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## Boutique Library Characteristics and Social Media Marketing as a Moderator in Fostering Sustainability in Malaysian Boutique Libraries

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### Abstract

Inspecting Malaysian boutique libraries and their environment, focusing on unique traits and social media marketing as a sustainability tool. This study underlines the need to understand Malaysian boutique libraries' specific qualities and survival. The study focuses on qualitative literature surveys, content analysis, and case studies. After reviewing boutique library literature, promotional materials, goal statements, and a few Malaysian boutique libraries' websites are examined, and the report emphasises Malaysian boutique libraries' key traits. This study also investigates how social media marketing can help boutique libraries survive. Social media helps boutique libraries reach their target audience, promote their services, and establish a community.

Keywords: Boutique library, special library, library usage, library service, social media marketing, sustainable libraries

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### 1.0 Introduction

Boutique libraries are an evolution in the traditional library model, emphasizing the establishment of specialized, intimate areas that create unique resources and experiences for their patrons. This conceptual study examines the intriguing junction of boutique library characteristics and the dynamic influence of social media marketing in defining the trajectory of Malaysian boutique sustainable libraries. Boutique libraries, identified by their distinct ambience, specially selected materials, and personalized services, have developed a worldwide repute for their capacity to offer a customized and immersive reading of the surrounding environment. The incorporation of sustainable practices within boutique libraries remains an underexplored domain within scholarly discourse. In light of the prevailing global emphasis on sustainability, a comprehensive comprehension and promotion of sustainable methodologies in boutique libraries are imperative for their enduring success and substantial contribution to overarching environmental, social, and economic objectives. The extant body of scholarly research underscores the imperative of incorporating sustainable practices into library management, encompassing multifaceted domains such as energy efficiency, waste management, and community engagement. However, the application of these sustainability principles within boutique library settings remains conspicuously limited. Despite Malaysia's

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commendable strides in elevating traditional library services, a discernible scholarly gap persists, specifically in the realm of sustainable practices, particularly within the nuanced context of boutique libraries

These libraries frequently go beyond the traditional duty of information transmission, boosting community interaction and supporting sustainable practices. In the setting of Malaysia, a country noted for its complex cultural tapestry and growing interest in sustainability, boutique libraries present an intriguing chance to explore a synthesis of cultural enrichment, sustainable practices, and modern information transmission. Table 1.1 depicts the differences between boutique libraries and conventional libraries.

Table 1.1 Boutique Library vs Conventional Library

Service Features	Boutique Library	Conventional Library
Subject & resources	Might have specialized or limited collections in some field of area or subject expertise.	Major collections or materials with considerable subject/program/patron needs.
Customer-focused	Constant networking with library stakeholders and users through the Library Committee. Carried out surveys, required skills & and training to cater to user needs.	Service-level agreement in operation committing the library to a high level of customer care; surveys to determine service direction and development; and consultation exercises to check information needs are met and services known
Unique services and personalised	In-house business information portal serving as a one-stop centre; business databases; email notification; acquisitions; collaboration and in-house activities.	Service actively taken to the students by meeting them outside the library – physically; via social networking (portal forum, Twitter, Facebook); CSR, etc.
Decision making	High level of autonomy for the Head Librarian, allowing quick decision-making and significant investment in resources and services.	Librarian controls the library budget and trust funds, hiring, and manages all aspects of services, collections; policy, etc.

(Source: Mazlan, M.A., Abd. Rahman, S.A and Husaini, H., 2022)

The introduction of social media has influenced how libraries communicate with their patrons and other interested parties in this dynamic library landscape. Social media platforms offer exceptional opportunities for marketing, community participation, and engagement. Malaysian boutique sustainable libraries are increasingly embracing social media marketing tactics to expand their unique offers, develop community, and support sustainability efforts. Recognizing the beneficial interaction between boutique library characteristics and social media marketing is critical for increasing their effectiveness and creating a sustainable environment.

The purpose of this conceptual study is to investigate the foundational characteristics of boutique libraries in Malaysia, with an emphasis on their distinguishing traits, operating strategies, and community involvement. In addition, we look at how social media marketing could be utilized as a moderating element in the success and sustainability of boutique libraries. Understanding the interaction between boutique library characteristics and social media marketing is critical for realizing these libraries' full potential and guaranteeing their long-term growth and influence.

