VISUALIZATION OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING ADOPTION OF ICT PLATFORMS AMONG MALAYSIAN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship in Malaysia is a growing sector that contributed economically to the nation while addressing social issues in the community. So far, many social enterprises in Malaysia are still funded through charities, foundation works and corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. However, dependency on these funding channels limits their growth and sustainability. To shift towards a more sustainable business ecosystem, the application of sophisticated technology becomes necessary. Among them is the adoption of ICT platforms to drive the operations and management of social enterprises. Hence, this study aimed to determine whether the social entrepreneurs (SE) in Malaysia are willing or ready to adopt the ICT platform and visualize the influencing factors. If they are not motivated to adopt the ICT platform in this digital era, it is crucial to understand the challenges faced in adopting the ICT platforms. The study is performed through interviews with selected social entrepreneurs in Malaysia. The findings revealed that some of the influencing factors are the availability of the ICT platforms, the ease to integrate these platforms into their business operations and the level of technical support that they have within the organizations.

Keywords: Community, digital literacy, digital platform, social entrepreneurship, sustainability.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In today's global competition, business enterprises need to establish a strong strategy and be supported by a good ecosystem to continue surviving. This includes social entrepreneurs (SE) that are profit-based organizations that serve to address a particular social cause. SE often begins with the financial support obtained from charities, grants, foundations, corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, angel investors and many more. Yet, without a proper strategy to sustain, it will be difficult for SE to continue their business operations and serve their beneficiaries at the same time.

Hence, with the advances in technologies and ICT approaches, adopting ICT platforms into their business nature is essential. This is of importance to SE, especially to manage their business operations which include diversifying their revenue streams, reaching out to potential customers and introducing new products. The objective of this study is to visualize the factors influencing the adoption of ICT platforms among these SE. Through the visualization, a strategy to encourage the adoption of the ICT platforms among Malaysian social entrepreneurs can be established.

2.0 SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN MALAYSIA

Social enterprises are the key actors that are driven by their social focus while contributing to the socio-economy of the nation, making them ideal business entities that benefit the community (Abd Muin, Abdullah and Bahari, 2014). While they have been delivering significant impact to the community and the environment, there are still many challenges to overcome for them to sustain.

According to Council (2019), most social enterprises in Malaysia are based in the Klang Valley area, which is Malaysia's central economic region. Social entrepreneurship can be considered relatively young in Malaysia with many operating for less than five years and many of the activities are still at ground level (Adnan, Yusoff and Ghazali, 2018). The main focuses for existing SE in Malaysia are towards education, environment, poverty and art. Among the biggest challenges for the SE in Malaysia include lack of access to funding, quality human capital, lack of support to grow and become sustainable

(Blueprint, 2015).

Although profits are not the main reason for starting a social entrepreneurship business, being profitable helps with self-sustainability and provides a mechanism for self-monitoring (Adnan, Yusoff and Ghazali, 2018). Yet, many social enterprises are over-relying on financial support from charity, foundations, corporate social programs and grants. There were also concerns that some of the social enterprises lack a unique selling point for their goods and services. As there is a promising trend of social enterprises implementing changes towards achieving sustainability (Frączkiewicz-Wronka and Wronka-Pośpiech, 2014), directing social enterprises towards adopting ICT platforms could be one of the strategies, relevant to this digital era.

3.0 ROLE OF ICT PLATFORMS IN PROVIDING SUSTAINABILITY FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Provide Various Channels to Resources
Like other for-profit businesses, social enterprises are highly likely to benefit from the application and use of ICT platforms. The adoption of ICT platforms can open many channels to resources, markets and beneficiaries. Among the many resources needed by a social entrepreneur is economic funds and volunteers. SE can use ICT to obtain these resources more rapidly when compared to the traditional approaches (Frączkiewicz-Wronka and Wronka-Pośpiech, 2014).

Diversify Revenue
Through the ICT platform, obtaining funds through crowdfunding and microfinance is made possible. Crowdfunding allows social entrepreneurs to pitch their business idea by connecting directly to regular Internet users (Short *et al.*, 2017). The business idea is then realized through a voluntary collection of funds from the public. Microfinance, on the other hand, lets social entrepreneurs make small amount loans with no collateral and often interest-free loans.

