



## **A Short Communication on Mapping the Pattern and Problems Associated with Internet Usage among Youths in Malaysia: Some Preliminary Results**

**Md. Salleh Hassan<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Mohd Nizam Osman<sup>2</sup>, Norsabila Ramli<sup>1</sup>  
and Hayrol Azril Mohamed Shaffril<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia.*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Language and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia.*

### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors MSH and HAMS wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors MNO and NR managed the literature searches. Author HAMS did the analysis. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to determine the pattern and problems of internet usage among youths in Malaysia educational institution. Albeit the presentation of preliminary data from actual study, it provides a 'draft map' to the pattern and problems of internet usage among youths in Malaysia. To elicit the data, questionnaires were distributed to 47 undergraduate students of Universiti Putra Malaysia. Analysis performed has confirmed that respondents used internet mainly for seeking information with regard to their studies and to communicate with friends. Financial constraint and information overloaded are among problems faced by them in using the internet.

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: [majudesa.desa@gmail.com](mailto:majudesa.desa@gmail.com);

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1987, the internet was introduced in Malaysia. After 26 years, internet seems to play a major role in developing both, the country and its community. This is possible due to continuous efforts made by the government in ensuring all communities in Malaysia have equal access towards internet usage. In the Eighth Malaysian Plan (8MP), the government has allocated RM7.9 billion for ICT projects and programs while in the Ninth Malaysian Plan (9MP), a total of 12.9 billion was allocated for similar purposes. A number of high impact ICT projects have been established, such as Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), Rural Internet Centre, Medan Info Desa and Community Broadband Centre. Through National Broadband Initiative, which was introduced by the government in 2010, is to take further actions toward producing high speed internet made available and affordable to all communities particularly those in rural areas, the underprivileged. In addition to Government's efforts, several private service provider companies (such as TM, Celcom, Maxis, Digi and Unifi) have offered alternatives to internet access for Malaysians.

The impact of such efforts have started to benefit the community. [1] had informed that a total of 6.4 million Malaysians have subscribed to broadband services while the internet penetration rate per household in the fourth quarter of 2012 was 66.0%. Almost quarter millions of rural communities have become members to recent ICT projects such as 1Malaysia Community Broadband Centre and Mini Community Broadband Centre established by the government. In Malaysia, urban communities especially and male users are seen to dominate the use of internet [1]. Interestingly, youths aged below 24 years old (40.4%) has been confirmed as main users of internet in Malaysia.

Malaysian youths are active users of internet and this is proven by a number of facts. First, according to [2], most Malaysian youths surf the internet between 4-5 times a week and some of them spend more than 28 hours a week. Furthermore, a total 45% of youths use internet over other media, in which they actively use for blogging and social networking [3]. Youths, particularly those in secondary school and tertiary level, are main users of internet and this

might be geared by the demand of their studies and the needs to gratify their leisure time [4,5,6]. This finding however is quite different from youths in developed countries such as Japan and Korea, albeit using the internet for socializing and educational purposes, entrepreneurship activities is another main purpose for internet usage [7]. Malaysian youths have creativity and innovativeness, therefore the internet can positively be manipulated by them. However, [8] have raised their concern on excessive internet usage as it may intertwine with higher risks and negative activities within the internet such as violent games, pornography and gambling. [9] then added that among the problems that lead to digital divide among youths are due to high maintenance cost, lack of technological knowledge and skills, slow access to internet and lack of privacy while [10] on the other hand have stressed on poor internet coverage and inadequacy of internet centre as the main cause for digital divide.

Although Malaysian youths and their internet usage is a unique study, yet, local scholars seem to place less interest on this matter. Studies on the pattern and problems faced by youths in internet usage are still scarce and the need for such study is mounting. In response to this scarcity, the present study is presenting preliminary data on the pattern and problems of internet usage among youths in Malaysia as an early effort to fulfil the existing gap. The main contribution of this study is information offered to concerned parties regarding critical matters that needs focus to further improve internet usage among youths in Malaysia. Although for this article the preliminary data was used, it can possibly provide a 'draft map' with regard to the pattern and problems in internet usage among youths in Malaysia.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Findings from present article are gained through preliminary analysis performed from the pre-test data. The instrument used for collecting the data is a questionnaire developed via comprehensive literature reviews and instruments developed from past studies. This article focuses on three main parts, namely; demographics part (13 questions), the pattern of internet usage (14 questions) and problems of internet usage (12 questions). Respondents were given an

