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Information Communication Technology, Identity, and Brunei Society: A Critical Literature Review

ABSTRACT: *Modernity reduces the overall riskiness of certain areas and modes of life, yet at the same time introduces new risk parameters largely or completely unknown to previous eras. Spread of new communication technologies, and above all the internet as well as communication networks, has dramatically influenced identities of individuals and their cultures. A study of new ICT (Information and Communication Technology), particularly as the internet, is changing the way the world works and will continue to do so into the future. By its unprecedented power to move and process information, it is impacting on global living patterns, culture, and governance; in fact, the internet impacts on every aspect of our society today. The question is whether a country like Brunei Darussalam can endure preserving its values, while the internet keeps exerting a damaging influence that can threaten its identity? Thus, this critical review will focus on the internet as a new form of ICT and look at the social impact of its potential threat to the identity of Brunei Darussalam society.*

KEY WORD: *Information and Communication Technology; Identity and Culture; Brunei Society; Internet; Social Impacts.*

IKHTISAR: *“Teknologi Komunikasi Maklumat, Identiti, dan Masyarakat Brunei: Satu Kajian Literatur Kritikal”. Kemodenan mengurangkan sifat berbahaya keseluruhan kawasan-kawasan tertentu dan mod kehidupan, namun pada masa yang sama memperkenalkan parameter risiko baru sebahagian besarnya atau benar-benar tidak diketahui pada era sebelumnya. Penyebaran teknologi-teknologi komunikasi baru, dan di atas semua itu internet serta rangkaian komunikasinya, telah mempengaruhi secara mendadak identiti individu dan budaya mereka. Kajian teknologi maklumat dan komunikasi baru, terutamanya internet, telah mengubah cara bekerja dan akan terus membuat pelbagai perubahan di masa hadapan. Kuasa yang ada pada internet dalam menghantar dan memproses maklumat, memberi kesan kepada corak hidup global, budaya, dan pentadbiran; bahkan pada setiap aspek kehidupan masyarakat pada hari ini. Persoalannya ialah adakah sesebuah negara seperti Brunei Darussalam boleh bertahan dalam memelihara nilai-nilai murni, sedangkan internet mempunyai pengaruh yang merosakkan dan boleh mengancam identiti sebuah negara? Oleh itu, kajian ini penting dengan memberi fokus kepada internet sebagai salah satu bentuk teknologi maklumat dan komunikasi yang baru, dan juga melihat ancumannya yang berpotensi untuk memberi kesan kepada masalah sosial dan identiti masyarakat Brunei Darussalam.*

KATA KUNCI: *Teknologi Maklumat dan Komunikasi; Identiti dan Budaya; Masyarakat Brunei; Internet; Kesan Sosial.*

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INTRODUCTION

The new wave of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) is transforming our world today. A wealth of publications has emerged in an effort to comprehend the various impacts of ICT on society and in particular that of the internet. As has been indicated by A. Seyal & M. Rahman (2007) that an internet is a favourite research tool among researchers in the world today (Seyal & Rahman, 2007:91).

Still, in Brunei, the equivalent literature remains scant. While much has been written about the government's role in providing internet connection, funding millions to institutions, as well as the impact on teaching and learning, but not much of it has been written with regard to the internet revolution that may impact on Bruneian society and identity. In defining "society and identity in Brunei", I specify a blend of Malay language, culture and customs, the teaching of Islamic laws and values as well as an acknowledgement of the institution of the monarchy as the ruling system. In Brunei, these norms and values outline the identity of Brunei society.

Hence, the purpose of this critical review is to synthesize the literature on the impact of the new ICTs – the sub media of the internet in particular – on Brunei society, but with particular reference to its possible effect on identity. In so doing, I hope to provide a coherent and organized view of the published material that will outline a future research agenda addressing the gaps in that scholarship.