### 1.2 Objectives

The study seeks to provide substantial insights to library professionals, and relevant stakeholders who are interested in operating boutique libraries in Malaysia, hence improving libraries' role in community development and sustainable practices, by addressing these objectives;

- RO1: Boutique Library Characteristics Investigation:** To effectively analyse Malaysian boutique libraries' unique characteristics and operational strategies, identifying aspects that distinguish them from typical libraries.
- RO2: Investigate Community Engagement in Boutique Libraries:** Understand the community-centric practices that contribute to the success of boutique libraries by exploring the extent to which they connect with their communities.
- RO3: Examine the influence of Social Media Marketing:** Investigate the influence of social media marketing on boutique libraries, identifying how it affects publicity, community involvement, and sustainability.
- RO4: Discover how social media marketing moderates** the relationship between boutique library qualities and overall success and sustainability.
- RO5: Propose Suggestions for Effective Utilization:** By the findings, make recommendations for boutique libraries on how to successfully use social media marketing to maximize their exposure and impact in the Malaysian environment.

## 2.0 Background of the study

Libraries have evolved from a simple book depository to a complex collection of resources organized by information specialists to educate, inform, and entertain users. The fast-changing digital ecosystem and growing desire for sustainable development have led to significant transformations in libraries. In alignment with the UN Agenda 2030, academic libraries lead sustainable development efforts. Focused on exemplary cases worldwide, particularly those recognized by the IFLA Green Library Award and SDG stories on the Library Map of the World, it demonstrates how libraries address all Sustainable Development Goals (Hauke, 2020). The study offers practical tools and encourages the adoption of successful strategies, positioning libraries as key contributors to a global movement for sustainable development (IFLA, 2018).

To remain relevant, libraries must adapt to emerging technologies, provide access to digital materials, and maintain organizational data security. Librarians must learn new skills to manage digital resources, collaborate with stakeholders, and advocate for the library's function. To cater to customers' demands, libraries must provide tailored services, easy access to materials, and advertise their boutique library usage. The comprehensive count of operational libraries encompasses various categories, such as the National Library of Malaysia (PNM), community libraries overseen by PNM, state libraries, rural libraries, special libraries, and academic libraries. According

to data provided by the Information Technology Department of the National Library of Malaysia in 2021, the table presented below illustrates the distribution of libraries in Malaysia across various categories.

Table 2.2 Numbers of Libraries in Malaysia

No	Category	Total
1.	National Library of Malaysia	1
2.	Community Libraries by National Library	4
3.	Public State Libraries	340
	- State Library	16
	- Region Library	2
	- PBT Library	9
	- District / Branch Library	144
	- Community Library by state	88
	- Mobile Library	81
4.	Rural Libraries	1086
	- Rural Library by National Library	507
	- Rural library by state	579
5.	<b>Special Libraries</b>	<b>628</b>
	- <b>Federal/ Agency Department Library</b>	<b>534</b>
	- <b>Statutory Organization Library</b>	<b>70</b>
	- <b>Private Agency Library</b>	<b>24</b>
6.	Academic Libraries	820
	- Public Universities	20
	- Private Universities	61
	- Private University Colleges/ Private Colleges	359
	- Private Schools	197
	- Resource Centre KEMAS	183
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2880</b>

(Source: Information Technology Department, PNM, 2021)

This study also proposed a link between the unique qualities of boutique libraries and the impact of social media marketing on patron usage. The goal of this study was to distribute surveys to consumers or clients of the selected boutique libraries in the Klang Valley to collect precise data. As previously indicated, there are 628 boutique libraries divided into three categories: Federal/Agency Department Library (534), Statutory Organisation Library (70), and Private Agency Library (24). This study has the potential to contribute to future studies on library management research and development, with a focus on Malaysian libraries.

This conceptual study examines the distinctive characteristics of boutique libraries in Malaysia, emphasizing sustainable practices and their utilization of social media marketing. In response to global trends in sustainable development and technological advancements, the research aims to fill a gap by investigating the interplay between boutique libraries, sustainability, and social media engagement. The study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing case studies, interviews, and surveys to gain insights. The anticipated outcomes include a deeper understanding of boutique library features, the role of social media in exposure and sustainability, and practical implications for both practitioners and researchers in the evolving library ecosystem. The research contributes to the academic discourse on library science, providing valuable insights for future exploration in this dynamic field.

