study was microentrepreneurs who attended the entrepreneurship program organised by the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA). FAMA is an organisation with official status under the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries, established to improve the marketing of agricultural food products such as vegetables and fruits. The program aimed to train microentrepreneurs in book-keeping recording and using the "Buku Kedai", a digital book-keeping application. Before the program

ended, the researchers distributed 300 questionnaires to the respondents in which 260 people returned, and the questionnaires proceeded for data analysis.

3.3. Measurement

The researchers adapted all the measurements for four variables from [26]: "Buku Kedai" adoption, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and subjective norms. Prior investigations have examined and verified the measurements [38]–[43]. Additionally, the researchers employed a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 5, in a continuum from strongly disagree to strongly agree), consistent with prior studies investigating the adoption of new technology [19].

4. RESULT

4.1. Respondents demographic profile

The researchers employed SPPS version 27 to describe the demographic profile of the respondents. Of the 300 distributed questionnaires, 260 returned, and the researchers eliminated 12 due to inappropriateness or partially filled. Finally, a total of 248 data proceeded for further analysis. The results indicated that 186 people, or 75% of the respondents, were females, while the remaining 62 or 25% were males. Additionally, almost 208 people or 80.62% were married; the remaining 40 or 16.13% were single. In terms of age, most respondents were between 30 years and below (114 people or 46%), followed by between 31 to 40 years (81 people or 33%), between 41 to 50 years (27 people or 11%), and 51 years and above (23 people and 10%).

Many of the respondents were high school educated (124 people or 50.2%), followed by those who obtained a degree (54 people or 21.9%), others (38 respondents or 15.4%), and college or diploma (32 people or 12.4%) qualification. The results indicate that 83 people, or 33.5%, were in the food and beverages sector, followed by grocery (63 people or 24.4%), flower (62 people or 25.0%), and services (40 people or 16.1%). Table 1 depicts the respondents' demographic profiles.

Table 1. Respondents demographic profiles

Gender	**Frequency**	**%**	**Marital status**	**Frequency**	**%**			
Female	112	45.2	Single	186	75.0			
Male	136	44.8	Married	62	25.0			
Age (years)	**Frequency**	**%**	**Level of education**	**Frequency**	**%**	**Business category**	**Frequency**	**%**
30 below	114	46.0	High school	124	50.2	Grocery	63	25.4
31 to 40	81	33.0	College/diploma	32	12.4	Flower	62	25.0
41 to 50	27	11.0	Degree	54	21.9	Food and beverage	83	33.5
51 above	23	10.0	Others	38	15.4	Services	40	16.1

N = 248

4.2. Measurement model

The study employed a structural equation model (SEM) using partial least squares (PLS) version 3 for further analysis. This analysis is better than other regression analyses as the study focused on prediction instead of testing the entire TAM model [46]. PLS-SEM assesses data in two models: measurement and structural. The measurement model considers the goodness of data in terms of validity and reliability. This model reveals the links between every latent variable and its indicators. Besides, the measurement model would evaluate the extent of data in fulfilling the reliability criteria convergent and discriminant validity.

Results revealed that the factor loading values were between 0.73 and 0.91, above 0.50, as [47] suggested. The composite reliability for all constructs was above 0.70, as [46] recommended. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) values were between 0.60 and 0.76, exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.5 [46]. Hence, all values fulfil the criteria of validity and reliability. Table 2 depicts the results of the measurement model.

The researchers then used the HTMT criterion, as [48] recommended, to assess the component's discriminant validity. For the stricter criterion, the HTMT values should be below 0.85. Meanwhile, for the lenient standard, the value should be below 0.90. Results indicated that all the values were below the criterion above, showing that all four constructs were distinct. Table 3 depicts the discriminant validity of the HTMT criterion.

