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Abstract or Executive Summary

Providing access to government information will increase transparency, accountability and public confidence in the government. The right to acquire information will foster a better understanding of decisions made by the government, would increase citizen participation in the political process, and would increase government efficiency. This study aims to determine the level of citizen's access to government information that is available through the official government open data portal. The objectives of this study are to know the level of understanding of the freedom of information act and the classification of government information. Survey method was used for this research in the form of questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed to 21 respondents in 21 ministries in Putrajaya. The study found that all respondents have a level of understanding of the freedom of information act and implementation of government information classification. The study develops a framework for access to government information by identifying four basic components which are Information Society, Transparent Government, Information System as an Enabler to Government Information and the factors affecting access to government information. The findings could help the government to prepare plans and improve access to government information thus upholding government transparency and accountability.

Framework to Access Government Information: A Case Study in Malaysia

Research team

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Yusmazy Yusop [2015-2016]

Background

Government information should be stored and protected as a high probative value. It involves the interests of the country; individuals and any manipulation would be a security risk. It has also the potential to invade on the privacy of an organization or individual should it fall into the hands of unscrupulous people. The seriousness of managing records and information received attention in this country when the Securities Commission of Malaysia (2010) urges the public listed companies to keep records and the failure to do so may destroy evidence and put the organization at risk (Van Geyzel, 2010). Although government information is considered as records and confidential, some information can still be accessed by the public through four methods such as press releases, online, library, or depository provisions (Piotrowski, 2007). The implementation of the right to obtain information from the government in Malaysia is still at a low level. This is not enshrined in legislation and no formal framework that can be used by people to get access to information. Moreover, there is no official document about the freedom of information law in Malaysia as according to Attorney General Website. In addressing this issue, this study will identify factors that affect access to government information accessibility and ensuring the integrity of the government record is always guaranteed by the owner of record particularly for electronic environment. The study also identifies how information systems can act as an enabler to access to government information in Malaysia.

Problem Statement

Transparency is an important element of the government to increase transparency in service delivery and reduce the activities of misconduct in public sector administration. Failure in ensuring government transparency can cause (Anderson, 2009; Cullier & Piotrowski, 2009; Dawes, 2010; Kolstad & Wiig, 2009; Kolstad et al., 2009; Stiglitz, 2002a, b):

- i. abuse of power
- ii. prevent the use of public incentives to ensure public officials act responsibly in the public interest
- iii. create overload of information
- iv. retain control over resources
- v. promote the opportunism and discard cooperation

- vi. limit the ability to choose honesty and effectiveness in government positions and contractual partner
- vii. prevent social trust and development

The main challenge is the people as stakeholders in government service do not have a secure channel for the government to monitor the activities of public concern. However, freedom of access to government information in the country are not enforced through legal provisions. The absence of these channels causes people to turn to alternative media such as social media, blogs, wikis, social networking and media sharing, and microblogging (Bertot, et al., 2011). This causes people often bribed with news and statements that are not guaranteed their authenticity through alternative media, especially social media. This has created a negative perception among the people to the government and at the same time the government did not have the opportunity to clarify the actual position.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) seeks to reduce the abuse of power by increasing good governance, strengthening of initiatives-oriented changes, reducing the potential treatment of delinquency, increased the relationship between civil servants and the public open space for community monitoring through surveillance activities and control the behavior of civil servants (Shim & Eom, 2008). The capability of ICT has witnessed a trend towards the use of electronic government to create a larger space for access to information and increase transparency, accountability, and anti-misconduct goals. The ability of e-government as a means of delivering information and services to the people has been recognized among developing countries however, the true potential has yet to be maximized by government agencies (Anderson, 2009; Cullier & Piotrowski, 2009; Fuchs, 2006; Colesca & Dobrica 2008b: 205; Mofleh, Wanaous & Strachan 2008: 3; Moon 2002: 426-427; Wang & Liao 2008: 718).

