

A Conceptual Framework for Determining Social Media Dependency (SMD) among Gen Zers

Pressca Negin^{*1}, Jati Kasuma Ali², Noraini Nasirun³, Yusman Yacob⁴

¹Faculty of Business Management, University Teknologi MARA Sarawak. 96400 Mukah, Sarawak, MALAYSIA

²Faculty of Business Management, University Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Sarawak Branch, Kota Samarahan, MALAYSIA

^{3,4}Faculty of Business Management, University Teknologi MARA Sarawak. 96400 Mukah, Sarawak, MALAYSIA

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This study proposed a conceptual framework for extending Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory in the study of Social Media Dependency (SMD). The framework is proposed based on in-depth analysis of determining influencing factors from social media dependency perspective. Extensive review of literature on three different domains namely social system, social media system and entrepreneurial system was carried out to propose the conceptual framework. Books and research articles on social media dependency or addiction were also consulted to see the emerging trends in global management and communication settings. Drawing from MSD Theory, a determining system; entrepreneurial system was proposed that highlights the factors that can play important roles in developing SMD among Gen Zers. It is argued that potential entrepreneurs, education, and entrepreneurial intention are a few of the important entrepreneurial elements in social media usage which can significantly develop Gen Zers SMD. It has also been proposed that MSD theory is known for making individuals develop dependency relations with the media if they find the resources provided by the media helpful in accomplishing various goals. This study is conceptual in nature. Proposed hypotheses need to be verified empirically, and this study is the first of its kind to observe Gen Zers SMD from three lens namely social system, social media system and entrepreneurial system simultaneously. The idea will significantly add value to MSD Theory, SMD and generational cohort's literatures.

Keywords: social system, social media system, entrepreneurial system, media system dependency, and social media dependency.

INTRODUCTION

It is suggested that the high dependence on smartphones by students may be indicative of a transition from the habitual use of smartphones into an addictive use of it (Ayandele et al., 2019). The addictive use of going online could result in accidents, psychological detachment, countless negative effects on physical health and various types of mental illness (Elhai et al., 2017). Gen Z (especially adolescents) may be more at risk for addictive symptoms because of using social media (Sirola et al., 2019; Throuvala et al., 2019). These symptoms include psychological states, like fear of missing out (FOMO) and no mobile phone phobia (nomophobia) (Griffiths et al., 2018; Griffiths & Kuss, 2017). Some even experience behavioural disorder like inability to control use of social networking (Hou et al., 2019; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017) and low social abilities (Engelberg & Sjöberg, 2004). Affective and cognitive responses could include low empathy (Davis, 1994), high neuroticism and openness (Błachnio et al., 2017; Griffiths et al., 2014)

However, overuse of social media in late childhood and early adolescence has significant benefits such as emotional support, self-expression, and community building that come from social system. In addition, during

the COVID-19 pandemic, connecting the unconnected is therefore more important than ever (GSMA, 2020). It was also found that people over 35 years old are more likely to be unconnected than those who are younger. In Algeria alone, 58% of people over 35 years old are unconnected, while only 13% of the younger population are unconnected (GSMA, 2020). This is because young consumers, compared to their older counterparts, are avid users of social media and they are largely aware of the services and activities in this medium due to heavy browsing and surfing in exploring social media system.

Furthermore, entrepreneurs who spend more time on social media (Ferdous & Huda, 2023; Wang et al., 2020; Wu & Song, 2019) were reported to have high reliance on social media. For students, the presence of sophisticated technology and digitalization opens wider opportunities to start digital businesses while they are studying at the university (Crittenden et al., 2019). Given that, this entrepreneurial system will be determined among Gen Zers students who are currently pursuing bachelor's degree studies in Business related programs. The entrepreneurial system is a system on entrepreneurship that consists of the complexity and diversity of actors, roles, and environmental factors that interact to determine the entrepreneurial performance of a region or locality (Spilling, 1996). In this regard, building entrepreneurial system is essential with the interaction of potential business community that takes place on the Internet. The growing use of digital technologies, digital platforms and technology-enabled services arises the need for Gen Zers to possess relevant digital literacy skills to carry out their designated tasks effectively (Pinto et al., 2020; Reddy et al., 2020; Feerar, 2019;). Besides that, integrating SMIQ with the education curriculum will enable the education institutes to prepare their future graduates/workforce for technology-enabled workplaces.

In this study, an underpinning theory of Media System Dependency (MSD) theory will be adopted. Media system dependency (MSD) theory was developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976, with the key concept that individual's media use is determined by the interrelations among society, media, and audience at the micro-level. Though originally conceived in the context of mass media television, the SMD theory can be adapted to the domain of social media, and extended to digital opinion leaders (Zhang et al., 2017) and online social communities (Kim et al., 2019; Sanz-Blas et al., 2017) as they offer their followers useful and reliable information to guide their personal actions and decisions (e.g., Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019), and to fulfil other needs (San-Blaz et al., 2021). To date, little systematic large-scale study of SMD among Malaysian Gen Zers has been conducted in Malaysia with a proposed model such as the MSD theory (Musa et al., 2017) although this communication theory was developed with the key concept that individual's media use is determined by the interrelations among society, media, and audience (Ball-Rokeach & Melvin DeFleur, 1976).

