

Internet Facilities in Rural Entrepreneurship: Narratives of Nigerian Rural Entrepreneurs and Malaysian Rural Entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

The study of internet facilities is very important for the knowledge of how the use of internet expands across businesses in rural areas. The aim of this research is to investigate internet facilities in rural entrepreneurship, narratives of Nigerian rural entrepreneurs and Malaysian rural entrepreneurs. The study is ethnographic in nature and targets to share a wide description of the knowledge and perceptions of thirty one respondents. Data were gathered from thirty one respondents using open-ended questions. The method applied to analyse the data was narrative analysis. The business owners with good knowledge in internet facilities in rural entrepreneurship were the respondents. The results show that internet facility is utilised in different manner by different types of businesses. While the Nigerian rural entrepreneurs relies less on internet facilities to differentiate itself, the rural entrepreneurs in Malaysia has heavy use of internet facilities in business. The results demonstrate that convergence of mobile telecommunications, computing and internet technologies has the power to change the lives of individuals. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is an element that has enabled a shift in business sectors. It has the power to increase the effectiveness of other factors of business, hence giving rise to business growth.

Keywords: Business Growth, ICT, Internet Facilities, Rural Entrepreneurship

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of internet facilities has transformed the way businesses are carried out. Geographical barrier is no longer a barrier for businesses. Through internet facilities, businesses have access to a full range of market opportunities from local to global. Even business owners in rural areas can access new markets and serve new customers through the effective use of internet facilities. In the new business environment, business growth is assured as access to business opportunities is increasing (Niebel, 2018; Azman et al., 2014; Cumming & Johan, 2010). Internet facilities such as computers, printers, phones, routers (hardware) and software are basically an electronic based system of information transmission, processing and retrieval which have exceedingly changed the way entrepreneurs think, live and perform business activities. Internet facilities have the potential to improve all aspects of business functions.

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Internet facilities focus on the crucial issues of how entrepreneurs communicate and learn in electronic environment. Thus it is not surprising that internet facilities are being seen as the leading keys to rural entrepreneurial varieties that include varieties in social conditions and economic substructure (Zhang et al., 2021; Solomon & Klyton, 2020).

There is a rapid development in the use of internet facilities in organisations. In recent times, internet facility is being applied in a broad range of areas in many organisations. It has offered new ways to store, process and distribute information within organisations and with distant customers. The modern internet facilities have enormously permitted access for easy operation and structure of organisations of all types around the globe that are utilising ICT. It is so reliable in reducing usage costs, improving efficiency and providing better customer service state. Internet facilities have an ability to enhance and control the operations of many organisations and can increase the use of management systems. With the use of internet facilities, businesses can interact more expeditiously. It allows businesses to become digitally connected. Internet facilities remove distance and time restraint in getting at required information flow and thus improving the coordination of activities amongst organisational boundaries. Internet facilities allow the diffusion of organisational information that can be essential input for effectual decision making at all levels. Internet facilities help in organisational planning thereby increasing organisational communication. With the use of internet and mobile devices, geographic distances have been shortened by increasing the speed of communication and becoming the instruments for growth of industries. Internet facilities are among the key factors that contribute to the growth of industries. The significant progress in internet facilities has made a progressive clear impact on development of organisations and the way entrepreneurs communicate and work across regions (Ahuja et al., 2010).

Many countries, including Malaysia, have provided nationwide internet access to ensure that rural populace gain access to the technology. The rationale for this development is to connect the rural communities to mainstream ICT development that is to empower and enable these communities to enjoy business development and growth through day to day business activities. This initiative supports the idea that internet facilities can play a significant role in social and economic development. An analysis on the role of internet facilities in national development identified three aspects which internet facilities can be categorised such as commodity, development support and development projects (Hu et al., 2018). The contribution of internet facilities for the support and development of rural entrepreneurship in developing economies like Malaysia and Nigeria is increasingly becoming a topic interest. Cumming and Johan in 2010 studied government provided internet technology to rural communities on regional entrepreneurship and observed that entrepreneurship increases among larger internet communities. However, they note that there is a decrease in entrepreneurship among smaller and more geographically remote internet communities. These developments entail the need for rural entrepreneurs to adopt innovative and informed marketing strategies to remain competitive, relevant and profitable (Cumming & Johan, 2010).

