

## Strengthening Personality Traits to Promote Iban Women's Empowerment and Tourism in Sarawak

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### Abstract

Tourism has a vital role to play in achieving Sustainable Development Goals, especially in the empowerment of women. To enhance the positive impact of tourism development on women's lives, initiatives to intensify personality traits and skills competencies need to be emphasized. Iban women are the majority ethnic group in Sarawak who were involved in economic activities and tourism. This paper aims to assess personality traits and improve skills competencies as a tourism agenda to empower Iban Women in Sarawak. The socio-economic status of Iban women in rural areas can be uplifted via tourism-related programs. This study uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive design through questionnaire form, which is a modified instrument of the Big Five and Competencies Skills that will refer to generic knowledge, skills, and attitudes. A total of 190 Iban women aged 18 and above were involved as respondents. Ultimately, Iban women had high consciousness traits ( $F = 4.31$ ). The trait indicates that Iban Women are committed to working as well as responsible, dependable, and trustworthy. The production of traditional handicrafts is the main skill of Iban Women in Sarawak who contribute to the state's economic growth and tourism development. The Iban woman not only plays a major role in supplementing income to their household in a far-off rural community but also enhances the preservation and conservation of the authentic culture of the Iban community. Further studies are suggested to include more indicators for enhancing Iban women empowerment initiatives.

**Keywords:** Iban Women, Empowerment, Tourism, Sarawak, Personality

### Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have established a worldwide framework for eradicating extreme poverty, combating inequality and injustice, and reducing climate change

until 2030. They will result in a brighter future for all. Given that the 17 SDGs and the 169 SDG targets explicitly are intended to give the world new directions, tourism can and must play a significant role in achieving sustainable solutions for people, the planet, prosperity, and peace. This is due to the fact that tourism is the strongest economic force that may directly or indirectly advance all sustainable development objectives. It is a target for goals 8, 12 and 14 which concentrates on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption, and production (SCP), and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively, (<https://tourism4sdgs.org/tourism-for-sdgs/tourism-and-sdgs/>).

Women are an equally significant group in accomplishing national goals, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals. According to the World Bank (2011), a number of nations show that when a woman manages the household budget, the income increases. This might be as a result of changes in the way money is spent to cash transfers or the woman's own wages. But in developing nations, women make up a significant portion of the labour, notably in the agricultural sector.

One of the strategies the government is pursuing to boost women's engagement in the workforce is women's empowerment. The state of Sarawak has additionally reacted to this initiative by allocating funds with the goal of empowering Sarawak Dayak women. The four crucial components of this empowerment, according to Sarakup Indu Dayak Sarawak Borneo (2020), are education, the advancement of women, the preservation of Dayak culture, and the development of Dayak women's human capital. According to comments made by Alice Jawan in The Star Star (2020), the emphasis on elevating Dayak women's roles is on four factors to help Sarawak improve in terms of skills, technology, economy, and other areas. The Dayak people, who make up most of the ethnic groups in Sarawak, are the largest population there.

The Iban community makes up the largest indigenous ethnic group in Sarawak, accounting up 35.3% of the state's total population and being represented in every region of the state. According to data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2016), Iban people make up 858,989 people, or 50% of Sarawak's overall population. The Iban should be utilised in this study as an example of the ethnic minority in Sarawak because they make up most of the the state's ethnic population, the researcher claims. Most Dayak communities, especially the Ibans in Sarawak, have historically relied on shifting cultivation as a source of revenue in addition to fishing and hunting for survival. Currently, most mothers raise their children in their homes. They live in a longhouse. Early in the 1970s, the Iban Community was the state of Sarawak's largest farming community, particularly in the rural area, according to Sim (1985); Ngidang & Abdul (1999); Jayum (1994), as cited in (Ugeh et al., 2015). According to Daniel Ugeh et al. (2015), Iban women take on additional responsibilities when their husbands are at work in addition to being wives, such as caring for their children's needs as both parents.

