BEHAVIORAL FACTORS INFLUENCING USAGE OF RURAL LIBRARY SERVICES AMONG YOUTH IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to explore the behavioral factors that impinge usage of rural library services among youth in Malaysia. This study employed a quantitative method, and a via multi-stage simple random sampling, a total of 400 rural library users among youth from four states in Peninsular Malaysia namely Kedah, Terengganu, Perak and Johor were chosen as the respondents. The data gained denote that all of the behavioral factors considered, namely perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude and social environment have positive and significant relationships with rural library usage among youths. It is highly recommended that the services offered in the rural library are in line with the youth needs and interests. This recommendation should be included in any rural library development plan as it will assist the concerned parties in constructing the best strategies by which to attract more people, particularly the younger generation, to use the services offered to them in rural libraries.

Keywords: Behavioral Factors, Rural Library Services, Youth, Rural Community Development, Youth Development
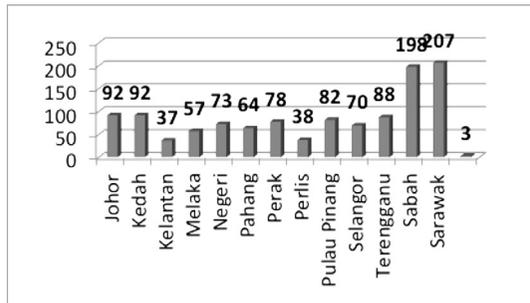
ABSTRAK

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor tingkah laku (behavioural factors) yang mempengaruhi penggunaan perkhidmatan Perpustakaan Desa dalam kalangan belia di Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif, dan melalui persampelan rawak mudah berperingkat, sejumlah 400 pengguna Perpustakaan Desa dari empat buah negeri di Semenanjung Malaysia iaitu Kedah, Terengganu, Perak dan Johor telah dipilih sebagai responden. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa semua faktor-faktor tingkah laku yang iaitu tanggapan mudah guna, tanggapan kebergunaan, sikap dan persekitaran sosial mempunyai hubungan yang positif dan signifikan dengan penggunaan Perpustakaan Desa dalam kalangan belia. Dicadangkan supaya perkhidmatan yang ditawarkan di Perpustakaan Desa adalah selari dengan keperluan dan kepentingan belia. Cadangan ini hendaklah dipertimbangkan di dalam mana-mana pelan pembangunan Perpustakaan Desa kerana ia akan membantu pihak-pihak berkenaan dalam membina strategi terbaik untuk menarik lebih ramai orang, khususnya generasi muda, untuk menggunakan perkhidmatan yang ditawarkan kepada mereka di Perpustakaan Desa.

Kata Kunci: Faktor Tingkah Laku, Perkhidmatan Perpustakaan Desa, Belia, Pembangunan Komuniti Luar Bandar, Pembangunan Belia

INTRODUCTION

According to the US Census Bureau (2010) rural area is an area with less than 2,500 people while for the Malaysia definition, a rural area can be understood as an area that has less than 10,000 people characterized with its agriculture land and natural resources (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2010). Though this number is lower compared to that of urban populations, rural communities are still an important group. One of the main issues resulting from this distinction is that an information gap exists between rural and urban communities. To overcome this problem, relevant agencies have suggested a number of initiatives, and ICT centers are among those already established. In Malaysia, for example, ICT centers such as Rural Internet Centers, Medan Info Desa and Wireless Village Projects have been established to ensure that the flow of information is continuous among the rural community. Another initiative that has been proven to be a success and has been widely used in developing the rural community is the rural library project. In the US, for example, a total of 79% of public libraries are in rural areas, and 646 libraries are located in rural areas in Illinois. The same scenario can be seen in Malaysia, where rural libraries have been introduced to ensure the development of rural communities. In Malaysia, rural libraries are administered by the National Library of Malaysia (NLM) and the government state. Rural libraries were established in 2000, and at that time a total of 25 rural libraries were established in a number of selected states. To date, there are 1,179 rural libraries throughout Malaysia (National Library of Malaysia, 2011) (Figure 1). The completion of a study with regards to rural libraries in Malaysia is deemed crucial; though an abundance of studies on general public libraries are available (Yaacob et al., 2010; Wan Dollah and Abdul Kadir, 2010; Namita, 2007), less interest has been placed on rural libraries, particularly in relation to the behavioral factors that impinge on the services offered therein and this raises a question with regard to what behavioural factor that might influence the rural library services usage among youth in Malaysia. In addition, a study related to rural libraries will have a number of important implications. First, it will contribute towards the body of knowledge; second, it will be a good reference point for concerned parties, researchers and students who intend to further discover and explore the behavioral factors affecting usage of rural library services; lastly, it will provide valuable data for concerned parties to generate strategies to attract more people to rural libraries, in line with their needs, interests and abilities.

