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## Affective Need of ICT in Improving Business Performance among Malay Women Entrepreneur

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### Abstract

Information Technology and Communication (ICT) industry is actively growing globally. This development also contributes to ICT usage in areas of business that becomes one of the sources in national economic growth. In conjunction with that, Malaysian government has conducted various initiatives in order to support ICT usage in business especially among entrepreneurs. The Industrial Revolution 4.0 becomes the catalyst to a new business environment that based on ICT platform. This study is carried out in order to understand affective need that found in the Uses and Gratification Theory elements in influencing ICT usage among Malay women entrepreneur. Qualitative approach has been used by interviewer profoundly women entrepreneurs around Negeri Sembilan and Bangi. It is found that affective need elements influence ICT usage among informants because it is easy to use, the difference in experience facing by entrepreneurs while using ICT applications and tools as well as the process of delivering fast and easy information. Furthermore, this study also found that informants use ICT in business to improve access to clients and other entrepreneurial partners. Additionally, reliance to ICT becomes something important in increasing business performance to achieve optimum level. This study implicates ICT usage among Malay women entrepreneurs especially to increase digital economy and to prepare for the industrial revolution 4.0.

**Keywords:** *Effectiveness, Ease to Use, Differences, Information Delivering, Women Entrepreneurs.*

### **Introduction**

The evolution of business world today encourages the birth of modern entrepreneurs based on ICT usage and this entrepreneurial field's contribution is giving a positive impact on the economic development of the country (Nor Azira Ayob, Sity Daud & Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, 2016). In Malaysia, the phenomenon of women entrepreneurs who dominate the business realm can be seen with the emergence of big brands names such as *Fareeda, Bella Ammara, Marshmallowsarf* and *Zawara*. Their business is not limited only to the use of mainstream media but also with the assistance of optimal use of ICT, including other Internet applications such as social medias which are Facebook and Instagram. In Malaysia, Facebook is the most popular SNS, used by internet users from all walks of life including students and professionals (Kasuma, 2017). The number of women entrepreneurs in Malaysia has increased significantly over the last few years from the various awareness and achievement programs implemented by the government. According to Online Mail (2016) report, 1.18 million women entrepreneurs have registered with the Companies Commission of Malaysia (SSM). This clearly shows a notable increase in women's involvement in entrepreneurship.

Additionally, Nur Yuhainis and Shuhymee (2017) have stated that ICT usage refers to collecting, processing, using and transmitting information electronically through the use of technology that allows the communication process. In addition, ICT also acts as a medium connecting between individuals with other individuals across boundaries, times and the world. In fact, today's community dependence on digital application has made ICT a significant part of everyday life.

According to Samsudin et al. (2011) Malaysia is a country that supports the rigid effort of integrating ICT usage into development of the nation. There is a high internet demand in Malaysia every year and this is due to the development of infrastructure provided by the government. The provision of infrastructure in the field of technology is one of the government's initiatives to ensure Malaysians are able to compete globally. The government of Malaysia has provided seven initiatives related to ICT usage. Amongst the initiatives is to create E-government and business processes involving ICT as a medium of communication.

Additionally, the development of ICT has indirectly affected the country's economic development. The presence of an online E-commerce or business system, for example, has had an impact on trading activity when it becomes the primary medium in the business activity nowadays. Online business activities have provided an efficient medium as it allows the continuation of communication between traders and customers without having face-to-face conversation. The increased utilization of computers and internet at home and in the field of entrepreneurship has offered a new way of making purchases through an E-commerce system which allows people to shop online. Through E-commerce also, business activities are significantly efficient without having difficulties in regards to time consumption (Nik Rahim, 2009).

Nonetheless, the acceptance of ICT through social media applications in business is still relatively low among women entrepreneurs of small and medium industry (SMEs). Ahmad Shahrul, Siti Zobidah and Muhamad Sham (2012), stated that the E-commerce system available in Malaysia is still regarded as a new medium for women entrepreneurs. This is mainly contributed by the fact that most people are still conducting direct and face-to-face transactions without using the technology. Only a handful of users are using E-commerce methods. The Malaysian Government has taken various initiatives to promote the use of E-commerce and ICT systems among entrepreneurs. However, the effort seems to be limited because there is a gap between the increasing number of internet users and the number of users making online trading (Ruslan Ramli & Norazuwa Mat, 2013).

