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Potential Benefits of ICT towards Rural Positive Youth Development in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Information Communication Technology (ICT) offers an abundance of benefits to users especially in socio-economic aspects. Rural youth are one group of users that has experienced such benefits. They are able to access more opportunities due to their superior ICT knowledge and compatibility. This study aims to identify the potential benefits of ICT usage for rural youth development. Through document analyses and review of literature, it can be concluded that the benefits offered from ICT usage towards youth development can be categorized in the aspects of competency, character, confidence, caring, connection and contribution. With all of these aspects of potential benefits in place, it is hoped that consistent involvement from youths in rural development can be ensured.

Keywords: Information Communication Technology, Youth In Malaysia, Rural Youth, Positive Youth Development, Rural Development.

INTRODUCTION

ICT nowadays is inseparable with the youth, especially Generation Y, Z and baby boomers also known as savvy youth (e-born and intergenerational learning). New media is ubiquitous, technology affects everyone everywhere even if they don't use it directly (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002). Even as large part of our population is excluded from participating actively in the information society, another group has been privileged simply by being born in societies and under circumstances that make them especially knowledgeable about new technologies (Dralega et al., 2010). Even in places where access is limited and the digital divide is exist, younger generations are more knowledgeable about technologies than their parents are.

Intergenerational interactions have value, and benefit the community at large as well as the participating generations. The older generation receives access to information and knowledge, while youth engage in civic activities that help them to challenge the discourse of apathy.

Young people are the main users of the new ICTs, especially through smart phones application such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp the power of internet access has advanced and varies their ICT usage in terms of information seeking, sharing and communication purposes. Overall, the age pattern in some countries, such as China, Armenia, Bolivia, Egypt, Kyrgyz Republic, and Indonesian youth is the largest Internet users starting with ages 15 and above (McKenzie, 2007). ICT use and ownership of the smart phone mainly from the urban communities which are also more educated and have higher household income.

Youth are most important population because they are shaping the future of a country. According to Pittman & Irby (1998), they have recognized six principles of Youth Development frameworks which are: 1) more than prevention; 2) enduring, comprehensive, and engages youth; 3) goes beyond the basics; 4) happens everywhere; 5) not just coordination - vision is required; 6) all youth are developing, have strengths, have needs, can contribute to their communities; and valued.

In the international stage, youth are growing force however they are underestimated. Statistic according to UN (2013), almost half of the world's population is under the age of 25. In addition, they found that issues and policies raised among young people are in dire need of attention. They have been overlooked and neglected the problems faced by young people while focussing on poverty reduction strategies. However, governments and the international community have increasingly recognized young people as a powerful agent of change, whose inclusion in politics is vital to improving democratic processes (UN, 2013).

Youth, ICT and Development

ICT has played an important role in young people's development especially to prominence on a global scale. Collaboration between International Telecommunication Unit (ITU) and UN-Habitat has highlighted that ICT has helped youth in mobilizing, collaborating and given them a voice where there was none before (UN, 2013). Furthermore according to the findings, ICT has brought them together in response to social concerns and has connected them across vast of geo-political barriers. Another research done by ITU and Broadband Commission has shown the benefits of ICT access across all major sectors which are in line with the major purpose of this study (ITU, 2008). Their findings on youth have discovered that access to information is very crucial towards better access to capital, markets and training (career or studies). Besides participation in political process increases, youth are recognizing as responsible citizens in the society presently. It is also found that youth entrepreneurship as a solution for youth employment, which the ICT have facilitated them in enhancing their access towards new

technology, internet network and speed in information retrieval during their business practice (ITU, 2008).

Youth today have found that they are willing to confront the challenges in pursuit the development by following the latest trend to make full use of the benefits arising from the ICT utilization. However the challenges or barriers that are more important here is to what extent the ICT utilization can inspire them to change the world in positive way. The role of agencies such as the government and the UN is critical in determining policy which can accelerated the ICT utilization towards global development strategy. Access to ICT has significantly changed the lifestyle of youth either in developed and less developed countries (UN, 2013). In addition, ICTs introduced world without borders which enabling the communication between youth and others from around of the world to be connected and promoting connection through interactions and mutual understanding between them. In this Information Society, youth has been recognized as avid and creative users of ICTs, they were also act as contributors to the development of society and in the same time can bridging the Digital Divide (UN, 2013). Furthermore, besides close the gender gap by promoting better and inclusive access to ICT for young women, ICT helps in enhancing their academic, social and economic development. ICT has also given an equal opportunity to a number of youths who are less fortunate, such as migrant youth, refugee, youth with HIV and AIDS, disabled youth, rural youth, youth experiencing poverty, and those facing discrimination which is to ensuring that ICTs are used and developed in an inclusive and equitable manner.