Malaysia has made tremendous strides toward gender equality, according to the results (Malaysia Prime Minister's Department, 2017). Women are now more active in the workforce. Compared to 46.4 percent in 2009, it demonstrates a trend in the positive direction toward reaching the goal of 59 percent by 2020. While gender parity in education has been attained since the early 1990s, women's life expectancy is higher than men. The percentage of female students enrolled in public higher education in 2015 was 62 percent, exceeding the 60 percent mark since 2003. Similar results were found for the participation of Iban women in the economy in Sarawak. According to Tan Sri Empiang Jabu in Utusan Borneo Online (2014), Iban women must constantly be dedicated, patient, open-minded, and diligent to enhance their

abilities, standard of living, and ability to generate revenue for their families while utilizing chances that are presented to them.

Therefore, this study critically examined the personality traits factor that have a significant impact on efforts to empower the Iban women's community in Sarawak.

## **Literature Review**

### **Personality Traits**

The natural traits of an individual are referred to as their personality (Barrick & Mount, 1993). Personality also refers to mental and behaviour characteristics that remain consistent across time (Bozionelos, 2004). Each person has distinctive personality traits that influence their actions and thoughts (Wallace, 2004). The interactions between people and their surroundings also have an impact on personality. Additionally, these interactions also affect how people live their daily lives (Rotter, 1990, Azizi et al., 2011). The Big Five uses five distinct dimensions to characterise a person's personality on the broadest possible scale (De Raad, 2000; Goldberg, 1990; John et al., 2008, Rammstedt et al., 2017). The five qualities in this study are conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. The significance of these five personality traits determines the status of women and the degree to which minority women can draw attention to individual personality traits in the general community.

Terms like personality, motivation, interest, and beliefs refer to non-cognitive skills. Evidence suggest that significant personalities and life outcomes have led to high potential critical missions in relation to public policy and intervention; in other words, whereas cognitive talents, like personality, are frequently equally important in predicting key indicators of life success (Rammstedt et al., 2017). Performance at work and income have an impact on personality (Hogan and Holland, 2003; Judge et al., 2012). According to research by Rammstedt et al (2017), the Big Five personality traits play a substantial role in explaining life success. The amount of life satisfaction of an individual is influenced by their personality as well as their social environment. Particularly, those with higher levels of emotional stability, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness frequently report higher levels of life satisfaction (Steel et al., 2008).

The Big Five personality was established in 1981 at a symposium in Honolulu as a descriptively connected model personality. It is the outcome of a consensus reached among the key scholars, including Goldberg, Tekemoto-Chock, Comrey, and Digman. A survey of personality tests revealed that most of them evaluate the five core traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Goldberg, 1993). Consequently, it was at this point that the Big Five personality, often known by the acronym OCEAN, was created. The following provides a further description of the Big Five personality model's five traits

### **Openness to Experience**

The conceptual definition of openness to experience refers to people's predisposition to be inventive, thoughtful, and creative (Judge & Bono, 2000). The operational definition of openness in this study, however, relates to people with a strong and clear imagination, an interest in abstract concepts, and an ease in comprehending those concepts.

### **Conscientiousness**

According to Barrick & Mount (1991), a person who is conscientious is likely to be tenacious, accountable, authoritative, and consistent. The operational meaning of accuracy in this study relates to those who complete jobs promptly, follow directions, put items back where they came from, and work in an organized manner.

### **Extraversion**

According to Judge et al (2009), an extraverted person is outgoing, talkative, and sociable in social situations. The operational definition of extraversion in this study relates to those who chat a lot, like get to know each other, and stand out at an event.

### **Agreeableness**

According to Drheim et al (2016), agreeableness is the quality of being decent, dependable, and friendly. In this study, those who are amenable to understanding the emotions and issues of others are referred to by the definition operational for agreeableness.

### **Neuroticism**

Neurotics are those who frequently experience tension, anxiety, and emotional shifts (moody) (Murray et al., 1995; Clarke, 2004). In this study, the term "neurotic" is used to describe those who exhibit traits including moodiness, irritability, and emotional instability.

