

CAPABILITY OF TELECENTRE IN DEVELOPING RURAL COMMUNITY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Outbreak COVID-19 was declared as a pandemic on March 2020 by World Health Organization (WHO) (WHO, 2020). The outbreak of the virus has affected the economy and living style among the people in Malaysia (Shah et al., 2020). People around the world are affected by this pandemic situation and ought to live with new norms to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The government has imposed Movement Control Order (MCO) as part of initiatives to break the chain and curb transmission of the virus (Aziz et al., 2020). Practicing new norms in the community regardless of their income status and social status would be the necessity to break the chain of the pandemic and protect vulnerable groups (Lim et al., 2021). Hence, the pandemic situation has enforced society to make use of the technologies as a medium or tools in working operational, studies, communication, businesses, and social needs. However, obligatory to practice new norms among the society caused other issues for the left-behind community as low-level income households, special disabilities group and as well as for rural area community in terms of digital usage or information communication technology (ICT) usage.

The Digital divide very synonyms with the rural community as they are vulnerable to many challenges such as geographical areas, socioeconomic and infrastructure (Cheruiyot, 2010). Rural area communities having scarcity in terms of internet facilities and technologies appliances as most of the rural area communities are from low-level income households and remote to get sufficient facilities. The digital divide disallowed the capability of enhancing education, communication, working experience, job opportunities, and health information (Skaletsky, 2013). Students having difficulties embracing online classes due to a lack of internet access and uneven internet access (The Star, 2020). Hence, telecentre would be problem-solving for the digital divide as Seretse et al, (2018) telecentre contribute to rural community development in terms of economic, social, and educational as telecentre facilitated community with the access of ICT services. A telecentre is a place for the community to access ICTs (Noor, 2019).

A telecentre is also known as a technology center for communities in rural areas (Lee, 2010). Facilities provided by telecentres such as internet access, computer, printer, photocopy machine, and other applicable facilities. A telecentre can be an enabler for community development and able to enhance the economy and society of the nation (Glander-Dolo, 2010). A telecentre is also known as a community center in which there are many services provided such as computer classes, online business classes, entrepreneurship classes, and so on. A telecentre is one of the strategies to enhance the quality of life of the

poor community but then government must consider pertaining on advantages that the community gets from telecentre to ensure telecentre is used wisely (Tizala, 2011).

1.1 Capability of Telecentre

Community needs telecentre as a medium to develop themselves indirectly it shows that capability of telecentre to provide appropriate infrastructure and services is very crucial. The capability of telecentre determines the effectiveness of the telecentre to play roles as an enabler for community development. The community would enhance their businesses through a fully beneficial ICT platform (Rashid, 2018). Wilson (2004) refers to physical access to ICT such as access to computers and the internet in which is measured with the distribution of ICT devices per capita. The capability of telecentre is one of the factors that contribute to the digital divide. Despite physical access problems, challenges to access ICT also being a predictor factor to the digital divide (Kwami, 2010). There are a few challenges to access ICT such as temporal factor (time provided), level of illiteracy, and material factors (financial). The infrastructure of telecentre would influence the capability of telecentre nonetheless challenges to access telecentre also should be taken into consideration in evaluating the usefulness of telecentre.

Poor infrastructure of telecentre unable telecentre to deliver ICT services to the community. Physical instruments such as internet access should be prepared appropriately as according to Ani et. al (2007) low internet service and infrastructure influenced factors used of the internet in Nigeria. A telecentre is technology solving, on the other hand, it may become useless if the community is not interested to participate or make use of it (Simms, 2004). Facilitating community with telecentre would be a better choice for the government to encourage digital inclusion among the rural community but if the community refuses to participate, telecentre’s program would be ‘elephant project’. Hence, a failure program would jeopardize that organization and wider the digital divide between communities.

Thus, the objective of the study is to analyse the capability of telecentres in influencing the effectiveness of telecentres. The capability of telecentres to facilitate rural communities with services and ICTs equipment might influence the effectiveness of telecentres in providing their services to a rural community.