Internet facilities play important roles for the growth of businesses. Business growth may be achieved in Nigeria and Malaysia through knowing the use of internet facilities. Many entrepreneurs do not attain growth because they fail to use internet facilities. If internet facilities are properly demonstrated, the failure to accomplish growth in business will be decreased (Badariah, 2014; Borghoff, 2011). There are no empirical studies that have investigated internet facilities in rural entrepreneurship of Malaysia and Nigeria. Previous studies are done on one entrepreneurial region only, which are not enough for gaining knowledge on internet facilities. Study made by Cumming and Johan (2010) using quantitative research method demonstrates the differential impact of the internet on spurring regional entrepreneurship. Study done by Azman

et al., 2014, using quantitative research method shows an empirical description of digital maturity among ICT users. Therefore, there is a gap to be investigated. The present study targets to address this gap. That brings up the research question "What are the internet facilities used by rural entrepreneurs? How are rural entrepreneurs coping with the rapid infusion of internet facilities into the business space?" It is postulated that the use of internet in businesses would be an effective tool for learning, teaching or more appropriately for training.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Internet facilities consist of software, hardware, networks, and media for gathering, storing, processing, transmitting, and presenting information. This definition distinguishes fields of internet and simultaneously links them together so as to function as an entity (Diaz-Chao, Sainz-Gonzalez & Torrent-Sellens, 2015; Tarute & Gatautis, 2014). Internet is defined as any technology that facilitates communication and helps in collecting, processing and transmitting information electronically (Kumar, Stauvermann & Samitas, 2016). Internet facility is the full array of the production, dispersion, and consumption of information, over all the media from television and radio to satellites. The information revolution alleviated the change from analogue to digital technology; unites computers, telecommunication and television into a single multimedia environment (Borghoff, 2011). Internet is one of the most important driving forces for growth of industries. It can be described as the socialised knowledge of creating goods and services. It improves the capacity to produce goods or services. It has guided to change in the manner of conducting business (Malhotra, 2009).

The growth of companies towards the use of internet facility is characterised as the act of connecting different companies located in different regions with the intention to accomplish or share a common or different goal. Internet implementation in companies is completely necessary for the performance of the network for the spread of information, technology, goods, services and people all around the network. The most crucial distinction in organisational system is to be or not to be in the network. An organisation which is in the network can share and increase its chances. Be out of the network, the organisation becomes cut off, and the chances of good benefits vanish since everything that matters is organised all around a universal web of interacting networks (Pilar & Forero, 2013; Ahuja et al., 2010).

Internet has presented an important role in the growth of organisation. It has alleviated the heralding of a new generation organisation comparable to the old generation, the agricultural revolution and the modern organisations for an industrial revolution. The world is changing from a manufacturing based industrial economy to a service controlled and network based knowledge economy. Trade in performances, powered by internet is enhancing too. The diffusion of internet technology are among the most differentiating characteristics of the modern globalising world. The World Wide Web, of which the internet technology is a major component, is turning to a prototype of the global society. With its redistributed and interconnected networks crossing the entire world, the internet has come forth as a mark of growth.

