Sabah Civil Servants Internet Usage and its Impact on their Consumer Behavior

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Abstract

From the end of the twentieth century to the early twenty first century the government of Malaysia is consistent in its efforts to make the information communication technology (ICT) usage as a way of life in the country. Promoting ICT usage as a way of life has been aggressively campaigned by the Federal Government since the Internet era began. It is expected that the civil servants should be among the first consumers to embrace ICT as compared to other citizens. This article researched Internet usage by Sabah civil servants and aims to discover whether it has impacted their consumer behaviour. The research used random sampling method with prepared questionnaires. It utilised the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to understand why and how the civil servants utilised the Internet to meet their needs. Altogether 12 Sabah government agencies comprising 316 respondents from the top to the lowest grades participated in this study. 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, to enhance their knowledge, to buy online and to even try to earn extra income.

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour, Civil Servants, Information Communication Technology, Internet, Social Media, IT Literacy

Penggunaan Internet Dalam Kalangan Kakitangan Awam Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Perlakuan Pengguna: Kajian Kes Di Sabah

Abstrak

Bermula dari penghujung abad kedua puluh sehingga awal abad ke-21, kerajaan Malaysia secara konsisten telah berusaha menjadikan penggunaan teknologi maklumat dan komunikasi (TMK) sebagai suatu cara hidup di negara ini. Usaha untuk menggalakkan penggunaan TMK sebagai cara hidup telah dikuatkuasakan oleh kerajaan sejak Internet mula diperkenalkan dan digunakan di negara ini. Justeru itu, penjawat awam sebagai penggerak daya budi kerajaan bolehlah dianggap pengguna perintis TMK berbanding pihak lain. Artikel ini meneliti secara umum penggunaan Internet oleh kakitangan awam di Sabah bertujuan mengetahui sama ada ianya memberi kesan terhadap tingkah laku pengguna mereka. Kajian telah menggunakan kaedah pensampelan rawak untuk memilih responden yang akan menjawab soal selidik yang disediakan. Kajian juga menerapkan teori penggunaan dan pemuasan untuk memahami mengapa dan bagaimana kakitangan awam menggunakan Internet untuk memenuhi beberapa keperluan mereka. Seramai 316 responden yang terdiri daripada kakitangan peringkat pengurusan sehinggalah peringkat sokongan daripada agensi kerajaan negeri Sabah menyertai tinjauan ini. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kakitangan awam Sabah hampir sepenuhnya menerima dan menggunakan Internet dan ianya memberi kesan terhadap tingkah laku pengguna. Rumusannya, kajian ini telah membuktikan penjawat awam di Sabah dalam skop kajian ini banyak menghabiskan masa di Internet melalui penggunaan media sosial untuk bersosial, meningkatkan pengetahuan mereka, membeli-belah dalam talian dan berusaha untuk mendapatkan pendapatan tambahan.

Kata kunci: *Tingkah Laku Pengguna, Penjawat Awam, Teknologi Maklumat dan Komunikasi, Internet, Media Sosial, Literasi IT.*

Introduction

The world today is increasingly interlinked and the reality of becoming a global village is more apparent than ever. In Malaysia, the government right from the start of the Internet era has been enthusiastic in embracing the information-communication technology (ICT) society and in establishing a workable e-Government. A Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) was launched in Malaysia on 1st August 1996 to spearhead the nation IT programmes. 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 developments. A study by Dargham and Anthony (2000) discovered that "less than half (46%) of the respondents consider themselves computer literate." Their findings concluded that in 2000 only 17% can be classified as IT literate based on their definition. In addition, according to them 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 respondents 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 user friendly and more with training being given to government or public or civil servants, this sad condition would have been greatly improved.

The government efforts to make ICT a way of life can be considered as successful. This is based on the rate of Internet penetration and usage 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 the individual who can access Internet at home, via any device type and connection." In terms 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 include 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 terms 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 %age of Internet users who sought information from social media (69.6%) surpassed those who visited official websites (59%).

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 servants 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 information and communication technologies (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 businessmen are adequate and current. However, not much detailed study on the usage of Internet or online channels 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 servant's competency level of using Internet or online media, their perception and habits regarding the ICT, the objectives of their usage

and how it have impacted their life as consumers and the driver for the ICT culture.