The focus throughout is on reviews which are gathered from international studies and which illustrate the impact of new ICTs on society and their effect on identity. Those fields then serve to structure the review of existing published studies and records related to Brunei. After pursuing this identified relationship concerning identity, society, and the internet, a future research

agenda is constructed around issues and areas that remain substantially unexplored. I hope this critical study can be used as a foundation to build a stronger base on which to develop further questions and empirical investigations.

In order to establish the list of publications to be reviewed, I used the following keywords to search the literature: Impact of Internet, Internet Society, Internet and Policy, Safety in Cyberspace and Internet Culture, Identity, Internet and National Identity, and Community and Technology. To include the disciplines of social studies, education and anthropology, I used the following databases: SAGE, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. I limited my findings to articles, books, book chapters, and websites that provided information about one or more of the following: (1) the Definition of New ICT; (2) the Definition of Identity; (3) Information about Brunei Society and the Internet; and (4) Impact of the Internet on Society.

To understand more about this topic, the literature review explores the published literature in relation to two main questions as the heart of the review: "Can Brunei Darussalam uphold its identity in the new era of technology?"; and "What are the potential unintended consequences to the individual and to Brunei society?"

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Definition and Historical Development. Various terms are used to describe the definition of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). It includes, for example, the use of broadcast material or CD-ROM (Compact Disc – Read Only Memory), micro-computers with appropriate keyboards and other devices keyboards, electronic toys, e-mails, video-conferencing, internet-based research, ILS (Integrated

Learning Systems), and communications technology to exchange administrative and assessment data.

At the same time, J. Kenny (1998) included the following list of items as components of ICT: Audio Recorders, Still Video Cameras, Scanners, Video Recorders, Still Cameras, Optical Readers, Overhead Projectors, CD-ROM Players, Radios, Television, Tape Players Music Keyboards, Tele text, Modems, Satellite Access, Film Projector, Fax Machines, ILS, Slide Projectors, Telephones, Photocopiers, Multimedia Computers, and Printers (Kenny, 1998).

As ICT covers a broad area, the main discussion here will be focussing on the internet. As stated by S. Xue (2004) that an internet is the core part of ICT (Xue, 2004:240). In technical terms, the internet is a short form of “internetwork”,¹ which is often referred to as the net. If we go back to the origins of the internet, it took a few years for the internet’s gestation period when the Pentagon sought to ensure nuclear attack survivability for its military communications network during the 1960s.

As claimed by S. Lehman-Wilzig & N. Cohen-Avigdor (2004,) this marked the birth of a new “medium” of technologies; however, once the academic community (as users) became involved, functions such as emails slowly developed in the early 1970s (Lehman-Wilzig & Cohen-

¹See “Internetwork” in *Oxford English Dictionary*. March 2009. Available online also at: <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00304286> [accessed in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam: 26th October 2014].