### **Tourism in Sarawak**

After the manufacturing sector, the tourism sector is Malaysia's second-largest economic contributor (Ibrahim & Razzaq, 2010; Kaur et al., 2016). This data demonstrates that the tourism sector contributes significantly to economic growth, job opportunities, and foreign exchange earnings. The Sarawak Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth and Sports, the Malaysian agency in charge of the state's tourism policy, has released historical and more modern materials, according to which the proliferation of culture and the direction of economic activity in the state are both significant components of tourism policy. For Sarawak, whose economy depends on the extractive industries and is currently undergoing a protracted decline in those sectors, economic diversification has never been more crucial. Nearly a fifth of Sarawak's 2.4 million people reside in North Sarawak, which includes the Miri and Limbang Divisions. This region is as linguistically, culturally, and religiously (2010 population, 451,132). The pattern of tourist visits to northern Sarawak recommends that any efforts to enhance tourism through heritage and creative arts should be directed to the closest a area in Sarawak (Haigh, 2020).

According to Cunha & Cunha (2005), the tourism sector is an industry related to travel and leisure. It is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world, and it has a considerable positive impact on both the growth of the nation's economy and the prosperity of nearby communities (Osman & Sentosa, 2013). Tourism has grown dramatically in recent years as a result of tourists looking for areas to unwind and decompress (Lin & Yeh, 2013). Due to contributions of significantly to driving economic activity and raising community revenue, rural tourism has drawn more attention from governments, non-governmental organisations (NGO), and industry participants (Egbali et al., 2011). The goal of tourist development, according to earlier studies (e.g., Moshabaki & Malek, 2004; Yu et al., 2011), should be to raise the standard of living for locals by creating more work possibilities and household income. However, the rise of mass tourism has a detrimental influence on the

environment (e.g., pollution, deforestation, depletion of natural resources), and it generally decreases local community support for the development of rural tourism (Miller, 2006). Additionally, local communities are unhappy with tourist development since locals' sentiments toward rural tourism development are frequently ignored when tourism starts to flourish in a region (Banks, 2010). To ensure the long-term viability of rural tourism development and the preservation of local resources and culture, it is crucial to win over local populations (Tosun, 2006). Overall, a well-planned rural tourism programme will be advantageous to all tourism stakeholders, including tourists who will enjoy engaging with the region's natural and cultural resources as well as residents and industry participants in terms of welfare. To ensure the competitiveness of a destination for tourism, it is crucial to build sustainable tourist resources. The influence of environmental constructs and their contributions to the growth of destination competitiveness also play a role in the creation of successful tourism destinations (Chin et al., 2014).

The Sarawak government and travel companies recognised the Iban longhouse as the primary tourism product as the state's tourism sector began to flourish in the 1980s. The Iban are a native population of Sarawak in Borneo, and they live in longhouses. The Iban created their longhouse, a communal residence, out of historical concerns for defence and security. The Iban live and survive as a community.

### **Issues and Challenges of Iban Women**

Some Iban people in Malaysia still reside in areas of extreme poverty, close to rivers and forested areas. As a result, many people in the Iban society still works in basic jobs. According to statistics released by the Malaysian Government, this location causes the Dayak community to still lag and grow hazy (Negin, 2021). The association between personality traits and skill proficiency among Iban women in Sarawak is important both academically and practically. The initiative of community empowerment toward quality of life will theoretically be predicted by personality qualities. Community empowerment in economic growth and poverty reduction will lead to economic efficiency.

The government must put in the necessary policies to ensure that women may participate equally in all sectors of the economy, particularly as the nation ages by the 2030. Empowerment initiatives must be implemented in order to promote women's participation in the labour force. If empowerment is to be attained, special considerations must be given to the Iban community, who makes up the majority of Sarawak's population. The competence of this group should be leveraged to highlight its identity. In addition to make sure their children attend school, mothers also have a responsibility to ensure that the children are fed adequately and that the fields' paddies are maintained in good condition for a good crop of paddy.

In addition to concentrating on personality factors, this research also measures and assesses the skills gap among Iban women in Sarawak. Consequently, this study will also suggest acceptable approaches and activities. Industry 4.0 is anticipated to have a substantial impact on the labour and employment markets, including job displacement (the displacement of workers), greater labour productivity, and a growing skills gap. Therefore, the human capital of the nation must always be in line with the demands of the dynamic market and economy of the nation.

