

Internet Usage Among Users Of Cyber Cafes In Moving Towards Knowledge Society

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ABSTRAK

Kertas kerja ini adalah laporan daripada kajian yang telah dibuat pada tahun 2000 untuk mengenalpasti penggunaan Internet di cyber cafe di Klang Valley. Pemilik dan seramai 442 pengguna di 27 cyber cafe telah ditemubual dan diperhatikan.

INTRODUCTION

Building up a knowledge society requires access to knowledge and information. The Internet offers some tools to such access. However, it contains all sorts of knowledge and information that raise issues concerning its contribution to the establishment of knowledge society. Because of its capabilities for worldwide access and delivery of knowledge and information, the Internet creates demand for its access and attracts the set up of many cyber cafes. There has been an increasing number of cyber cafes in developed and developing countries, including the United States, United Kingdom and Malaysia.

Searches in some online databases showed that most articles discussed cyber cafes as one of the ways to bridge the digital divide because the concept of knowledge society must include everyone in the country and the world. For example, some cyber cafes are aimed for women, the elderly and the minority. In addition, searches on the Internet itself displayed advertisements of these cyber cafes and discussions on discrimination in the provision of its access, like age, race and gender, which mostly are from the sociological point of view. The psychological point of view expresses the concern of addictions in using the Internet in cyber cafes. Too few studied the details of the content as used by the users in cyber cafes.

The provision of the Internet access in cyber cafes has attracted many users from a variety of family background and educational level. This Internet usage in cyber cafes must be studied to see if it is really useful for the establishment of knowledge society and whether its use is only at setting up information society only. As shown in the *hadith* cited in the beginning of this paper, a knowledge society is at a higher level of society than an information society because the former involves the acquiring, creating and disseminating knowledge rather than merely information. Information is processed raw data, with the data being at the lowest level. Knowledge in information with values.

But of course, the highest level of knowledge is wisdom, obtained through divine guidance. At present, even though there are historical evidences that wisdombased knowledge society had taken place during the Muslim Golden Era of Civilization, many countries aim to first establish a knowledge society after their establishment of an information society.

To these developments of knowledge society and concerning the provision of Internet's access in cyber cafes, a research funded by the International Islamic University Malaysia was conducted in the year 2000 with one of its aims as to identify the Internet usage among users in cyber cafes in Klang Valley. The research involved interviews with the owners and a total of 442 users at 27 cyber cafes and observation of their usage and behavior in a accessing the Internet.

This paper report some findings from the research.

INTERNET USAGE AT THESE CYBER CAFES

The questions to answer here are related to Internet usage and bow far its the Internet used to achieve the goal of establishing a knowledge society.

ESTABLISHMENT OF CYBER CAFES

Table I shows the objectives and reasons for setting up the cyber cafes, services, facilities, training offered and the charges imposed for the Internet access.

The objectives and reasons were mairly business purpose and this affected the facilities, services and training offered at the cyber cafes, *i.e.* to meet the needs of the market and customers (users) and generate income or al least offset their investment. Futhermore, majority of the users said that the price is affordable to them.

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Table 1 : RESPONSES GIVEN BY OWNERS OF THE 27 CYBER CAFES CONCERNING THEIR OBJECTIVES, REASONS, FACILITIES, CHARGES AND TRAINING.

Set-ups of the cyber cafes	Number of Cyber Cafes
Objectives for setting up the cyber cafes :	
Market demand	15
Income	15
Reasons for setting up the cyber cafes :	
Strategic location	16
Income	14
Access to computer	14
Services offered in the cyber cafes :	
Internet and WWW	27
E-mail	27
Network games	24
Web site and web page design	10
Facilities provided at the cyber cafes :	
Terminal	range : 8-46, average : 18 at 27 cyber cafes,
Printer	average : 1 at 25 cyber cafes,
Scanner	average : 1 at 16 cyber cafes.
Server	1
TV lounge	1
Food and drinks lounge	1
Refreshment	15
Charges/hour	
RM 1 - RM 1.90	None
RM 2 - RM 2.99	5
RM 3 - RM 3.99	13
RM 4 and above	
Training offered to users :	
Internet and WWW	1
E-mail	0
Web site and web page design	2
Word processing and presentation	5