**Figure 1: Number Of Rural Libraries In Malaysia
According To State**

Source: National Library Malaysia, 2011

Generally, reading materials such as magazines, newspapers, books, and novels are the main items offered by rural libraries. In addition, in line with the era of digitalization, computer and Internet services are provided for users at selected rural libraries. Users can take advantage of these facilities in order to search for sources or accomplish various tasks. In addition, rural libraries can be a suitable place for communities to conduct activities, as they provide a comfortable place for students and professionals to conduct group discussions, and offer relevant sources that might assist them.

In this modern day, ICT and the younger generation cannot be separated, and providing ICT facilities in rural libraries is a good strategy for attracting rural youth. Provision of ICT facilities in rural libraries can also be a good means by which to overcome the gap between rural and urban communities (Shariful Islam, 2009; Shaffril, Omar, Abu Hassan, Bolong and D'Silva, 2012). According to Momodu (2002), rural youth prefer to seek information related to agriculture, politics, health and education. The European Youth Information Charter (2004) has expressed the importance of making sources available in rural libraries that are in line with youth needs, demands and interests. In addition, other crucial criteria that should be accentuated include equal access to information, which is easily accessible and involves no cost, as well as the availability of opportunities by which users can improve their ICT skills and knowledge.

Youth in Malaysia and potential problems in attracting them to use rural library services
In any society, youth is one the major pillars for the future of community development. Their physical and mental strength is needed for any national development. In Malaysia, a total of 12 million people out of its 28 million population in Malaysia are youths; this is equivalent to 43% of the total population, of which 6.1 million youths in Malaysia are male while 5.9 million are female (IPPBM, 2010). Such a large number denotes the influence and strength they have in driving the nation's development. In addition, a total of 7.05 million youths are

working in numerous sectors, primarily business and construction. Of this, a total of 4.2 million youths possess only secondary-level education (SPM[1] or below), and such a low achievement level reflects the needs and demands of Malaysian youths for education, knowledge, information and ICT (IPPBM, 2010). In response to this, the government has set forth a number of initiatives, such as Rural Internet Centers, Medan Info Desa, Wireless Villages, and rural libraries.

It seems that youth acceptance of ICT projects is high, as such projects are found to be in line with their needs and interests (Samuelsson, 2010). Nonetheless, a similar scenario cannot be found within the rural library scope, and a number of obstacles have been identified. Corradini (2003) suggests that the attendance of this group to rural libraries is not encouraging, and that factors such as migration to urban areas and lack of interest have become the main causes of this. In addition, youths may consider rural libraries to be "boring" places, and more suitable for avid readers and children. Another existing problem is the fact that library opening times are unsuitable for the public. Norshila, Masitah and Wan Nor Haliza (2011) has proven that lack of time is the main factor that hinders youths from coming to rural libraries. During weekdays, youths are busy with school and studying, while those who are working have very limited time to go to rural libraries and are only able to do so during the weekend.

Behavioral factors influencing youths in rural library usage

Behaviour is anything that a thing does, involving movement, as a response to stimulation (Sheldon, 2005) and within the scope of this study, behavioural factors refer to factors that might influence rural library services usage among youth. There are many behavioral factors relating to rural library usage among rural youths. One of these is attitude. Based on a study conducted in India by Takalkar and Rama Devi (2012), attitude towards rural library usage can be affected by the types of sources offered at the library. Analysis with regards to people's information needs will reveal the adequacy of information germane to development schemes, employment opportunities, education and health, and will encourage people to come and use rural library services, which in turn creates positive attitudes among them.

Perception also becomes one of the impingement factors for rural library usage. Based on past studies done by Norshila et al. (2011) and Corradini (2003), the majority of youths possess a negative perception towards rural library services. For them, as mentioned above, rural libraries are only for avid readers, and this is not surprising as Omar, Shaffril, Bolong and D'Silva (2012) accentuate that most youths in Malaysia perceive rural libraries as being typically related to reading books, and only a small percentage of those studied stated an interest in using the services offered. Moreover, rapid ICT development has had an impact on library usage, as the majority of youth nowadays prefer to seek information using the Internet, rather than utilizing library services.