Over the years, number of women entrepreneurs involve in business online is growing. These figures have proven that women entrepreneurs are beginning to exhibit interest in the use of ICT in the business environment. The decision of women to opt for this career field symbolizes the upsurge in those who choose to own a business and work on their own (Bowen & Hisrich 1986).

Women entrepreneurs are defined as individuals who carry out small businesses and businesses are owned by that individuals who establish and manage the businesses with their respective principles and goals (Smith-Hunter 2006; Faradillah Iqmar, Samsudin, Ali Salman, 2015). Ergo, this article aims to find out the importance of the usage of ICT in the business of women entrepreneurs. Effectiveness of ICT refers to the impact of ICT utilization in their businesses. These effects include entrepreneurial emotions before and after using ICT in business as well as factors that drive entrepreneurs using ICT in their business. The effectiveness of ICT was analyzed according to the use of ICT by women entrepreneurs in conducting business activities.

### **Uses and Gratification Theory**

The study carried out by Herzog becomes collateral to Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1974) in developing Uses and Gratification Theory. Based on the theory, they listed five fundamental elements that become audience pivotal motivation in the use of media. The first element is in terms of cognitive need; media used for information access, knowledge and understanding on something. The second element is affective need element which meets the individual emotions need through media consumption. The third element on the other hand is on reflexive (Self-integrative) needs aspect. Self-requirement implies the media used to increase self-confidence towards something. Forth element covers social needs which media used to bridge someone's relationship with people around and surrounding community. The last element is the need to remove stress or known with escapism. Nevertheless, this article concentrate to affective need element only as to be discussed.

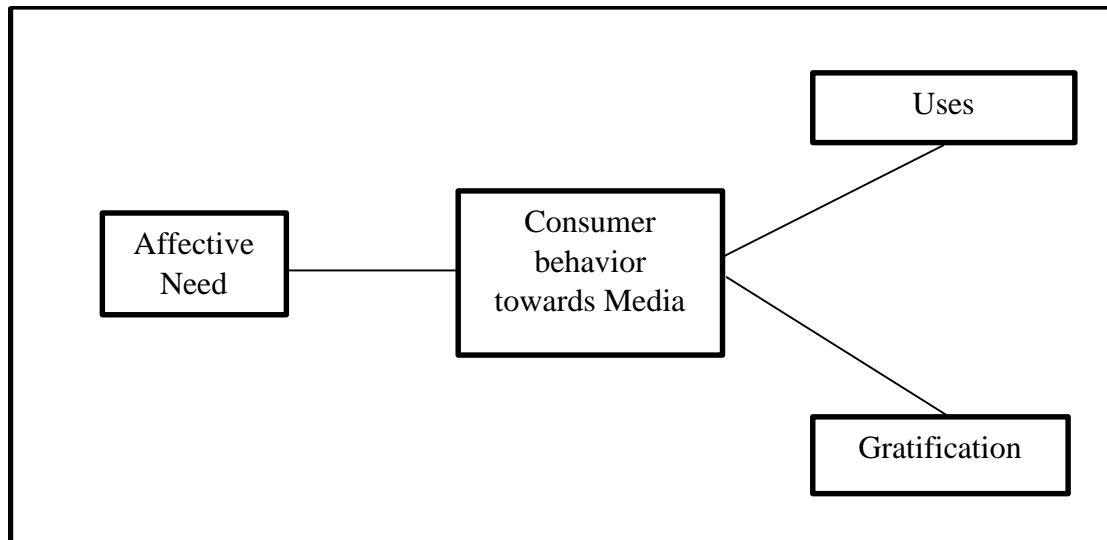


Figure 1: Uses and Gratification Theory Adaptation (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch 1974)

Affective need refers to form individual emotions when using media. Feelings experienced could be sad, happy and so forth in order to fulfill satisfaction in the use of media (Iriz and Dezhi 2014). Hence, affective need includes all emotions, pleasures and feelings possessed by audience when using media. Meanwhile, social need element on the other hand understood in the form of media consumption in order to strengthen the relationship of society and community surrounding. Social need fulfills the Hierarchy of Maslow need namely human ones to mutually interact with other human and accepted surrounding community (Nurul Madiha 2016). Media plays an important role in giving space to individuals to socialize with family, friends and altogether building social network through computer ones. Interaction and human contact are happening without distance limitation and time. In fact, partnership and information distribution also done without any limitation.