New York State Office of Technology (2002) believes that the readiness of records allows user to access, use, and understand the records covering the technical aspects and the metadata. Access to electronic information is not only limited to government officials, but also to all citizens. Every citizen has the right to access government information that is stored in the shelf life is determined by the disposal schedule of the National Archives of Malaysia (2003). Storage of such information must be based on the principles of RIM so that the information is well managed and able to act as evidence of government.

Also, the need of Information Access Act and guidelines is crucial to prevent the spread of false information, which eventually damage the country's image. Past studies found that developed countries have the Act and guidelines to access government information such as the Freedom of Information Act (United States), Access to Information Act (Canada), and the Access to Information Act 1985 (UK). In contrast, Malaysia does not have any act that regulates the implementation of access to government information (Muhammad Izwan, 2014). According to Coronel (2001: 11-12), Malaysia was ranked fourth among the eight ASEAN countries surveyed in a study to obtain information from the government's macro-economic indicators of socio-economic, legal proceedings and the parliament, government budgets and contracts, information about public officials and private individuals. Among the factors that put the country in a position of this medium is that intelligent access is

available through the use of ICT applications for foreign investors and international business institutions after the financial crisis of 1997. This initiative facilitates the search of information related to business, financial and socio-economic. However, none of the information related to budget, government contracts, public servants, and private data has found.

Agency like MAMPU (Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit) acts as a custodian of information in Malaysia is responsible for the exposing and sharing authentic information. In parallel with Big Data phenomena, MAMPU took an initiative to leverage information sharing and use of data for transforming e-government by creating a people-centric government delivery service system. Although all public agencies create and maintain information and open-data, but they are not competent in managing records in the electronic format since they have no foundation in managing records in the paper format. Records matters have never been given priority before, Only when the government embarked on e-government initiative, the requirement for managing records is omnipresent since records and information need to be referred prior to making decision and should be kept for evident at least for audit purposes. With such a situation in place, it is doubtful as to whether e-government initiative is a success since agencies has not performed the basic requirement for the endeavor. This has hindered high quality service (Mohd Bakhari et al., 2013) and does not help improving the government's transparency, accountability and integrity.

Moreover, agencies are facing difficulties on how to go about managing records since there are no proper processes and systems (Azimah, 2007). Systems were designed without taking into consideration the RIM requirement but were designed to best meet the requirement of IM only without realizing that not all information qualifies as records although all records are information. Systems that are designed for managing information are not appropriate for managing records where the latter requires specially designed system, which cover the entire life cycle from creation through disposal. Disposal function is not available in the system designed for the former, thus making the system only cater part of the life cycle (creation through maintenance) despite the requirement for records disposal is expressly stated in Section 8.3.6 of the International Standard for Records Management (ISO15489) which states: Records systems should be capable of facilitating and implementing decisions on the retention and disposal of records. It should be possible for these decisions to be made at any time in the existence of records, including during the design stage of records systems. It should be also possible, where appropriate, for disposal to be activated automatically. Systems should provide audit trails or other methods to track completed disposal actions (ISO 15489).

The negligence of RIM principles in managing RIM at large does not occur in Malaysia but also persist globally. For example, such a phenomenon has urged the US President, Barack Obama signed the Presidential Memorandum – Managing Government Records on November 28, 2011 which marked the beginning of an Executive Branch-wide effort to reform records management policies and practices and to develop a 21st century framework for the management of Government records (Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies and Independent, 2012).

Although Malaysia has been embarking on Big Data and information sharing in electronic environment, neither policy nor guidelines has been proposed to leverage the information sharing process. Therefore, this study is conducted to identify the factors that influence sharing of information to the public and to identify the level of information freedom through legislations and Acts. These are the basis for developing a framework of accessing government information in Malaysia.

Research questions

- i. What are the public rights to access government information?
- ii. What types of government information can be shared to public?
- iii. What are the factors that influence to access the government information?
- iv. Are there significant relation between the identified factors and access to government information?