While in Malaysia, youth was placed under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which is based on the National Youth Policy. Youth generation is the largest source of the country and they are potential to contribute to national development. Potential youth mobilization energy will determine the strength and resilience of social development, economy and politics of countries.

Several strategies implemented by National Youth Development Policy are: - 1) Knowledge Development – efforts will be intensified to develop knowledge in various aspects as fundamental to development and sustainability of youth; 2) Formation of Attitude - efforts towards implementation of the values and the formation of positive and creative attitude will be fostered among the youth to face current and future challenges; 3) Skills Development and Entrepreneurship - preparing youth with the latest technology, technical and vocational skills and entrepreneurial activities in accordance with the requirements of national development; 4) Nurturing Healthy Lifestyle - the youth are encouraged to join voluntary associations or activities that can promote a healthy lifestyle, active and dynamic. This practice will be able to produce leaders who are responsible and quality; 5) Ease of Social Interaction - improving facilities suitable for promotion and healthy social interaction among the youth and the community; 6) Partnership in Development - using partnerships and collaboration between government agencies, private and non-governmental organizations for youth development; 7) Network International Relations - encourage youth to improve networking and interaction with the international community (KBS, 1997).

Youth in rural areas often have less access to technological assets than their counterpart youth in urban areas (Elbert & Alston, 2005). However, Malaysian government has emphasized ICT as a mechanism (Shaffril et al., 2010; Samah et al., 2011; Badsar et al., 2011), which have impacted in improving the living conditions most of rural communities that act as a strategy for rural community development through bridging digital divide. Hence, several of ICT centre such as access 1 Malaysia Internet Centre (1MIC) and Community Broadband Library (CBL) have been developed in certain rural areas. There were volume of studies on ICT centres, most of it only covers ICT centres success at the organisational level and the objectives of the establishment of the ICT centres. Despite the facilities provided, to what extent the ICT utilization can inspire rural youth in positive way of self or community development? This current study is also important in bridging the gap in the body of knowledge pertaining to the specific benefits of ICT usage towards positive youth development among rural youth community. Therefore, it is crucial that research on rural setting also important in terms of community building as a whole rather than research on urban areas only.

As discovered by Thioune (2003), utilization of ICT could positively impact on economic growth, education, communication, and mobility as well as providing opportunities for positive development. In additions, youth always been related with anti-social and abnormal behaviour that will lead to social problems and risks. Positive youth development characteristics seems to affect youth to be at lower risk for a developmental path that will integrates personal, social, and behavioural problems (Lerner, 2004). Does ICT usage really can bring benefits in terms of positive youth development to the rural youth community? Besides contribution in literature on specific positive youth development dimensions in rural settings, one other dimension which is 'contribution' will be included as an additional character that might be consists in this study area. This aims of the study is to identify the potential benefits of ICT usage for rural youth development in the contexts of positive youth development characteristics.

TELECENTRES PROVISION IN MALAYSIA RURAL AREAS

Realizing the benefits of ICT as an effective tool in driving the country towards achieving its vision as developed nation in 2020, Malaysian government has introduced several initiatives to provide ICT facilities, whether in urban or in rural areas (Bashir et al., 2011). Various telecentre projects have been established which is objectively to reduce digital gaps between the urban and the rural community. In addition, they are also aimed to foster the rural community utilized the ICT for the purpose of community development (Masrek & Rashidi, 2012). Among the telecentre projects all over the country since the late 1990s been recognized in Malaysia are Pusat Internet Desa (PID), Community Broadband Centre (CBC), Pusat Internet 1 Malaysia (PI1M), Community Broadband Library (CBL), Rural Library and inclusive of Kampung Tanpa Wayar (KTW) which also known as Wireless Village Programme.