Literature Review

It is undeniable that, the role of ICT have been developing and recognized in creating and improving the quality of human life and development of governance. Ekwe (2008) asserted that ICT as technology tool has greatly assisted humankind for information exchange, interaction and process of information and knowledge through an array of electronic medium from radio and television to telephones, computers and the internet. Certainly, ICT could assist in many areas which could be used in achieving and accessing information as it offers broad information and knowledge.

In the government sectors of developed and emerging markets particularly, an expanding number of Electronic Government (E-Government) initiatives are being employed to enhance the public services to the citizens. There are currently an increasing number of government departments utilizing the ICT particularly the Internet web-based network as a tool in providing and assisting services between the organizations and citizens, employees, corporate as well as other non-governmental agencies (Zaharah, 2007). The E-Government is put into operation to make it better in the area of accessibility and interaction with the people as it will help the flow of information and governing process easier (Rajesh, 2007).

The Internet has certainly intensified many things to become simpler and of convenience. As the Internet become advanced and with the foundation of Web 2.0, the interaction and connectivity has developed tremendously. These developments allow the consumers to create and interact online through social platforms mainly via the social media. The universal availability of the internet has offered people the opportunity to interact virtually which is through the social media. As defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that provide the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. Social media has promoted user generated contents and enable users to share their contents in a variety of networks (Madni, 2014).

Dann & Dann (2011) established that social media is structured upon the interconnected elements which include social interaction, content and communication. Online social networks have become an effective and fundamental platforms for people to communicate and interact as well as able to influence and shape people's behaviour and communication in a wide range of features that it offers (Cheung & Lee, 2010). This is supported by Heinrichs, Jeen & Lim (2011) which asserted that social networking sites provide the tools to reach and communicate with others and allow users to connect with individuals or communities that share mutual preferences.

At the same time, the internet has been an effective tool for work purposes especially for the employees. According to Tahir (2014) the internet offers quick and direct access in seeking information, maintaining connection and interaction with the others as well as providing proficient ways for research purposes, communication, marketing and also partnerships. He also added that connection to the internet at the workplace is ubiquitous as it leads to the improvement and enhancement of performance and productivity for the employees. This is supported by Parr (2008) which he described online networking as the utilization of electronic and Internet tools to share and connect with others in more proficient ways. Internet provides the opportunity for knowledge sharing and enables the employee to work together with each other efficiently (Skeels & Grudin, 2009).

A number of studies has supported the contention that the use of internet helps to improve communication and interaction between employees, is time-saving, enhances information-seeking and learning as well as augments the work environment which contribute to creating more productive workers (Anandarajan, Simmers, 2004). Additionally, López Sánchez, Minguela, Rodríguez & Sandulli (2006) conducted an analysis to investigate the productivity of the employees when using the internet at the workplace. The result shows that there is a positive relationship on productivity when the internet was used for work purposes. The data that was collected among 464 Spanish firms from computer assisted telephone interviews found that there is a positive impact on the usage of the internet and productivity at the workplace.

Another study conducted by Coker in 2009 found that the employees are more productive when they have access to use social media or for personal surfing. He discovered that employees that engage in social media are good in interaction as well as at solving problems while the act of personal surfing helps the employees to become more focused in their work responsibilities. It is believed that by allowing the employees to take short breaks for personal surfing, it will help their brain to be rejuvenated and restored. This finding is further supported by Lim and Chen (2012), where they found that the use of internet for non-work purposes for a while during work could help them become more productive and feel refreshed.

On the contrary, despite the existing benefits, there are also number of reports and studies on the abuse and misconduct of the internet usage at the workplace. The usage of internet access in the workplace for non-work related purposes during working period is commonly termed as cyberslacking or cyberloafing (Lim, 2002), a form of work deviance as it consumes unproductive use of time and derogates the workers from finishing their work loads. Griffiths (2003) in his study has highlighted six types of cyberloafing in the workplace comprising cybersexual internet abuse, online relationship abuse, internet activity abuse, online information abuse, illicit internet abuse and miscellaneous internet abuse. He also concluded that the internet abuse in the workplace could be a serious threat to the working environment.