As Malaysians (and Muslim for some owners), the owners understand the positive impact and were aware (some are cautious) of the negative impact of the selling up cyber cafes (Table 2). The describe their hopes to contribute to the establishment of knowledge society, *e.g.* knowledge, assignment, IT literacy, public access and information seeking. On the other hand, there were negative side of the usage as they. For example, network games, pornographies, miss information, obsessed with chatting, playing truant, noisy and waste of money.

Some owners have anticipated their visitins pornographic sites and thus came up with regulations. Majority said that they would say no, warn, advise asked then to leave or some block users access. However, owners at of the 27 cyber cafes admitted that

they would just ignore the act, indirectly giving approvals to such immoral activities. This evidently 155 users (36 %) freely visited pornographic sites (Table 6).

Table 2 : RESPONSES GIVEN BY THE OWNERS AT THE 27 CYBER CAFES CONCERNING IMPACTS AND THE PORNOGRAPHIC SITES.

Impact	Number of Cyber Cafes
Positive impact:	
Knowledge	5
Students assignment	5
IT literacy	5
Public access	5
Information seeking	3
Rights for information	1
New development in IT	1
Healthy entertainment	1
Negative impact:	
Too many network games	4
Bad influence from the websites	3
Obscene photos and images	3
False news and information	2
Wasting time on chatting	2
Playing truant and noisy	2
Wasting money	1
Actions towards users surfing pornographic sites:	
Warning and say no	
Ignore	5
Advice	
Ask users to leave	5
Blocking the access	2

INTERNET USAGE

The provision of Internet access encouraged 88 users (20%) of the 442 users interviewed to visit the cyber cafes daily, while 277 (63%) visited weekly and users (16%) visited monthly (Table 3). This result showed the strong commitment of these users to access the Internet at the cyber cafes.

These users came from various races, gender educational background and employment status.

Of the 442 users, 315 users were Malay (71 %) suggesting that the Malays probabry do not have computers or Internet connections al homes while they have strong interests and are keen to access the Internet at these cyber cafes, compared to other races like Chinese and the Indians.

The Internet usage is not dominated by a single gender, *i.e.* both male 229 (52%) and female 201 (45%) are heavy users of the Internet.

Table 3 : RESPONSES GIVEN BY THE 442 USERS CONCERNING THEIR VISITS, RACE, AGE, GENDER, EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND EMPLOYMENT.

Profile of Users	Number of Cyber Cafes (% of total users)
Frequency of visit:	
Daily	88(21%)
Once - twice a week	277 (63%)
Monthly	70(16%)
Race:	
Malay	315 (71%)
Chinese	63 (14%)
Indian	30 (7%)
Others	24 (6%)
Gender:	
Male	229 (52%)
Female	201 (45%)
Age:	
9 - 10	6(1.4%)
11 -15	52 (12%)
16 -20	174(39%)
21 -25	139(31%)
26 -30	36 (8%)
31 -35	9 (2%)
36 - 40	2 (0.4%)
41 -45	1 (0.2%)
46	1 (0.2%)
Education:	
Primary	25 (6%)
Secondary	164(37%)
Higher learning institutions	246 (56%)

Users belonging to the age group of 16 - 20 and 21 - 25 years (174 and 139 respectively) are the majority of these cyber cafes visitors (Table 3). Their groups alone made up a total of 70%, suggesting that these visitors are of the ages of curiosity and exploration and of seeking friends and peer groups. These ages will reflect Internet usage (Table 4 and Table 5) at these cyber cafes.