### ICT Usage Affective Need in Business

Modernization trend and development urge womenfolk to involve in career world and together with menfolk in developing country (Haryana Rozana 2015). According to Suriyani Muhamad et al. (2017), women play role that is important in national economic development and women participation in workforce increase country's economic growth. Currently, women work in almost all sectors of the economy including agriculture, industrial, manufacturing, education, health, tourism and various other fields. Entrepreneurial field is one of the areas pioneered by women with more and more of them in Malaysia to take opportunity to get involved in the field. As a matter of fact, with business online which facilitates process trade transaction, save time and energy and involves use of low capital attract interest of women to involve especially young women who have graduated from various fields of education (Chen et al. 2011; Nurdin Gusniar 2014). Ergo, it is proven that ICT development brings big benefit towards advancement of women in one country (Siti Masayu Rosliah 2016).

In examining the phenomenon of ICT usage in business by women entrepreneurs, it should be seen from various aspects. Hence, this study focuses on affective needs that refer

to individual emotional forms when using the media. This affective requirement is also one of the most important dimensions in the Theory of Utility and Satisfaction founded by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974). The feeling of being sad, happy, and so forth are fulfilled while using the media (Iriz & Dezhi, 2014). Therefore, effective needs are reflected in all the emotions, pleasures and feelings the audiences have while they use the media. This also covers the aspect of ICT as an easy-to-use medium, experience using ICT and through the information delivery.

Nowadays, with current technology, we are no longer in need to queue in order to pay the bills instead, everything can be done through online. The Malaysian government has also encouraged the use of ICT among the people to assist them in becoming more informed through technology. Government policies always support the development of ICT in order to move the country in support of the development of ICT around the world thus becoming the catalyst for the ICT these days. ICT facilities, especially the internet, have facilitated the acquisition and distribution of information among the public. Unlimited use of ICT helps facilitate daily activities. Thus, the significance of ICT in the life of the society is now becoming prominent and this has become the basis of the research conducted by researchers. This is also seen as appropriate approach in meeting the effective needs of ICT.

In addition, social media also provides opportunities for women entrepreneurs to identify the needs of the current community. Erdogmus and Cicek (2012) mentioned that social media has a great ability to help companies, especially entrepreneurs to build product branding through networking, communication and restructuring the community. Today, there is increase in number among women in Malaysia who are taking the opportunity to engage in entrepreneurship. Sales and business transactions that are easy and cost-effective and no longer time-consuming as well as cost-efficient attracted women to venture into these area especially young women (Chan et al., 2011; Gusniar Nurdin et al., 2014). Hence, with all the conveniences that available through ICT, providing more space and opportunities has made the young women entrepreneurs to become more competent.

### **Affective Need of ICT Improves Entrepreneur's Business Performance**

According to Nur Yuhainis Ab Wahab and Shuhymee Ahmad (2017) in the study of the relationship between ICT usage and SME business performance in Malaysia, ICT usage becomes an important issue and experiences rapid development through the Malaysia Seventh Economic Plan. There are three main components of ICT that contribute to the rapid development of technology which are computing technology, communication technology and media technology (Mpofu & Watkins-Mathay, 2011; Nur Yuhainis Ab Wahab & Shuhymee Ahmad 2017). ICT becomes major aspect that is widely used in business (Abdul Manaf, 2006).

Ionita (2013) defines performance as the achievements and results obtained from the tasks that have been completed. Performances often illustrated through the success of a company or business through positive growth and productivity. Nonetheless, business performance is seen as operating ability to meet the requirements of the major shareholders of the business (Smith & Reece, 1991; Nur Yuhainis & Shuhymee Ahmad 2017). Through the performance shown by a business or company, it is also possible to determine whether the business is successful or failed (Lucky, 2011).

