

Going With Mother's Wish: A Decision To Become An Entrepreneur In Kelantan.

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Prologue

The rain is pouring down from the sky as the monsoon season starts in the Malaysian Peninsular area. Sun is already down, and Nusratina Binti Shaari (Ms Tina) is sitting alone in her room, thinking about her next move to take her business to the next stage.

Ms Tina reflected, "Things never be easy for middle- or lower-income group people in middle-income group country; education enables us to get a job or earn a living, but life circumstances led us to fight and look for our destiny."

Ms. Tina has to get serious about her Kuih Karas business. She has already left her job in Kuala Lumpur, and with COVID-19, the opportunity to get another is impossible. Ms Tina thinks she has a business option and needs to keep her head cool and fully enter into the business. However, Ms Tina must be vigilant and consider the prospective marketing channels and connecting to the prospective customers for her business.

Ms. Tina exclaimed, "Thinking about starting a business is easy, but it takes demanding determination to develop and sustain a small business."

Ms Tina background

Nusratina binti Shaari was born to a small restaurant owner who had a small business, and she understand the nature of business and effort required to sustain a trivial business. My family helps her get the best education and guides her toward a career outside their family business.

Ms Tina exclaimed, "My family business experience nurtures the business aptitude, and I have the strong mental attitude to take clients' negative and positive feedback. However, family always helps make a career outside their family business."

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KEYWORDS

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Disclaimer

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Ms Tina completed her graduation from MARA University of Technology in 2012, and she decided to move to Kuala Lumpur to try her luck and gain work experience. Tina got her first job as a management trainee at Oracle Synergy Sdn Bhd. The full-time job and responsibilities helped Tina learn the necessary management skills and understand the corporate culture.

She completed three years as a management trainee and was promoted to report analyzer. Ms Tina performs well in her new role at Oracle Synergy and is willing to keep working for the next few years. Ms Tina learns about business management and develops people skills and profit and loss preparation. Understand the management of weekly and monthly meetings. Learn how management reporting and data management help management decision-making. Ms Tina was performing well and looking for a promising career in the industry.

Tina was working fine in her new role and enjoying the success of her hard work. In late 2019, Tina received a call from her family, and her father told her that her mother was not well. Tina's mother became ill and may not recover, and her mother needs the care and support of a family member. After making a risky decision, Tina returned home to take care of her mother for a few weeks.

Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic, which originated in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, rapidly spread worldwide, creating an unprecedented global health crisis. The virus's rapid transmission led to a significant increase in infections and deaths, disrupting the norms of daily life and causing a substantial economic downturn. Globally, the pandemic resulted in approximately 572 million cases and 6.3 million deaths.

In Southeast Asia, Malaysia was notably impacted by the pandemic. To curb the spread of the virus, the Malaysian government implemented a Movement Control Order (MCO) from March 18, 2020, to January 2021. This lockdown significantly reduced socio-economic activities, leading to a widespread sense of fear and uncertainty. The lockdown particularly affected low-income families, who faced considerable challenges during this period.

While lockdowns were essential in controlling the virus's spread, they were not a long-term solution. A second phase of the MCO, known as MCO-02, was introduced from January 11, 2021, to early March 2021. Following this, Malaysia's National COVID-19 Immunization Program commenced on March 5, 2021. This vaccination drive was crucial in restoring public confidence and enhancing the country's preparedness to mitigate the pandemic's impact.

The National Recovery Program, initiated on June 15, 2021, and continuing until January 2022, marked a significant milestone in Malaysia's response to the pandemic. Under this program, every adult resident in Malaysia received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, along with an additional booster shot. By the end of 2021, Malaysia reported approximately 4.7 million COVID-19 cases and a death toll of 16,000.

Food business in Malaysia

In Malaysia, significant societal changes have been evident since the early 1990s, characterized by rapid modernization and the rise of a substantial middle-income demographic. These shifts have notably influenced Malaysia's food culture, primarily through a process known as compressed monetarization. A considerable proportion of the population, estimated at 75%, has transitioned from rural to urban settings. This urban migration often results in small residences with limited cooking facilities. Consequently, with both men and women engaged in the workforce, there is a growing preference for dining out or ready-to-eat meals.

Dining out in Malaysia transcends mere sustenance; it is a vibrant social affair that fosters interpersonal connections and offers a chance to indulge in various flavors. This practice is deeply embedded in the Malaysian way of life, where sharing meals with friends and family is synonymous with creating a sense of warmth and harmony. Eating out is not just about relaxation and celebration; it is a journey through the diverse culinary traditions of Malaysia. The food scene boasts many choices, including Malay, Indian, Chinese, Arabic, and Thai cuisines, featuring dishes like nasi lemak, satay, roti canai, nasi biryani, and many others.