Access to Human Capital
Social entrepreneurs often faced a limitation to getting human capital. Hence, the ICT platform aids in providing online "volunteers" to get certain work done by experts, without having to fully commit them to the business environment (Peña-López, 2007).

Enable Creation of Relevant App
ICT platform also enables the creation and deployment of relevant apps that will enhance the operation of social enterprises (Ahmad, Naveed and Hoda, 2018). The app can be designed to connect SE with their beneficiaries and partners at much ease, hence allowing for efficiency in delivering tasks and obtaining feedback that guides for quick decision-making.

Measure Impact
A survey by Council (2019) also revealed that social entrepreneurs are interested to measure their impact or performance, especially regarding social impact. However, there is a lack of a relevant, flexible and real-time tool that concentrates on measuring the social impact. With this limitation, SE faced difficulties to deduce how their SE has contributed towards addressing their social cause. Hence, there is a need for a better and easier way to use impact assessment tools (Rawhouser, Cummings and Newbert, 2019) and this can be made possible through the adoption of the ICT platform.

Networking with Stakeholders
In addition, ICT platforms can provide a way to create networking with various stakeholders such as beneficiaries, clients, suppliers, employees, donors and society. These stakeholders have diverse needs and importance to the SE and all these needs must be catered to. With ICT platforms that can provide the medium in which all these needs can be fulfilled within a platform, SE can sustain itself regardless of the nature of the business organization. For example, among the popular ways for networking in the current situation is through social media (Shafigullina and Palyakin, 2016), a type of ICT platform.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The study is performed using a qualitative approach, focusing on in-depth interviews with selected social entrepreneurs in Malaysia. This method allows the participants to communicate their perspectives, experiences and expectations on this issue.

Sampling Frame
The sampling frame for this study includes the social entrepreneurs around the Klang Valley and Penang. The selected social entrepreneurs for the in-depth interviews will be based on these criteria:

- Manage social enterprises operating 5 years and below
- Manage social enterprises that advocate for education
- Social enterprise is active

Data Collection
Data collection involves interviewing selected SE to gain insight into what motivates them to adopt the ICT platform. The general questions backbone includes:
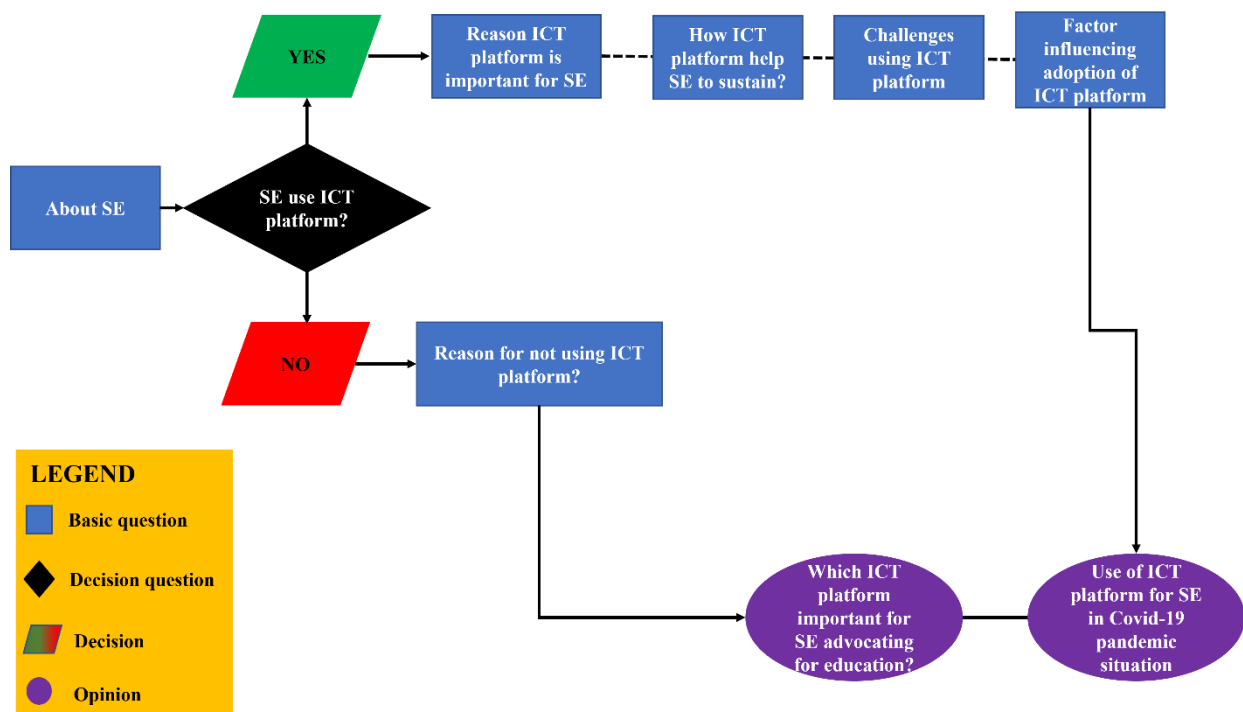