Table 2. Measurement model

Construct	Items	Loading	AVE	CR
Perceived usefulness (X1)				
"Buku Kedai" improves my search for the mode of book-keeping recording	PU1	0.837	0.646	0.880
"Buku Kedai" minimizes the time I usually spend on book-keeping recording	PU2	0.785		
"Buku Kedai" helps me in terms of making better book-keeping decision	PU3	0.830		
"Buku Kedai" makes it easier for me to make product comparison among book-keeping modes	PU4	0.762		
Perceived ease of use (X2)				
I do not get frustrated when using "Buku Kedai"	PE1	0.728	0.679	0.813
"Buku Kedai" is easy to learn and use	PE2	0.849		
I feel flexible in performing "Buku Kedai"	PE3	0.890		
"Buku Kedai" provides book-keeping transactions that ease the recording of cash transactions, stock, capital, expenses, and liabilities	PE4	0.806		
Less effort is needed when I perform "Buku Kedai"	PE5	0.837		
Subjective norm (X3)				
Most people who are important to me think that I should use "Buku Kedai"	SN1	0.825	0.757	0.803
It is expected of me that I should adopt "Buku Kedai"	SN2	0.914		
I think every enterprise should adopt "Buku Kedai"	SN3	0.869		
"Buku Kedai" digital apps adoption				
Generally, I have a positive view on "Buku Kedai"	EA1	0.830	0.883	
I would adopt "Buku Kedai"- a digital book-keeping application	EA2	0.604		
When adopting "Buku Kedai", I often feel overwhelmed	EA3	0.627		
"Buku Kedai" can substitute the traditional book-keeping system	EA4	0.834		
"Buku Kedai" can support the existing book-keeping record	EA5	0.838		

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	DA	PU	PEU	SN
"Buku Kedai"; book-keeping apps: adoption (DA)	0.827			
Perceived usefulness (PU)	0.608	0.796		
Perceived ease of use (PEU)	0.632	0.536	0.755	
Subjective norms (SN)	0.742	0.669	0.589	0.838

4.3. Structural model

After satisfying all the reliability and validity requirements, the researchers analysed the data in the structural model. This model measured the path coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and p-values using a 5000-sample re-sample bootstrapping technique. The researchers used p-values, beta coefficient and confidence intervals to test the significance of the hypotheses. The results indicated that all the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were less than 5.0, showing a low correlation between predictors, and thus, the multi-collinearity did not exist. The results further indicated that the $R2$ was 0.686, and all three predictors explained 68.60% of the variance in "Buku Kedai" adoption. Next, the researchers tested the relationship between three predictors of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and subjective norms with "Buku Kedai" adoption (a digital book-keeping application). The results revealed that perceived usefulness (β1=0.230, t=4.143 ***p<0.00), perceived ease of use (β2=0.409, t=4.143 ***p<0.00), and subjective norms (β3=0.283, t= 4.548 ***p<0.00) were positively related to "Buku Kedai" adoption, thus, supported all H1, H2 and H3. Figure 1 indicates the structural model and Table 4 depicts hypotheses testing for all relationships of the study.

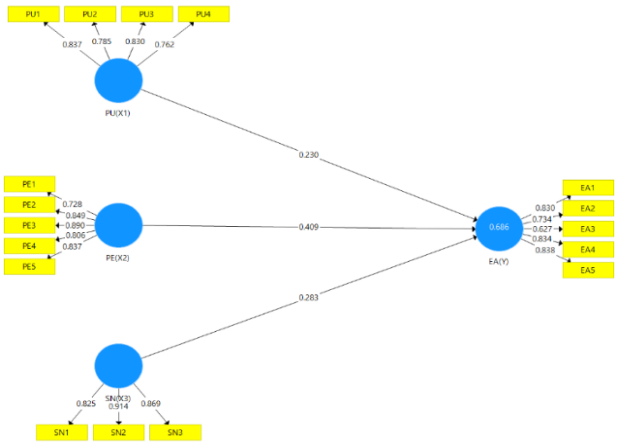

Figure 1. Structural model

Table 4. Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis		Estimate	S.E.	T	p-value	VIF	Relationship
H1	PU→ DA	0.230	0.058	4.143	0.000	2.312	Significant
H2	PEU →DA	0.409	0.064	6.367	0.000	2.943	Significant
H3	SN → DA	0.283	0.052	5.480	0.000	2.411	Significant

