Communications and Internet Culture
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Internet connection is started in 1990 and becomes widely used in Malaysia since 1995. According to data from Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), Malaysia ranks as number 2 in terms of Internet penetration (per 100 inhabitants) among ASEAN countries in 2008, after Singapore. Although the Internet penetration rate is still not as high as other developed countries like Japan, South Korea and The United States of America, the Internet penetration rate in Malaysia is still considered acceptable compared to the world penetration rate of 22.04% (Figure 1). The number of Internet users is increasing year by year as shown in Table 1 below. According to International Telecommunication Union, there are about 16,902,600 Internet users as of June 2009, which is 64.6% of the population in Malaysia. Women, Family and Community Development Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jalil said a study by MCMC found that Internet penetration in 2010 was at 60% of 28.6 million population and expected to increase to 70% by 2015 (news on 12nd October 2011, Wednesday at Borner Post Online).
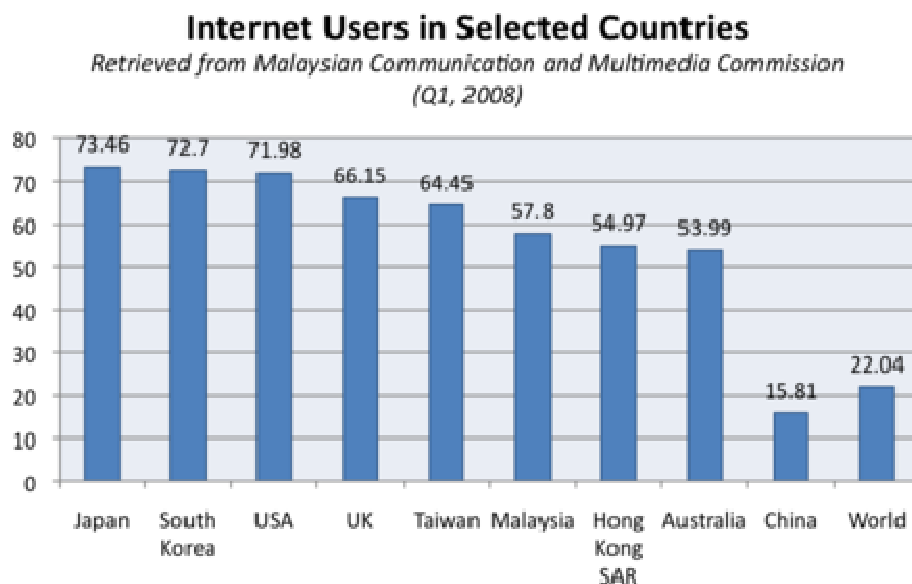

Figure 1: Internet penetration rate in selected countries.

(Source: http://comm215.wetpaint.com/page/Malaysia+Internet+Penetration)

Table 1: Internet usage and population growth in Malaysia

Year	Internet Users	Population	%	Source
2000	3,700,000	24,645,600	15.0	ITU
2005	10,040,000	26,500,699	37.9	C.I. Almanac
2006	11,016,000	28,294,120	38.9	ITU
2007	13,528,200	28,294,120	47.8	MCMC
2008	15,868,000	25,274,133	62.8	MCMC
2009	16,902,600	25,715,819	65.7	ITU
2010	16,902,600	26,160,256	64.6	ITU

ITU: International Telecommunication Union

C.I. Almanac: Computer Industry Almanac Inc.

MCMC: Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission

(Source: http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/my.htm)