A survey conducted among 224 corporations in 2005 by WebSense.com, an internet monitoring corporation, exposed that 61% of American employees misuse of the internet and were involved in cyberloafing activities. The finding also discovered that the average American employee spent about 24% of his working hours on cyberloafing activities which sets the average amount of time spent on non-work related Internet activities at 10 hours per employee per week. They also revealed that up to 64% of the companies have taken disciplinary action towards the employees who have been caught in cyberloafing activities and 30% took action by terminating. Access of pornography is the most recorded with 42%, follows by online chatting (13%), gaming sports (8%), investing (7%), and shopping at work (7%) were among the abuse of the internet usage by the employees.

Another study by Indonesia Internet Service Provider Association (APJII) in 2013, found that 87% of employees in Indonesia use the internet for non-work related social networking, 68.6% to seek information and news, 62.1% to download video and 57. 9% to send email. On the other hand, Malaysian scholars, Siti Ezaleila & Azizah (2011), found that online social networking has been made use as the latest type of communication tool particularly for the active Internet users to blend and interact with their friends. Their research has also shown that Internet users spent many hours to interact with their friends by logging in to the social media accounts several times a day. This shows social interaction in the cyberspace through new media applications like social networking has become a trend that has transformed the human communication. This finding supports the conclusion by Riegner (2007) where he found that the internet users spent 27% of their time engaging in communication and interaction via the social media, blogs or email and also as much spare time for entertainment and leisure activities.

Further to this,   a study relating to consumer behaviour in online group buying by Selimovic and Pestek (2013) has found that nearly all of the respondents use the internet in everyday routine where they use the internet either for social networking, entertainment, and information seeking or for online shopping. The results also show that most of the respondents were aware on the concept of the online shopping especially through the social networks. The results also found that the most common group purchases in online shopping are the middle-range employees and the higher monthly income individuals . The study also found that online shopping is on the rise in tandem with the adoption and penetration levels of the internet.

According to Wertime & Fenwick (2008), consumers are expected to become a participant than a viewer. They asserted that with the rise of social media, consumer behaviours have shifted from "consumers as viewers" to "consumers as participants". On this aspect, it is quite obvious that social media has become a great influencer toward consumers' purchasing decision-making process. There are many factors that contribute to consumers' behaviour on the Internet or social media especially when it comes to buying or selling online. People are

currently utilizing the internet by surfing and then buying things which they found more convenient and easier. In fact, according to a report by StaffMonitoring.com (2015), 60% of online purchases took place during office hours and a majority of the purchases are non-work related purchases.

Oppenheim and Ward (2006) state that consumers are buying online because they believe that it is convenient. And with the development of e-commerce, it has been a decisive contribution. This finding supports a related study by Ioanas and Stoica (2014) among 116 respondents, which found that 42% of the respondents preferred online shopping for its convenience and 32% reasoned that the product they bought is home-delivered. In addition, a study by Yusniza (2011) found that the consumers shop from the websites or social media because of the benefits they gained from buying online which include affordable pricing, convenience, security, privacy, personalisation and friendly website feature. This means concumers trust in online buying when making their purchase decision (Mittal, 2013).

Judging from the studies above, it is quite noticeable that the the internet media has become a pervasive phenomenon in most parts of the world particularly among the working population which have adopted and adapted the internet culture either to socialise, to buy products or to earn additional income.

Study Objectives
This study's primary objective is to discover the Internet usage habit of civil servants in Sabah at all levels 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.

Conceptual Definition of Terms
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 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 kinds 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.

 ICT for this study refers to all the technologies used in telecommunications, broadcast media, intelligent building management systems, audio-visual processing and transmission systems, and network-based control and monitoring functions. Also, it describes several converging technologies 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.

For the purpose of this study consumer behavior is defined as: "The study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society."

Methodology and Theoretical Framework
This study which employs the questionnaire survey on Internet usage of civil servants in Sabah used the simple random sampling method. This means, 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. It was conducted with the assistance of the third year Universiti Malaysia Sabah off campus communication students.

The prepared questionnaire was divided into five sections of which the first section is on respondents' demographic characteristics relating to gender, ethnicity, age, position, income and academic qualification. The second section relates to respondents' media usage or behaviour with regards to hours spent 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. The fourth section seeks to discover the civil servants' consumer behaviour as influenced by the media, especially the Internet. The final and fifth sections seek to discover respondents' usage of Internet and its impact upon them as consumers.