Meanwhile, according to Mohd Khairuddin (2002) there are various factors that influence business performance. In Malaysia, the SME Master Plan 2012/2020 stated that the World Bank has revealed that there are six factors that affect business performance. The first factor is the adoption of technologies such as the low level of ICT utilization which is the cause of most small and medium businesses are not achieving high performance (SME Corporation Malaysia 2012). That is the reason business performance faces no changes due to the relatively low utilization of ICT as compared to the technological progress achieved by the country.

However, this phenomenon has go against with the current trend which is the use of ICT in business seen as important and highly demanded to be included as part of the process in business daily activities. It is also supported by the statement of the Minister of Communications and Multimedia, Datuk Seri Dr. Salleh Said Keruak (Astro Awani December 15, 2017), who mentioned that society must be prepared to face the fourth Industrial revolution and its challenges is to continue to advance the nation. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) witnesses the Internet of Things (IoT) in every aspect of life and differs from the first industrial revolution which focused on the use of steam-powered machines, both electrical and third-use information technology (IT).

### **Methodology**

This study has been carried out using qualitative method which is in-depth interviews with eight women entrepreneurs that have been using ICT in their business daily activities. The method of in-depth interviews is universal, open and non-permanent. Kamarul Azmi (2012) stated that in-depth interview methods were designed at understanding the subject of a research chosen by the researcher. He also added that the qualitative method was defined as an attempt to provide evidence of the nature and condition of the human being by using a general view of anything about social action.

This study focuses on Malay women entrepreneurs who own the business. The selection of informants is based on the needs of researchers who are targeting Malay women entrepreneurs who are actively doing business with ICT assistance. The use of ICT is depending on their business needs. The total eight female entrepreneurs (informants) chosen are aged between 21 years old and up to 45 years old and have been asked questions about using ICT in their business daily activities.

### **Result of the study**

Among the key factors in using ICT in business is that technology makes entrepreneurial work more convenient. Whether dealing with business activities such as financial affairs, company accounts, product and service marketing and customer relationships have made ICT an effective tool for entrepreneurs. Affective needs include the emotions and feelings the individual possesses while using the media. Among the factors found to meet the effective needs of ICT usage in business are ease to use, entrepreneurs feel a significant difference after using ICT and ultimately the process of communicating information more effective with the ICT assistance.

The ease-to-use factor in entrepreneurship is when business daily process are more convenient and easy to handle with the ICT tools and application. Informants state that

social media being part of ICT makes it easy for entrepreneurs to communicate while connecting and interacting with customers. This explanation can be read through the following sentence quoted from the informants whom they mention that it is much easier for them to interact with customers. Customers can directly ask to negotiate with the entrepreneurs, asking for contact numbers, do a brief consultation about the products they sell. This can be seen that it is effective for the business to be run with ICT assistance. They also added that information can be shared without difficulties.

*(U1): "lebih mudah, sebab customer terus berinteraksi dengan kita, boleh terus pm dengan kita boleh terus nego dengan orang, selalunya kita minta nombor telefon kan, minta nombor telefon, pastu kita akan WhatsApp jadi kat situ kita boleh consultation, tanya berapa kuning baby, kita akan bagi consultation kat situ..."*

*(U3): "...Memang lebih mudah, lebih mudah untuk pergerakan bisnes kita..."*

*(U7): "...Mudah la, sebab maklumat... jadi senang, so tak adalah, kira saya kat rumah pun boleh whatsapp lah dia nak tahu info apa apa tak payah email whatsapp is very fast la..."*

With the assistance of ICT, information is also easily distributed and shared to anyone, anytime and anywhere. Informants also added that online banking also facilitates dealings with customers. Example as when the customers need to pay for the products they wanted to buy can easily be done with the transaction through online banking. Although they noted that they need for more consistent and easy-to-manage computer system, they had to postpone the plan until their business change to Private Limited (*Sendirian Berhad*) mode. The statement can be studied from the quote that stated information is easy to access and nowadays payment can be done through the online transaction and with the system moderated by computer making the work becoming more easy.