In terms of users' age group, Figure 2 shows that most of the users are between 15 to 19 years old. This indicates that most of the Malaysians start using Internet in upper secondary school. As more and more people embrace Internet into their daily lives, the importance of Internet to the users is surveyed by MCMC and the results of the Household Use of Internet Survey 2009 show that 28% of the subjects think that the Internet is "very important" to their lives and 51% think that it is "important" (Figure 3).
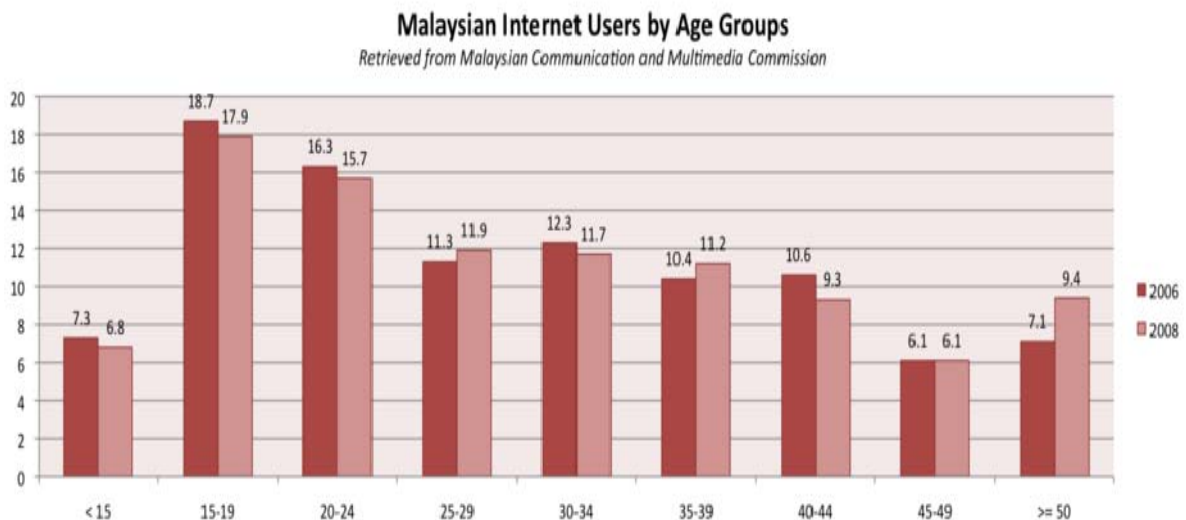

Figure 2: Internet users by age groups in Malaysia.

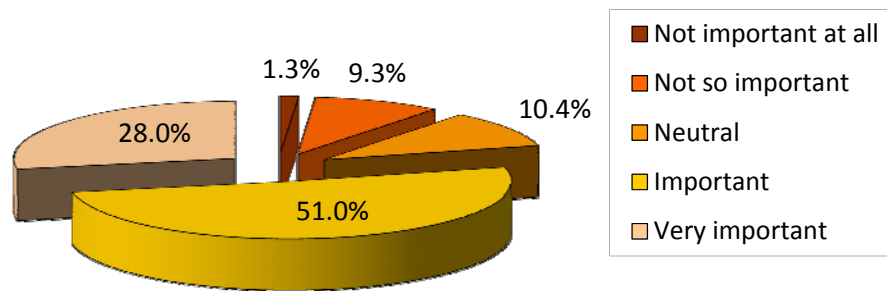(Source: http://comm215.wetpaint.com/page/Malaysia+Internet+Penetration)

Figure 3: Importance of Internet to users.

(Source:http://www.apira.org/data/upload/MicrosoftPowerPoint-HUIS2009Presentationat7thAPIRA)

