

INTERNET USAGE AMONG SABAH CIVIL SERVANTS AND IT'S IMPACT ON THEIR CONSUMERS BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

The Malaysian government from the end of the twentieth century till now in the early twenty first century is consistent in trying to make the usage of the information communication technology (ICT) as a way of life. It hopes that with the usage of Internet and the many social media programs relationship between civil servants and with the general or target public can be greatly enhanced. As one of the twelve National Key Economic Areas of the Economic Transformation Program (ETP) the Malaysian government has outlined the expansion and development of communication infrastructure. The Wireless Broadband Network (WBN) is recommended as the technology to enable wireless broadband access to the rural folks. Promoting ICT usage as a way of life has been aggressively campaigned by the Federal Government since the start of the Internet era. It is expected that the civil servants should be among the first consumers to embrace ICT as compared to other citizens. This article researched the usage of the Internet by civil servants and to discover whether it have impacted their behaviour as consumers. The research used random sampling method with prepared questionnaires. It utilised the uses and gratifications theory (UGT), the respondents' centred approach to understand why and how the civil servants utilised the Internet to meet their needs. Altogether 12 government agencies in Sabah comprising 316 respondents from the top to the lowest grades participated. The findings revealed that Sabah civil servants nearly fully embrace the Internet and its impact on their consumer behaviour is significant. They are increasingly spending more time on the Internet via the social media to socialise, enhancing their knowledge, buying online and even trying to earn extra income.

Keywords: behaviour, civil servants, communication, consumers, information communication technology, Internet, online, social media, IT literacy.

INTRODUCTION

The world today is increasingly interlinked, pervasively and in-depth. The reality of becoming a global village is more apparent than ever with the rapid progress or advancement of communications strategies and its social media programs. However, the 2016 Global Internet Report claimed that "today we are at a defining moment in the evolution and growth of the Internet. Large-scale data breaches, uncertainties about the use of our data, cybercrime, surveillance and other online threats are eroding users' trust and affecting how they use the Internet. Eroding trust is also affecting the way governments

view the Internet, and, is shaping the policy environment for the Internet around the world.” Many studies have shown that in developing nations the success of promoting Internet usage is very much dependent on government political will.

In Malaysia, the government from the start of the Internet era has been enthusiastic in embracing the information-communication technology (ICT) society and establishing a workable e-Government. It believes that the internet provides the people new channels or bridges to government services and information. As such government agencies in Malaysia at all levels are encouraged to have their own websites and civil servants to be proficient in utilising the internets. Internet age in Malaysia is considered to begin in 1995. In Malaysia, the increase in Internet hosts began around 1996.

A Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) was launched in Malaysia on 1st August 1996 to spearhead the nation Information Technology (IT) strategies and campaigns. The electronic government is one of the seven MSC flagship applications. The Federal Government launching of the MSC inspired State Governments to formulate policies promoting IT usage in their own states. In Sabah, the Sabah Information Technology Council (SITC) is established to give advice to the state government regarding IT policies and developments.

A study by Jamal A. Dargham and Patricia Anthony (2000) “Evaluating IT Literacy in the Public Sector in Sabah” discovered that “less than half (46%) of the respondents consider themselves computer literate. However, only 17% can be classified as IT literate based on our definition. In addition, the percentage of respondents who had undergone formal training in IT is only 39%.” The two researchers from Universiti Malaysia Sabah have defined a person as an IT literate if the respondent can perform 50% or more of the tasks in each of the four components of the ‘Essential IT Skills’. Today, with the Internet becoming more users friendly and more training being given to government or public or civil servants this sad condition have been greatly improved.

A National Public Policy Workshop (NPPW) in 2005 recommended a strategy to enhance the uptake of information and communication technology (ICT) and the Internet. It resulted among others, in 2010 the High Speed Broadband initiative launching. Internet users in Malaysia for July 2010 attained 25.3 million.