1.2 Theory

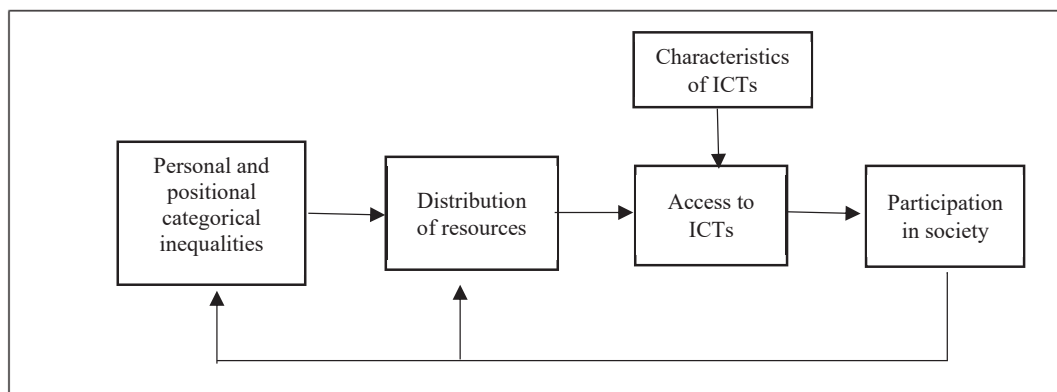


Figure 1: Resource and Appropriation Theory (Source: Van Dick, 2005)

Resource and Appropriation Theory was applied in this study to analyse the capability of the telecentre. The theory indicates to analyse acceptance, diffusion, and adoption of the new technologies (Van Dick, 2005). Through this theory, the researcher will find out the capability of the telecentre. Community response toward telecentre will determine the

achievement of the policy implementation adopted for the community in rural areas. Social demographics of community and resources of the community such as temporal, mental, material, and social influence that the community has affected community participation to telecentre. Nonetheless, determination to access telecentre must come from motivation in which influence by characteristics of telecentre such as facilities implemented at telecentre. Frequency of usage may disclose the participation of community toward telecentre as appropriate use of telecentre shown the appropriation of telecentre as a tool to develop rural community by enhancing their knowledge, communication, income resources, information possessions, and so on Van Dick (2005).

2. METHODOLOGY

The research design applied in this study was a quantitative approach and data collected by distributed questionnaires to the community online and face-to-face at telecentre. Unit analysis of this study is a telecentre named Internet Centre (*Pusat Internet*) at rural area in Kelantan. Internet Centre was implemented in 2009 under National Broadband Initiative in 2007 and before this Pusat Internet was known as *Pusat Jalur Lebar Komuniti* and *Pusat Internet Malaysia* (SKMM, 2017). Purposive sampling was applied to obtain actual data from users of the internet center who's registered as members. However, users who came to the internet center at the time distributed questionnaires involved in the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study found out that the capability of the Internet Centre influenced the effectiveness of the Internet Centre. The capability of the Internet Centre in terms of infrastructure such as internet access, circumstances of the internet center may influence the community to participate in activities or programs organized by the internet center. The rural community specified basic ICT facilities such as computer software, internet access, printing, and photocopy determined capability of Internet Centre to provide comfortable environments to the community.

Table 1: Relationship of Capability and Effectiveness of Internet Centre
Correlations

Capability and effectiveness of internet center	0.569
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Source: Author, 2021

Table 1 shows the findings of the study that the correlations between capability and effectiveness of Internet Centre are statistically positive significant, but the strength of the relationship is medium ($r=0.569, p<0.01$). From the study, the community agreed that Internet Centre is user-friendly and comfortable to them. However, the location of the Internet Centre should be more accessible and easy access for the community to visit. The incapability of accessing the internet affected an individual or community to gain knowledge, information, job opportunity, and other information (Skaletsky, 2013). Facilities limitation and inadequate promotion are some of the challenges of telecentre to sustain (Noor Bathi, 2005; Azman et al., 2010).

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of telecentre to provide ICT facilities for the inclusive community in this crucial period is appropriate since having internet access being challenging for society especially rural communities to have internet access. The study shown facilities in Internet Centre determines the capability of the Internet Centre as an enabler for service delivery in terms of ICT for the rural community. On top of that, usage of Internet Centre also significant with the effectiveness of Internet Centre. The study aligned with the theory of Resource and Appropriation that community participation towards telecentre occurrences community acceptance on the telecentre as a medium to reduce digital gap (Van Dick, 2005). The effectiveness of Internet Centre is substantial to facilitate community with useful services and effective for the rural community in making their life. Nowadays internet access is as crucial as other essential needs in which inclusive community towards internet usage and facilities is deniable. A telecentre is significant for the digital inclusion of rural communities as telecentre is attainable for rural communities' engagement to ICT services. ICT development would decrease the imbalance of income equality (Shaharuddin et al., 2018). Thus, the adoption and implementation of the telecentre's program should derive along with cohesive monitoring in ensuring facilities at telecentre are sufficient and appropriate for the community to attain. In concurrence with Industrial Relation 4.0, the industries and society expected massive usage of technologies in many ways with big data analytics, cybersecurity, internet of things (IoT), and so on.

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