Figure 4 below shows the purpose of Internet usage. Among all the purposes, 74.8% of the users use Internet for communication by text while 46.8% use Internet for social networking or online community. Communication by text includes using electronic mails and chatting by using instant messaging through programs like window live messenger and yahoo messenger. Among the users that use Internet for communication by text, 97.6% of them use electronic mails, 66.5% use instant messaging for chatting while 0.6% for other reasons. The usage of communication by text can be ranged from mere chatting, discussing projects and assignments online to business purposes. For social networking, Figure 5 indicates the programs used by the users with Facebook as the most popular online social network. According to Internet World Stats, there are about 11,221,040 Facebook users in Malaysia as of June 2011. However, with the introduction of Skype and other new online social networks, users tend to follow the trend by abandoning the previous network and starting a new account in other place. Therefore, the accuracy of the data is expected to be highly affected and largely changed in recent years. Through these online social networks, users can share pictures, articles, videos, jokes and even play online games together. Besides making new friends, users can keep in touch with friends and families who are separated away at certain distant. Recently, there is an upcoming trend to organize events and parties through these types of online social networks. Some even use these networks to send out invitations for their wedding ceremony.
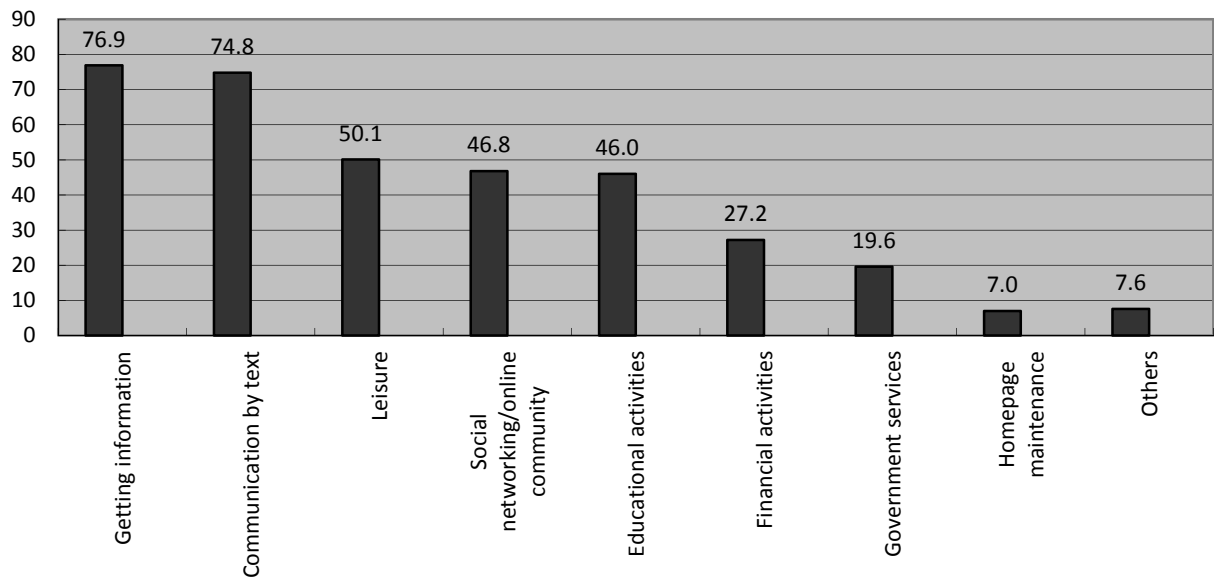
Figure 4: Purpose of Internet usage by percentage.

(Source:http://www.apira.org/data/upload/MicrosoftPowerPoint-HUIS2009Presentationat7thAPIRA)
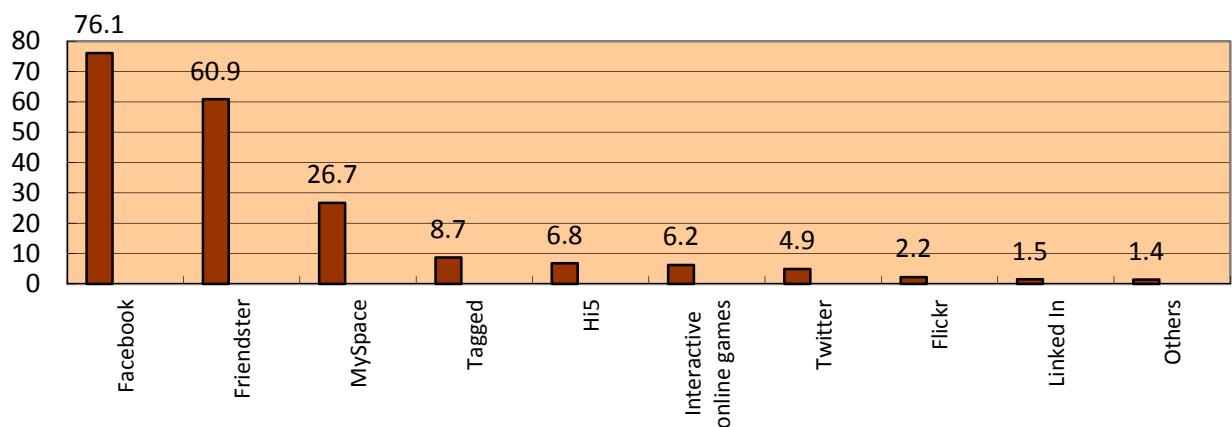