5. DISCUSSION

The study's first objective is to investigate the relationship between perceived usefulness and the adoption of "Buku Kedai" (a book-keeping application software) among Malaysian micro-entrepreneurs. Results indicated a positive and significant relationship between perceived usefulness and "Buku Kedai" adoption (β1=0.230, t=4.143, and p<000). The findings are consistent with prior studies, although they were conducted in different cultural contexts [38], [39], in which the higher the microentrepreneurs perceived that "Buku Kedai" is useful, the higher its adoption. Thus, the research accepts H1 that a relationship exists between perceived usefulness and adopting "Buku Kedai's" among Malaysian micro-entrepreneurs.

The second objective investigates the relationship between perceived ease of use and adopting "Buku Kedai" among Malaysian micro-entrepreneurs. Results indicated a positive relationship between perceived ease of use and "Buku Kedai" adoption (β2=0.409, T=6.367, and p<000). The results are consistent with prior studies, albeit they adopt different forms of technologies [39], [41]. Hence, the higher the microentrepreneurs perceived that "Buku Kedai" are helpful, the more likely they would adopt the application. Thus, the research accepts H2 in which a relationship exists between perceived ease of use and adopting "Buku Kedai" among Malaysian micro-entrepreneurs.

The third objective investigates the relationship between subjective norms and "Buku Kedai" adoption among Malaysian micro-entrepreneurs. Results indicated a positive and significant relationship between subjective norms and "Buku Kedai" adoption (β3=0.283, T=5.480), and p<000). The results are in tandem with prior studies, although they adopted different technologies [42], [43]. Hence, the higher the microentrepreneurs perceived that their social contacts (family, friends, and colleagues) expect them to adopt "Buku Kedai", the higher the likelihood of its adoption. Similarly, the study accepted H3, indicating a relationship between subjective norms and adopting "Buku Kedai" among Malaysian micro-entrepreneurs.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The study has proven the validity of TAM in explaining and predicting users' adoption of new technology. TAM provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors influencing users to adopt the technology. TAM has been used in various settings and has offered insightful information about technology adoption patterns, assisting researchers and practitioners in designing and promoting technology adoption. The study also contributes to the literature on the factors related to adopting new technology.

5.2. Practical implications

The study offers several implications to guide microentrepreneurs in adopting new technology. First, the microentrepreneurs must understand what the digital book-keeping application ("Buku Kedai") can offer them. Understanding the unique features and advantages offered by "Buku Kedai" will assist entrepreneurs to customise to their needs and preferences.

Second, the discovery provides implications to the SMECorp, the Ministry of Cooperatives and Entrepreneurship (MEDAC), and other government agencies in Malaysia to conduct training to educate entrepreneurs on the "Buku Kedai" application. The training will upscale their digital talent and build capability.

Third, the discovery also implies that the relevant authorities recognise the importance of subjective norms or social contacts, such as family and friends, in influencing the adoption of "Buku Kedai". Inviting family members and friends to the training program would make them support the entrepreneurs to adopt "Buku Kedai". Besides, sharing success stories of individuals or organisations that have successfully adopted "Buku Kedai" can inspire others to follow suit.

5.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although the study highlighted many implications, the researchers identified several limitations. The first limitation is the lack of representativeness of the sample. Obtaining a representative sample is challenging as micro-entrepreneurs operate in diverse industries and contexts. Future research should strive for a larger sample size and employ appropriate sampling techniques to ensure a broader representation of micro-entrepreneurs. Additionally, it would be beneficial to gather data from multiple regions or industries to capture the diversity of the micro-entrepreneur population.

The second limitation identified is the study employs a survey for data collection using self-reported data. This technique could be biased and have social desirability implications. Respondents may provide answers that they perceive as more favourable or socially acceptable. Future research should assure respondents of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Besides, further research should also clearly communicate the importance of honest answers and use well-validated measurement scales to minimise response bias.