Aims and Objectives/Goals

The aim is to develop a framework for accessing government information in Malaysia. This can be achieved through identifying:

- i. Level of freedom to access the information
- ii. Factors that influencing the access to government information via government portal.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach by means of questionnaire technique to collect data on the factors that influenced to information access. The focus will be on the implementation of the official portal of open data portal through www.data.gov.my. This method was chosen because it was easy to carry out when involved with a large sample population research and the acquisition of information from the questionnaire was then subclassified to represent a phenomenon in a large group. This method also allows the data to be obtained in a fast, high response rate from the primary source and with minimal cost. The questionnaires were given to the head of the custodian of the information to be uploaded to the open data portal of the Malaysian government.

The survey method was adopted to explore whether the selected sample understand the right to freedom of information, implement the classification of information, and use the access to government information that is available. The study population included the custodian of the data and information in the ministries around Putrajaya. There are twenty-one ministries in the federal government administrative centre in Putrajaya. For every ministry, there is a section responsible for providing information about the ministries and departments to be uploaded to the official portal of open government data.

The research instrument to collect data is a closed-ended questionnaire. The advantage of questionnaire enables the researches to collect all data in a short time. There are seven sections allocated in the questionnaires:

- Demographic questions
- The knowledge of information freedom Acts
- The implementation of government information classification
- The access to government information through open data portal (www.data.gov.my)
- The development of open data portal as an integrated portal
- The level of network security for securing the portal
- The top management commitment towards developing the portal

The questionnaires use a Likert scale from 1 to 5 as recommended by previous researches to seek for individual subjective responses and decrease the variance to measure.

Findings

In Malaysia, there is no comprehensive reference to access government information as compared to most countries in the world. Many researches focus on utilising ICT for accessing government information, but less disclosure on a study of reference and guidelines to access the information. ICT is seen as an instrument that can leverage the government activity from public knowledge for the purpose of national security. This can be seen through the rapid implementation of electronic government around the world including in Malaysia. However, it appears that the function provides to the people through the electronic government only focuses on facilitating the government's delivery system. The information published on the website is just a report. Sensitive information that is closely related to public interest is still locked-up up in ministries and government departments.

This study found out:

1. Levels of freedom of access to information
 - a. Level of understanding the FOI Act:
 - 42.9% have a high level of understanding of the Freedom of Information Act.
 - 52.4% of the respondents have a moderate understanding
 - 4.8% have a low level of understanding of the act.
 - b. The levels of understanding in the implementation of government information classification
 - 76.2% of the respondents have a high understanding on the implementation of the classification of government information.
 - 23.8% have a moderate understanding on the same matter.
 - c. The level of access to government information
 - 42.9% of the respondents opined that the access was given at high level
 - 57.1% of the respondents agreed that access to government information was at average level,

2. Six influenced factors to access government information:

i. Knowledge of Freedom of Information Acts

The results of each item infer that the respondents have a high level of knowledge of information control and freedom of information Act, but they moderately/average understand the information control and the Act because Malaysia does not have the Act. The level for this factor is high.

ii. Government information Classification

The respondents agree that the factor of classifying the government information is important which include to understand the type of information classification; the needs to classify information once received from ministries; understand the process of classifying the information; should refer to the responsible department if needed; and understand the implications of non-compliance. The level for this factor is high.

iii. Government information Access

17 items were analysed and categorised into two levels: the average and the high. There are five items (portal easily manipulated; relevant information; quick service; meeting the needs of design; and improve quality of life), which received an average mean score between 3.29 and 3.48. Whereas, 12 items namely ease of use; easy to learn; satisfactory portal; accurate information; reliable portal; easy to understand; suitable format; as expected; availability; help decision making; improve management service; improve awareness; and increase market opportunity have received a high score level between 3.52 and 3.81. Hence, in general, the respondents agree that an open government data portal can facilitate access to government information. The level for this factor is average.

iv. Integrated Portal Development

The respondents agree that the development of this portal involves engagement with stakeholders. Nevertheless, the criteria and aspects of user requirements still need to be improved. The level for this factor is average.