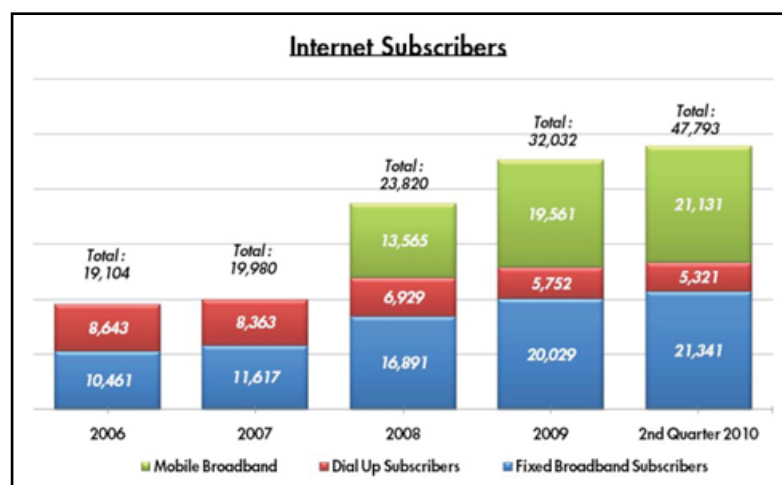
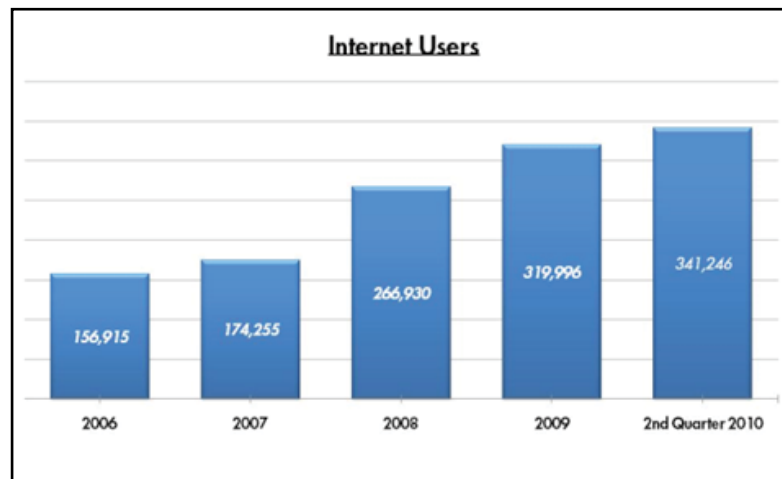


Figure 1:

Internet Users and Subscribers

(Source: <http://www.aiti.gov.bn/statistics.html>, 11/4/2015)

Avigdor, 2004:719). A. Whitworth (2009) also indicated that the evolution of the early internet particularly in USA (United States of America)’s universities was at first driven by intellectual curiosity in educational process and then later came the recognition that this could help with the communication of work (Whitworth, 2009:45).

However, today, as mentioned by A. Seyal & M. Rahman (2007) that the use of the internet in an educational setting is gaining threshold popularity with a large number of academics and students are getting the benefits of Internet technologies (Seyal & Rahman, 2007:91). Similarly in Brunei

Table 1:
Brunei Internet Usage and Population Statistics

Year	Users	Population	% Pen.	GDP p.c.*	Usage Source
2000	30,000	346,400	8.7 %	US\$ n/a	ITU
2007	165,600	403,500	41.0 %	US\$ 31,808	ITU
2009	217,000	388,190	55.9 %	US\$ 26,325	ITU
2010	318,900	395,027	80.7 %	US\$ 29,249	ITU

Source: ITU (2010).

Darussalam, the internet was slow to develop with only a relatively low rate of usage of only about 20% in 2002 (cited in ICU, 2002).

However, the climb in subscribers and users has dramatically increased through the years. The local report in figure 1 shows the country has achieved a great improvement in internet subscription as well as in the number of users as cited by AITI (Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry) of Brunei Darussalam in 2010. See figure 1.

Other international evidence by Internet World Statistics on Brunei reported that there were 318,900 internet users in June 2010, which account for a percentage of 80.7% of the Brunei population, as cited by ITU (International Telecommunication Union) in 2010. See table 1.

Even though both figures have reported dissimilar statistical data, but still both show the upsurge of internet use in Brunei Darussalam. It is expected that the growth will continue over the coming years and it is significant that the Brunei government continues to establish a regulatory framework to promote and facilitate the development of the internet; while at the same time, safeguarding social values and racial and religious harmony.

Power of the Internet. Undeniably, the internet has had a transformative influence on how information is accessed and shared around the world. From a tool to connect people to information, the internet has now

become a social networking vehicle that is changing the way people in all countries communicate with each other (Parent & Cruickshank, 2009:91) by means of E-mail, file transfer, online discussion forums as well as online publishing that allows users to send messages and files to one or many, with low cost, rapid delivery and convenience (Xue, 2004).