Figure 1. General questions backbone

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis
According to Vasileiou *et al.* (2018), qualitative data collection often involves a smaller sample size. The reason behind this is it is easier to focus on the behavior, action and obtain feedback from the sample. To add, qualitative data analysis differs from quantitative analysis by deducing why specific problems happen instead of providing the magnitude of certain attributes. Qualitative data analysis aims to reveal insight into the problems faced and experienced.

5.0 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Sample Demography

Around twenty social entrepreneurs are selected for the initial round of interviews based on the criteria listed. However, some social entrepreneurs did not respond or are no longer active to be included in the study. Therefore, the final list identified six social entrepreneurs that agreed to provide some insights and convey their experience through online interview sessions as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample demography (N=6)

SE	Area	Start Of Business	Social Cause
A	Selangor	2019	Work on education programs on endangered wildlife and habitat
B	Kuala Lumpur/Penang	2016	Work on towards making learning relevant through multiple approaches including lifelong learning and continuous exploration
C	Kuala Lumpur	2016	Empowering bright and deserving students to attain quality higher education
D	Penang	2017	Empowering people through leadership development to make a difference to the education landscape in Malaysia
E	Kuala Lumpur	2018	Empowering students through financial aid in pursuing their tertiary education
F	Kuala Lumpur	2016	Empowering, educating and engaging Malaysian youth on youth-centric agenda and democratic reforms

Note: SE= social entrepreneurs

Qualitative Data Collection

Table 2 demonstrated the qualitative data collected from the interview. All six SE uses the ICT platform to manage their business operations. The ICT platforms are important for SE mostly to manage business operations and to connect with their stakeholders, which may range from beneficiaries to donors. In addition, ICT platforms help SE by marketing their existence to the online community, hence providing continuous revenue from donors, investors, crowdfunding and interested parties on their social cause. Moreover, the challenges faced by these SE concerning using ICT platforms include lack of technical support, difficulties to integrate ICT platforms to ease their business operations and the lack of relevant ICT platform to cater to specific needs of the SE.

Table 2. Qualitative data analysis according to interview questions backbone

SE	Use ICT Platform	ICT platform is important for SE because…	How ICT platform help SE sustain itself?	Challenges using ICT platform
A	Y	• Connect with stakeholders (client)	• Continuous revenue	• Lack of technical support
B	Y	• Online communication among workers • Connect with beneficiaries	• Obtain funding through donor	• Difficulties to integrate some ICT platforms into their business operations • Lack of technical support

C	Y	• Connect with beneficiaries • Ease the scale of work	• Financial support through crowdfunding and investors	• Lack of technical support • Technical aspect to run the ICT platform such as Internet
D	Y	• Networking through social media	• Financial support through corporate investors, funders • Marketing of events to reach stakeholders	• Lack of technical support • Insufficient ICT platform that eases the scale of work (e.g., to update, boost team productivity)
E	Y	• Provide multiple channels to resources • Connect to stakeholders	• Receive donations from partners and sponsors to provide scholarships	• Difficulties to integrate some ICT platforms into their business operations
F	Y	• Project management • Conduct activities for beneficiaries	• Financial support through grants	• Lack of relevant ICT platform to cater to specific needs