The amount of internet users in the globe grows to 26 percent between the year 2004 and the year 2005. In the year 2007, 27 percent of internet users came from developing nations, a figure that grew to 32 percent of the world's 592 million internet users in the year 2008. Study narrated that in near future, 50 percent of the entire internet users are able to be from developing nations. In particular, this is a meaningful development anticipated (Izkair & Sulaiman, 2015; Fadun, 2013; Ahuja et al., 2010). The internet technology is looked upon as one of the newest qualitative change that the companies have ever encountered. It has allowed trade in services by enabling them to be divided into components, for each one to be located where it can be produced most effectively

and at the lowest cost. It is no more important for producers and consumers to be physically close to one another. As an outcome, IT enabled services are more and more growing in the similar way as manufacturing products did in many years ago. Internet has headed to a change in trade from particles sizes to bits sizes, a movement from small to large, from secondary economy to tertiary economy, and a conversion from industrial world to information world (Badariah, 2014; Borghoff, 2011).

Internet is offering even the rural entrepreneur a window of chances to advance the industrialisation stage and change their systems into high value added information systems that can contend with the high technology systems in the world market. Technological innovation has added to growth of industries by providing infrastructure for connections. The revolution occurring in information and communications technology has been the fundamental and the drive for the growth of Malaysia companies. Developing nations could not afford to overlook on the chances these information technologies are creating (Lin, Zakariah & Mohamed, 2012; Mohamed, Yap & Arshad, 2007).

3. METHODS

It is required that case studies of other people experiences on internet facilities in rural entrepreneurship would be a powerful tool for instructing and learning or more appropriately for directing. The purpose of this study is to develop case studies of people that have experienced internet facilities in their businesses located in rural regions which could be used for informative purposes. The case studies are produced based on interviews with fifteen Malaysian people and sixteen Nigerian people who are in baking business with good knowledge in internet facilities. After short questions through mail and self-administered interview to draw out personal details and educational background, a couple of questions relating to internet facilities in rural entrepreneurship were asked. The questions include the number of years and experience of using internet facilities in business, when the business commenced, the kind of commodity, the main business activity, the number of employees, the internet facilities used by the business and how the business cope with the rapid infusion of internet facilities.

The research is ethnographic in nature and targets to share a broad explanation of the perceptual experiences of thirty one respondents. Data were gathered through open-ended questions. The data obtained from the open ended questions is transcribed into narratives. The method applied to analyse the data is narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a story or an account involving the narration of a series of events in a plotted sequence which unfolds in time. Narrative, an approach which aims to elicit and scrutinise stories about the topic, subject or person being studied, are often collected through interviews (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). It is hoped that the findings, though limited in its representation of the huge population of rural entrepreneurs, would illuminate our understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs. The aim is to provide an opportunity to reflect on issues pertinent for future research on the impact of the internet as an enabling technology on rural entrepreneurship.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings obtained from the unstructured interview are written in the form of narratives which are named Narrative 1 and Narrative 2.

A. Narrative 1 – The Nigerian story by sixteen respondents

According to respondents, the entrepreneurs do not use internet as an enabling business tool alongside production machines, trucks and cars. The Nigerian rural entrepreneurs interviewed

in this study are mainly owners of bakery business in Enugu. The respondents in their companies indicated that they face irregular internet services, irregular power supply and poor training which came from government negligence on internet management. They cannot imagine running business with irregular internet services. Respondents attribute their current business success as one that does not depend on internet facilities. According to respondents, internet facilities do not help to communicate with our current and potential customers. Internet facility does not ease interstate communication for entrepreneurs who do business at different localities, and it does not enhance the ability to produce new ideas.

With regard to the entrepreneurs to keep up with latest technological development, respondents lament that business has not been easy for finance and upgrade of both the hardware and the software due to poor government support. Nonetheless, the respondents stance is that keeping up with internet facilities is not necessary to ensure business continuity and sustainability. With regard to accessibility of internet, the strength of use of internet facilities in the region is not upto an average and this has discouraged internet use to some degree. Respondents are not confident that the availability of more reliable internet service providers will reduce service cost and boost business success. Entrepreneurs are not encouraged on the use internet facilities in workplace. Lack of government support have discouraged the use of internet facilities in business and left entrepreneurs to define a strategy that will enable them to retain success in the business environment. The survey found several tools that facilitate business activities in the regions. These tools do not include internet facilities such as computers and printers but rather production machines. In rural regions of Nigeria, internet facility like computer does not play important role in helping entrepreneurs to communicate with the current and potential customers. Internet facility has not helped in efficient communication among staff at different level of employment. Therefore, internet facilities do not bring closely new ideas through products and global enhancement. The challenges of irregular power supply and low voltage capacity that interrupt the distribution of information, advertisement and communication also contribute to failure.

