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IDENTIFYING FACTOR OF E-BUSINESS ADOPTION AMONG HOMESTAY OPERATORS IN KUCHING, SARAWAK: QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors of e-business adoption by homestay operators in Kuching, Sarawak. Homestay is known as a private home that tourists rent where the owners would provide the facilities and comforts that gives the tourist a similar feeling of staying in their own house and they would have the chance to interact with nearby community as well. Entrepreneurs in Malaysia nowadays are steadily taking part in this particular business as it can be seen as a second job for them to get extra income. Entrepreneur practices e-business in their business management. E-business is the administration of conducting business via internet. This would include the buying and selling of goods and services, along with providing technical or customer support through the internet. However, not all entrepreneurs know how to take advantages from conducting e-business as e-business are still not fully utilized among homestay operators. This research involves 10 homestay operators as key respondents by using semi-structured interview. The findings revealed that there are four factors identified that influence entrepreneurs to use e-business: the gaps of age homestay operators on their communication style, the knowledge and experience of homestay operators, e-business awareness among homestay operators, and business location in term of their internet accessibility.

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1. Introduction

In this century, many entrepreneurs adopted e-business in their business management. E-business practices gives a huge contribution in business world as it is one of the way to improve existing business practices. Lee and Kalakota, (2001) mentioned that e-business is a 'disruptive' innovation that is radically changing the traditional way of doing business. It enables entrepreneurs to perform any electronics transactions along with value chain activities (Straub and Watson, 2001).

A study done by Oliver and Weber (1982), in the early 1980s have discussed the potential of e-business adoption that give many benefits in internal business functions of purchasing, manufacturing, sales and distributions. Tourism is one of the main economic sources of Malaysia where according to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (2014), tourism has been the second largest industry in Malaysia with a contribution of more than RM120 billion in 2013 alone. Many entrepreneurs nowadays are involved in tourism. Tourism industry gives high return to entrepreneurs and they can help to promote Malaysia to other country at the same time (*Kalsom, 2007;2009*). Homestay also has been identified as an industry that has a unique Malaysian appeal and packaged with tradition and cultural elements as well as natural heritage (*Intan et.al, 2011; Ibrahim & Rasid, 2009*) that can attract foreign and local tourist to choose homestay as their accommodation for their trip (*Chan et.al, 2004*). Nowadays, e-business can be used as a new platform to market new businesses compared to the traditional business way where e-business can make entrepreneurs management become more efficient as it contributes to the cost reduction, improved exchanges of information and data, facilitated business processes and consequently and improved coordination (*DeBoer et al.,2002; Croom,2005*).

E-business can be described as the use of information and communication in technologies in all the business process of a firm both internally and in relation to its outside partners, or in other words, externally. Hinson and Sorenso (2006) defined e-business as an application of information and communication technologies to facilitate the execution of organizational function. The huge impact of awareness and education to entrepreneurs would contribute to their revenue as most entrepreneurs could earn high income if they utilized all the knowledge they have (Lin, 2012). There are many research studies made on the adoption of e-business by large companies, but fewer studies have been undertaken on the adoption of e-business for small business by entrepreneurs (Allisson, 2014). However, e-business are not fully utilized and adopted by entrepreneurs as they failed to embrace the full capabilities of ICT and the internet. Alam and Ahsan (2007) claimed that although adopting the e-business give many benefits especially in terms of supply chain management, many SMEs in Malaysia still does not practice or make full use of e-business. Mostly, SMEs in Malaysia are in lack of knowledge, skills, and the right strategies to adopt e-business.

Adoption e-business among entrepreneurs gives more advantages for them to manage and expand their business. However, disadvantages will arise if entrepreneur does not practice e-business in this era of internet of things. One such disadvantage is the entrepreneur will face a large cost to advertise their product. E-business gives the entrepreneurs the advantage of ease of product advertising as they can use socialmedia as a medium of marketing communication which will, in turn reduce their advertising costs as this mediums requires only a little cost or none at all. The examples of aforementioned social media that are usually used or utilized in e-business are Facebook, twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. Another problem or disadvatage that has always been the main concern of both entrepreneur and the customers is the money transactions. There is a spossibility that customers might bear the risk of losing their money when they cancel their order in the last minute as the business might take it as a compensation for the loss that they had incur on their behalf. Most of these entrepreneurs does not have the luxury of time as they might have other jobs or commitment. But, by adopting e-business will make all of this easier for entrepreneur as everything is managed through the internet which would largely saves time in operating the business. It is very crucial to determine that the factors that influence e-business adoptions among homestay operators in Kuching. The research problems could be addressed through the following research questions: What is the factor that could lead homestay operator to adopt e-business for their business activities?