It must be noted that 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 UGT approach is selected as it is an audience or public centred method for

mass communication understanding focussing on what the public do with the media. In addition, the UGT assumes that the users have alternate selections to meet their objectives or needs or to fulfil their desires.

Findings and Analysis

To correspond with the study objectives and for ease of interpretation, the findings and analysis for this study is broken down into four sub-heads, namely civil servants' media usage, impact of media usage on civil servants, Sabah civil servants' consumer behaviour and Sabah civil servants' online buying.

In term of respondents' profile, a total of 316 respondents from 12 government agencies were selected of which 158 are men and the other half women. Their government grades ranking range from grade 11 to grade 54 and their ages range 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 terms of age categories, 34% are between 18-30 years, 52% between 31-45 years and the remaining 13% between 46 and 60 years.

With regards 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 the ethnic group column. In terms of education, 47.8% of the respondents only completed secondary school, 25.3% completed their diploma and 24.7% were degree holders while 2.2% listed themselves as others.

Civil Servants' Media Usage

The findings of this study reveal the Internet is top preference for Sabah civil servants with 66% claiming it to be their most favourite media and followed by the social media at 30%.   Adding 66% for those saying Internet and 30% social media we can conclude that 96% of the respondents are very familiar with the ICT. 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.   This finding is parallel with the statistics provided by Internet Users Survey 2016 which mentioned usage of Internet and online media as a major medium of communication among Sabah civil servants.

The reasons the civil servants selected the Internet as their favourite media include, it being the latest in 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 kinds of service like e-government, online business and more.

Further, 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 with 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 providing 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 while another 35% claimed that it keeps 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 is not only useful for their work related information but also for socialisation, entertainment and even income generation.

As for the number of hours the Sabah civil servants spend using the media 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 media. Also, more men use the media than the women civil servants in Sabah. It is noted that the higher grades civil servants said that they generally use the Internet for information and usually during office hours while the lower grades use it for entertainment during office breaks and at home. Due to their higher education level,

it can also be speculated that the higher grade civil officers have more tendency towards news stories and general knowledge while the lower grade staff which are from the lower education level and with different interest and were more inclined towards entertainment materials.

Impact of Media Usage on Sabah Civil Servants

The survey revealed that 51.58% because 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, 46.2% 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 as the most impactful, 3.48% 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 due to 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.

The other factors influencing Sabah civil servants other than the media are friends, families, advertising, culture and religion. Besides media, friends are said to be the most influential for Sabah civil servants with 33.2% of them saying so and followed by families with 22.2% admitting it. Sabah civil servants claiming families, friends and advertising as most influential comprise 18.9% while 17.4% believed that families, advertising, religion and culture are the most influential to them. Only 6% claimed advertising to be the most influential besides the mass media and it is accepted as part of any promotion campaigns. Sadly, only 1.27% believed that culture is the most influential to Sabah civil servants with religion mentioned by 0.95%. Here, one can conclude as to the problem

of integrity and corruption in the state if not the nation when culture and religion are not considered as very influential by the civil servants.

In terms of very important source of information to the Sabah civil servants other than the mass media, again friends was rated as the highest with 55.7% admitting it, followed by families with 31.96%. Advertising as a source of information takes 7.91%, religion at 2.53% and culture 1.9%. With regards 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 46.2% giving priority to friends and 20.6% families. Advertising as a source of information for Sabah civil servants' amount to 12.7%, 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 by 83% retail shops, 79 at tamu or agriculture market, 71% at night markets and 62% at the wet markets. Similarly, with regards to their favourite shopping places 46% said supermarkets, 21% retail shops, 12% tamu, 8% wet markets, and 5% at night markets and 4% stated other 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 benefit the consumers, especially the civil servants.

The most frequent time Sabah civil servants go shopping is when they are really in need of certain goods, especially essential items. Of these, 41% of them admitted it. Their favourite excuses were they had no time and usually they were limited with 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 were because it would be easier to plan their household spending as well as having enough money to ensure all their needs are met.