None of the visitors/ users are above 50 years old. and only 0.4% is above 40 years old. Most likely explanation is that the cyber cafes are not seen as a suitable places for them. Another possible explanation is that this age group is less interested in the Internet.

There were users at the cyber cafes who aged ranged from a to 12 ears old (in the 11 - 15 year range in Table 3), who are still in the primary school visited cyber cafes. In addition, users within 11 to 15 years old ranked third highest for users categorized by age. This result suggested that the cyber cafes attracted a very high number of teenagers, approximately 232 users with a percentage of 52.4 and primary school children as young as standard three. This evidence requires serious concern as it can lead to playing

truant as already witnessed by the owners of two cyber cafes (Table 2).

Of the 442 users, 246 (56%*) users were from higher learning institutions. These users are expected to represent the educated groups of the society, *Le.* future knowledge workers unfortunately most of their main activities (Table 4) did not reflect the higher level of knowledge required for establishing a knowledge society.

MAIN ACTIVITIES AND FAVORITE SITES

The most common activities (Table 4) were chatting (28%), and followed by e-mail (19%) and games (10%). These most common activities (except games) even if they involved knowledge, suggest that the Internet was heavily used only at the basic level of knowledge activities, *i.e.* exchange of information. Useful activities that seem to be directly related to knowledge included information seeking (6%), assignment (2%), job search (0.4%), counseling (0.2%) and quiz (0.2%). Other could be useful activities are surfing the Internet (7%), contacting friends and play chess.

However, the rest of the main activities were hang out (*lepak* and *mengurat*), artists web sites, sex picture and snooker, which are purely entertainment and immoral activities. There were 6 users who visited the cyber cafes just to hang out. This result suggests that perhaps the environment of these cyber cafes encourages such activity.

There was 1 users whose main activity was browsing sex pictures on the Internet, which adds to the suggestion that there are people who would go for the Internet for such immoral activities (Table 2 and Table 6).

Table 4 : RESPONSES GIVEN BY THE 442 USERS CONCERNING THE MAIN ACTIVITIES AT THE CYBER CAFES.

Activities	Number of Cyber Cafes (% of total users)
Chatting	122
E-mail	85
Games	45
Surfing Internet	
Informatin seeking	
Assignment	
Hangout, <i>lepak</i> and <i>mengurat</i>	6
Contact friends	1
Job search	1
Artists web site	1
Counseling	1
Chess	1
Quiz	1
Sex picture	1
Snooker	

Table 5 : RESPONSES GIVEN BY THE 442 USERS ABOUT THEIR FAVOURITES SITES AT THE CYBER CAFES.

Favourite sites	Number of Cyber Cafes (% of total users)
Yahoo!	70(16%)
Hotmail!	52(12%)
MRIC	28 (6%)
Internet access	8 (2%)
Netscape	7 (2%)
Artists	4 (0.9%)
Infoseek.com	4 (0.9%)
Mailcity	4 (0.9%)
Ct.22n.com	3 (0.6%)
Lovemail	3 (0.6%)
Music	3 (0.6%)
Reformasi web site	3 (0.6%)
Bollywood	2 (0.5%)
Excite	2 (0.5%)
Harakah	2 (0.5%)
Lunch.com	2 (0.5%)
Yashraj.com	2 (0.5%)
CNN news	1 (0.2%)
Amboi.net	1 (0.2%)
Avault.com	1 (0.2%)
Audio_find.com	1 (0.2%)
Berita	1 (0.2%)
Catch.com	1 (0.2%)
Cikkiah.cib.net	1 (0.2%)
Discovery	1 (0.2%)
Discussion	1 (0.2%)
Download.com	1 (0.2%)
E-circles	1 (0.2%)
Education	1 (0.2%)
Entertainment	1 (0.2%)
Euro2000	1 (0.2%)
Fashion.com	1 (0.2%)
Final fantasy	1 (0.2%)
Geocity.com	1 (0.2%)
Gohip	1 (0.2%)
Hotbad	1 (0.2%)
Ikhlis.com	1 (0.2%)
Islamic city	1 (0.2%)
Lingkaran Islam	1 (0.2%)
Lycos	1 (0.2%)
Lyrics.com	1 (0.2%)
Magewar	1 (0.2%)
Malaysia kita	1 (0.2%)
Mamak	1 (0.2%)
Melayu.net	1 (0.2%)
MetaCrawler	1 (0.2%)
Myfirsttime.com	1 (0.2%)
Modelings.com	1 (0.2%)
National Geographic	1 (0.2%)
Pnm.com	1 (0.2%)
Regit.com	1 (0.2%)
Ricjdees.com	1 (0.2%)
	1 (0.2%)
Southparkscows.com/swcel.com	1 (0.2%)
Trailer	1 (0.2%)
USA.net	1 (0.2%)
Vidnet.music	1 (0.2%)
Viswanathan anand	1 (0.2%)
Worldwide net	1 (0.2%)
Wwf.com	
Xsmusic.com	

