Cyber Café Usage in Malaysia:
An Exploratory Study

Syed Shah Alam
Senior Lecturer, Department of Marketing, Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
Postal Address: **40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia**
Authors Personal/Organizational Website:
http://www.fbm.uitm.edu.my/index.php?option=com_peoplebook&Itemid=45
E-mail: syedshah@salam.uitm.edu.my
Dr. Syed Shah Alam is a Doctorate in E-commerce. His teaching and research interest are internet marketing, E-commerce, mobile E-commerce and Internet Banking. His articles on E-commerce, Online shopping, ICT adoption in SMEs have been published in leading international journals.

Zaini Abdullah
Assistant Vice Chancellor (Internationalisation) UiTM International Center, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
Postal Address: **40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia**
Author's Personal/Organizational Website:
http://www.fbm.uitm.edu.my/index.php?option=com_peoplebook&Itemid=45
E-mail: zabadu@salam.uitm.edu.my
Dr. Zaini Abdullah is an Assistant Vise Chancellor (Internationalisaton) and former Dean of the Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam, Malaysia. He is the founding Deputy Director at UiTM's Centre for ASEAN Studies. He is also a member of Chartered Institute of Transport (UK) and the Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management. His areas of research interest are HRM, knowledge management and E-commerce.

Nilufar Ahsan
Research Fellow, Faculty of Management, Multimedia University,
Postal Address: **63100 Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia**

E-mail: nilu_far70@yahoo.com
Nilufar Ahsan is currently a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Management, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya Malaysia. Her research interest includes organisational behaviour, and ICT management areas.

ABSTRACT

Using empirical and new field data, this exploratory study investigates the pattern of the use of cyber cafes in two cities in Malaysia. The research was based on the convenience sample survey of 284 respondents in total in the two cities, Melaka and Miri in Sarawak. It can be argued that cyber café seeks to provide its customers with inexpensive Internet access in a comfortable environment. People of all ages and sex come to enjoy the unique, upscale, educational, and innovative environment at cyber cafe. This study investigates the rate of usage of cyber café by the respondents. The results of our study and the implication for future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The internet is highly in demand nowadays compared to a few decades back. Basically, the internet consists of millions of interconnected computers scattered around the globe, all linked by fiber, phone lines or other cabling, using a common set of communications protocols that allow the computers to talk to each other (Bounds and Karl, 1996,). People throughout the world are using Internet connections and computers to communicate with each other without geographical boundaries. However, internet connections and personal computers are not affordable for some people in some countries.

There are some barriers that hinder the Internet access by people in some developing countries like Malaysia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The major barriers include low rates of personal computer ownership and high cost of hardware (Haseloff, 2005; Alam et al, 2007). Low income level is one of the important barriers that make the Internet an expensive tool in developing countries (Haseloff, 2005). In this instance, variety of cognitive barriers which include low literacy rates, lack of English language skills and or lack of e-literacy skills will likely to have some effect towards the effectively use of new technology such as Internet (Vatanasakdakul, 2004; Warschauer, 2002).

As a result, Malaysian and many other developing countries, the peoples are still relying on other modes of Internet access, mainly the arrangement of public terminals, such as Internet kiosks, cyber cafes, or multipurpose community telecentres (Rogers and Skukla, 2001; Haseloff, 2005). Compare to other public Internet access place, cyber cafes are playing important role as the most common Internet access place in the urban and rural area in Malaysia.

It can be argued that cyber café seeks to provide its customers with inexpensive Internet

access in a comfortable environment. People of all ages and sex come to enjoy the unique, upscale, educational, and innovative environment at cyber cafe. The concept of cyber cafes are social meeting points, with many customers considering the atmosphere and opportunity to be with friends an important reason for use and a breaking down of gender barriers in computing with somewhere to have a decent cup of coffee or tea in a public place. Now a days cyber cafes are important part of our domestic life and it's bring IT into real communities, allowing people to use and learn about them in there own way. The existence of cyber cafes in the developing countries like Malaysia, India, South Africa and Bangladesh actually help a lot of people to access Internet easily. A study of Adomi et.al, (2003) found in their study in Delta State, Nigeria, cyber cafes have become very important in Nigeria, as the cost of having internet connectivity is so high that private individuals cannot afford it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyber café started in the early 1990s in the United States (Stewart, 2000, p.322). Later on in the late 1990s it is almost very important for the Internet users in the world. In New York in USA a biggest cyber café in the world was opened with 800 computers in 2000 (Lachmayr, 2003). Cyber café can actually be defined as a shop, café or place which is opened to public, where anyone can just hire a computer for a certain period of time, with a certain amount of fee. They can access the Internet, write a CV or even play computer games. Most of the time, people who do not have a personal computer or internet connectivity, or visitors of other country will go to cyber cafes. Cyber café is first place peoples surf the Internet due to the limited access Internet into their home or office.