A study in 2012 by a team of researchers from the School of Social Science (SSS), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) tried to discover the level of broadband penetration in Sabah and the factors hindering or facilitating its growth. At the point of the study, Sabah has the lowest broadband penetration level. The government is trying to increase it reach in the state to make comparable to the other Malaysian states at the very least. An opinion survey was used on 3200 respondents selected randomly covering all the districts in Sabah, both in the urban and rural areas as well as those in the isolated zones. A questionnaire was prepared to gather relevant data to meet the objectives of the study which include the respondents’ awareness of broadband, their attitude towards it, their utilization of it, their expectations of it and the future of broadband in Sabah.

The study found that respondents from all areas and walks of life were expecting that the broadband penetration to be quickly expanded and the quality of transmission and service enhanced. Interestingly respondents from the lowest income group were the most claiming they were willing to subscribe to broadband for their own benefits despite their limitations. The study recommendations include getting all the stakeholders together including from the civil society organization to meet the objective of realizing an information culture society in Sabah through full broadband penetration in the state.

The government efforts to make ICT a way of life can be considered as successful based on the rate of Internet penetration in Malaysia. According to the Internet Live Stats (www.InternetLiveStats.com) Malaysia Internet user for July 1, 2016 was estimated to have a penetration of 68.6% or 21,090,777 individuals out of the total population of 30,751,602. Here, the Internet Live Stats has defined “Internet user as individual who can access Internet at home, via any device type and connection.” In term of World Internet Users, Malaysia has 0.6% out of 3,424,971,237 of the total world share.

It is interesting to note that the Internet Users Survey 2016 Statistical Brief Number Twenty Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commission concluded that Malaysian Internet users’ behaviour was basically socially driven. It concluded that “Malaysians were more prone to exert themselves in leisure activities that incorporated networking features such as OTT messaging, Facebook and participation in informal forums. These platforms turned out to be the primary source of

information for a majority (86.9%) of Internet users against news portal which accounted for only 65.5% of user base. The adoption of banking, shopping or trading via online was relevant to about one third of Internet users, which was relatively small as compared to social networking.” The survey also concluded that the online platform had significantly brought the retail industry to a new level.

Further, the Internet Users Survey 2016 concluded that “consumers were generally satisfied with their online purchasing experience and suggested improvement measures in the online market. Online consumers generally presumed that e-commerce should offer better price. Its other pulling factors included swift payment process and availability of reviews for comparison purpose.”

According to the Internet Users Survey 2016, the government introduced numerous online services to deliver better services to the people. “It resulted with 18.5% of Internet users engaged on online business registration and license application, 18.1% submitting complaints to government agencies and 14.7% utilising online immigration services. Internet users also visited government websites for investment (13.0%) and tender purposes (6.4%). It further includes visiting official portals to obtain general information (2.9%), public welfare enquiries (2.8%) and summons issued (2.0%).”

Also, according to the Internet Users Survey 2016, 70% of those visiting government official websites were looking for job vacancy in the public sectors, while 65.5% were searching for education opportunity including admission, financial aid, programme structure, etc. Only 30.4% used the online income tax services.

In term of visiting government official websites, the Internet Users Survey 2016 found that only 59% of the Internet users have done so. Furthermore, only 17.8% knew how to access them directly. Also, 30.2% of them admitted they neither visited government official websites nor obtained information from it. This is despite the fact that government information is also circulated via instant messaging (56.1%), e-mails (39.4%), blogs (37.3%) and online video platforms (25%). Instead, the Internet Users Survey 2016 showed that the percentage of Internet users who sought information from social media (69.6%) surpassed those who visited official websites (59.0%).

It can be said so far, the Malaysian government has spent considerable sums of money and effort to create computer literacy among the citizens and also to ensure that civil servants are adequately competent in utilising the digital media. In advanced nations like United Kingdom its government have even instituted a code of conduct for Internet utilisation for its civil servant to ensure its ethical and responsible usage since this digital channel can be easily exploited and abused by the users. In Malaysia so far, it has not been instituted as such.

With so much money already spent on nurturing a Malaysian ICT culture, the pertinent questions are how competent are the civil servants in using Internet for official work as well as for social and business purposes, what are their duration of usage daily, do they use it ethically with full responsibility and why do they use it other than for official duties. In short what is their consumer habit as user of the digital media and how does it impact their behaviour as consumers.