open-ended or closed ended options for the demographics part. The pattern of internet usage part uses a five Likert-like scale ranging from 1 (never) to always (5), whereas the problem of internet usage part uses a five Likert-like scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior to pre-test process, the questionnaire was validated through a series of instrument development meeting. A validated questionnaire was then pre-tested among 47 Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) undergraduate students. The pre-test was self-administered by the respondents and assisted by two trained and experienced enumerators. SPSS was utilized to analyse the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of the data. In order to calculate the level of mean score for the pattern and problems of internet usage, a calculation was based on 5 (value of maximum mean score)/ 3 (number of levels). The calculation has resulted in three levels of mean score, namely low (mean score of 1.00 – 2.33), moderate (2.34 to 3.67) and high (3.68 to 5.00).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, findings on respondents' demographics data, their pattern and problems in internet usage were discussed. Findings presented were based on frequency, percentage and mean score analyses.

#### 3.1 Demographics Data

Out of 47 students who filled the questionnaire, 66.0% of them are females. The mean score for respondents' age was 22.7 years old. Most of them are ICT literate, on average they have been using the internet for 7.3 years. 70.2% of the respondents use the internet via their lap tops and 19.1% of them accessed the internet via mobile phones. Some of them were detected using the internet via PC and iPad. Wi-Fi is the main preference for internet service and English was the main language used while they surfed the internet. On average, they spent RM73.2 (roughly equal to USD28) per month for their internet service. In line with the study done by [2], youths in this study are heavy internet users and this was evident when respondents were found to spend 284 minutes per day (equal to four hours and 44 minutes) to surf the internet. On average, the respondents sent three emails and received eight emails per day. The majority of them have social networking accounts, 100% of them have Facebook account, 42.6% of them

have Twitter accounts while 8.5% of them have accounts in other social networking sites (Table 1).

#### 3.2 Purpose of Internet Usage

Table 2 demonstrated the purposes of internet usage among the respondents. Out of fourteen purposes of internet usage, eleven purposes yielded high mean scores (mean score of 3.68 – 5.00) while the other three purposes yielded moderate mean scores (2.34 – 3.67). Patently, the respondents used internet mainly for getting information for their study and daily tasks. To have such finding is not surprising as online references are very much preferred by youths, particularly those in higher learning institute [4,5,6] and a few reasons can be associated with such scenario. First, online resources offer unlimited references for their study. Second, although they have the Sultan Abdul Samad Library, most of them prefer to seek their information via online resources probably due to its simple and quick procedure - through a click they are able to acquire intended information, this in turn will save their time, energy and efforts while saving their money for photocopying cost. Furthermore, respondents also found internet usage as a way to communicate with their friends, with the emergence of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, global communication is made.

This study have produced results that are in line with a study done by [11], which confirms that among the main purpose for internet usage among youths is to seek and fulfil their entertainment needs. Furthermore, results from this study are supported by a 9 who found that most youths in Malaysia used the internet to fulfil their entertainment needs via online sources such as You Tube, Facebook and Twitter. Not all the respondents use the internet to seek political information, which was why this purpose yielded lowest mean score. Though the majority of them have met or exceeded the legal age ( $\geq 21$  years), politics is not their prime interest when surfing the internet and [12] has further clarified this by stating that most youths express less interest in politics as a result of their poor connectivity within their communities and the poor amount of information on political candidates and on current issues. Moreover, youths believe that election results would not affect them, their ignorance have caused them to leave the responsibility of voting to the elders [12].

Table 1. Demographics data of the respondents (n=47)

Factors	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	16	34.0	
Female	31	66.0	
<b>Age (years old)</b>			22.7
21-22	23	48.9	
23-24	20	42.6	
25-26	4	8.5	
<b>Experience in using internet (years)</b>			7.3
1-3	8	17.0	
4-7	17	36.2	
>8	22	48.8	
<b>Main devices used for surfing the internet</b>			
Lap-top	33	70.2	
Mobile phone	9	19.1	
PC	4	8.5	
IPad	1	2.1	
<b>Type of internet connection</b>			
Wi-Fi	23	48.9	
Broadband	20	42.6	
Wired	4	8.5	
<b>Main language used</b>			
English	41	87.2	
Malay	4	8.5	
Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese)	2	4.3	
<b>Amount spent for internet services per month</b>			73.2
<RM30	11	24.4	
RM31-RM50	8	17.8	
>RM50	21	57.8	
<b>Time spent for surfing the internet (minutes)</b>			284.1
<90	6	12.8	
91-200	14	29.8	
201-300	15	31.9	
>301	12	25.5	
<b>Sent emails per day</b>			2.7
0	6	13.0	
1-2	21	45.6	
>3	20	41.4	
<b>Received emails per day</b>			8.1
0-2	13	27.7	
3-5	15	31.9	
>6	19	40.4	
<b>Social network (Facebook)</b>			
Yes	47	100	
No	0	0	
<b>Social network (Twitter)</b>			
Yes	20	42.6	
No	27	57.4	
<b>Social network (Others)</b>			
Yes	4	8.5	
No	43	91.5	