Internet facility is able to bring a total change in the business activities of rural entrepreneurs if there are an implementation desire and know how acquisition. In this sense, entrepreneurs will overcome hindrances and embrace rapid change of internet facilities such as new hardware and new software through government involvement, constant power supply, educating poor knowledge people who are not able to overpower ignorance, and providing more reliable internet service with low service cost that will reduce the training and access cost.

B. Narrative 2 – The Malaysian story by fifteen respondents

According to respondents in Malaysia, the entrepreneurs use internet as an enabling business tool. The Malaysian rural entrepreneurs interviewed in this study are mainly owners of bakery business in Kuching. Given the nature of bakery business, they all get technologically by owning atleast a computer, a printer as well as subscribing internet access from a local Malaysian company. As staff discipline is critical to the success of bakery business, they invest in a CCTV to monitor their staff not just to observe possible misbehaviour but also to observe determination and commitment among all staff. The bakery owners feel that there have been much government encouragements for them to use internet facilities in their businesses. However, they do acknowledge that the government has developed strong infrastructure to promote the use of internet facilities nationwide. Nevertheless, they think they do not need to improve the usage of internet facilities in their business since the existing internet facilities play much direct role in their business. Internet facilities help in connecting distinct companies located in different regions with the purpose to accomplish or show a common goal.

Internet facilities in business are completely essential for the performance of network connections for the distribution of information, goods and services all around the network. The most essential distinction in business success is to be in the network. According to respondents, an organisation which is in the internet network can share and increase its chances of business success and continuity. Be out of the internet network, the organisation becomes switched off, and the opportunities of good benefits disappear since all that matters is coordinated all around a comprehensive network of interaction. Respondents denotes that rural entrepreneurs in Malaysia are utilising internet facilities not only for improving ratio of output and reducing costs, but also for extending good customer service, so that businesses can interact more successfully with the use of internet facilities. Managing information is a significant role acted by internet facilities which as well assists in raising the supply of information between entrepreneurs. Sellers and buyers are fit to share information and move goods across regions with the use of internet facilities, which helps to increase access to supply chains. This brings about business growth in organisations.

The distribution of internet facilities in Malaysia has changed the way in which entrepreneurs function and communicate. Internet facilities play an important part in the existing business continuity and is used in a wide range of fields in different organisations. The coming of internet facilities in Malaysia has significant advantages for rural entrepreneurship development and has penetrated every kinds of business diversity. Organisations rely heavily on internet facilities with the target of developing and growing high class businesses. Internet facilities have the ability to increase and assure that the work of several organisations can also increase for the effective use of entrepreneur management system. Internet facilities are seen as a primary tool for the effective business connection to any organisation in Malaysia.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the study is achieved through the use of narrative analysis. Internet facilities such as computers, printers and routers are of greater use in Malaysia than in Nigeria. The two narratives portray different ways in which rural businesses leverage on internet facilities to conduct business. The Nigerian narrative shows less effort to incorporate internet facilities into their business processes while the Malaysian narrative relates an experience of business owners which use internet facilities maximally. The difference could be due to the deviation in the types of government support towards the use of information technology. Both narratives can demonstrate the representative of each country's adoption of ICT. Nonetheless, it is noted that Malaysian rural entrepreneurs are aware that the usage of internet facilities in business can improve efficiency and bring business growth to businesses across industries while Nigerian rural entrepreneurs are not aware following government negligence on ICT. More narratives and quantitative descriptions need to be gathered before patterns on how rural entrepreneurs employ internet facilities.

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