Review of existing literature on Internet usage, especially using the social media for social and business objectives by students, consumers and business people are adequate and current. However, not much detailed study on the usage of Internet or online channel by civil servants for official duties or socialisation or even business-like entertainment and income generation is still insufficient. Thus, the urgent need to study the civil servants’ competency level of using Internet or online media, their perception and habits regarding the ICT, the objectives of their usage and how it has impacted their life as consumers and the driver for the ICT culture.

STUDY OBJECTIVES, DEFINITIONS, DEMOGRAPHY AND METHODOLOGY

This study primary objective is to discover the Internet usage habit of civil servants in Sabah at all level of the state government and how it has impacted their behaviour as consumers. It also seeks to know their objectives when utilising the Internet at any time of the hour, whether for official purposes or other goals like entertainment, socialisation, buying online and even generating extra income for themselves.

In this study Internet refers to the “global system of interconnected computer networks utilising the Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) linking devices worldwide. Internet is labelled as the *network of networks*. The Internet comprises of public, private, government, business and academic networks of local to global scope connected by a huge array of wireless, electronic and optical networking

technologies. It transmits nearly all kind of information resources and services like the inter-linked hypertext documents and applications of WWW (World Wide Web), telephony, electronic mail, and peer-to-peer networks for file sharing.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for this study refers to all the technology used in telecommunications, broadcast media, intelligent building management systems, audiovisual processing and transmission systems, and network-based control and monitoring functions. Also, it describes several technologies converging and the utilisation of common transmission lines transporting very diverse data, communication types and format. Its scope is broader than information technology. The ICT culture is the outcome of the ICT practices and activities making consumers very computer or Internet savvy.

For this study, Literacy with Information and Communication Technology (LwICT) means the ability to use digital technologies for communication/networking as well as to do research, organise, evaluate and create information so as to function competently in a knowledge economy. It further means to use ICT not only competently but also responsibly and ethically as citizens of the global community.

Government or civil servants in this study refers to all members of the public service. According to Article 132 of Part X of the Federal Constitution public services are (a) the armed forces; (b) the judicial and legal services; (c) the general public service of the Federation; (d) the police force; (f) the joint public services mentioned in Article 133; (g) the public service of each state; and (h) the education service.

Consumer for the purpose of this study refers to Section 3(1) of Malaysia Consumer Protection Act 1999 which defines a consumer as any person who acquires goods and services for personal, domestic or household use. It does not apply to person acquiring goods and services for commercial use. Consumer culture is an economy focusing on selling of consumer goods and services and spending money on them to emphasize on lifestyle utilising material goods to attain happiness and satisfaction. Characteristics of consumer culture include the desire to keep up with economic peers or one's neighbours, believing that buying new gadgets or products can enhance life quality, spending as a bonding experience or a social phenomenon rather than just an economic exercise.

This study utilised the "Uses and Gratification Theory" (UGT) as an approach to understand why and how civil servants actively seek out the Internet to fulfil their tasks, objectives or needs. The study select the UGT as it is an audience or public centred method for mass communication understanding focussing on what the public do with the media. Also, because the GT assumes that the users have alternate selections to meet their objectives or needs.

The study was done with the assistance of the third year Universiti Malaysia Sabah off campus communication students during the month of December 2016. This study on the Internet usage of civil servant in Sabah used the simple random sampling method. Meaning, respondents chosen from the civil service are selected entirely by chance and every member of the targeted population has an equal chance of being included in the study. The completed questionnaires were processed using the IBM SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences) program.

This study used as its instrument a prepared questionnaire of which is divided into five sections. The first section is on respondents' demographic relating to gender, ethnicity, age, positions, income and qualifications. Second section relates to respondents' media usage or behaviour with regards to hours spend with the media, perception of selected media and objectives of using the chosen media, especially the Internet. Section three tries to discover the media influence upon the civil servants. Fourth section seeks to discover the civil servants consumer behaviour as influence by the media, especially the Internet. Final and fifth section seeks to discover respondents' usage of Internet and its impact upon them as consumers.

In term of respondents' profile, a total of 316 respondents from 12 government agencies are selected of which 158 are men and the other half women. Their government grades range from grade 11 to grade 54 and their ages ranging from 18 to 59 years old of which 18 is the minimum age and 60 is the maximum in the civil service for retirement. In term of age's categories, 34% are between 18-30 years, 52% between 31-45 years and the remaining 13% between 46-60 years.