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[1]*SPM refers to the Malaysian Certificate of Education.*

Another behavioral factor that should be considered in rural library usage is social environment. The way rural libraries are presented to the community can be an influential factor. The libraries' internal decoration can also affect users' interest. A study done by Omar et al. (2012) concludes that decoration can be a reason why youths and adults do not want to use the services offered by rural libraries. In addition, surrounding community and family members can be a great influence in use of rural library services. Rouibah (2008) stresses that people will use services that are used by people close to them, and also expect them to use these services.

Other behavioral factors that should be considered are perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. People perceive a service as being beneficial to them if that service aids them in their work and enhance their productivity (Davis, 1989) as such Meso, Musa and Mbarika (2005) accentuate perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as important behavioral constructs for service usage. If the community perceives the services offered as being easy to utilize, they will be more likely to use them persistently, which in turn will lead to sustainable usage of the services offered (Rogers, 2003). A service may be perceived as useful if it involves minimum cost, is capable of widening the market, and enables users to gather large amounts of information within a short time (Laudon and Laudon, 2000; Ongori, 2009).

Thus, the objective of this paper is to determine the behavioural factors that might influence rural library services usage among youth in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

This is a correlational research, in which a developed questionnaire was used to obtain the data needed. The main instrument used for the study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on the reviews of literature made. The questionnaire consisted of six parts (Please refer to Table 1). For the demographic part, the respondents were given an open-ended and closed-ended option of answer while for remaining parts, the respondents were given a five likert like scale option of answer which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was then pre-tested at a selected rural library in Muar and was proven reliable based on the cronbach alpha value gained (>.700).

Table 1: Distribution of Questions

Part	Number of questions
Demographic factors	5
Purpose for visiting rural library	9
Perceived ease of use	8
Perceived usefulness	10
Attitude	10
Social environment	13

Based on multi-stage simple random sampling, a total of 400 rural library users from four selected states in Peninsular Malaysia (Perak, Johor, Kedah and Terengganu) were selected as respondents. All of these were youths, and the respondent selection criteria were as follows: 1) users of rural library services; and 2) aged 40[2] or below. A total of 16 rural libraries were involved in this study, of which each state was represented by four rural libraries, and each rural library was represented by 25 respondents (25 respondents x 16 rural libraries = 400 respondents). The respondents were selected randomly based on the list of membership provided by the rural library officers. Descriptive and inferential analyses were run, whereby statistic measurements such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and pearson product moment correlation were employed.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic data for the respondents studied. The majority of the respondents were female (65.3%), while a huge majority were Malay (99.8%). A combination of 63.8% of the respondents possessed a PMR[3] and SPM level of education, and only 13.0% of them had achieved a university level of education (diploma, degree, master's or PhD). The largest portion of respondents is composed of those ages aged between 25-40 years old (45.3%). A total of 31.0% of the respondents visited the library once a week, and 29.3% visited twice a week.

Table 2: Socio Demographic Data for Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Gender				
Male	139	34.8		
Female	261	65.2		
Age				
15-17 years	146	36.5		
18-24 years	73	18.3		
25-40 years	181	45.2	23.4	8.77
Race				
Malay	399	99.7		
Indian	1	0.3		
Education level				
Not in school	4	1.0		
Primary school	45	11.3		
PMR	132	33.0		
SPM/ SPMV	123	30.7		

[2]*In Malaysia, according to the definition by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, youths are considered those aged 40 or below.*
[3]*Lower Certificate of Education.*

Skill certificate/ STPM	44	11.0		
Diploma	34	8.4		
Degree/ Master/ PhD	18	4.4		
How many times you come to the library in a week				
1	124	31.0		
2	117	29.3		
3	77	19.3		
4	49	12.3		
5	23	5.5		
6	5	1.3		
7	5	1.3	2.413	1.363

Behavioral factor studies

Within this study, a total of four behavioral factors were studied, namely perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude and environment. The overall mean score for each behavioral factor was gained and then categorized into three levels based on the calculation of 3 (levels)/5.0 (maximum mean score) and it resulted in three levels namely low (1.00-2.33), moderate (2.34 – 3.67) and high (3.68 – 5.00). As shown in Table 3, perceived ease of use yielded the highest mean score, yet become the main behavioral factor in influencing usage of rural library services among youth. Perceived usefulness and attitude were the second and third behavioral factors that influenced usage of rural library services among youths, while the last behavioral factor is the social environment, with a mean score of 2.27.