When asked for their favorite sites (Table 5), most preferred Yahoo! (16%), followed by Hotmail (12%) and MRIC (6%). Other sites considered as favorites are related to entertainment for instance artists, lovemail, music, Bollywood, etc.. There were also some informational and educational sites, which include CNN news, *berita*, discovery, discussion, Euro2000 (sports), Islamic City, National Geographic, etc.

None of the users chose the government web sites, except pnm.my (Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia), which was chosen as a favorite site by one user. Of the 442 users, 3 users chose *Reformasi* web sites as their favorite sites and 2 users chose *Harakah*.

These results suggest that majority of the 442 users considered non-Malaysian web sites as their favorites. Yahoo! And Hotmail! Became one-stop web sites where these users can access all kind of information and services and most frequently chatting and e-mail. The findings also suggest that these users did not consider online database. Malaysian newspaper and Malaysian government agencies *Jaring*, ministries, universities, etc as favorite sites.

Table 6 : RESPONSES GIVEN BY THE 442 USERS ABOUT THEIR FAVOURITES SITES AT THE CYBER CAFES

Internet Usage	Number of Cyber Cafes (% of total users)
Pornography sites :	
Visited	155(36%)
Never visited	261 (59%)
No response	26 (5%)

It is quite alarming that 155 (36%) users of the 442 users interviewed (Table 6) openly admitted that they visited the pornographic sites. In addition, 26 users (5%) were hesitant and did not give any responses. This result suggests that visiting such sites is not uncommon among the Internet users in this research.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This research revealed that activities among users on the Internet are still at the informational level, *i.e.* the basic level of activities for knowledge society. To establish knowledge society, the activities among users must be moved upward. The activities in the knowledge society must be more on knowledge acquisition, dissemination and creation, rather than exchange of basic information, such as chatting.

The *hadith* of Prophet (*sw*) quoted at the beginning of the paper provides us the proper guidance that knowledge society must be established as the soil receiving water and bringing forth vegetation and fruits. Whereas, information society is like the hard soil that hold water, like reservoir, that can't directly bring forth to any vegetation and fruits trees.

The government and related agencies must come up with proper guidelines in monitoring or regulating the cyber cafes. The government must not only provide licensing to cyber cafes without any form of monitoring.

The government and non-government organizations must come up with more creative and innovative web sites to attract users. There must be a Malaysian like Yahoo! And Hotmail that provide all kinds of informational services and act as one-stop web sites that serve all needs.

Even though there are free aducational and informational sites like CNN, some are charged as online databases and encyclopedias. Thus, the government and non-government organizations must subsidize the subscription costs. The effort by some places in establishing K-community is one of the ways to move forward orward to solve this kind of problems.

Malaysia has the means to establish knowledge society because the support from the leadership and public is there. However, serious efforts are crucially needed to develop the local content of our own sites on the Internet.

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