Cyber café in developing countries thus offer opportunities for ordinary people to obtain access to information and opportunities to communicate (Furuholt and Kristiansen, 2007a). But, still it is consider as the threat to traditions and cultural values. Even in some countries, cyber cafes are regarded as a political challenge (Furuholt and Kristiansen, 2007a). According to Hong and Huang (2005) a high number of cyber cafes have been closed down by the Chinese authorities aiming to fight 'unethical' use of the Internet and to build a safer environment for young Chinese people. They reported that, youngsters and even minors are using cyber cafés for commercial gambling, violent games and viewing pornography.

Nevertheless, cyber cafe can help make our lives easier. Without having a personal computer and also without paying monthly fee for a fixed Internet connection people can learn about new technology or ICT. Even nowadays people can buy or place an order to get any information from cyber café spending less amount of money. Cyber cafe can be considered as a model of public internet access and it makes everyone have an equal opportunity to get closer with information technology through a different channel and environment. A report of Haseloff (2005) cited by Furuholt and Kristiansen (2007) that, cyber cafes can function as centres for support, education and learning bout new tools and therefore could help people to overcome skill deficits which would normally exclude them from access to information and new technologies.

Various types of cybercafés can be seen in the world. According to Haseloff (2005)

cyber cafés range from the original small-scale entrepreneur model, where a small number of computers using a slow dial-up connection is set up in a convenient atmosphere; to traditional cafes which extend their existing services by offering Internet access; to franchised ultra-modern Internet pools with a very large number of computers and broadband connection offering the same standardized sercie in different cities. In Malaysia cyber cafes can be categorized into a few different types, according to the environment, services and facilities offered, as well as the available broadband connections. Report by Lachmayr (2003), Liff and Steward (2003) and Laegran and Stewart (2003) explain more detailed classifications of cyber cafes. According to them cyber cafes are classified according to the atmosphere, the function, the management type and their users.

Cyber cafes are used for different purposes and different segment of users. Laegran (2002) study in Norway reported that youngsters used cyber café to e-mail friends and chat, search for music and films and research topics that could help individuals realize plans for education or traveling. A study in the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia by Wahid et al. (2006) reported that main categories of use cyber café in Yogyakarta are communication, instrumental and recreational purposes.

A study in Africa by Mutula (2003) found that students use cyber cafes mostly for educational purposes while business people tent to use cyber cafes to transact business and for electronic money transfer. Another study by Odero (2003) found that cyber cafes are using by Pretorial postgraduate students more for educational purposes and undergraduate students used for chatting, listen to music and for other form of entertainment purposes. Chachage (2001) study in Tanzania found that cyber cafes are mainly used for recreational purposes and personal communicational purposes.

Since the ICT (Information and communication technology) have been viewed as the new and powerful tool to foster development like other developing countries, the Malaysian government has been promoting and encouraging the use of these technologies across the masses in all possible ways, including cyber cafes. In Malaysia, the cyber café trend began in 1990s (Sharifah, 2005). Generally people who don't have personal computer at home or don't have high-speed Internet access are the most common users of cyber cafes. A cyber café is also handy for travelers who can stop in to check email, look up directions, or send off a message to loved ones at home. Other people may just feel like getting out of the house to sit and relax undisturbed in front of a computer in a comfortable setting. A study by Daniel (2005) found that for people who don't have laptops, this is a convenient option to use cyber cafes. In Malaysia are very useful especially to students and adults alike who do not have the means to own their own computers.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The research design was purposefully exploratory because there is a dearth of research on cyber cafes in Malaysia. But the cyber café culture has successfully been exported to many parts of the world (Bulder, 1997; Rogers and Shukla, 2003). In Malaysia, the development of cyber cafe culture is still considered in between the early and middle stage. No such study about cyber café is available specific to Malaysia; hence findings

will help the cyber café owners and government authorities to devise strategies which can improve the services provided by the cyber cafes. We attempt to reveal the usage of cyber cafes by the respondents. This study is examined the purposes of Internet usage by the Melaka and Miri, Sarawak based cyber café users in Malaysia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population

A survey instrument was formulated to obtain feedback from cyber cafes users from two states in Malaysia, namely Malacca and Sarawak. The information gathered was analyzed and implications were drawn from it. This survey method was used because it would be less time consuming and less expensive. However, there is sufficient information in a sample to allow it to represent the population even though a sample was use. The non probability sampling was used in this study. This sampling design was chosen for its convenience as the samples selected for the interviewer convenience. The time and cost factor was taken into consideration too. The questionnaire was given out to the cyber café owners of the two cities to distribute to the users.

