UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

UNDERSTANDING THE UTILIZATION OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION APPLICATIONS AMONG EMPLOYEES OF SELANGOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ENDEMIC PHASE

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focuses on the use of digital communication application utilization among Selangor Local Authority's employees during the COVID-19 pandemic and endemic phase. The challenges arose in ensuring effective communication channels and overcoming potential barriers like technological disparities, varying digital literacy, and the need for secure and efficient platforms. In order to gain insights into the core focus of this analysis, five (5) research objectives were addressed: (1) To understand the importance of digital communication applications for employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) To ascertain the assistance of digital communication applications to employees at Selangor Local Authorities in their daily tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic (3) To explore the utilization of digital communication applications by Selangor Local Authority employees during the COVID-19 pandemic (4) To explore the utilization of digital communication applications by Selangor Local Authority employees during the endemic, and (5) To discover the extent to which digital communication applications can replace conventional methods at Selangor Local Authority during the COVID-19 pandemic and endemic phase. This study was guided with the Social Present Theory (SPT) and Media Richness Theory (MRT). Meaningful findings were obtained through in-depth interviews with ten (10) informants who worked at the MBSJ, MPKj and MDSB and lived nearby selected Selangor local authority. Data analyses were conducted with data gathering and using the qualitative data software, NVivo 12 to analysis the coding. The thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Overall, the findings revealed significant themes in every research questions. The results demonstrated that to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic, local authority employees must take the initiative to learn about digital communication. Employer-employee communication faces new difficulties due to relying solely on digital communication. It might be difficult for some workers accustomed to verbal or face-to-face interactions to transition to a work environment emphasising digital communication. Employees need to be tech-savvy, adept at using digital tools and determined to use technology responsibly for communication to be successful. The study also demonstrates that local authorities frequently use social media platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram for online communication. WhatsApp and Telegram are more prevalent use than other applications because the applications can be quickly accessed if a task needs to be completed immediately. For those who require a quick response, most work-related matters are handled through Telegram and WhatsApp. Therefore, a typical application used by most employees will encourage more discussions when necessary and boost the effectiveness of employee communication.

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INTRODUCTION

1.0   Introduction

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges, reshaped societal dynamics and altered the communication landscape for individuals and organizations alike. Within organizational contexts, employees have experienced a transformative journey in their communication practices, with a pronounced reliance on digital platforms during the pandemic and its subsequent endemic phase. This research aims to comprehensively examine the intricacies of digital communication within the specific context of Selangor's local government entities, providing insight into the emerging patterns, challenges, and implications that have unfolded during these critical periods.

Scholars, exemplified by Castells (2001), posit that the ascent of the network society has fundamentally transformed communication patterns, making digital platforms integral components of daily interactions. The pandemic has served as an accelerator for this digital shift, underscoring the indispensable nature of practical online communication tools.

One noteworthy aspect is the swift adoption of virtual collaboration tools, emerging as a defining feature of the remote work landscape. Scholars like Hara et al. (2012) emphasize the significance of understanding how these tools influence collaborative work dynamics, while Wellman (2001) explores the concept of community in the digital age, where the virtual realm becomes crucial for maintaining a sense of connection among employees in the face of physical distancing measures.

The imperative for adaptability and continuity in the face of global health crises has significantly impacted governmental operations. Scholars such as Norris and Moon (2005) highlight the critical role of digital communication technologies in sustaining government functions during emergencies. This transition to remote work has led to a surge in the reliance on digital communication tools within the government sector. Drawing on the insights of Fountain (2001), who underscores the importance of e-