Recently, Malaysia has seen the emergence of themed cafés and restaurants. These establishments offer unique and innovative dining experiences and have become particularly popular among society's younger and more affluent segments. Despite this trend, 'Mamak' stalls retain their charm and popularity. Known for being open around the clock, these stalls serve as hubs for social gatherings, offering late-night meals at affordable prices, with favourites like roti canai, murtabak, and teh tarik (milk tea).

Seafood is an indispensable part of Malaysian cuisine, attributed to the country's extensive coastline and numerous rivers and lakes. Malaysians enjoy a wide range of seafood from saltwater and freshwater sources. The preparation methods are diverse, including steaming, baking, currying, stir-frying, and creating soups, all cherished by seafood enthusiasts nationwide.

Tina Coming Back to Her Mother

Precisely in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Malaysia, Ms Tina decided to return to her village to take care of her sickening mother. However, at that time, the Prime Minister of Malaysia announced the MCO phase, so some employment sectors in Malaysia had to be dismissed. After two months, her mother's condition still showed no signs of recovery. Ms. Tina decided to quit her job to return and take care of her mother full-time.

In the beginning, Ms. Tina never thought of venturing into business because she saw the struggle of her parents, who ran the business with difficulty. Ms. Tina

is the daughter of a married couple who work as small restaurant traders. That makes Ms. Tina think that doing business is a complicated job. Tina's mother likes the kuih karas and suggests that Tina learn to cook kuih karas. Tina's mother taught her to cook the Kuih Karas at home. After many attempts, Tina cooked the best kuih karas, and even my mother tasted it and praised my efforts.

"My mother requested me to consider starting my business and becoming an entrepreneur like my parents."

Kuih Karas was Tina's mother's favourite food at that time. Kuih Karas is only famous in the state of Kedah, causing Ms. Tina to have the opportunity to produce Kuih Karas products in Kelantan to make it easier for the people of Kelantan to get Kuih Karas without travelling to Kedah. Tina has to decide to start thinking about starting a small kuih karas business.

Tina commented, " My mother likes to eat kuih karas, and she likes the kuih karas I cooked for her. The praise of my mother for my cooking strengthens my skills and capacity to cook good kuih karas."

However, the idea to sell Kuih Karas came about due to the request of her late mother at that time, who really wanted to eat Kuih Karas. After going through several failures, She finally succeeded in making a delicious Karas cake. Starting that day, Ms. Tina often made kuih karas be shared among her mother, relatives, and neighbours. Since that day, several people contacted Ms Tina to get Kuih Karas, and starting from that day, she got the idea to sell Kuih Karas and make them a source of income.



Figure 1: Kuih Karas

During that time, Tina's mother expired, and Tina was left alone. Tina faced the difficulty of the COVID-19 period, and without a job, it became necessary to start thinking about building the business. Tina's father suggests that she think about starting a food business.

Tina stated, "I got my passion for entrepreneurship from my parents, but my mother nurtured it and guided me to select the path of entrepreneurship."

Ms Tina lacks many resources; she is introverted and has few friends. Tina started the business with RM 10 and made two bottles of karas cake, and to her surprise, she could sell them fast. Things got smooth within a month; Tina made a few bottles of karas cake every day and sold them within a day. Everyday sales empower Tina and bring the required money and exposure to uptake the business.



Figure 2: Kuih Karas

Social media penetration in Malaysia

Social media usage is increasing in Malaysia due to the low rate of internet and the availability of high-speed internet. Malaysian business landscape heavily relies on the internet and social media. Malaysian entrepreneurs use social media platforms for marketing, customer engagement, networking, and brand development. Social media empowers small and young entrepreneurs to reach a broad audience by using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, to name a few. Social awareness and use are rising among the general population. Social media offers a low-cost marketing platform to showcase products and services to attract potential customers. The social media platforms are based

on visual appeal and are particularly valuable for food and business businesses. Social media is suitable for engaging with a broader audience in less time and cost. Social media portals facilitate interacting with customers, receiving feedback, responding to their queries, and building customer trust and loyalty. The social media networks are good networking tools to engage with peer businesses and potential business partners. Social media facilitates idea generation, sharing of information, collaboration, and developing business opportunities. However, heavy time investment is required for content creation, online channel management, customer engagement, and larger audience engagement. The effective use of social media harnesses business growth, nurtures customer engagement, and networks with peers. The use of social media is emerging as a vital tool of business management, facilitating marketing and business development. However, entrepreneurs must be digitally literate to handle their digital presence and understand the importance of social media in today's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Epilogue

Tina has to decide on the Kuih Karas business full-time. Tina has to think about establishing a network for selling the Kuih Karas. Making the product is more straightforward than selling it. Social media can offer a viable platform to promote and sell small entrepreneurs' products. Tina is thinking about using social media and taking good advantage of it. Social media empowers young and novice entrepreneurs to experiment and try their luck in the business. Now Tina has to take the big step to establish the shop and take the business to the next level.

Annexure

Tinas' Kichen