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Rothschild (2008) describes telecentres as public places with access of computer and internet for the underserved population as an opportunity to access and utilize appropriate digital technologies. While according to Roman and Colle (2002), the public place that have connectivity with computers and networks that can beneficial the community, that is similar views by Reilly and Gomez (2001) on telecentres as a place that provides people with ICTs for various purposes (educational, economic, social and personal development). In line with the statements, several previous studies on the use and effectiveness of the telecentres have been conducted and found that these telecentres were perceived to be very useful and beneficial to the rural communities in terms of problem solving and also assist them in their development (Omar et al., 2008; Bashir et al., 2011; Masrek & Rashidi, 2012; Sahharon et al., 2014; Samsuddin et al., 2015).

With the existence of these telecentres, to some extent it has contributed to the development of the community by reducing the digital divide and improved the local lifestyle. Young and Gail (2001) have states that the existence of telecentres is the most important asset in providing the benefits of ICTs to poor communities, due to the highly cost of usage and subscription, and inadequate facilities and access. The researcher added, telecenters might overcome the barriers of distance and location by facilitating the access to ICT, they were also able to foster social cohesion and interaction.

Studies conducted by Mokhtarrudin (2002) on ICT projects in the Bayangan village of Keningau, Sabah found that the projects are considered successful. The measurement was in terms of ICT literacy rate have increased and also scored the highest among other villages in Sabah, which is close to 70% of the total population through the MID program. Whereby, study done by Postill (2008) on the ICT project in Subang Jaya (USJ) found that the utilization of the Internet has facilitate their USJ-community in the new form of daily communication. Their community has changed from 'social community' to 'community networks'. Previously, social community more focused on relationship and meeting physically, with the facilities provided in the USJ e-community, meetings can be done via virtual network. According to Pigg (2001), the initiative of this community network focused on three objectives: to gather local information and improving the access of the population, ensuring residents have an opportunity and able to use the Internet, and sense of concerns in developing the community.

Studies on success and failure factors in rural ICT projects done by Omar et al. (2008) have mentioned that there are arguments among rural communities on the interpersonal communication, especially communication with friends, family members and neighbours which play an important role in disseminating information to the public. Telecentre has become as a one-stop centre for rural community especially youth, in accessing the e-Government applications/ portals, e-learning and as an information resource exchange that meet the needs of remote regions and districts which consists of small population.

In order to address the digital gaps of the rural community, many developing countries had implemented telecentres. In the context of Malaysia, various types of telecentres had been established in the rural areas and one of them is the Community Broadband Centre (Masrek & Rashidi, 2012). A total of six potential benefits have been identified by Sahharon et al. (2014) for the wireless village initiative (KTW) in Malaysia for rural communities. There are 1) Creating connection and gaining information; 2) affordable internet services; 3) opportunities for effective communication; 4) to create a first-class mind individual; 5) economic impact at the community level; and 6) exposure to online services. These benefits seem always regarded when ICT been utilizing by youth, but in terms of development it may be significant with some impact on the development of youth itself.

Bashir et al. (2011) described on the role of telecentres, which is in terms of human endeavours aspects economically, politically and socially the rural communities have impacted positively. The researcher added that sharing experience, digitally discussing with each other's and involving community activities showing that they are socially engaged when they are connected with internet access through telecenters. Furthermore, five major desirable outcomes which are revitalize sense of community, enhance social capital, empower members of the community, enhance strong democracy and provide economic opportunities can be used in measuring telecentre success have been identified by O'Neil (2002).

Therefore, it has been introduced by Lerner et al. (2005b) in respect of Positive Youth Development (PYD), which emphasizes the positive vibe among the youth. There is a 5Cs who first introduced Competence, Connection, Character, Confidence, and Caring. However there is another C of Contribution been recognized by previous studies (Bers, 2006). Therefore in this paper, the researcher explore on the role ICT that can help and support the development of youth toward more positive lifestyle. PYD is about involvement of young people among adults' in the structuring of services, systems, and activities. According to Bean et al. (2011), the main goal of PYD approach is to help young people in acquiring knowledge and developing their skills towards healthy, happy, responsible, and productive adults they need to become.