### 3.0 Literature Review

According to Hussain (2020), while Industry 4.0 poses challenges to traditional library services such as book lending and reference, it also allows libraries and librarians to provide digital services and support for new technologies. As a result, libraries and librarians must adapt to new technology and skills to fulfil users' changing demands. Social media, which enables libraries to communicate and engage with different stakeholder groups, plays a critical role in pushing academic libraries outside their traditional boundaries and engaging new stakeholder groups (Harrison and colleagues, 2017). It facilitates two-way communication between libraries and their users through public participation and liaison work with user groups, allowing libraries to communicate, and develop policies and services while allowing users to convey needs and provide feedback (Cheng, Lam, and Chiu, 2020). Special libraries are ever-changing information repositories that serve specialist fields, companies, or organizations. They are primarily concerned with obtaining, organizing, and disseminating knowledge about a specific subject or professional field. These libraries provide a multitude of materials and instruments to aid in the advancement of knowledge in a range of fields, including medical research, technological discoveries, and legal precedents (Lisadunetwork, 2018).

The library and information sector, as a customer-focused industry, has long recognized the value of the boutique model. The core of the boutique service consists of specialist library workers, who are required to demonstrate service effectiveness, a substantial return on financial investment, and user satisfaction. According to Mazlan, M.A., Abd. Rahman, S.A and Husaini, H. (2022) the boutique library model offers advantages by capitalizing on the distinctiveness and consistency of personalization in its components, thereby enhancing both aesthetic appeal and practicality. William (1966) provides a comprehensive account of the origins of special libraries in the United States. Individuals belonging to this group were commonly referred to as "special" librarians. The chosen terminology proved to be less apt than the underlying concept it sought to represent, as it lacked precise definition and descriptive clarity.

According to a survey conducted by the American Library Association (ALA) in 1966, it was found that special library services place a high priority on attaining organizational goals, while also being constrained by specific subject domains. These services are designed

to cater to the individual requirements and preferences of their customers, exhibiting a growing range and depth. The exact number of special libraries in Malaysia is currently indeterminate as a result of the lack of reporting and registration within private organisations affiliated with the National Library of Malaysia (PNM). (Table 2.2). A special library is a type of library that caters to the informational needs of a particular group, organisation, industry, or issue domain. Special libraries, as opposed to public libraries, are designed to satisfy the specialised needs of their intended audience. These libraries are critical for professionals, researchers, and individuals working in certain fields, as they meet information needs and facilitate knowledge acquisition. As a result, it is critical to define a precise description for special libraries to distinguish them from other types of libraries.

By the study by Mazlan, M.A., Abd. Rahman, S.A and Husaini, H. (2022) the proposed structure for a boutique library is made up of five important features that work together to create an amazing user experience. It prioritizes the measurement and improvement of user happiness, often known as quality of experience (QoE). Second, the mood is intended to be homely, with a modest, cosy, and pleasant environment that makes clients feel at ease and encourages them to return. Third, the library's one-of-a-kind characteristics are highlighted as a key attribute, eliciting favourable sentiments and contentment among users. Fourth, personalisation through customised services and technology aids in addressing individual user needs and increasing fulfilment. Finally, value-added services, whether in the form of new features or improved offerings, play an important role in increasing the perceived value of the library experience. These aspects, when combined, form a complete foundation for boutique libraries, emphasising user happiness, comfort, and a distinct ambience.