2. Literature Review

Adoption of e-Business in SMEs

Moodley (2003), define e-business as any form of commercial or administrative transaction or information exchange made by organizations which are available over the internet. This means everything involved in any transaction and management over the internet comes from e-business systems. Zhu, Xu and Derrick (2003) in their study of drivers of e-business concluded that the pressure by competitive motivate entrepreneurs to adopt e-business. In addition, competitive pressure is important to force entrepreneurs adopt new technologies in their business management, (Iocovou et al.,1995). Modern firms nowadays face increasingly complex and competitive environment. Within this context, organizational capabilities and technological innovation are major challenges and crucial to firm's success (Tornatzky and Fleischer, 1990; Veliyath and Fritzgerald, 2000). A successful e-business systems adoption is recognized as a key concept of technological innovation and investment (Damaskopoulos and Evgeniou, 2003; Jackson and Harris, 2003). Watson, Berthon, Pitt and Zikhan (2000) and Reedy, Schullo & Zimmer (2000) state that e-business as any business carried out over an electronic network.

Lin (2008) state that e-business technologies are different from adoption of traditional business systems as e-business are more complex, emerging technologies that can provide a wide range of functionality ranging from developing online business processes to facilitating cooperation with both customers and business partners (Lin, 2008, p.62). Croom (2005) gave the opinion that e-business as the use of system and open communication channel for the whole business transaction such as information exchange, commercial transaction and knowledge sharing between organizations. It is not only about the communication between entrepreneur with customers but it involves all channel in business. Social media offers a unique marketing method (Eagleman, 2003).

Li (2007) suggested e-business is about the use of information and communication technologies to enable organization in private and public sector to do things in different ways. Porter (2001) suggested that internet can improve organization's value chain to become more efficient. The advancement of technology give benefits to both side of operators of management and customers and also suppliers. E-business are worth to be adopted because it enables the firm to perform electronic transaction along value chain activities (Straub & Watson, 2001; Zhu and Kraemer, 2002).

Factors Of E-Business Adoption Among Entrepreneurs

Technological Factors

Technologies are all different. The kind of technology features must be matched and suitable for different applications. All the nature, purpose, scope, and benefits of each technology can make it suitable for different application (Markus and Keil, 1994; Kaplan and Sahwney, 2000; Swanson, 1994). In all the noted theories, characteristics of technology are highlighted as important determinants of its adoption. A study by O'Keelfe et al. (1998) is to investigate the strength and weaknesses of being an early adopter of the web from small firm context and they believe that aggressive first users of information technology can gain business advantage in the same as early market entrants. ICT has also advanced, enabling systems to be linked

together within and across organizations and national boundaries (*Menzies, 1993*). However, changes in technology with their impact on the numbers and skills of the workforce, pose a major challenge, for most organizations and those responsible for the human resources of their organization (*Bee and Bee, 1994*). E-business is technology that can help entrepreneurs in their internal business function in their business management such as money transaction, contacted with supplier and purchasing, and market the product.

Perceived Relative Advantages

Rogers (1995) state that the more beneficial a technology is perceived, the more suited for adoption it becomes. He emphasizes that relative advantage, compatibility and simplicity in an innovation provide positive standing towards its adoption. MOA (Motivational, Opportunity and Ability) model suggest that the features of technology help motivate the adopter by offering certain perceived benefits to the adopter. TOE (technology, organizational and ability) model suggest that technology with characteristics superior to other alternatives are more worth to adoption. The findings of Drew (2003) suggest that SMEs are placing e-business at the centre of their technology strategy. Most of the sample firms reported that the driving forces behind the adoption of e-business are the opportunities for growth and need to keep up with competition. By adopting e-business in SMEs, the entrepreneurs will get extra strength as e-business give more advantages for entrepreneurs who applied it on their business management. E-business can help in an internal factor of applying e-business. Entrepreneurs which fully adopt e-business in their business management have more opportunity to build share in market.