Meanwhile, 20% of the civil servants chose the sale seasons to do their shopping. The reasons they gave include, they can save because prices were generally lower, the shopping atmosphere was like a festival and they were usually heavily promoted either at strategic locations or via the mass media. Buying during free or leisure time was mentioned by 7% of the respondents. According to them it helped to strengthen family bond as well as being able to select the products more carefully and with the cooperation of family members. Clearly those shopping at their leisure time made sure that their family members were involved to make it a family outing.

Another four percent said they usually go shopping when the supermarkets or shopping complexes are 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 were safe from pickpockets, they could take their own sweet time to window-shop and sometime get good bargains because of the lack of customers.

Only three percent said they enjoyed shopping during the hectic period. Reasons they gave include feeling like in a festival, prices normally lower and sometimes the sideshows appeal to them. The remaining respondents said they had no preferences as it depended on their moods and needs.

In terms of who they would like to accompany them when shopping, half of the respondents said they enjoyed shopping with their family and the rest said they would rather shop alone as they were freer to enjoy themselves and buy what they felt 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 recreation. On the other hand, the bachelors admitted they enjoyed shopping alone as it allows them the freedom to fully do what they like and buy what they desire to fulfil their needs.

Sabah Civil Servants' Online Buying
A significant number of Sabah civil servants or 85 % of them admitted that they have bought products or services online. Only 8 % denied

ever buying online and the remaining 7 % gave no response. Those who admitted buying online said that it was very convenient, and they needed not waste their time and money as well as face the traffics and the rush to get the products or services they desire or need. Also, they said buying online was much cheaper and hence save money and they could buy at any time of the day or night.

Interestingly, compared to other areas in Sabah, 87.5 % of the civil servants in Kudat claimed they had purchased goods and services via online. They said that the Internet was influential in motivating them to buy online as it becomes very user friendly and truly convenient in selecting the products they want to buy.

However, in terms of frequency on buying online 33% respondents claimed they did it often and 54.2% admitted they did it rarely or occasionally. Only four percent said they very frequently purchased products or services online. The eight percent of the respondents who denied buying online said they had 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. No reasons were given for their non-response.

This study discovered that 33% of the civil servants bought clothing online, 20% purchased gadgets and other goods like sport goods, baby 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 major 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 to buying it online.

Interestingly, 88% of the Sabah civil servants claimed they have bought airline tickets via online. Only four percent said they never bought air tickets online and the remaining eight percent gave no response. Nearly all the 88% said they knew that Malaysia Airlines, Malindo and Air Asia provided special facilities and even discount when buying online, especially through the smart phones. A few even mentioned that Air Asia

sometimes offered 30% discount when buying their tickets via the smart phone application.

Further, 82% of the Sabah civil servant respondents claimed they have used the Internet banking services, with five percent 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 was very easy to use and very convenient as they did not have to face the hassle of braving the traffic and lining up at the bank to wait for their turn and rush to get a parking space. According to them it is saved their money and time and best of all they could do their banking needs at any time they desired or when they were free to do so. Most of them were also able to name a number of services that were already available online which included 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 wished all can be paid via online.

The year 2000 was the landmark period when a number of Sabah civil servants claimed they began buying online. Several of the respondents claimed 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 had begun buying online. From 2004 to 2008, 23% said they started purchasing online, from 2008 to 2012, 29% admitted they began online buying and for 2016, three percent of the respondents confessed they began buying online. According to the respondents the trend towards online buying among civil servants in Sabah is due to the increase in broadband penetration, cheaper computers and smart phones making it more affordable to them at all levels of the public service.

In response to what influenced them to begin buying online, as expected friends were the top motivating force with 30% of the respondents stating it. The main reason for this is because their friends were the closest to them and they often discussed with each other about many things other than official work. The second most motivating force to influence Sabah civil servants to start buying online is advertisements as 25% of them mentioned it. The family followed closely as the force influencing them

to buy online as they are not only close to them but were much affected by their needs and desires with 24%. Own experience only amounts to 21 % as the factor pushing them to start buying online.

Nearly three quarters of the respondents at 72 % claimed that the Internet did make them spend more. Another 23 % confessed that the Internet did 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 provided include cases of cheating online as reported were rather discouraging and the channels to resolve the cases were almost nil.

It is quite remarkable that 75% of the public servants felt that cheating could be avoided by ensuring having adequate information before purchasing online is made. They also believed that cheating via buying online could also be evaded by proper planning before buying and making comparisons in terms of prices and quality as well the companies' it served.