**Table 2. Purpose of internet usage by respondents (n=47)**

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Mean</b>
To gain information regarding study/tasks	4.36
To communicate with friends	4.23
To gain recent and updated information.	4.17
To gain entertainment by watching video/listening to the music.	4.15
Receiving picture/video	3.98
To use internet application (online banking/YouTube)	3.98
Sending picture/video	3.96
To gain information regarding courses offered by the association / ministry	3.91
To gain information regarding the association's activities.	3.85
To communicate with family members	3.72
To communicate through email with teacher/lecturer/employer	3.68
Playing online games	3.64
To gain information regarding business/entrepreneurship	3.53
To gain information regarding politic	3.45

### 3.3 Problems of Using Internet

Table 3 shows the problems of internet usage among respondents. Though this finding only refers to the preliminary results of the actual study, it is quite concerning to reveal that all twelve problems yielded moderate mean scores (mean score between 2.47 to 3.51). The respondents have associated financial factor as the main problem for them to use the internet. Such finding is in line with local studies done by [9,10,13], in which they found that financial factor is among the main obstacle for the community to use technology. [9] added that individuals with higher financial ability have more financial power to buy technology, thus widen their opportunity to technology. Generally, students have limited access towards finance, some of them still depend on their parents as financial sources and therefore they are burdened by financial commitments to pay high quality internet bills. Information overload is another problem, respondents are given access to unlimited information whereby the main restriction is that it is uncertain whether the information disseminated are representing the actual scenario. In this case, it is vital for them to filter such information. According to [8], unfiltered

internet usage will expose youths to higher risks and negative activities such as violent games, pornography, and gambling Lack of privacy is another concern raised by respondents and the emergence of social networking which require respondents to have their own account have worsened the scenario [14]. Nowadays, it is not possible for an online account to be hacked and cause a lot of problem to the online users. Furthermore, social networking account can easily be seen by strangers. The respondents seem to have less problem with regard to knowledge in using the internet and study done by [15] have confirmed that education achievement has something to do with their internet usage. An educated individual is expected to use internet more than a less educated individual. Within this case, all of the respondents are university students who are exposed daily internet usage for both – personal and studying purposes.

**Table 3. Problems of using internet by respondents**

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Expensive cost for accessing the internet	3.51
Information overload	3.49
Lack of privacy	3.47
Wasting a lot of time	3.43
Longer time to download	3.17
It is difficult to gain relevant information	3.09
Slow access to internet	3.06
English is not my mother tongue	2.96
Lack of time	2.85
Lack of access	2.85
Internet is something complicated to use	2.72
Lack of knowledge with regard to internet usage	2.47

### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on findings, it was concluded that Malaysian youths are heavy users of internet. The main purpose of their internet usage was to gain information regarding study/tasks, while expensive cost for accessing internet was the main problem faced by them. To produce a concrete recommendation from this present study is unbecoming as data gained from pre-test were only representative. The main limitation for this study is mainly the sample size of 47 UPM students and the results might be enriched if a bigger sample size is involved. Nevertheless,

even with a small sample size, it provides a 'draft map' for future studies with regard to the pattern and problems in internet usage among youths in Malaysia. Based on the preliminary data, a future study with a bigger sample size is expected to similarly produce the same data, which is to use internet for the purpose of information seeking, communication and entertainment while among the internet usage problems they are expected to face concerns expensive costs, information overload and lack of privacy.

## 5. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

In conclusion, the researchers are planning to collect a bigger sample size (400 respondents) among youths across the country, which will be among the participants of courses and seminars organized by either ministry of youth or other relevant youth agencies. Analysis from a bigger sample size should demonstrate a clearer picture on the patterns and problems in internet usage. In addition, by conducting a bigger study it should help the concerned parties and scholars to formulate a new discipline, culture, and theory.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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