Again, S. Xue (2004) also claimed that the internet has greatly affected information access, education, and entertainment. It provides information resources for students, faculties, and other learner communities; enables researchers with similar interests around the world to communicate and share research ideas and progress; offers educators new technologies for teaching and training; and provides new opportunities for distance learning (Xue, 2004:239).

Evidence also suggests that the internet can enhance civic involvement and strengthen community ties. D. Shah *et al* (2000) and L.W. Jeffres (2007) found evidence that the internet may stimulate civic involvement in a secondary analysis of the 1999 based on DDB Needham Life Style Survey. They found also that time spent on the internet was a positive predictor of such civic participation as volunteering, attending club meetings, and working on community projects (Shah *et al.*, 2000; and Jeffres, 2007:132).

It is also correlated with informal socializing and taking advantage of community leisure opportunities. These

findings are consistent with those reported by C.A Lin & D.J. Atkin eds. (2007); and L.W. Jeffres (2007), which reveal that there is potential for both internet use and traditional media to strengthen community identity (Lin & Atkin eds., 2007; and Jeffres, 2007:132).

A. Malina & N.W. Jankowski (2002) and L.W. Jeffres (2007) also reported that a community-building effort in Scotland showed that hundreds of individuals, groups, and business were connected through a community system, with new relationships established, and discussion groups formed around topics such as employment, health, community initiatives, civic issues and legal problems (Malina & Jankowski, 2002; and Jeffres, 2007:132). Again, L.W. Jeffres was able to illustrate that almost 23% of residents in internet communities were involved in community sports leagues, compared with only 18% of those in non-Internet communities. He also illustrated that involvement in religious organizations was greater, 45.5% *versus* 41.9%, as was involvement in community charities, 31.6% *versus* 25.4% (Jeffres, 2007:132).

Although the differences are not startling, they are statistically significant as this show indirect evidence that merely living in a community with internet access enhances the chances that one will get more involved in civic activities. In addition, local residents are also using the web to generate income. J. Krim (2004) and L.W. Jeffres (2007)'s study on one woman in a poor Philadelphia neighbourhood USA (United States of America), who now uses the internet to help sell a line of candles to other people in the neighbourhood (Krim, 2004; and Jeffres, 2007:31).

It is also interesting to note that S. Lehman-Wilzig & N. Cohen-Avigdor (2004)'s interpretation of the explanations for the fast growth of new media in culture nowadays: that is the

openness to innovation, cost-benefit utility, user-friendliness, and a nation's technological infrastructure especially as the most important factor is social need and readiness. They stated that without the proper communications and social conditions, new media can wait for decades to realise their potential. They illustrated that in the 1950s, no one conceived of CATV (Cable Television) as a medium for original programming as the three networks and local stations fulfilled that function quite nicely (Lehman-Wilzig & Cohen-Avigdor, 2004:715). However, when the "melting pot" ethos disintegrated in the 1960s – feminism, Black Power, massive immigration, a return to ethnic roots – the need developed for discrete, audience-sector programming, and thereafter CATV skyrocketed in popularity.

However, the challenge is still visible and should not be ignored, as S. Xue (2004) claimed that the internet has a huge impact on social values and political ideology in developing and non-democratic countries (Xue, 2004:238). The impact may be beneficial as well as negative since the flow of information over the internet can undermine social values as well as religious harmony. Nevertheless, this claims needs exploring in order to justify its precision.

FOCUS ON BRUNEI UPHOLDING ITS IDENTITY IN THE FACE OF THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF THE INTERNET TO SOCIETY

Brunei Darussalam is endowed with its National Philosophy, *Melayu Islam Beraja* or Malay Islamic Monarchy, which is also known as MIB. It was officially proclaimed by His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah as Brunei National Philosophy on the first of January 1984 – the very moment Brunei Darussalam assumed its independent and sovereign status. It has become the nation's formal guiding light and is

a way of life for Brunei Darussalam's people that shape our identity where people of Brunei speak Malay language, practise Malay culture and customs, follow the teaching of Islamic laws and values as well as an acknowledging the institution of the monarchy as the ruling system (Melayong, 2014).