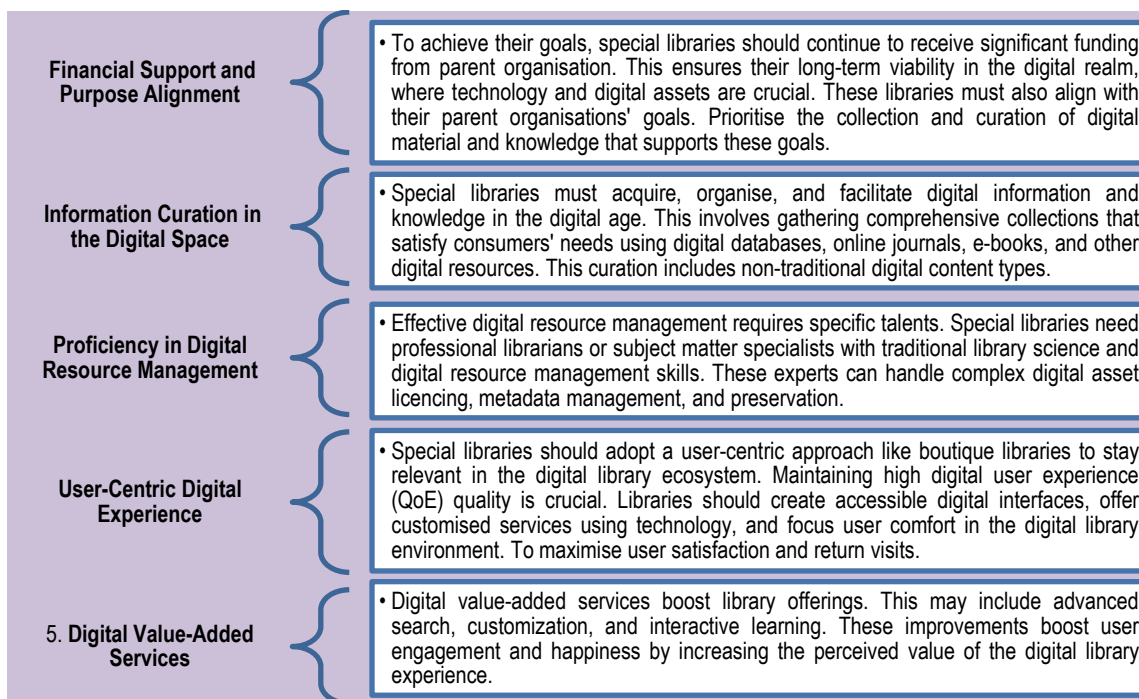


Fig.1: Principles of Special Libraries by Echelman (1967)

The integration of Echelman's evaluative factors for special libraries with the suggested framework for boutique libraries presents a comprehensive methodology for ensuring the viability of special libraries in the contemporary digital landscape. In the era of digitalization, special libraries might achieve success by upholding the principles depicted in Fig.1.

#### 4.0 The Problem Statement

After defining the problem and study purpose, a comprehensive literature review is essential to understand the current research and ongoing discussions in a specific field. This review focuses on the evolution of libraries, beginning with practice transitions and extending to the establishment of boutique libraries. Hussain (2020) has presented arguments regarding the transformations observed in library functions, technology, services, collections, and management. The study examines the transformation of libraries over four distinct phases that correspond to the period after the Industrial Revolution. Initially, their existence was virtually negligible as a result of their constrained magnitude and inadequate administration. Nevertheless, the library is experiencing growth and enhanced administration due to technological advancements, as corroborated by Revathi and Mohan (2022). According to the source, libraries were traditionally perceived as establishments primarily dedicated to housing knowledge, where access to information contained in papers was restricted to prevent theft. A study by Brown, Claire (2017) in her article titled "The biggest challenge facing libraries and information services today," Brown (2017) delves into the primary obstacle faced by these institutions. The issues in the particular area have been discussed:

1. **Environment** - Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we've transitioned to remote assistance, rendering traditional library spaces obsolete. Success in implementing remote working in corporate or legal libraries involves fostering collaboration and sharing experiences
2. **Social** - Communication and promotion are vital for contemporary information professionals in effective library management. A brief poll on evolving library job titles provides valuable insights into the current information sector, despite a limited sample size.
3. **Economic** - The perception of library and information services within an organization could alleviate resource scarcity and budget challenges. A clearer understanding of the importance of well-funded information teams might encourage businesses to allocate necessary resources, though the complete resolution is not guaranteed

The challenges faced by libraries include financial limitations, insufficient knowledge and proficiency in sustainability among library personnel, the rapid pace of technological progress, the competency of librarians in implementing sustainable practices, spatial constraints, resistance to change, evolving user expectations, and the necessity for users to possess advanced skills and knowledge (Khalid et al., 2021; Mathiasson & Jochumsen, 2022). The topic of smart libraries has garnered significant interest in scholarly literature (Shah & Bano, 2020). Hence, it is vital to examine the impact of smart and digital libraries' components, which encompass cutting-edge technologies and knowledgeable personnel, on the successful integration of sustainable practices within special libraries. Additional investigation is required to delve into these associations and formulate tactics to augment the sustainability of specialised libraries while upholding their unique attributes and purposes.