The third limitation is that the study captures data at a specific time, making establishing causality or temporal sequence between variables difficult. Furthermore, determining whether adopting "Buku Kedai" drives actual adoption is challenging. Future research should consider incorporating longitudinal designs, such as follow-up surveys or panel data collection, which can detect changes in intention and technology adoption over time. By acknowledging these limitations and implementing the recommended strategies, researchers can enhance the rigour and applicability of their study on technology adoption among micro-entrepreneurs. Hence, this will contribute to advancing knowledge and provide practical insights for micro-entrepreneurs seeking to embrace technology in their businesses.

6. CONCLUSION

Results indicated that all the predicted factors, namely perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and subjective norms, are positively and significantly related to "Buku Kedai" adoption. In other words, the higher the microentrepreneurs perceived the usefulness and the easiness of the application, the more likely they would adopt "Buku Kedai". Besides that, subjective norms manifested by family and friends also play a significant role in influencing micro-entrepreneurs to adopt "Buku Kedai" application. Thus, TAM offers a novel perspective on the study of the adoption of "Buku Kedai," a digital book-keeping application. The discoveries shed valuable insights for policymakers, governments, academicians, micro-entrepreneurs, and others to formulate training and development programs for upscaling digital talent and building capabilities among microentrepreneurs. Indeed, in the era of digital economies and the pursuit of success, micro-entrepreneurs should adopt digitalisation, specifically the "Buku Kedai" application. Hence, digitalisation enables entrepreneurs to make data-driven decisions, expands their reach, and enhances their operational capabilities. In today's dynamic and digitalisation-driven world, adopting the appropriate digitalisation can give entrepreneurs a competitive edge and thus boost chances of success in their business venture.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

Wan Noraswaniaty Wan Ahmad holds the position of a senior lecturer at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. With 15 years of teaching experience, her expertise spans financial accounting, cost accounting, entrepreneurship, and fundamental business mathematics. Her profound research interest in accounting education and the transformative effects of digitalization on accounting practices. She participates in both academia and industry consultancy projects, and practical collaborations within faculty programs. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Accounting, focusing on the niche field of accounting and digitalization, thereby continuing her pursuit of academic advancement. She can be contacted at email: waniaty@uitm.edu.my.

Rabaatul Azira Hassan holds the position of a lecturer at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia since 2023. She previously served as a senior assistant in the Bursary at UiTM Bursar's Office. With 17 years of experience in financial management, her expertise lies in combining practical experience with academic rigor to enhance the learning experience for her students. Currently, she teaches financial accounting and risk management. Committed to furthering her academic pursuits, she is actively pursuing a Ph.D. in Accountancy. She can be contacted at email: rabaatul@uitm.edu.my.

Maheran Zakaria holds the valued position of associate professor at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. Leveraging a decade of banking industry experience, she transitioned to academia, adding depth to her role. Her research passions encompass audit, ethics, entrepreneurship, and education. She is a dynamic transferrer of knowledge in consultancy, supervision, community engagement, and fostering international collaborations. Notably, she serves as the coordinator of the master in accounting program, reflecting her leadership in academic initiatives. The manuscript, a result of her research grant, delves into the crucial factors driving the success of micro-entrepreneurs. She can be contacted at email: maher835@uitm.edu.my.

Saifful Nazri Md Nazir holds the position of a senior assistant accountant at UiTM Bursar's Office Kota Bharu Campus since 2007. Previously he served as accounts assistant at various private companies like Mydin, UMW Toyota and Boustead Sission Paint which covers part of purchasing, payable, and receivable department. As currently he served senior assistant accountant at UiTM Bursar's Office with 16 years of experience in different scope of student accounts, payables, assets and disposal management, procurement and fund, and accounts unit. He can be contacted at email: saifful@uitm.edu.my.

Dwi Suhartini born in Surabaya on December 15, 1968. She is a lecturer in the accounting department at Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jawa Timur (UPNVJT) in Indonesia. Her undergraduate education and master, degree were taken at the UPNVJT in the field of accounting while her doctoral degree in accounting was taken at the postgraduate doctoral program at Airlangga University, Indonesia. She actively carries out higher education tri dharma activities in various professional and scientific activities, both as a lecturer and researcher, and as a resource person in community service activities. She can be contacted at email: dwisuhartini.ak@upnjatim.ac.id.