Being a small country with a total population of 0.3 million, we share a common core set of values; and without it, we would lose our personal identity and sense of worth. Over time, the values become the roots of traditions that we find important in our day-to-day lives.

However, big changes in our lives can sometimes shake our sense of identity. The growth of ICT (Information and Communication Technology), and particularly the internet, cause public upheaval with cultural, social, and political implications (Golmohammadi, 2007). However, not only Brunei faces this issue but similarly Kuwait, where they raise society issues as well in their parliamentary debates on the internet and the security of Islamic values in the new media age (Wheeler, 2001:189).

Evidence suggests that the changes in today's life have engendered ambiguity as to whether ICT, and particularly the internet, might make a positive contribution to uphold Bruneian identity and if so, to what extent, particularly since the acceptance of the internet in all aspects of social life means that users are attracted to "negative" applications, which in turn could lead to moral and social decadence. In this context, S.E. Caplan, E.M. Perse & J.E. Gennaria (2007) labelled internet use as a multidimensional syndrome consisting of cognitive and behavioural symptoms that result in negative social consequences (Caplan, Perse & Gennaria, 2007:49).

Noticeable evidence of this includes the adult or child pornographic images, online alcohol and cigarette sales, online hate sites, or other material deemed to be unfit for viewing by young people.

As mentioned by V. Lo & R. Wei (2002) and also cited in M. Flood (2007), the internet is an ideal environment for pornography as it is an excellent medium for the storage, display, and transfer of images and text. Users can gain easy and affordable access to pornographic materials across geographic boundaries and age groups, they can view pornographic materials in anonymity, they can select and customize the materials they wish to download, and they can store images discreetly and conceal them from others (Lo & Wei, 2002:30; and Flood, 2007:48).

Again, M. Flood (2007) also noted that use of the internet brings other dangers for children. In interacting online with others, young people may be subject to personal attacks, unwanted or inappropriate sexual advances, or recruitment into vulnerable sexual situations (Flood, 2007:50). The internet is a new medium for the enactment of old forms of child abuse, including child pornography, paedophile advocacy, the promotion of child sex tourism, and the commercial exploitation of children through online advertising.

I am able to discover several cases, for instance, in the USA (United States of America), *NBC (National Broadcasting Company) News* dated on 5 February 2008, under the heading "Parent: Inappropriate Images of Students Circulated by Students" reported that the incident in question stunned the parents as there had been reports that students were forwarding inappropriate photos of themselves and of others to the cell phones and computers of peers and possibly onto the broader Internet. This case was perhaps the most obvious in illustrating why there could be a definite danger for young people.²

To cite a local example in Brunei

²See, for example, news on "Parent: Inappropriate Images of Students Circulated by Students" in *NBC10.com*, on 5 February 2008. Available online also at: <http://www.nbc10.com/news/15226614/detail.html> [accessed in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam: July 2, 2015].

Darussalam: a recent case trial reported a 13 year old school girl raped by a 27 year old internet friend in her home after befriending her on MSN (Microsoft Sharing Networks) chats. The court imposed the penalty of 14 years in jail and gave 14 strokes of the cane by the Brunei High Court (cited in Stephen, 2010).

Not only young people are influenced by the internet; conversely, the adults equally share its impact. For example, the increasing number of local Bruneians who are lured into becoming drug mules through various forms of ICT as there are numbers of recent cases reported involving Bruneians who have been manipulated by criminals through the internet.³

Further, D.N. Greenfield (1999); A. Cooper, I.P. McLoughlin & K.M. Campbell (2000); and K.M. Hertlein & F.P. Piercy (2006) cite, and in their study on internet, infidelity that is now becoming more common where they reveal 42% of compulsive Internet users report they are engaged in an affair while online (Greenfield, 1999; Cooper, McLoughlin & Campbell, 2000; and Hertlein & Piercy, 2006).

