

Chapter 4

Composite Indicators of a Knowledge Society: Triangulation of Experts Interviews and Factor Analyses

Norsiah Abdul Hamid

Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

Norhafezah Yusof

Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

Mohd Sobhi Ishak

Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

Halimah Badioze Zaman

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The concept of Knowledge Society (KS) began due to recognition of the importance of knowledge and information in the development of a society. This chapter proposes a holistic view of knowledge society based on the development of composite indicators in nine different dimensions. The objective of the study is to propose a multi-dimensional approach comprising human capital, ICT, spirituality, economy, social, institutional and sustainability as determinants towards achieving a KS. These dimensions are discussed in-depth by the experts in semi-structured interviews and also validated by using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The semi-structured interview data are presented in a verbatim manner so as to provide readers with in-depth feedback from the experts, while the EFA and CFA results of composite indicators are presented in graphics. Thus, this chapter contributes to the understanding of composite indicators of a knowledge society which can then be used by policy makers for future policy-making decision.

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge society concept began due to recognition of the importance of knowledge and information in the development of a society. Active knowledge activities such as access, generation, sharing and disseminating are deemed crucial in the knowledge society. These activities which then expanded and multiplied the knowledge determine the vision towards transforming a society. Thus, as stated by Mioara (2012), a “knowledge society” has always existed: “what is new now is the speed at which knowledge expands and innovates”. Societies are no longer depending totally on resources such as land, labor and natural resources, but rather on the potential to produce, acquire, use and distribute knowledge (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 2001). Other scholars and researchers also agree that our society is now living in the age of information and knowledge, in which the most critical resources are both elements, and they have become the most important commodities for productivity (Al-Hawamdeh & Hart, 2002; Britz, Lor, Coetzee & Bester, 2006; Clarke 2003; Drucker 1993; Evans & Wurster, 1997; Evers, 2001; Lor & Britz, 2007), and major contributors towards economic and social growth (Rohrbach, 2007; Stehr, 1994).

Studies on KS are discussed more often in the western and developed countries. Governments and researchers in these countries put much effort into modelling and measuring the development of their societies so as to be acknowledged as a KS. They have long been aware of the importance of knowledge in developing their nations. In contrast to this situation, there are very few research coming from developing economies like Malaysia on this topic, particularly on the transformation of a society from the Industrial Age to the Knowledge Age (Amirudin, 2003). Acknowledgements on the importance of knowledge and information only begun in Malaysia around 1991 when the government proposed ‘Vision 2020’, in which Malaysia is targeted to be a fully developed nation by the year 2020. Since then, studies and initiatives have been undertaken to focus on the utilization and application of knowledge in every single human activity. However, it is evidenced that the initiative to define and benchmark KS in Malaysia is still lacking. The Malaysian government has realized the importance of knowledge (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 2005), but it has given priority to the economic growth of the nation, neglecting societal and human development.

Many governments in the Asia Pacific region such as Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Philippines and Thailand have undertaken the initiatives to enhance the economic, political and social aspects to achieve the knowledge society. For instance, Singapore is one of the earliest countries in the region to launch its KS vision in 1992 (Gerke & Evers, 2006). The Australian Knowledge-based Economy/Knowledge Society project started in early 2000 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (Roberts, 2002). The study posited that the concept of Knowledge Society has not been well explored in a statistical sense, as compared to Knowledge-based economy (Roberts, 2002, p. 3). The project presented a comprehensive framework for the measurement of well-being based on a rich set of key indicators, comprising of economics, social and environment dimensions. China formally made an effort to reform its economic structure to an open market and socialist market economy in 1993 (Gao, 2005). Gao further added that the essence of the transformation towards a KS is to transform the input-driven growth to knowledge-based growth. Hence, the importance of being a knowledge society to any nations can be seen in twofold. First, for the societal members, they would better appreciate knowledge as a source for development and human living. Second, for the government, a knowledge society means its society has achieve a level where the status of the society is at par with the developed nations, thus portrays the first class mentality of its citizens and high income nation.

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