However, 25% of the respondents were adamant that no matter what steps are taken the chances of being cheated when buying online is still high and that getting compensation is almost none as compared to buying face to face. It is interesting to note that 68% of the respondents would advise 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 agreed that civil servants should be allowed to generate extra income through the usage of the Internet. The reasons they gave included the bad economy the country is currently facing, increase in the cost of living, salaries they received were fast becoming insufficient and one need not rent any premise to do business. However, they placed a proviso that the internet usage was not meant during office hours and not while using

government facilities. The remaining 25% of the respondents who did not agree reasoned that it could affect official duties and contribute to the decline of performance of the civil servants in serving the rakyat and together with it the government's 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 was becoming increasingly inadequate. Only 22.9% claimed they were not interested in e-business or e-trading even with permission to do so. Despite this, 18% of the Sabah civil servants' respondents admitted that they had already begun their online business while 79 % said they had not done so and the remaining three percent did not response. Nearly all of those who were in support of e-business and were already doing online business were from respondents from the middle to the lower grade categories. A clear policy is certainly needed to allow or ban civil servants from doing business outside or within office hours.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The UGT theory applied in this study shows that the Sabah civil servants do indeed deliberately seek out the media they feel could meet their current needs in them trying to fully utilise the Internet and improve their quality of life. As the Internet or the social media become increasingly affordable in price and service as well as user friendly the more the IT culture is growing in Sabah, not only between the civil servants but also among the general public.

Their utilisation of the Internet does have an impact on their perception and behaviour as consumers. Indeed, the findings show that the Sabah civil servants' usage of the Internet and the social media 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 as well as the motivation to improve themselves. 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 socialisation, entertainment, buying online and even for generating income. However, the study somehow does not detect any abuses of government IT facilities or that Sabah civil servants have

utilised the Internet in the government facilities with full responsibility and ethics.

None of the Sabah civil servants' respondents mentioned about the need to have a code of conduct or practice with regards to the ethical and responsible use of the government Internet facilities, especially during office hours. However, it is important to note that in an advanced nations like the United Kingdom a code of conduct for using government Internet facilities is already in place. If for some reason the code has been formulated among Sabah civil servants, obviously there is an urgent need to promote it among all grades of the civil service in all government departments. On the contrary, if it is not already instituted there is certainly a pressing need to formulate and promote it so that abuses of its usage by civil servants can be diminished or completely stopped.

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 a critical need to provide them with the code of practice in using government Internet facilities. Further, with the proven advantage of online buying, government agencies should come up with a mechanism to allow its officers to buy online for all their official needs as the use of online system can save millions of ringgits for the authorities. Special officers should be appointed to ensure the government agencies get the best substantial savings through them.

Public or civil servants in all grades should be given regular in-service training on IT and Internet usage to ensure they are highly competent and are updated with current knowledge. This is because the IT is fast improving and becoming user friendly as well as having deeper and wider penetration to the people and that citizens are rapidly becoming skilful Internet users. Also, there is still the need to create a home page or e-service in government agencies to be more user 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 hour of the day and night. This undertaking would ensure that the government's income can be further enhanced and be made more

sustainable. Thus, it is recommended that more government services if not all can be served or paid online.

It is unfortunate that up till today, the problem of the poor maintenance of homepage of public agencies continue to persist. As such, we propose that more officers should be appointed to ensure that information provided by homepage concerned are not only always current and continuously updated but also more user friendly.

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 is about time the government come up with a clear policy and guideline to allow them to do so. As it is, this study showed that nearly a quarter of the Sabah civil servants are already adding their income through e-business. However, with regards to doing business online, a more detailed study needs to be conducted to ensure it does not lead to failure. Additionally, results from the study could also provide ways to work out a mechanism such that the business activity can be well monitored and developed further. In this way, civil servants found to abuse the official guideline could be duly punished so that any misuse of the approval could be minimised. Some civil servants believe that this undertaking can help reduce corruptions among civil servants since they can enhance their income online during non-office hours in a legal manner. Maybe, by engaging in multitasking they can be better civil servants to serve their public or consumers better.

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 and continuously trained to do their job well in the e-society and e-economy as well as the knowledge economy.

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