*(U2): "Lagi mudah, sebab semua maklumat tu dihujung jari sahaja, lepastu kalau duit tu diorang akan transfer je, bagi number account, sebab saya tak ada sistem, sepatutnya ada sistem dalam komputer, maksudnya dalam google, dia tekan je..."*

Other than that, the use of ICT is also seen as facilitating informants through the systems employed in the business. According to one informant, she used the SBS (Simplified Business System) system in the business. The SBS system is software dedicated to small and medium sized businesses. SBS software does not require informants to have accounting knowledge because the system is easy to use. The advantage of using the system is that the informant can access and track business performance at any time and from any location. With this simple online software, it is helpful to informants who face complexity issues in doing report business accounts. Informational statements can be seen through the following sentence:

*(U4): "...Dengan bantuan ICT ni sebenarnya kalau ikutkan macam SBS dia membantu kita on administration part, mencepatkan process tu kalau tak kita buat manual...ok tapi if the system is okay then okay lah result dia..."*

Furthermore, studies also have found that there are differences in daily business activities before and after using ICT. According to the informants, the difference is



significant because ICT makes every deal easier and more convenient. One of the informants has made her own comparisons to see the difference using ICT in the business activities carried out. She saw the difference when she stopped using Facebook for two months and apparently she faced the risk of losing customers while not using Facebook. The statement can be seen through the following sentence where she mentions that the difference is very significant and it actually affects the outcome of the profit she gained for every month.

*(U1): "Sangat ketara lah kalau compare dengan tak ada internet..saya pernah buat facebook, contoh dalam bulan 3, bulan 4 ni macam kurang, saya stopkan facebook adds, cam kurang lah dia punya sales, kalau nak compare dari bulan satu,dua...kita buat straight je, memang banyak customer datang...cuma bulan 4 ni harapkan customer yang dah buat iklan yang survey sebelum ni..."*

It is clearly shown that women entrepreneurs are aware of the need to use ICT in business. Even entrepreneurs themselves are aware of the importance of ICT with their own attempt to see the differences in doing business without ICT and ways in which processes are done with the assistance of ICT. Additionally, differences can be seen through the use of smart phones, which almost majority in the community possessing their own. If there are companies that still stick to use fliers for advertising, it is considered ordinary and rarely seen that the public actually take time to read the brochure. The informant also added that the difference also felt when the system is having problems and the day-to-day business activities had to be done manually and eventually this caused delay in their work and could not be completed.

The role played by social media today also becomes the factor for entrepreneurs to expose themselves in ICT usage. According to one of the informants, ICT differences can be totally felt and seen when an entrepreneur's business is known through social media. If the business is viral through social media, the communities are getting more information about the business that being carried out. Therefore, social media is considered to be a role in making a business known and publicly known. Hence, when businesses start to be known to the public indirectly the numbers of customers are also increasing. It also makes entrepreneurs feel the huge significant difference. The use of ICT helps increasing the number of subscribers but if ICT usage is taken by granted than the number is difficult to increase. Informants also highlighted that new businesses requires consistent use of ICT.

Next, one of the ICT needs that also meets the emotion of entrepreneurs is the delivery of effective information about the business carried out through ICT. Delivering effective information is important to bring businesses closer to customers. If the delivery of information is difficult, then the business will be considered bad in delivering the information needed. As an example, according to one of the informants, she provides a therapeutic rental service for a newborn baby that having jaundice for home services which did not require the parents to take their child to GO hospital to be treated. The informant has identified the problem of some parents who had the difficulties to bring their child to hospital to treat jaundice. Thus, it allows the entrepreneurs to promote that situation as one of her marketing strategies which jaundice can be treated with the therapeutic machines without having to go to the hospitals. Interested customers may rent the therapeutic auto-delivered machine to their home and the person in charge will explain

how it can be used to the customers. They will be guided by the person in charge who in this situation is the entrepreneurs herself.

According to other informants who happens to be entrepreneurs too said that, in the process of developing information to be delivered to customers, the shared information should not be in too long sentence. Simplify the information and make it precise while meeting the needs of customers. This is because she is aware that some individuals do not like to read long information. The lengthy description sometimes disrupts one's thinking. The information needed is only regarding to what service is provided and how they can contact if they interested.