v. Network

The respondents also agree that the item “network security monitor” provides a high influence on the overall network security (mean = 4.00, standard deviation = 0.775). The item “guaranteed network security” recorded the lowest mean score relative to the standard deviation (mean = 3.76, standard deviation = 0.768), implying that the respondents still feel that the network security infrastructure can be improved in order to avoid the portal from being invaded by hackers or irresponsible stakeholders. The level for this factor is average.

vi. Top Management Commitment

The analysis found that overall, the scores of the items for the factor “top management commitment” are also high (mean value between 3.62 and 3.67). The respondents agreed that each item was important (mean between 3.62 and 2.67, standard deviation between 0.740 and 1.161). A strong commitment from the

management will ensure that the cooperation of all parties can be well coordinated to achieve the objectives of the system. The level for this factor is high.

4.2 Developing the Framework of Access to Government Information

The proposed framework of access to government information is based on the previous studies by Komba (2013) through its research on the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis 1989), Siau and Long Model (2005), Model Wilson (1999), Theory of Dissemination of Innovation (Rogers 1995) and DeLone and McLean models (1992). Based on results from data analysis, this framework includes six factors that affect the official portal of the Malaysian government's open data in conformity with the scope and limitations of this study. The six factors are contained in three identified components which are: Information society; Transparent Government and Access to Government information. The framework is shown in Figure 1.

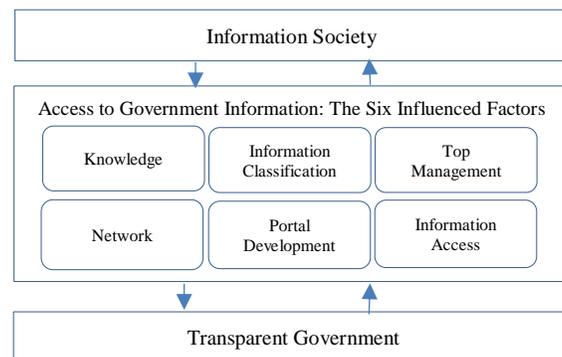


Figure 1: The Framework of Access to Government Information

Information Society: The first component represents the target group who benefits from the access availability. However, the role of the community is not just as the recipient of information, the community also needs to provide input and feedback on the type of information and the quality of access provided as a continuous improvement process. The community also needs to be aware of the particular level of access to information on national security factors.

Transparent Government: The second component is a primary source of all the information that becomes the essence of government information access. Responsibilities include ensuring that records and access information are of high quality and meet the needs of target groups. The principle of confidentiality of government information should be balanced with the freedom of public information. In addition to providing information, the government is also a trigger in facilitating access to information through this government's open government official portal initiative. The open-portal initiative is to facilitate and control for information freedom.

Access to government information: The third component is Access to Government Information through an online portal. There are six factors (identified in this study)

influenced to the access such as knowledge, information classification, access, portal development, network, top management commitment.

Conclusions

The study is expected to help the government through the Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) for improving the development of the open data portal in terms of user interface; content; and security. The MAMPU also can collaborate with the National National Archives, to monitor all the processes to acquire/collect/gather gov-information and store in the portal for public access.

Products

1. Yusmazy Md. Yusup, Umi Asma` Mokhtar, dan Zawiyah M. Yusof, , 2016, Non-ISI, Factors that Influence Access to Digital Government Information in Malaysia , Archives Science Study , 76-83 , Bercetak
2. Yusmazy M. Yusup, Umi Asma' Mokhtar & Zawiyah M. Yusof , 2018 Pengarang , Access to government information: a case study in Malaysia , Proceedings of the 10th International Joint Conference on Knowledge Discovery, Knowledge Engineering and Knowledge Management/IC3K2018, Portugal
3. Zawiyah Mohd Yusoff, Mohamad Shanudin Zakaria, Umi Asma` Mokhtar & Ahmad Tarmizi Abdul Ghani , 2018 , Information: To Share or Not to Share? , Special Issue UKM-IIC2018 , Special Issue

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Appendix [I-x]

[you may want to include Appendices with questionnaires, interview protocols, release forms, specific products of the study such as checklists, or other data or information pertaining to the study]