Perceived Compatibility

Every organization can have different perspective on how useful a technology may be. However, for some organization, adopting EPT (*Effectiveness of E-Procurement Technology*) may have high risky ventures because of their lack of compatibility with their existing technology. Such perceptions are influenced by the adopting organization's level of understanding of technology. For example, a centrally controlled firm may have better or worse awareness of the EPT adoption effects on its performance. Same goes to the authoritative for decision-making style may be biased towards certain innovations, thereby eliminating the ability of the firm to accept them, (*Arash, 2010*). Entrepreneurs need to be careful when using e-business. Not all types of businesses are suitable for E-business. Perceive compatibility means that e-business need to suit for the firm. E-business adopted for a firm should compact with what firm have so that they can fully utilized e-business. Firm should have ability to use e-business. E-business should have a match firm for example match with their cost, the knowledge that firm possess. E-business gives great advantages for those firms that knows how to take advantage from e-business technology. Some of firm failed to apply innovation theory because they are unable to match with the firm requirements which means that they are not compatible with the firms organizational objectives.

Perceived Complexity

Rogers' (2003, p.257) defines complexity as "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use." According to him, the complexity of an innovation, as perceived by members in a social system, negatively affect its rate of adoption. Previous research done by Thong (1999), Frambach (et al., 1998), and Houghton and Winklhofer (2002) on

the effect of complexity on innovation adoption generally found a negative relationship exist with only a few of those showing a non-significant relationship (Premkumar and Roberts, 1999; Sultan and Chan, 2000). It is expected that the more difficult the innovation is perceived to be, the less likely are respondents to adopt it. Perceived complexity give a challenge for a firm to adopt new innovation that is always changing by the time. Each firm has their own degree of innovation. This firm innovation follows the degree that fixed by each firm. Innovation in technology has a concern on technology compatibility with other business related environment within organization (Al-Qirim, 2007).

Growth of the Internet.

One of the basis factors affecting the potential for e-business or internet adoption by SMEs is the number of people connected to the internet. Both internet and information on the web increased rapidly. Since the launch of the internet service in 1994, the internet plays an important role in the massive information market in many countries (Srikantaniah and Dong, 1997). The advantages from internet adoption and open standards of internet are the main factors that affect the growth of the web. The growth of IT knowledge will become challenges to entrepreneurs to follow the new technologies. Firms that have a business IT specialist are more likely to adopt IT innovations because they could develop their own website or use specific technologies for a better management of the value chain (Lin and Lee, 2005). IT knowledge is an important factor in the adoption of new technologies and increases the levels of a firm's technology adoption (McGowan and Madey, 1998). In his study, Tiessen et al. (2001) found that technical capability facilitated firm's e-business adoption.

Organizational Factors

Size of Firm: The importance of firm size is relative to the technology use by the firm because of its role as the source of firms, as well as since firm's resources includes financial, and human capital might approximate firm size (Mole et al., 2004). A study investigated by Premkumar and Roberts (1999) and Premkumar (2003) found that larger firms in the small business group have a higher tendency to adopt communication technologies than smaller ones. Similarly, Thong (1999) state that larger businesses in SME business groups tend to adopt more advances IS as they have more resources available.

Organizational Readiness: Readiness is in substance an organization's internal capability in accepting a new technology (Iacovou et al., 1995; Mehrtens et al., 2001). Availability of resources includes the accessible finances or personnel (Chwelos et al., 2001) can also impact organizational readiness. Capital funding for new equipment purchases, budgetary line items for training, and operational funding for added human resources needs may be all considerations for the adoption of new technologies. In addition, readiness includes the effects of three key determinants such as (a) Appropriate structure and culture which permit the introduction of innovations are more ready, (b) Furthermore, those organizations whose have the technological capabilities, know-how and personnel skills to implement and use the innovation are more ready to apply and (c) Organizations that have the financial means to purchase and to allocate adequate resources toward its implementation show more readiness.

Top management: Support from top management has found strong experiential support as a factor affecting the adoption of innovation. Bruque and Mayano (2007) in their study found that top

management plays an important role and become one of the important factors that affect the speed of adoption of information technology in SMEs. The same results were found in many other experiential innovation adoption studies (Bharati and Chaudhury, 2006; Beatty et al., 2001; Premkumar and Roberts, 1999). However, Toe and Pian (2003) found that on the factors affecting firm's level of adoption of the web represented in five levels differ from simple e-mail adoption to using the web to transform business operations, found that top management support does not affect the level of adoption of the web. Both explain that there is a little difference in top management support among different levels of adoption.