Social media usage like *WhatsApp* is also used by informants. *WhatsApp* is one of the tools that are being used to communicate by the society including entrepreneurs. The use of *WhatsApp* is also due to its ease-to-use features as said informants, she informs customers only through the *WhatsApp*, and if the customers are interested, they can keep in touch with the entrepreneurs. Among other efforts made by entrepreneurs in the process of delivering information is to create and produce their own website to facilitate needs of customers to obtain information on how the product are being produced.

## Discussion

The results of the interview have shown that the use of ICT in business has become an effective need that helps and assist women entrepreneurs today. Technology also has changed the community environment these days. According to Suriatie and Nor Aishah (2017), technology is a medium for daily business affairs especially with the existence of broadband networks that help the entrepreneurs to communicate and doing their tasks. The field of entrepreneurship is now become synonymous with the use of ICT and the internet for the marketing activities. A stable and strong business is a business that is always aware of current and current trends (Suriatie & Nor Aishah 2017; Ruziah et al., 2011).

Study has found that the effective needs of ICT that occur in women entrepreneurship can be divided into three main elements which are the element of user-friendly, the difference experience in using ICT in business and the ultimate delivery of information through ICT. Majority of informants say that ICT applications in business make things easier. Informants found out that social media being part of ICT facilitate communication and interaction with customers. This result supported by Suriatie and Nor Aishah (2017) which is stating that variations in social media branches enabled internet users in particular to have the option to communicate with each other. Women entrepreneurs see this as an opportunity to approach customers' targets.

Nowadays, online entrepreneurship is nothing new but becomes a trend for women entrepreneurs to create channels on social media to reach out to their consumers. The findings also found that entrepreneurs felt a significant difference before and after using ICT in business. Majority of informants mention that they do feel the significant difference when using ICT in their daily business activities. Informants also notice the difference in the number of customers after they started using ICT. ICT was found to help women entrepreneurs to attract customers to their business. Customer awareness of the business is increasing the number of customers that already existed. Thus, through ICT also the

process of advertising and product marketing is easy to do and make the marketing more attractive.

Entrepreneurs need different strategies and approaches in managing businesses to improve business sales performance (Suriatie et al., 2017). This is in line with the findings of the study that the differences felt before and after using ICT in business are very significant among informants. According to one of the informant's statement, at the beginning of her business establishment, she did not apply ICT and that made it difficult for business operations to be carried out. After implementing ICT in business, she felt that the business process was smooth and more convenient.

Other than that, among the effective needs of ICT usage is the process of delivering information. Nur Yuhainis et al. (2017) stated that ICT usage refers to the collection, processing, use and transmission of information via ICT that allows communication to occur. Through the use of ICT in their business activities, informants mention that they can share the information about business conducted to the public. Business informants are directly introduced to the public when the process of delivery of information is made. The results of the study have answered the objective of the research which is to understand the need for effective use of ICT in the business. ICT has become an affective need that satisfies the entrepreneurial emotions in carrying out business activities.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be concluded that the affective needs of the Uses and Gratification Theory element encourage the use of ICT in business among women entrepreneurs today. Among the key factors that make use of ICT are seen as an effective need when ICT facilitates business, even the entrepreneurs also feel the significant difference after ICT is applied and the process of delivering information is also become faster and more effective. Technology is a development that occurs without the limitation of time and this makes ICT applications should be adopted by entrepreneurs to facilitate the process of business conduct in the current years.

The findings explain that the need for effective of ICT in business makes entrepreneurs more up to date and able to cope with current developments and follow the trend of society in these days. Social media has been seen as playing a major role in becoming a new channel for entrepreneurs to conduct marketing activities and approaching the customers. Thus, it is justified that the use of ICT is an effective need for women entrepreneurs. The information sharing by informants who explain that the use of ICT in business is being developed as an effective requirement prove that ICT has become an important part of today's business activities. In fact, it is not limited to women entrepreneurs who are located in urban areas only, but women entrepreneurs who stayed in rural areas also aware about the importance of ICT in the current years. This shows that, as long as business is running, the ICT uses are needed irregardless of where you are located.

Ergo, this article is expected to provide an understanding and explanation of the need for effective use of ICT in business among current Malay women entrepreneurs. Through the explanation and understanding it can be expected to help the new potential entrepreneurs and Small and Medium Enterprises entrepreneurs realizing the importance of ICT as well as gaining the positive use of ICT in their business activities.

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