With regard to ethnicity, 17.1% claimed themselves as Bajaus, 15.5% as Dusuns, 13.9% as Malays, 12.7% as Kadazans and the remaining percentages as Rungus, Bugis, Ibans and Indians. It is also noted that 14.2% of the respondents did not fill in their ethnic group. In term of education, 47.8%

of the respondents only completed secondary school, 25.3% diploma level and 24.7% degree holders while 2.2% listed themselves as others.

CIVIL SERVANTS MEDIA USAGE

By the end of 2016 the Internet has become the top media use by Sabah civil servants for communication whether for official, social, business or even entertainment with 21.8% mentioning Internet and 21.7% stating social media in accordance to the findings of this study. Only 11.8% said newspaper, followed by radio at 10%, television at 9.6%, online newspaper 9.2%, and the rest include online and printed magazines, brochures and leaflets.

Internet is the top preference for Sabah civil servants with 66% claiming it to be their most favourite media and followed by the social media at 30%. This means that at the end of the 2016 nearly all of the Sabah civil servants are familiar with the digital media based on their Internet usage as the communication engine.

The reasons the civil servants gave as to why they chose the Internet as their top media include it bringing the latest information and communication technologies, its capacity to carry events live or at very fast speed where Internet are available, it becoming increasingly user friendly and interactive as well as providing all other kind of services like e-government, online business and much more. It is also becoming cheaper and more affordable to more consumers. The smart phone also have increased the Internet popularity.

Not surprisingly, 52.8% of the civil servants selected the Internet as their top media for obtaining information, news and even entertainment because it is fast if not instantaneous and using the latest technologies. Another 23.7% said that the Internet is their priority media because it is very convenient and easy to use. According to them since nearly all of them now owned smart phones the Internet and especially the social media have made much of their task easier like paying bills and even generating extra incomes for themselves as well entertainment almost anywhere at their fingertips. The rest of the respondents said they now find it difficult to keep in touch with families and friends or being entertained or even in businesses without the Internet and their smart phones.

It is interesting to note that 38% said that the Internet played a vital role in their official duties including their current knowledge about public affairs in Malaysia and the world. Another 35% claimed that it keep them in touch with information relevant to their duties and public affairs useful for their work and general knowledge about the nation and the world. The remaining 27% admitted that the Internet, especially the social media it is not only useful for their work related information but also for socialisation, entertainment and even income generation.

The number of hours the Sabah civil servants claimed they are using the Internet showed that 36.2% spend an hour to two hours a day, 32.1% more than three hours a day, 20.6% between two and three hours and the rest less than an hour. Generally, the higher grades civil servants said they spend more time using the Internet. One of the main reasons can be that because the higher grades civil servants are in majority better educated than their lower grades officers and during their universities days they have to use the Internet for their assignments and socialisations or even for getting services or businesses. Thus, for most of them it has become a way of life.

Also, more men claimed to use the Internet than the women civil servants in Sabah. In fact, 15% more men than women claimed to use the Internet. The men claimed that they use the Internet for information and news while the ladies more for social and entertainment.

IMPACT ON MEDIA USAGE ON SABAH CIVIL SERVANTS

The survey revealed that 51.58% of the Sabah civil servants claimed they are being strongly impacted by the media they use, while 34.81% felt very strongly impacted and the remaining 12.66% said the media did not influence them strongly.

Not surprisingly, 46.20% of Sabah civil servants believed that the Internet is the most influential of the mass media while 36.71% felt that it is the social media and 6.01% thought that it is the electronic newspaper. Only 6.65% of the Sabah civil servants said that television being the most impactful, 3.48%

it is the printed newspaper and 0.95% the printed magazines. Clearly, the Internet and online media like the social media is becoming overwhelmingly impactful on the Sabah civil servants.

The overwhelming popularity of the Internet and its various programmes are because of its easy access to the civil servants and that all government agencies have computers and Internet services as part of their working tools. This is said so by 50% of the respondents. Credibility of the Internet communication is felt by 40% of the civil servants. However, 5% of the respondents said that Internet has limited credibility and the last 5% felt that Internet has no credibility at all.