## 5.0 Methodology

The use of a mixed methods research design to capture both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the study. Quantitative methods, including surveys and statistical analysis, will be used to gauge the effectiveness of social media marketing in fostering sustainability. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the characteristics of boutique libraries and the impact of social media marketing on sustainability.

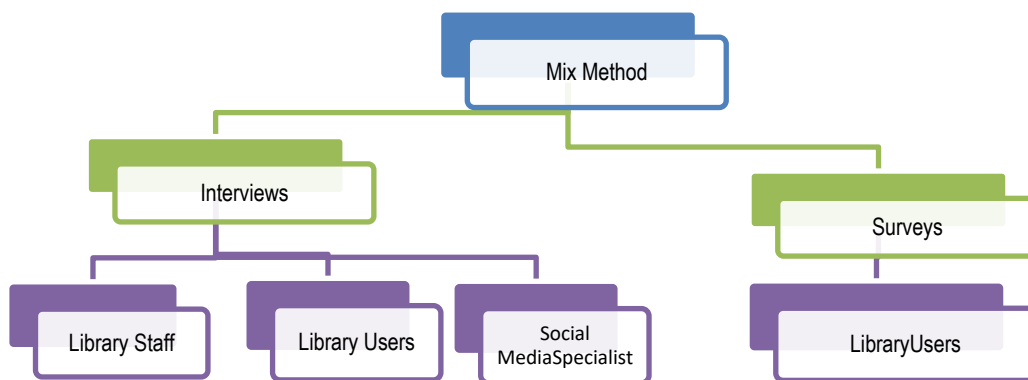


Fig. 2: Research Methodology

**Sampling** - Target sample criteria boutique libraries are selected based on several criteria, including size (small, medium, and large), location (urban, suburban, and rural) and diversity of speciality collections (e.g. cultural, historical, niche interests). Criteria considered for selecting sustainable boutique libraries:

- Eco-friendly practises Efficient lighting, recycling, sustainable sourcing of materials.
- Community engagement: Ongoing local collaboration, and responsiveness to customer needs.
- Digital inclusion: Digital literacy programmes, bridging the digital divide.
- Cultural preservation: Local culture preservation initiatives, curated collections.
- Diverse collections: Reflecting cultural and intellectual diversity.

**Qualitative Data** - Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders to gather data on best practices. Interviewees may include library administrators, staff, and patrons. Questions will focus on understanding the unique characteristics of the libraries, challenges faced, and perceptions of sustainability. The interviews will be recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes relating to the characteristics of boutique libraries and sustainability.

**Quantitative Data** - Quantitative techniques use post-positivist claims for knowledge development and incorporate inquiry strategies including experiments, surveys, and data gathering using statistical instruments, according to Harrison, Reilly & Creswell (2020). Administer surveys to a wider audience, including library patrons and social media followers. The survey will include Likert scale questions to quantify perceptions of boutique library characteristics and the impact of social media marketing on sustainability. Descriptive statistics summarize data features, including mean, median, mode, standard deviation, variance, and range. Inferential statistics make predictions about a population based on a sample, using methods like hypothesis testing and regression analysis.

Subgroup analysis explores variations based on demographic variables, while validity checks ensure survey response reliability. Statistical software, such as SPSS, enhances transparency and adherence to statistical reporting best practices.