3. Estimation Method

The population of the study consisted of ten registered homestay operators in Kuching city. This population are selected because Kuching has a high number for business homestay in Sarawak as recorded in Sarawak Tourism Board. A purposive sampling method was selected because of the knowledge of the respondents making them suitable for the study (Sarantakos, 2005). Semi-structured interview is used to collect the data. This method is selected because this research is about the study of the participant's experiences. It comes with open-ended question. In data analysis, discussion method is used by researcher to analyse recorded interview. All interviews made are audio recorded and transcribe verbatim.

4. Results and Discussion

Demographic information on 10 informants among registered of homestay operator are as follows:

Name	Age	Education Level	Years in Business	Homestay Location
Ms. V	27	Diploma	3	Padawan
Mr. J	45	SPM	6	Padawan
Mr. J	41	SPM	8	Padawan
Mr. E	44	SPM	12	Padawan
Mdm. J	48	SPM	10	Padawan
Mdm. M	54	SPM	10	Matang
Mdm. S	58	SPM	8	Matang
Mr. M	57	SPM	18	Sematan
Mr. HjS	52	SPM	11	Matang
Mr. HjM	52	SPM	11	Matang

Age differences does influence selection of e-business

Age is not a barrier for a person who wants to run any business. Every entrepreneur has their own way on how to run their business no matter how old they are. It depends on how they take the opportunity to use any facilities or any resources. Age are classified in terms of Gen Y (18-29 years), Gen X (30-47 years), Baby boomers (48-65 years). The way each age group communicates is very different between them. For Gen Y, they are more inclined to use social media, Gen X also uses social media but they would prefer the use of SMS or phone calls better and for Baby boomers they would like to deal face to face. Same cases on how homestay operators are take advantages from e-business technology. My respondents are from different group ages. One of them from Gen Y, three of them from Gen X, and six of them from Baby boomers.

"..I prefer to use Facebook and blog to receive any booking from tourist. They also can contact me through WhatsApp.."

MS.V, 27 years.

The other three respondents also provide the same opinion that they prefer to use website, agent traveller, phone calls, e-mail, Facebook and blog.

"..I choose to deal with travel agencies because it can ease my work to deal with customers especially for money transactions.."

MR,J 45 years.

The way Baby boomers communicate with customers are they are more likely to contact directly with tourist through phones calls or to deal face to face with tourist. The reasons behind this are because they are not familiar with social media.

"..I don't have any social media. So, I just receive bookings through phone calls or the tourist just comes to my home-stay."

MDM.S, 58years

"..I received all bookings from tourist through phone calls. Some of them will come by themselves as my homestay is well-known among tourist. Especially for local tourist."

MR.M, 57 years.

"..For me, phone calls are much better to use. Faster and easy to deal with tourist. You can reach a deal on instant time."

MR.HjS, 52 years

From this finding, it clearly show that the gaps of age have different communication style among every groups of age. Communication style of homestay operators influence the way they deal with customers as Gen X and Gen Y more prefer to apply E-business and Baby boomers prefer traditional ways of doing business.

Knowledge and Experience provide homestay operator an idea to use e-business

Managing a business is not easy for entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs should have the knowledge about the things that they are going to manage and the things that they need to practice on their business. Nowadays, e-business is practiced among entrepreneurs especially for SMEs. However, not all homestay operators use it in their business. From the findings obtained, it is found that only some home stay operators fully utilizes e-business because as most of them lack the knowledge about technology especially about social media as a tool of e-business.

"..When I attend seminar with other homestay operators, most of them already aged. They much like to use phone call to receive customers request or customers just come to them"

rather than use other social media such as Facebook, website, twitter, Instagram, blog because they have lack of knowledge on how social media works for their business. They also don't like to explore what technology can offer them"

MR.J, 41years.

"..I don't have any knowledge about social media. How to use it as tools to promote my homestay. I just receive phone call if customer want to stay at my home-stay .."

MDM.S, 58years.

"...I have blog and Facebook. But it's not me myself who create that. My niece helps to create it for my homestay. I don't have any idea about social media. Any transaction or updating contains of blog and Facebook are handled by her. But she only helps me on her free time because she just helps and not works with me. So, any online transaction I just leave to her. I don't know how to handle it when it comes to e-business.."

MDM.J, 48years.

Some of them also lack experience to run homestay even though they have knowledge about social media. One of my respondents who take over her late father's business homestay said that she need to learn more as she is new to this business.

"..I just take over this business about three years ago. I'm still new in homestay business. I know some basic knowledge on how to use e-business in our business. However, experience is important to handle some business. For me, it's very hard because I start with zero knowledge. But, I'm glad that e-business can help because I'm not a full time homestay operators as I'm working too."