In order to focus on cyber café users, researchers were personally visited the cities in the two states. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a cross sectional approach was undertaken to measure cyber café users' responses regarding Internet usage.

Data Collection

The population of this study comprised of all cyber café users from some main cities of two states in Malaysia, Melaka and Sarawak. The authors sent letters to each cyber café owner explaining the purpose of the study and requesting assistance in distributing the survey. Survey samples were construct from information provided by our contacts at each cyber café owner, who helps us select respondents representing a diverse range of users and age groups. Survey samples were hand-delivered to the twenty cyber café owner in November, 2007 by one of the authors. Data was gathered based on personally administered questionnaire. A packet of 20 survey questionnaires were given to randomly selected twenty cyber cafes from Melaka and Miri of Sarawak.
 To maximize the return rate for this study, a token of appreciation (souvenir) was given to all participants including cyber café owner. Telephone inquiries were conducted only one week later as a last resort for reminding the owner of the cyber cafe. The response rate for the survey was overwhelming at 82 per cent (328 responses). Due to missing values for at least one section of the responses 44 samples were discarded from this research and finally 284 samples were then processed and analysed by using SPSS.

Instrument development

The data for the study was gathered through a structured-undisguised questionnaire. The questionnaire was pretested several times within the faculty from three departments to establish face validity of the items. The aim of the pretest was to prevent any vagueness and misunderstanding with minor adjustment to the wording and sequence of the questions. The revised questionnaire was then administered to respondents with a

cover explaining the academic purpose of the study (Obasi, 1999). Questionnaire also allows people time to think about the questions which result in more meaningful answers (Peil et al., 1982).

The questionnaire was divided into three major parts. The first section is related to cyber café usage. This section mainly about when the users normally go to cyber cafes, length of time spent, preferred languages while using computers and also the main purpose of going to cyber cafes. Then the second part of the questionnaire is about the benefits and economic benefits perceived by cyber café users. Aside from that, it also discussed about the reasons why the users preferred cyber cafes rather than home computers, as well as the criteria of cyber cafes that will influence users' intention to use cyber cafes.

The final section of the questionnaire is about the demographic information of respondents. General questions such as gender, age group, occupation, level of income, home town and level of education were asked in this part.

RESULTS

Demographic Information of the Respondents

Demographic data of the participants' gender, age, race, education level, occupation and monthly household income was collected through some questions of the survey. Frequencies and percentages were the methods used to report descriptive statistics using SPSS 14.0 (see Table I).

Table I *Demographic background of the respondents*

	Frequency	Per cent
Gender		
Male	228	80.3
Female	56	19.7
Age group (years)		
20 years and below	102	35.9
21-30	159	56.0
31-40	21	7.4
Above 40	2	0.7
Race		
Malay	35	12.4
Chinese	137	48.2
Indian	33	11.6
Others	79	27.8
Educational level		
School going	49	17.3
STPM/ Diploma	18	6.3
SPM	32	11.3
Undergraduate	174	61.3

Master Degree and above	07	2.5
	04	1.3
Others		
Occupation		
Business owner	15	5.3
Manager/administrator	04	1.4
Self-	15	5.3
employed/professional	09	3.2
Technician	235	82.7
Student	06	2.1
Others		
Mothers language		
English	120	42.3
Malay	29	10.2
Mandarin	121	42.6
others	14	4.9
Language use for cyber café usage		
English	243	85.5
Malay	04	1.4
Mandarin	32	11.3
others	05	1.8

Gender and age group

Majority of the cyber café users (80.3%) are male while female respondents accounted for the remaining 19.7% of the total respondents or 56 respondents. This indicates that the male are more frequent usages cyber cafe compared to the female counterparts.