The six Cs of PYD consists of clusters of individual attributes, such as intellectual ability and social behavioural skills (competence); positive engagement with people and institutions (connection); integrity, moral centeredness, and spirituality (character); positive self-regard, sense of self-efficacy, and courage (confidence); humane values, empathy, and sense of social justice (caring) (Roth & Brooks- Gunn, 2003) and involvement as active participant and decision maker in organizations and community (contribution) (Bers, 2006). In enhancing civil society as a consequence of rural youth which becoming morally and civically adults, these six Cs are developed as an outcome for better generations.

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BENEFITS OF ICT TOWARDS RURAL POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Competence: ITU (2008) in its digital inclusion activities has set a main goal which promoting broadband school connectivity that involves schools and community. ITU helps to boosts youth educational level, and their economic potential by involving in learning activities which provide with crucial ICT and life skills. Competence in terms of academic, cognitive and vocational supporting the findings by Mokhtarrudin (2002) on increased of the ICT literacy rate through e-learning activities (Omar et al., 2008).

Furthermore, based on previous study (Sahharon et al., 2014) through the provision of KTW in the rural area have benefits rural youth in gaining opportunities for having an effective communication and creating a first-class mind individual. According to Samsuddin et al. (2015) findings, rural communities are positively accepting KTW project and it is successful in bridging the digital gap between urban and rural areas in Malaysia. Exposure to online services not only impacts the self-development but also impact economic at the community level. By having the ability and motivation through civic and social, cultural, physical and emotional health, and employability of rural youth, indirectly it will develop the competence value positively. This statements in line with National Youth Development Policy (KBS, 1997) in aspects of nurturing healthy lifestyle, ease of social interaction, and partnership in development.

Connection: Social networks have long been recognized in the development of an individual in the social and employment goals. Social networks or social connections have a profound impact in the quality of live. It is reported, people who have diverse social connections have higher life-evaluations which most of pleasurable personal activities involve socializing (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2010). The researcher added, social connections bring benefits to the extent of people's health, probability of finding a job, and certain of the neighbourhood characteristics for example the prevalence of crime and the performance of local schools. In line with the statement, Armengol (2006) estimated that about half of all jobs in Europe and the United States are through social contacts.

Ramli et al. (2015) highlighted the empowerment of networks for business will increasing income and strengthening marketing aspects which is in line with Bashir et al (2011). Besides for advancing employment outcomes, networks often provide additional support, assistance, resources, and the opportunities to socialize with people who come from a different gender, age, and/or cultural background in terms of development of bonding networks. By building and strengthening the relationships between youth and community and between youth and institutions, it will results a positive impact on promoting civic engagement and volunteer work, and engaging in community development activities.

Character: The technology can be as incentives to the youth in productive activities for their involvement. Studied done by London (2010), staff from telecenters in the United States (US) reported that youth were able to avoid gang violence and criminal when they were more attach

with programs. Through empowerment of technology also, it has strengthened the sense of community and impacted on self-esteem positively. Youth with stronger and more varied social assets (positive peer role model, positive non-parental adult role model, involved in community activities, report future aspirations, able to exercise responsible choices, report good family communication) are less likely to be involved with crime, violence and drugs.

It is to be said that Information centers such as telecenters and rural libraries with ICTs also act as community hubs and resource providers for rural youth which promoting the integration of disenfranchised youth into broader social and community networks. London et al. (2010) study has found that, youth have given an opportunity to improve their lives and their communities through empowerment of skills mastery with the creation of social capital. Youth that participating in organized activities wills results leadership qualities and ability to overcome adversity. Previous study that supported this element also includes character such as having sense of responsibility and autonomy, having a sense of spirituality and self-awareness, and having an awareness of one's own personality or individuality (Lerner et al, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005b; Bers, 2006).

Confidence: Neff (2009) have supported that ICTs or technologies can increase external aspirational horizons (types of jobs or education levels deemed accessible) and interior measures of self-worth and capacity. The researcher added, beside improvement on self-esteem, motivation and confidence also has impacts on individual employability in terms of to better withstand the psychological stresses of interviewing, of rejection, or of prejudiced views of disability encountered during the job search.