MS.V, 27years.

One of the respondents has run home-stay business from 1997 until now. He doesn't use e-business on his homestay management. He is very confident with his homestay business because he has many experiences on managing his business.

"..I am the first entrepreneurs for homestay business on Sarawak join homestay programme conducted by government. I have many experiences in the past 18 years ago, till now I handle this business alone. My homestay is very famous among local tourist. So, I don't need e-business to operate my homestay. I prefer to use phone call with my customers."

MR.M, 57years

Knowledge and experience by managing homestay are both important to homestay operator. By using knowledge about E-business it will help homestay operators to become more efficient at the same time they also can gain experience to improve their homestay management on controlling the bookings from tourist.

Awareness of E-Business

E-business is a good technology to apply on business. It has many advantages for any entrepreneurs to adopt on their business management. SMEs nowadays are applying e-business on their management. Some homestay operators also take advantages from e-business as it can help them so much on any transactions. Home-stay operators who are aware of e-business will fully utilize e-business on their home-stay business.

“..E-business is good for my business. Those who do not have an awareness of the goodness of e-business are would be left behind because they are losing opportunities to take advantages from e-business. E-business can help in reducing costs such as promoting cost. Now, I have less paper works, so I use my social media to promote or to introduce my home-stay to tourist. Plus, I can promote my home-stay to foreign tourist as e-business don't have any limitation to local tourist only...”

MR.J, 41 years.

However, e-business is still not familiar among home-stay operators. There many homestay operators are still not aware about e-business and how social media as e-business tools to helps in their business management. For my findings, six from ten of my respondent is not aware of e-business.

“..I'm not familiar with e-business and not aware of it. I did not use e-business..”

MDM.S, 58 years.

“.. I'm not sure what e-business is and how it can work for my home-stay. I'm not aware of e-business..”

MR.HjS 52 years.

“..I'm not aware about e-business. I don't care about e-business. I just think I am too old to explore more about technology, about social media, about e-business. What are government provided for me is already good enough...”

MDM.HjhM, 54 years.

The awareness about e-business can give a great opportunity to them is very low. High awareness of e-business can make a business become more efficient.

Business Location and Internet Accessibility does play roles.

Business location can influence the uses of e-business on business management. Business location that has high accessibility of internet can adopt e-business very well and this will give advantages for entrepreneurs. Homestay locations are usually at village which means the accessibility of internet is very limited. For my findings, it is found that some homestay has very limited accessibility of internet and they would have to use phone calls to deal with tourist.

"..Internet accessibility in this village is very limited. That's one of the reasons for me not to use e-business. By using phones call is much faster to deal with customers..."

MR.M 57years.

However, business location that has low internet access is not a barrier for some of homestay operators to adopt e-business. One of my respondents is a full-time home-stay operator who is adopting e-business to run his home-stay business.

"...even our location has limited accessibility of internet, but it is not a reason for us not to adopting e-business. You can go to café cyber or any place to online. To check your blog, Facebook, website. For me it is not a big issue to get some advantages for e-business.."

MR.J 41years

"...even our location has limited accessibility of internet, but it is not a reason for us not to adopting e-business. You can go to café cyber or any place to online. To check your blog, Facebook, website. For me it is not a big issue to get some advantages for e-business.."

MR.J 41years

"..I'm working at town. So, I can check any e-mail, or Facebook bookings when I'm working..."

MS.V, 27years.

5. Conclusion

Homestay operators in Kuching, Sarawak mostly consist of retirees. Home-stay business is a businesses that contributes to Sarawak economy. Homestay business need to be managed well and e-business would be able to help homestay operators to manage their business. For home-stay operators who lack the knowledge about e-business should learn to explore how to adopt e-business so they can get advantages from it. Homestay operators can save their costs when they can apply e-business on their homestay management. Most of homestay in Sarawak is under government programme. Government should take some actions to make homestay operators aware to the advantages of using e-business. Government could conduct some seminar or assign people to educate homestay operators about e-business. There are many alternatives that government can do to increase the engagement among retirees or others to run homestay business. Homestay operators themself should have the desire to learn something new for them to make all easy. Even though e-business gives more advantages for home-stay operators but there are still homestay operators didn't apply e-business to manage their homestay. Most of homestay operators lack knowledge of e-business. Homestay operators should grab opportunities to use what technology offers to them. Social media is the basic e-business tools and free for homestay operators to use it in their management as it can reduce much costs for their business.

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