Figure 5: Programs used for social networking/online community.

(Source:http://www.apira.org/data/upload/MicrosoftPowerPoint-HUIS2009Presentationat7thAPIRA)

The language used for communication via Internet in Malaysia is mainly in English. As a multi-racial country, multi-lingual communication is not uncommon at the Internet. With Malay Language as the Malaysia national and official language, the Chinese and Indian citizens in Malaysia sometimes use their native language, which is Mandarin and Hindu, for communication through the Internet. For the ease of typing and communication, many Internet users start to create new informal short forms and

abbreviations which can only be understood among the Internet users from younger generation. Instead of words, some tend to use emoticons to express their feelings and thoughts during communication. Besides that, sentences used are usually in incorrect grammar with wrong spelling. The emergence of this Internet culture is said to be a problem among students in Malaysia which turn may affect their language proficiency.

Recently, Internet is used as a platform to spread an idea or advocate a movement. For instance, when some users saw a video about animal abuse in Facebook, their response towards animal abuse could be strong enough to influence the involved parties to take appropriate measures for the problem. On the other hand, it is also used as a link to connect different parties at different places to work and cooperate for the same objectives.

The convenience brought by Internet into our daily lives is undoubtable.

Internet also makes communication possible across long distance which helps to save a lot of time and money. Unfortunately, problems like reduced physical contacts, identity fraud and others arise. According to Cyber Security Malaysia chief executive officer Prof Datuk Husin Jazri, Cyber Security Malaysia detected 11,930 cyber security incidents from January to September 2011, with 4,175 involving fraud, 3,452 spam, 2,345 hacking, 867 malicious code, 525 attempts to hack, 354 cyber harassment and 48 content-related offences. It was a 130% increase over cyber security incidents in 2010 (news on 12nd October 2011, Wednesday at Borner Post Online). There are also comments that pointed out that more and more users become addicted to Internet and dependent on their virtual lives, as they feel confident and safe behind the computer screens. As a result, less time is taken for face to face interactions. And there is worry that this may affect Internet users' communication skills in reality. However, this problem is still not serious at the present stage. If users are educated about these issues, Internet should be a very convenient and useful tool to improve communications among people instead of becoming a hindrance.

Many claimed that communications through the Internet is threatening youngsters' way of making friends. It is undoubtedly that many Internet users make friends in the virtual world. Also, there are worries that they may get cheated due to identity fraud. However, recently, with the prevalence of online social networks that require background information with personal pictures, identity fraud is decreasing compared to the time when instant messaging were the main trend.

In my opinion, communication through Internet indeed brings a lot of conveniences to

our life. From the perspective of a foreign student, it makes frequent communications possible with friends and families as it is a very cheap, easy and fast way to keep in touch with others. It is also possible to let them know about one's recent life in other country by sharing pictures online. This is especially important for the foreign students who just arrived in a foreign land without any friends to cure their loneliness. From my personal experience, communication through the Internet is also a very efficient way to contact families and friends during any emergency, like the earthquake which happened March 11th, 2011 when telecommunication systems were down temporarily. On the other hand, many people tend to lose contact with their ex-classmates after graduate and they may most probably end up losing contact forever. Internet enables us to know each others' latest whereabouts and recent lives. Some even use it to stay in touch with their teachers or lecturers. No matter what kind of new inventions it is, most importantly is the way people use it. If people do not misuse the Internet, the benefits it brings to our lives are much more than the disadvantages.