The goal of this study is to determine the psychological qualities of ethnic minorities in order to help them adjust to their changing environment. In addition to that, this study aims to assist the government and industries in identifying appropriate fields for employment and

tasks carried out specifically by Iban women especially in tourism. In addition to making this ethnic minority an indicator and reflection for Dayak women in Sarawak, this specific attention will help the strategy for women's empowerment that will be developed. According to Gartner (2019), employees expect things like job changes due to devitalization and say things like "I need skill improvements." How much of an improvement, exactly? Without an evaluation of competency, we won't know. The competencies Iban women need to have succeed in the new labour market and technology advancements will be examined in this study.

### Research Methodology

Data collection strategies is planned with reference to the literature review found in the context of studies on the empowerment of Iban women in Sarawak. The sociocultural demands of the Iban population, a sizable community, would directly reflect the needs of the ethnic minorities in Sarawak. Research techniques that are quantitative are used in this study. The questionnaire form is used to gather information. The Iban, Sarawak's biggest indigenous ethnic group, is the study's focus group. In order to choose study participants from the various facets of the Sarawakian Iban population, the cluster sampling approach is employed.

The study sample comprises of Iban women from all division in Sarawak. This study involved 190 respondents, all of whom are young people between the ages of 18 and 40. Surveys had been disseminated using email, social media, and field research. The study tool is divided into two sections: Part B: Personality Traits and Competencies, and Part A: Demographic Respondents. Data were gathered between July 2021 until December 2021. Using SPSS Version 26, the data analysis is broken down into three phases: descriptive analysis, levels, and correlation relationships.

Before the main study, a pilot study is carried out. It reveals the respondents' level of comprehension of the questionnaire's questions and items. The pilot study required at least four or five volunteers, and a maximum of no more than thirty, according to Hair et al. (2007). The alpha coefficient that the study should produce shouldn't be less than 0.6. Due to the instrument's Cronbach's Alpha dependability range of 0.0 to 1.0, this is the case. This demonstrates that a value's reliability increases as its value approaches 1.0.

Prior to the main investigation, a pilot study in Sarawak with 38 participants was done. According to Cronbach's alpha, the value was greater than 0.7. For the 30-person study sample used in the pilot project, the Cronbach's alpha value for the personality construct was 0.707. The numbers are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Findings of instrument reliability for a pilot study*

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Alpha Cronbach
Openness	4.1316	.61758	.825
Conscientiousness	4.3118	.55794	.734
Extraversion	3.9719	.65180	.464
Agreeableness	3.8789	.73676	.752
Neuroticism	3.1526	.79499	.678

### Result, Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the main research findings. Descriptive analysis was performed to explain the demographic findings of the respondents with regard to age, religion, section, level of education, occupation and monthly income. These demographic data allow to better understand the characteristics of study participants. Table 1 shows that the highest respondents are from districts Bintulu (f=51, %=26.8%). The majority of the respondents (f=78, %=41.1) were in the age range of 31 to 40. The total of the respondents is Iban ethnic in this study (f=190, %=100). Secondly, over 80% of the respondents have a secondary education (PMR: f= 9, %= 4.7; SPM: f= 81, %= 42.6; SKM: f= 4, %= 2.1; Diploma: f=28, %= 14.7; Degree: f=43, %=22.6 and Master: f=9, %= 4.7). Most of the respondents in this survey are government employees (f=52, %=27.4) and the majority of respondents reported monthly incomes of RM 1,000 or higher. Nearly all of those who filled out the questionnaire for this study also enjoy engaging in agricultural pursuits or making handmade goods which can contribute to the tourism industry. Table 1 below displays the complete demographic breakdown.