In terms of other factors influencing Sabah civil servants other than the media like friends, families, advertising, culture and religion do have some level of impact on them. Other than media, friends is said to be the most influential for Sabah civil servants with 33.23% of them saying so and followed by families with 22.15% admitting it. Sabah civil servants claiming families, friends and advertising as most influential are at 18.99% while 17.41% believed that families, advertising, religion and culture are the most influential to them. Only 6.01% claimed advertising to be the most influential besides the mass media and it is actually part of any promotion campaigns. Sadly, only 1.27% believed that culture is the most influential to Sabah civil servants and with religion mentioned by 0.95%. Here, one can reasonably conclude as to the problem of low integrity and high corruption in the state if not the nation when culture and religion is not considered as very influential or not highly significant by the Sabah civil servants.

In term of very important source of information to the Sabah civil servants other than the mass media as the highest, again friends is rated as the second highest with 55.70% admitting it and followed by families with 31.96%. This is followed by advertising at 7.91%, religion at 2.53% and culture with 1.90%.

With regard to whom they would seek information other than the mass media in an open ended questions, again not surprisingly the Sabah civil servants chose friends over families and other sources, with 46.20% giving priority to friends and 20.57% families. Advertising as source of information for Sabah civil servants amount to 12.66%, religion and culture amount to 4.43% each while the remaining respondents did not answer this question.

SABAH CIVIL SERVANTS CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

In terms of places frequented for buying goods, 92% of Sabah civil servants mentioned supermarkets, followed 83% for retail shops, 79% at tamu or agriculture market, 71% at night market and 62% at the wet market. Thus, with regards to their favourite shopping places 46% said supermarkets, 21% retail shops, 12% tamu, 8% wet market, and 5% night market and 4% said others than those mentioned and the final 4% gave no response. The reason as to why supermarkets is the most popular place to shop is because it offers almost all that is needed and that it is very heavily advertised or promoted with lots of attractions that seemed to benefits the consumers, especially the civil servants.

The most frequent time Sabah civil servants go shopping is when they are really in needs of certain goods, especially essential items, 41% of them admitted it. Their favourite excuses were they have no time and usually they were limited by financial constraints.

The second favourite time for them to go shopping is immediately after receiving their salaries as mentioned by 22% of them. Reasons given for selecting this period was because it will be easier to plan their household spending as well as having enough money to ensure all their needs was met.

Meanwhile, 20% of the civil servants chose the sale seasons to do their shopping. Reasons they gave include that they can save because prices were generally lower, the shopping atmosphere was like festivals and they were usually heavily promoted either at strategic locations or via the mass media.

Buying during free or leisure time was admitted by 7% of the respondents. According to them it helps to strengthen family bond as well as being able to select the products more carefully and with the cooperation of family members. Clearly those shop at their leisure time make sure that their family members were involved and making it a family outing.

Another 4% said they usually go shopping when the supermarkets or shopping complexes were not overly overcrowded or filled with consumers. The reasons they offered include that the sale persons were usually more polite than during the hectic days, they need not be too careful of pickpockets, they

can take their own sweet time to window-shop and sometime get good bargains because of the lack of customers.

Only 3% said they enjoyed shopping during the hectic period. Reasons they gave include feeling like in a festivals, prices normally lower and sometimes even have sideshows. The remaining respondents said they have no preferences. It depends on their moods and needs.

In term of who they like to accompany them when shopping, 50% said they enjoy shopping with their family and the other 50% said they would rather shop alone as they were freer to enjoy themselves and buy what they feel like buying. Nearly all married respondents said they enjoyed very much going shopping with their families as it became part of their family bonding and recreations. On the other hand, the bachelors admitted they enjoyed shopping alone as it allowed them the freedom to fully do what they like and buy what they desire to their heart content.