**Content Analysis** - Analyze social media content from selected boutique libraries over a specified period. This includes examining the frequency and types of posts, engagement metrics, and the alignment of social media strategies with identified boutique library characteristics. Social media content from Facebook, Instagram and Twitter is collected and analysed using a combination of manual coding and automated tools. Metrics such as likes, shares, comments and the frequency of posts are tracked to measure the effectiveness of social media marketing

The study's limitations include context-specific findings for Malaysian boutique libraries, constrained causal exploration due to cross-sectional design, potential biases in self-reported data, susceptibility to rapid social media changes, influence of external factors, sample representativeness issues, potential oversight in moderator selection, focus on specific social media metrics, self-selection bias among participating libraries, and difficulty capturing long-term changes in sustainability practices.

### 6.0 Proposed Conceptual Framework

The proposed paradigm for ensuring the sustainability of a boutique library encompasses multiple dimensions of sustainability, encompassing financial, environmental, technological, and human resource considerations. The aforementioned components encompass a range of elements that contribute to the sustainability of libraries. These elements consist of diverse funding streams, environmentally conscious practices within library operations, educational initiatives focused on environmental issues, technologically advanced library infrastructure, digital collections, and the establishment of specific jobs dedicated to promoting sustainability within library settings.

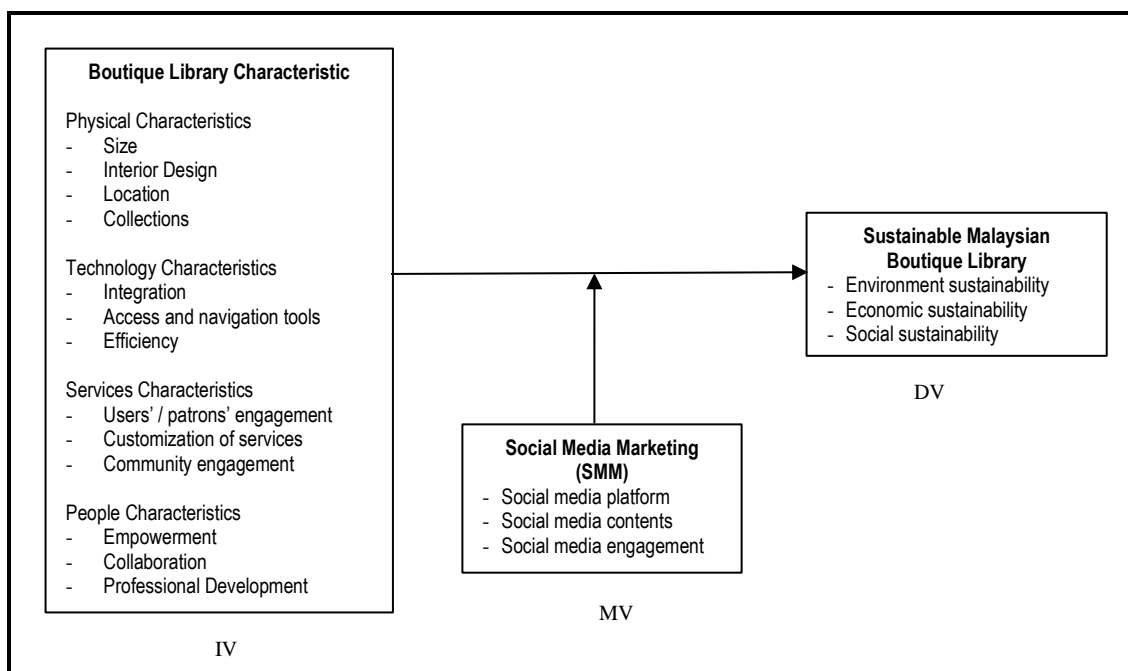


Fig.3: Proposed Framework for this Study

The framework additionally highlights the significance of user happiness and feedback in enhancing services and the quality of the experience. The importance of advocating for sustainability cannot be overstated, as it coincides with the long-term objectives of both the parent organisation and the community, hence emphasising the need for long-term planning. Through the incorporation of these elements, the boutique library has the potential to flourish within a continuously changing information environment while simultaneously maintaining social, environmental, and economic sustainability. The presented paradigm encompasses various dimensions of sustainability, including financial, environmental, technological, and human resources. It emphasises the significance of user-centred services, community engagement, adaptability, and ongoing improvement. The boutique library integrates intelligent library principles with a strong emphasis on sustainability, enabling it to thrive in a dynamic information environment while maintaining social, environmental, and economic viability.