The impact can also be perceived in language. As stated by S.V. Aghili & S.T. Esma'eili (2010) that overusing the internet can lead to a decrease in adhering to the mother tongue and eventually may result in a decline in linguistic identity as the internet uses English language more. They added that the necessity of being familiar with an international language in communication should not be confused with dependency on the Internet and enthusiasm for an alien language and culture (Aghili & Esma'eili, 2010:14).

S.V. Aghili & S.T. Esma'eili (2010) also cited P. Varjavand (1999), who

declared that the language of a nation is the rhetorical system of theirs; and is an important tool for formation, preserving, and conveying their culture (Varjavand, 1999:66; and Aghili & Esma'eili, 2010). Even more importantly the impact of the internet also becomes a major issue as far as the Islamic religion is concerned as it has a unique status in Brunei Darussalam. Therefore, internet content should not threaten morality, religious duties, benevolence, and genuine religious guidelines that are important values and a major factor in preserving the religious identity.

Research and findings from previous studies and disciplines suggest that using the internet does have an effect on the individual's social identity and thereby weakens it; it reflects a growing concern with problematic internet use and its potential ill effects.

CONCLUSION

Modernity reduces the overall riskiness of certain areas and modes of life, yet at the same time introduces new risk parameters largely or completely unknown to previous eras. Spread of new communication technologies, and above all the internet as well as communication networks, has dramatically influenced identities of individuals and their cultures.

From my critical review, I have come to the conclusion that the rapid and fundamental changes have caused an identity crisis in society. Therefore, recognizing and paying attention to the various impacts of the rapid spread of communication technologies in different areas of human social life requires further investigation. In considering issues raised, there is a call for research that could answer the question as to whether the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) – and the internet in particular – is capable of fostering Brunei identity. How can it be appropriately integrated?

A further compelling reason for

³News on "Cyber Predators Pose Grave Threat to Youths" in newspaper of *The Brunei Times*. Bandar Seri Begawan: 30 June 2009. Available online also at: <http://brudirect.com/index.php/200906301594/Local-News/cyber-predators-pose-grave-threat-to-youths.html> [accessed in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam: 15th January 2015].

additional research is the lack of empirical evidence supporting how the internet can help one country on one hand take advantage from it; and on the other, uphold its identity despite the challenges. Most published evidence concentrates on the internet's impact on society and some articles have given a solution on how to overcome the harm caused by the internet. Thus, it is logical to ask to what extent is the internet used to strengthen identity within society, enhance relationships, and reinforce society values. Clearly, this is an empirical question that needs an answer.

We cannot, however, disregard the argument which suggests that ICT will promote Brunei identity since ICT will inevitably improve communication between the government and the public. As P.E.N. Howard, L. Rainie & S. Jones (2001) argue that the internet allows ideas to circulate to a wide audience. And also as observed by J. Kenny (1998) that Apple Computers used to describe ICT as the "wings for the mind", where ICT makes it possible for those, who have already learnt to fly, to do so higher and faster as well as enabling those who have never flown at all to make a start.

With this in mind, we can then suggest that the idea of using ICT would certainly be able to revolutionize all means of communication in Brunei Darussalam to a more positive end.⁴

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⁴**Statement:** I, hereby, declare that this paper is my original work and not product of plagiarism in any books or journal that have being published. The citation is stated and shown in the References. This paper is never also being submitted and published by other scholarly journal.

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Internet, ICT, and Government Policy

(Source: ASPENSI's Photos Collection, 17/4/2015)

However, big changes in our lives can sometimes shake our sense of identity. The growth of ICT (Information and Communication Technology), and particularly the internet, cause public upheaval with cultural, social, and political implications. However, not only Brunei faces this issue but similarly Kuwait, where they raise society issues as well in their parliamentary debates on the internet and the security of Islamic values in the new media age.