SABAH CIVIL SERVANTS BUYING ONLINE

A significant number of Sabah civil servants claimed that they have bought products or services online that are 85%. Only 8% denied ever buying online and the remaining 7% gave no response. Those who admitted buying online said that it is very convenient and they need not waste their time and money as well as face the traffics and the rush to get the products or services they desired or needed. Also, they said buying online is much cheaper and hence save money and they can buy at anytime of the day or night. Interestingly, 87.5% of the civil servants in Kudat claimed they have purchase goods and services via online, that is more than the other areas in Sabah.

However, in term of frequency buying online 33% claimed they do it often and 54.2% admitted rarely or occasionally. Only 4% said they very frequently purchase online. The 8% of the respondents who denied buying online said they have no confidence in buying via Internet and felt that they could easily be cheated without getting any compensation. The rest gave no response on their views of buying online.

This study discovered that 33% of the civil servants bought clothing online, 20% purchased gadgets and other goods like sport goods, babies products, car accessories, electronic items and the like. The findings showed that there is an increasing trend and dependability for buying online among Sabah civil servants. Among the top reasons given for this phenomenon is that those products are not easily available in their areas and that generally the prices are rather very expensive when compared buying it online.

Interestingly, 88% of the Sabah civil servants claimed they have bought airline tickets via online. Only 4% said they never and the remaining 8% gave no response. Nearly all the 88% said they knew that Malaysia Airlines, Malindo and AirAsia provide special facilities and even discount when buying online, especially through the smart phones. A few even mentioned that AirAsia sometimes offered 30% discount when buying their tickets via the smart phones application.

Further, 82% of the Sabah civil servants respondents claimed they have used the Internet banking services, with 5% saying never and the remaining 13% not responding to the question. Those Sabah civil servants who have used the Internet banking services admitted that it is very easy to use and very convenient as they need not face the hassle of braving the traffic and lining up at the bank to wait for their turn and mentioning the rush to get a parking space. According to them it definitely save their money and time and best of all they can do their banking needs at anytime they desired or free to do so. Most of them are also able to name a number of services that are already available online which include prepaid reloading, reserving hotel rooms and paying for it, buying movie tickets, airline tickets, income taxes, utilities bills, insurance and many more and they said they wish all can be paid via online.

The year 2000 was the year a number of Sabah civil servants claimed they began buying online. A number claim it was while they were studying overseas that they started buying online, especially for air tickets. In the year 2000 to 2004, 11% of the respondents claimed they have began buying online, 2004 to 2008, 23% said they started purchasing online, 2008 to 2012, 29% admitted they be began online buying and for 2016, 37% of the respondents confessed they began buying online. According to the respondents the trend to online buying among civil servants in Sabah is due to increase in broadband penetration, cheaper computers and smart phones making it more affordable to them at all level of the public service.

In response to what influence them to begin buying online, as expected friends was the top motivating force with 30% of the respondents stating it. The main reason for this was because their friends were the closest to them and they often discuss with each other about many things other than official works. Second most motivating force to influence Sabah civil servants to start buying online was advertisements as 25% of mentioned it. The family followed closely as the force influencing them to buy online as they are not only close to them but are much affected by their needs and desires with 24%. Own experience only amount to 21% as the factor pushing them to start buying online.

Nearly three quarter of the respondents at 72% claimed that the Internet do not make them to spend more. Another 23% confessed that the Internet do make them spend more while the remaining 5% did not give any response.

Interestingly, 65% of the Sabah civil servants agreed that buying online or Internet helped to make them better consumers. The reasons they gave for this include enabling them to make quality and price comparisons, getting more relevant information, planning the buying and have more choices. For the 35% of the respondents who disagreed the main reasons they provide include cases of cheating online as reported are rather discouraging and the channels to resolve the cases are almost nil.

Interestingly, 75% of the public servants felt that the cheating can be avoided by ensuring adequate information before purchase online is made. They also believe that cheating via buying online can also be avoided by proper planning before buying and making comparisons in terms of prices and quality. However, 25% of the respondents were adamant that no matter what steps were taken the chances of being cheated when buying online is still high and that getting compensation is almost none.

It is interesting to note that 68% of the respondents would advice their friends or families to buy online while 32% said they would not do so.