Note: SE= social entrepreneurs, Y= yes

Visualizing The Qualitative Data Analysis

Figure 2 visualized the factors influencing the adoption of ICT platforms among social entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Firstly, to motivate the adoption of ICT platforms, relevant ICT platforms must be available to cater to the specific needs of SE. Then, once these platforms are available, they must be supported by the technical capability of human capital, especially within the business organization. Having highly skilled human capital will lead towards an easy integration of all the required ICT platforms to manage the business operations. These three influencing factors are interconnected with each other, hence addressing these will highly motivate the social entrepreneurs to adopt ICT platforms.

As mentioned by SE (A) on ICT platforms, "*…have to use it, for us…to survive, to continue thriving in the business."* This highlights the need for an ICT platform for SE for them to be sustainable in this digital era. Meanwhile, SE (B) mentioned that if one failed to adopt an ICT platform, "*you suffer the reduction in productivity."* This is because ICT platforms minimize the workload by providing more efficient tools to both obtain and convey information.

SE (C) also believed that "*as more and more people in the ecosystem adopt it(ICT platform), all organizations need to do it or if not, you will be left out.*" She also mentioned that with the pandemic Covid-19 situation, adoption of ICT platform is "*somehow forced to many businesses, including social enterprises, when everything shifted to online-based".*

In the interview with SE (D), he highlights on "*social enterprise is always limited by funds, our money, as we are not looking for profit. So pricing is definitely something that we always look at, whenever we want to purchase something. And having to think that social enterprises also work on limited resources, therefore, the features and functionality are important. If you have this one app that can do everything for social media, for example, from checking, planning, scheduling, to writing content, and at an affordable price, I think that will be very interesting."*

SE (E) focuses on the importance of easy integration of ICT platforms to manage SE operations ideally as "*right on this one single platform"* as sometimes having too many platforms for one purpose may cause detrimental consequences rather than easing the process. In agreement to SE(C), SE (F) agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic indirectly influences the adoption of the ICT platform through this statement "*I would say the pandemic also encouraged some of the people, our target market and advocates to use ICT platform…".*
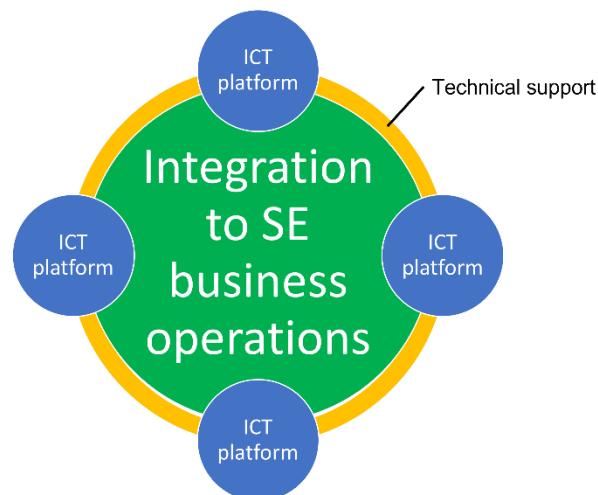
Figure 2. Factors Influencing Adoption of ICT Platforms

6.0 CONCLUSION

This paper contributes twofold. Firstly, the qualitative data analysis of the interviews conducted on selected social entrepreneurs revealed that the ICT platforms are most important for communication, they help SE to sustain by providing channels for revenue stream and the willingness to adopt ICT platforms are deterred by the lack of relevant ICT platforms, the difficulties to integrate the platform into the business operations and the lack of technical support. Secondly, an indirect contributing factor that influences the adoption of the ICT platform is the pandemic Covid-19 outbreak. During this situation, people are forced to adopt the ICT platform to survive. This also affects SEs in which they need to quickly adopt ICT platforms to conduct an online meeting, reach their stakeholders and expand their network coverage. Failure to adopt the ICT platforms quickly during the pandemic has resulted to a business halt and caused many SEs to be non-active. Hitherto, in conclusion, the ICT platform is a crucial tool for many SEs for them to sustain in the future.

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