In this study we tried to identify whether the younger generation is one of the most common cyber café users or not? For this reason respondents age was considered as one of the demographic variable in this study. The survey results show that more than half of the respondents are in the age group of 21 to 30 years and this group stands for 56.0% of the total respondents. The second highest ranking of cyber café users are 20 years and below old with 35.9% of the total respondents or 102 respondents. The other age groups have indicated less than 10% of the total respondents. They are within the age of 31 to 40 years old, amounted for only 7.4% and finally the respondents from the age group of above 40 years old with the least percentage, which is 0.7% or 2 respondents only (see Table I).

Race, occupation and educational level

The Chinese has the highest percentage which is 48.2% compared to the Indian group with 11.6% which has the least percentage among the four races. Other than that, the "others" group stands for 27.8% and followed by the Malays with 12.3% from the total respondents. Occupation of the survey respondents was considered another demographic characteristic for this study. There are 82.7% of the total respondents who are students, and followed by business owner and self- employed/ professional with

5.3% each. Other than that, 3.2% of them are technicians, 2.1% work as sales, clerical or service workers. The least is manager or administrator with only 1.4%. Table I exhibits the educational level of the cyber café users who were interviewed. The educational level of the respondents is ranked the highest for those are still studies in undergraduate level that represents 61.3% of the total respondents or 174 respondents. The second highest ranking is school going students who are still studying in secondary schools with 17.3% of the total respondents or 49 respondents. It is followed by the respondents with SPM certificate that accounts for 11.3% or 32 respondents, STPM or diploma holders accounted for 6.3% or 18 respondents, Master or degree holders are 2.5% or 7 respondents and lastly other qualification holders that represent only 1.4% or 4 respondents

Mothers' language and language use for Internet usage

Mothers language is refer to the language normally spoken by the people in everyday life. Table I also reveals that out of the 284 respondents, 42.6% of the café users speak Mandarin. Obviously, the Mandarin users were the highest sample because Chinese respondents are the highest in this study. Then it is followed by 42.3% of the respondent were speak in English. The lowest percentage of respondents was 4.9% who use other language for their general conversation. Besides that, there is 10.2% of the respondent use Malay as their communication purposes.

Although most of the respondents (42.6%) use Mandarin as their language but, the respondents for this study found that English is their first preferences to browse the Internet at cyber café (85.6% or 243 respondents). Meanwhile 11.3% of them prefer Mandarin while using computers in cyber cafes, followed by 1.8% preferring other languages and finally only 1.3% preferring Malay as the language used in computers.

Usage of Cyber café

Frequency of cyber café use

This study examines how frequent respondents visit the cyber cafes in a week and in a month. The frequency table has shows that most of the respondents (29.9% or 85 respondents) visit cyber cafes 1 to 3 times a week. Meanwhile, 26.8% or 76 respondents did mention they normally visit the cyber cafe 3 to 7 times a week. This is followed by, 25.4% or respondents who visit cyber cafes once in two weeks. There are only 12.0% of them visiting once a month and only 6.0% go to cyber cafes less than once a month. Obviously, the cyber café is one of the important places where people browse Internet frequently.

Time spent (per session)

The amount of time the respondents normally spend in cyber cafes is shown in figure Table II. As it shows clearly, most of the respondents (60.2%) go to cyber cafes for 1 to 3 hours. There is only 3.9% who spend more than 5 hours in cyber cafes. Other than that, 24.3% will normally stay in cyber cafes for 3 to 5 hours and finally 11.6% will be in cyber cafes for less than 1 hour.

Visiting hours

The café user was asked about the visiting time preferred by the customer for Internet browsing. Table II shows that almost 49.6% of the total respondents prefer at late night to visit cyber cafes. About 35.2% of them prefer to visit in the evening and 14.1 normally go for cyber café usage in the afternoon. Only 1.1% of them visit during the morning hours.

Table II Usage of Cyber café

	Frequency	Per cent
Frequency of cyber café use	85	29.8
1-3 times a week	76	26.8
3-7 times a week	72	25.4
Once in two weeks	34	12.0
Once a month	17	6.0
Less than once a month		
Time spend (per session)		
Less than 1 hour	33	11.6
1-3 hours	171	60.2
3-5 hours	69	24.3
More than 5 hours	11	3.9
Visiting Hours		
Morning	03	1.1
Afternoon	40	14.1
Evening	100	35.2
Late night	141	49.6

Purposes of Cyber café usage

Respondents were asked to indicate the purpose of cyber café usage when they browse the Internet. For this study respondents were given eight options to choose from and we allowed selecting all that applied to their situation. Majority of the respondents (69.0%) used the cyber café to form entertainment purposes. The most common purpose of café users was for communicating through online (e-mail, instant message, and or chatting with friends) (66.7%). A total of 124 respondents (43.7%) indicated that they used cafe for searching information for their study or other purposes and 32.8% of café users browse Internet for pleasure purposes. Out of 284 companies 79 respondents (27.8%) used cyber café for education materials and 13.7% used cafe for other purposes. By gaining more information on the product and services 38 or 13.4% the respondents may find new ideas to make any purchases of the product or services. Only 23 respondents mentioned they were using café for business purposes (see Table III).