Youth especially in rural community need support and opportunities to make a successful transition to adulthood. According to Ramli et al. (2015) that confident is one of benefits offered from ICT to youth agro-based entrepreneurs in utilizing new technologies which creating new opportunities for them. To become healthy and productive adults, youth should acquire the knowledge and skills they needed through the positive youth development approach. ICTs empowered youth in increasing their expectations, allowing them to take alternatives paths than those offered in their communities. Confidence definition by Lerner et al. (2005b), is to improve the self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, identity, and belief in the future among youth. In other terms, being aware of someone progress in their life and expected to continue progress in the future.

Caring: As social spaces, rural libraries promote as a community building. There is a finding on relationships built based on courses conducts in telecenters in US, which they managed to form friendships, mentor mentis relationships with instructors, and romantic relationships with other students (Neff, 2009). Farida and Ghadially (2010) have proven that there is a correlation between Internet use and feeling empowerment. Their research on Muslim communities in India found that Internet use can enhanced the feelings of empowerment and it is higher in women than in men.

Besides that, caring is about having a sense of sympathy and empathy for others (commitment to social justice) and sense of caring and compassion (Lerner et al., 2005b). This element could improve youths' empathy and identification with others. In the aspects of membership and belonging, youth can participate and engage with the community as community member and being involved in relationship with another person, this statement is in agreement with other studies (Barber & Olsen, 1997; Eccles et al., 1997). The researcher added that "social belonging" or "social membership" results lower substance abuse and lower delinquency. More than that, caring is having a sense of safety and structure, such as being provided with adequate food, shelter, clothing, and security, including of protection from injury and loss.

Contribution: The social networking is creating new spaces for citizens to engage in civic activity and governance through widespread of mobile phones utilization which also has made youth more aware and active in politics (UN, 2012). Nowadays, young people are aware of their rights or their opinions regarding what should be done in their country. Through enabled of social media most youth are using these platforms to access information, to discuss, share experience and voice their opinions which indirectly create political awareness among rural communities especially rural youth (Bashir et al., 2011).

Commitment and empowerment forge increased by using ICTs which engage and motivate youth to get involved in developing and learning about their communities. To get youth engaged in positive local development processes, they have to inclusive the attractive and constructive ways such as, citizen journalism, user-generated content, reporting, and neighborhood videos and music. According to UN (2012), the statements of "Knowledge is power, power is self-esteem" have been used by young leaders in Kenya, they attributed that the access of information as an empowering agent allowing which youth to involve with government officials in planning and development the future generations in the country.

CONCLUSION

Rural youth development is very essential as it will help to shape the future of rural youth into more positive direction. Indirectly, it will impact towards the development of rural communities if youth can make a difference, or at least gain return on investment (ROI) to the rural population in terms of economic and social advancement of the local community. In addition, rural youth who previously often relate with high social issues such as promiscuity between men and women, drug addiction, and crime would be reduced if the facilities provided at the rural area such as ICT fully utilized by them (London, 2010). In addition, by providing the ICT facilities in remote areas will provide opportunities for the youth to develop themselves in social and economic sectors in line with the national youth development policy (KBS, 1997).

Youth are seen as a source of development and not just a subject to which development strategies are applied. ICTs are widely acknowledged as important resources for socio-

economic advancement in both developed and developing countries. Promoting youth organizations in order to attract the youth and the community to support and participate in activities organized is one of the actions planed in the national youth development policy that should be carried out to sustain the objectives of the policy by inclusive the ICTs elements (KBS, 1997).

Moreover, ICT is also as an agent in connecting the developed and developing countries to achieve the specific target or vision as stated in the actions planed of national youth development policy (KBS, 1997), providing youth with understanding of the concept of universal (globalization) and the importance of their relationship with government agencies, private sector, youth organizations and non-governmental organizations and international networks. Without ICT, it is difficult for people to communicate with each other in sharing information and developments in various fields. ICT as a liaison or communication tools that plays a very important role in community development. ICT can also bridge the gap between rural communities and urban communities, also known as the digital divide.

Galvanized within the broad field of ICT for development (ICTD), research emerging from these different spaces is theoretically diverse and multidisciplinary in nature. Theories and analytical frameworks emerging from computer science, political science, economics, information science, transnational studies, and many others continue to enrich our understanding on the role public access to ICT in promoting social change. However there are limitations and challenges which are: 1) resistance to empowering young people in the organizational and cultural, 2) difficulty of stepping back (opportunity for youth to lead), and 3) doubtful among youth whether they are being listened to in influencing the system.

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