### 7.0 Discussion

The analysis of the characteristics of boutique libraries in the Malaysian context shows that specialised collections, inviting spaces and personalised services contribute significantly to sustainability. Specialised collections create a unique identity and attract an engaged community. Inviting spaces encourage repeat visits, while personalised services deepen the connection with customers. Together, these interrelated features contribute to overall sustainability.

The analysis of boutique library characteristics in the Malaysian context reveals that specialized collections, inviting spaces, and personalized services significantly contribute to sustainability. Specialized collections establish a unique identity, attracting a dedicated community. Inviting spaces foster repeat visits, while personalized services deepen the connection with patrons. These interconnected characteristics collectively contribute to overall sustainability.

Given the interconnected nature of these issues, it is critical to discuss the implications of boutique library qualities, social media marketing, and sustainability for the future trajectory of libraries. Boutique libraries must embrace technology, adjust to changing user expectations, and deal with both environmental and financial issues if they are to remain viable. The following are a few significant characteristics for consideration:

Criteria	Justification
Physical Characteristics	The physical features of a boutique library, including specialised design and modern furnishings, create a welcoming and functional space that promotes accessibility, collaboration and cultural relevance
Technology Characteristics	Technology in boutique libraries digitises, improves accessibility, streamlines operations and facilitates innovation, contributing to overall efficiency
Services Characteristics	Boutique library services offer personalised support, tailored programmes and expert-led workshops that promote community engagement
People Characteristics	The success of boutique libraries depends on staff with specialised expertise, community engagement and adaptive leadership. Cultural competence, a user-centred approach and passionate, collaborative staff enhance the quality of service. Continuous professional development ensures the library's relevance and influence.

Social media marketing plays a crucial role in strengthening unique selling propositions and increasing reach. However, limited resources and funding pose a major challenge and affect the ability to enhance and maintain these features over time, jeopardising the overall sustainability of boutique libraries in Malaysia.

Finally, the combination of the unique characteristics of boutique libraries, social media marketing and sustainability creates a variety of opportunities and challenges for libraries. By considering these aspects together, the potential is created for the establishment of smart and sustainable boutique libraries that not only provide excellent user experiences but also contribute to wider societal goals of sustainability and knowledge dissemination.

## 8.0 Conclusion & Recommendation

The topic of sustainability is crucial in the field of modern library management. Implementing sustainable practices that encompass financial, environmental, and technical issues is a problem for university libraries, including boutique libraries (Khalid et al., 2021). Sustainable libraries are critical in combating climate change and advancing social inclusion, establishing themselves as indispensable partners in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2030 Agenda) (IFLA International Advocacy Programme). According to Shah and Bano (2020), smart sustainable libraries are created by combining intelligent library components with sustainable practices implemented by cutting-edge technology for service improvement while also reducing their environmental impact and promoting social equity.

Boutique libraries should implement a system for continuous monitoring and evaluation of their sustainability efforts, including the impact of social media marketing. This iterative approach will help boutique libraries adapt to changing circumstances and ensure the ongoing success of sustainability initiatives. To enhance sustainability, a focused social media strategy is recommended, featuring regular updates on specialized collections, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and interactive content. Collaboration with digital literacy initiatives can address the digital divide, involving workshops on basic digital skills and social media literacy. Stakeholders, including librarians and community advocates, should collectively advocate for increased government support through dedicated funding programs and policy incentives for cultural preservation, emphasizing the societal value of boutique libraries. These recommendations aim to provide practical guidance for boutique libraries in Malaysia to enhance their sustainability by addressing funding challenges, optimizing social media marketing, promoting digital inclusion, and advocating for broader support at various levels.

Boutique libraries can use the study's findings to enhance their visibility and reputation. By implementing the recommended strategies, these libraries can establish themselves as dynamic cultural hubs, attracting both local and international attention. This increased visibility can lead to greater support and collaboration opportunities. While this study gives useful information, it has several drawbacks. The sample size and geographical concentration may have an impact on the findings' generalizability. Future research should broaden the scope to include a more diversified selection of boutique libraries and analyze how these features can be transferred to different cultural situations. Furthermore, investigating the long-term implications of social media marketing on sustainability would provide a better understanding of its long-term influence.

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