Again it is interesting to note that 75% of the respondents felt that civil servants should be allowed to generate extra income through the usage of the Internet. The reasons they gave include the bad economy the country is currently facing, increase in the cost of living, salaries they receive are fast becoming insufficient and also one need not rent any premise to do business. However, they also put a proviso that is not during office hours and using government facilities. For the remaining 25% of the respondents they did not agree saying that it could affect official duties and contribute to the declining of civil servants performances to serve the rakyat (citizens) and together with it their positive reputation.

Nevertheless, 77.1% of the respondents said that they would start an e-business if a clear permission is given to supplement their government salary income which is becoming increasingly inadequate. Only 22.9% claimed they are not interested in e-business or e-trading even though permission is given to do so.

However, 18% of the Sabah civil servants respondents admitted that they have already began their online business while 79% of them said they have not done so and the remaining 3% did not response.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The uses and gratification theory used in this study showed that the Sabah civil servants do indeed deliberately seek out the media they feel meet their current needs in them trying to fully utilise the Internet. Their utilisation of the Internet does have an impact on their perception and behaviour as consumers. Indeed, the findings showed that the Sabah civil servants generally do have a positive impact on their behaviour as well as the effort to contribute better to their employers and the public at large.

The ability of the Sabah civil servants being at home with the Internet is reflected by government departments and agencies in putting more information on their website. However, there is the need to focus on comprehending the price of efficiency on their websites and who utilises them and why, so that civil servants can better understand and meet the citizens' needs. Also, their websites are becoming more presentable and user friendly as well being updated more regularly.

Clearly, the Sabah civil servants are generally at home using the Internet for all kind of activities, including for official work as well as for socialisations, entertainments, buying online and even generating income. However, the study somehow do not detect any abuses of government IT facilities or that Sabah civil servants have utilise the Internet in the government facilities with full responsibility and ethically.

Actually, none of Sabah civil servants respondents mentioned about the need to have a code of conduct or practice with regard to using the government Internet facilities ethically and full responsibility, especially during office hours. In a number of advance nations like the United Kingdom it already exist a code of conduct for using government Internet facilities. If it is already formulated, obviously there is an urgent need to promote it among all grades of the civil service where ever they are. If it is not already instituted there is clearly an urgent need to formulate and promote it so that abuses of its usage by civil servants can be diminished or completely stop.

For those involved in online buying there is an urgent need to educate them so that they do not easily become victims to unscrupulous traders. Also, there is an urgent need to provide them with the code of practice in using government Internet facilities.

Further, there is an urgent need for government agencies to buy online for all their official needs as it is proven that it can save millions of ringgit for the authorities. Special officers should be appointed to ensure the government agencies get the best plus substantial savings through them.

Public or civil servants in all grades should be given regular in service training in IT and Internet usage to ensure their high competencies and current knowledge. This is because the IT is fast improving and becoming user friendly as well as deeper and wider penetration to the people and that citizen are rapidly becoming skilful Internet users. Also, there is still the need to make government agencies home page or e-service to be more users friendly.

Further, the increasing usage of Internet among civil servants should be utilised to ensure payments of government services and taxes can be done at any hours of the day and night. Thus, it recommended that more government services if not all can be served or paid online. Till today the problem of public agencies homepage not updated continue to persist. More officers should be appointed to ensure that their homepage are always current.

As a significant number of civil servants have shown interest in generating their extra income through e-commerce or e-trading or e-shopping it about time the government come out with a clear policy and guideline to allow them to do so. Government computers and Internet facilities cannot be used by any civil servants for personal gained. As it is, nearly a quarter of the Sabah civil servants are already adding their income through e-business.

However, it must be clearly said that those who abuses the guideline should be duly punished so that it can minimise any abuses of the approval. Some civil servants believe that this can help to reduce corruptions among civil servants since they can enhance their income online during non-office hours. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that it can eliminate or reduce corruption.

Government websites security should not be compromised under any circumstances. The threat of cybercrime must be heeded. Government should never underestimate the dangers of breaches of its systems and the fact that there is an apparent and current threat from criminal and espionage activities on the cyber space or Internet.

Finally, it can be said there is no looking back when it comes to utilising the Internet for e-government or any kind of e-enterprise and that the civil servants should be adequately trained to do their job well in the e-society and e-economy as well as the knowledge economy.

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