Table II Purpose of Cyber café Usage

	Frequency	Per cent
Business and work	23	8.1

Searching for information	124	43.7
Online shopping	38	13.4
Online communication	161	66.7
Entertainment	196	69.0
Education	79	27.8
Pleasure	97	32.8
others	39	13.7

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the analysis, it is pretty obvious that most of the users of cyber cafes from both two cities are male and young adults ranging from 20 to 29 years old. It is consistent with the results of Peter (2003). As it is found in other studies that younger users' online activity may remain comparatively high (Bucy, 2000). They normally spend their time in cyber cafes during late night. However, the most worrying part is their main purpose of going to cyber cafes is mainly because of entertainment. Online games are becoming one of the most favorite activities for young people nowadays (Ishii and Wu, 2006) and majority of them visit cyber cafes around 1 to 3 times a week and some of them even visit everyday just to play online games with their friends.

The respondents mentioned that the existence and services of cyber cafés help them a lot. This is parallel with their reasons for preferring cyber cafes than home, which indicate that cyber café users do not have of computers and other facilities at home. As shown in the results in section 4, most of the cyber café users in Malacca are college or university students. With minimal amount of income or allowance per month, they might not be able to own computers or telephone lines as it is found in the study in African countries by Pieter & Justin. (2003).

LIMITATIONS

As in all empirical research, several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. The first limitation concerns the sample. The respondents of the study were all from the two states in Malaysia represented only quite limited by viable group. So it may be difficult to generalize the findings to other states in Malaysia due to social, infrastructural and/or economic differences. Secondly, only a few studies have conducted in other countries that limit the literature in this study. In addition no academic studies concerning factors influencing cyber café usage were found. Thus this study is based on consultancy reports than profound academic studies. Finally, the data was obtained from a questionnaire presonallyl, and hence the information obtained may have some biases.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICES

As the numbers of cyber cafes are increasing tremendously these years, researchers should develop better measurement and analysis to gain better understanding on the cyber cafes usage and the benefits gained by the users and society. This is supported by Siriginidi study (2000). Therefore, future research should develop better measures to analyze cyber cafes from different states in whole Malaysia. It is understandable that

people from different states or places will have different priorities while selecting which cyber cafes to go.

It also suggests that, future research on cyber cafes users should set short and simple questions in their survey questionnaires because the users are charged based on a certain amount of money per hour. That is why they are not willing to spend too long on answering the questionnaires. They will tend to answer the questionnaires without thinking much because they do not want to waste their time and money. In addition, questionnaires should have more than one language, which means using Bahasa Melayu is suggested. This can increase the possibility of users understand the content of the questionnaires distributed.

CONCLUSIONS

There are several conclusions that can be drawn based on the main findings which have been found in this paper. It is quite clear that cyber cafes users in Melaka generally do not use cyber café services to do business online. It means that e-commerce is still not widely adopted among youngsters in these cyber cafes. This is contradicting with the latest trend of adopting e-business and moving towards globalization.

In addition, this research has shown most of the cyber cafes users are from the younger generation and most of them are students. However, it is not a positive sign when we can see that majority go to cyber cafes for entertainment purposes, but not for educational reasons. The original purpose for having cyber café was to enable people who can't afford buying computers and owning internet connectivity to have internet access for work and educational purposes. Yet the youth are actually spending long hours in cyber cafes to play online games with their friends and the results of this survey also show that less than 50 percent of the respondents use cyber cafes to search for information and to keep in touch with their friends and family.

It is observable that most of the cyber cafes are allowing users below 18 years old to enter the cyber cafes and even play online games there. All these can actually create more social ills to the society and that is why cyber cafes owners should set rules and regulations restricting under-age people from going to cyber cafes. Owners should not focus on profits and business only, instead they should concern on the consequences towards the society as a whole. Local government can plays an important role in this as well because stricter actions should be taken with heavier punishment for owners who do not obey the rules.

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