Table 3: Behavioral Factors Influencing Usage Of Rural Library Services Among Youths

Factors	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Perceived ease of use				
Low	1	0.3		
Moderate	36	9.0		
High	363	90.7	2.905	0.302
Perceived usefulness				
Low	1	0.3		
Moderate	39	9.7		
High	360	90.0	2.898	0.312
Attitude				
Low	2	0.5		
Moderate	36	12.3		
High	349	87.2	2.868	0.354

Social Environment				
Low	5	1.3		
Moderate	104	26.0		
High	291	72.7	2.715	0.479

Table 4 demonstrates the main usage of rural library services among youths. Based on the data obtained, it can be seen that their main usage was related to reading materials. In the case of rural libraries in this study, novels were the most preferred reading materials among youths. The majority confirmed that they do spend their free time in rural libraries. Although reading publications was stated as their main purpose, borrowing such materials was stated as another reason. Surprisingly, using Internet and computer facilities was not a popular reason for visiting rural libraries among the rural youth in Malaysia, and such findings contradict studies conducted by Zabed Ahmad (2010), who claims that today's youth state ICT as their top priority for visiting libraries. The results show that for youths, rural libraries are not the best places for them to conduct group discussions and activities with their families, and this is confirmed by the mean score presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Mean Score Of Rural Library Usage

Purposes	Mean	SD
Read publications	4.435	0.726
Fill free time	4.338	0.834
Borrow reading materials	4.310	0.909
Use Internet facilities	4.241	1.036
Use computer facilities	4.080	1.134
Search for information relating to activities/events	4.068	0.995
Complete tasks/homework assignments	3.873	1.160
Conduct group discussions	3.658	1.260
Conduct activities with family	3.305	1.169

Pearson product-moment correlation was employed to determine the relationship between the four behavioral factors relating to rural library usage. As portrayed in Table 5, there is a significant and positive relationship between rural library usage and all of the behavioral factors studied. Perceived usefulness scored the highest relationship ($r = 0.508$), followed by attitude ($r = 0.466$), social environment ($r = 0.459$) and finally perceived ease of use ($r = 0.408$).

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Relationship Between Purpose for Rural Library Usage and Behavioral Factors

Variables	p	r
Perceived usefulness	0.000	0.508
Attitude	0.000	0.466
Social environment	0.000	0.459
Ease of use	0.000	0.408

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis conducted, we have confirmed that the four behavioral factors considered have influential power on rural library usage. To further strengthen and improve these four behavioral factors, a number of recommendations are highlighted. First, is to improve on the existing services. In order to improve ICT services in rural libraries, essential requirements such as computers, Internet and wi-fi must be available so as to fulfil users' needs (Norshila et al. 2011). Additionally, it is recommended that rural libraries provide updated reading materials, such as new novels in larger amounts, and educational books for PMR or SPM candidates. Perceived usefulness of services can be changed from positive to negative; Teo (2008) confirms that offering too many services will result in most of them being abandoned, as users will only use services that they are interested in, which means that only certain services are benefiting users, while the rest are not. For example, though there are a number of ICT applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Yahoo Mail, Gmail, chat and blogs, not all of these applications are fully used and mastered by users, as they only use applications that fit in with their ICT interests, skills and knowledge, which in turn results in other applications being ignored (Teo, 2008). Similarly, within the case of rural libraries, all the services offered to the users must be in line with their interests, skills and capabilities. These can be identified if the librarians are capable of conducting suitable and appropriate research. Courses or open days should be conducted regularly. Such events should brief users on the services offered, the benefits of these services, and the procedures involved in using them. In this way, the perceived ease of use of the services offered could be improved. Intensive promotions are needed to improve community support towards rural libraries, which in turn will create positive attitudes within communities, and social environments that support the usage of rural library services.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it can be concluded that perceived usefulness is the main behavioral factor that influences rural library usage among youth. Perceived usefulness includes the usage of ICT. Based on the results depicted in Table 4, the purpose of visiting libraries among the youths surveyed is to use the Internet and computer facilities. ICT is one of the most important sources when searching for

information, and thus ICT facilities must be adequate and in a good enough condition to attract youths. In addition to ICT services, reading materials are important and must be monitored by experts in order to ensure that there are quality publications on offer.

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