Table 1

*Profile of respondents (N=190)*

Demographic characteristics	Frequency (N=190)	Percent (%)	
Districts	Betong	16	8.4
	Bintulu	51	26.8
	Kapit	9	4.7
	Kuching	15	7.9
	Limbang	9	4.7
	Miri	8	4.2
	Mukah	16	8.4
	Samarahan	6	3.2
	Sarikei	11	5.8
	Serian	9	4.7
	Sibu	16	8.4
	Sri Aman	24	12.6
Age	19-25 years old	33	17.4
	26-30 years old	14	7.4
	31-49 years old	78	41.1
	Over 50 years old	65	34.2
Status	Single	43	22.6
	Married	131	68.9
	Single mother (have children)	16	8.4
Education Level	No school	2	1.1
	Standard 6	14	7.4
	Form 3	9	4.7
	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)	81	42.6
	Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia	4	2.1

	Diploma	28	14.7
	Degree	43	22.6
	Master	9	4.7
Monthly Income	RM 2,001 - RM 3,000	27	14.2
	RM 1,000 and below	50	26.3
	RM 1,001 - RM 2,000	37	19.5
	RM 3,001 - RM 4,000	28	14.7
	RM 4,001 - RM 5,000	8	4.2
	RM 5,001 and above	40	21.1
Profession	Self-employment	42	21.5
	Government servants	52	27.4
	Private sector	29	15.3
	Students	18	9.5
	Not in employment	50	26.3

### Analysis for Instrument Big Five Personality

The five dimensions of personality explored in this research include openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Table 2 shows the results of the researcher's frequency and standard deviation study of the five characteristics of personality. The study showed that across all five personality traits, each item scored higher than 3.0 on average. The average scores for these traits are as follows: openness, 4.16–4.24, conscientiousness, 4.30–4.466, extraversion, 4.21–4.32, agreeableness, 3.5–4.55, and neuroticism, 2.13–3.92. Respondents, overall, are quite diligent, especially when it comes to completing a task that is in line with the stereotype of a typical female.



Table 2

*Mean for trait personality*

Dimension	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Openness</b>	I have a clear imagination	4.24	.634
	I am interested in abstract ideas	4.16	.855
	I enjoy understanding abstract ideas	4.21	.875
	I have a good imagination	4.24	.751
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	I do work in an organized manner	4.45	.602
	I like to follow directions	4.45	.602
	I always put things back in place originally	4.66	.534
	I do my work quickly	4.32	.739
<b>Extraversion</b>	I am the main pillar of my family	4.32	.662
	I like to follow instructions from my superiors and colleagues	4.21	.843
	I like to meet different people in an event	4.32	.662
	I like to stand out	3.32	1.118
<b>Agreeableness</b>	I sympathize with other people's feelings	4.55	.602
	I am interested in other people's problems	3.53	1.330
	I feel other people's emotions	4.08	.882
	I feel other people's emotions	4.18	.865
<b>Neuroticism</b>	I have mood swings frequent	3.13	1.212
	I'm not relaxed most of the time	3.92	1.050
	I am easily offended	3.47	1.289
	I often feel depressed	2.13	1.095

Based on Table 2, personality characteristics of Iban women tend to be openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness. These characteristics can be seen through clear imagination, do work in an organized manner, follow directions and work quickly. Iban women also as a main pillar of their family, follow instructions and understanding with other people feeling and emotion. These all traits help Iban women to involved in economic activities and tourism and it can improve their skills and competencies as a tourism agenda particularly to empower Iban Women in Sarawak. Additionally, prior research from Fong et al (2017) has demonstrated that local communities can deal with difficulties related to tourist development in rural areas provided they have a high level of local community competence, capacity, and skills. The ability of the local community to successfully complete the activities necessary for the sustainability of community tourism development depends heavily on its sense of self-efficacy. According to the study that had been conducted in the rural community of Kuching, the growth of sustainable rural tourism is positively correlated with the local population's high degree of self-efficacy or confidence is essential components of entrepreneurship, leading to overall success in tourism especially in rural areas. It is related to this study that a few areas Iban community in rural areas.

## Conclusion

Researchers offer various recommendations following an examination of numerous prior studies on community empowerment, personality characteristics, and skill competencies. The program's implementation's effects can be used to evaluate its efficacy as well as new initiatives and programmes to support Iban women (Yacob et al., 2021). According to the study's findings, these encompass employing technology, starting a business, and creating jobs (Prime Minister's Department, 2017). Indicators for measuring and evaluating programmes to empower Iban women in Sarawak will be the personality traits and talents that Iban women possess. Dayaks in Sarawak have distinct identities and groups, and as Sarawak tourism's industry progresses it would further open up new employment prospects for Iban women which will help them raise their standard of living.

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