Recent studies in adopting MSD theory were conducted in the field of communication, environment, consumer behavior and product marketing and all these studies were conducted outside Malaysia. In addition, few past studies of SMD and SMIQ employing MSD Theory was found in Malaysia but it has been inconclusive because it was tested among Millennial in Klang Valley, Malaysia (Musa et al., 2017). Additionally, the most recent study of MSD Theory in Malaysia focuses on the constructed meaning of memes on social media among Muslim Gen Zers was conducted among students from Putra University Malaysia, National University of Malaysia and the University of Malaya (Anuar & Yusuf, 2023). In hence, comparative cross-national studies are essential to examine and validate the generalizability of the MSD model globally because it is best known for its contribution in studying the personal goals of mass media users (Sheldon et al., 2021; Ball-Rokeach & Melvin DeFleur, 1976).

Therefore, to bridge the gap between contextual and theoretical issues, more research on SMD with specific variables are necessary to understand it better, particularly in the context of its outcomes based on the relationship between social system, social media system and entrepreneurial system among Gen Zers in MSD theory which are attempted in this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Dependency (SMD) and Gen Zers

Terms, such as social media addiction, problematic social media use, obsessive social media use, and compulsive social media use, are commonly used to refer to the phenomenon of maladaptive social media use

characterized by either control disorder symptoms, addiction-like symptoms and/or aggressive symptoms. Among these terms, social media addiction is most commonly used and it can include SNS addiction or Facebook addiction. This addiction is alarming to the extent that behavioural addiction symptoms such as sleeping disorder, aggression and problematic gambling occur among Gen Zers (Cao et al., 2020; Chen, 2019; Turel & Serenko, 2012).

However, due to the historical connection between the term “addiction” and substance use disorders, some researchers worry that the term “social media addiction” may impede the severity of traditional psychiatric disorders and that it is incomprehensive in discussing this issue (Carbonell & Panova, 2017). Besides that, this term may also undermine the digital skills among Gen Zers (Longobardi et al., 2020) due to persistent use of social media. Therefore, this study advocate for the term social media dependency which in return round up to online skill to distinguish such compulsive social media uses from formal management and informal conditions.

Moreover, social media dependency is such a broad term that it can refer to Gen Zers using social media for positive psychological well-being and social functioning (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016) or for illegal, unethical, or socially unacceptable activities (e.g., online stalking, cyberbullying, and spreading scams and false information) or due to negative feelings such as loneliness and social isolation.

Determinants of Social Media Dependency (SMD)

Social system is found positively affecting people’s mental health (Li et al., 2021). Depression symptoms are lower in individuals who report higher social support than in those with lower social support (Grey et al., 2020). According to Qi et al. (2020), they found that levels of social support negatively correlated with the severity of depression and anxiety symptoms among adolescents. Thus, social support mediates the effect of stress on psychological disorders among Gen Zers. These findings highlight the need to research the impact of social system on the mental, emotion and physical health of this vulnerable generation.

Social media system is a group of Internet-based applications system that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow content generation, dissemination, and communication among communities of users. The advent of the ‘Insta-Gran’ is gaining traction in Malaysia due to its best picture sharing applications. In early 2022, Malaysia had 15.55 million Instagram users, accounting for 47.2% of the country’s total population and most of these users are young generation (Joyce, 2022). These Internet based platforms provide autonomy, competence, and relatedness that motivates human behavior (Sheldon & Gunz, 2009) as they are just at users’ fingertips. In turn, it increases addictive salience among Gen Zers narcissism nature because video editing in YouTube is fulfilling the need for competence, uploading self-presentational Instagram picture, story and reel is fulfilling the need for autonomy and receiving Facebook likes is fulfilling the need for relatedness.

The entrepreneurial system consists of the complexity and diversity of actors, roles, and environmental factors that interact to determine the entrepreneurial performance of a region or locality (Spilling, 1996) and these are argued to contribute to SMD if frequently acted on (Wang et al, 2020). The study of social media in entrepreneurship has been associated mostly with recognizing the benefits of social media for businesses and their uses for enterprise growth. It has been argued that social media allows the geographical barriers for the sale of products to be overcome, provides quick and cheap communication with customers, and facilitates the development of customer prospect data to increase sales (Jagongo and Kinyua, 2013); social media also improves business performance (Ahmad et al., 2018) and the survival chances of new ventures (Delacroix et al., 2019). A few research also have found, entrepreneurs who spend more time on social media (Wu & Song, 2019; Wang et al., 2020; Ferdous & Huda, 2023) were reported to have significant predictors of SMD.

Furthermore, the literature on entrepreneurship widely recognises the university’s role as a pool of potential entrepreneurs (Lechuga Sancho et al., 2021). The reasons why students do or do not intend to run their own businesses have been the subject of interest in the entrepreneurship literature (Trang & Doanh, 2019). In addition, the significant number of research studies published in the last decade linking entrepreneurship and social media use, to date, no study has analysed in depth the relationship between the frequency of use among

different social media sites and the intensity of this relationships by gender and age group (Barrera-Verdugo & Villarroel-Villarroel, 2022). There is currently a knowledge gap that needs to be addressed. This information should be relevant for higher education institutions because if their students allocate considerable time to using social media, institutional efforts to form entrepreneurial competencies can be positively or negatively affected by the content exposure on these digital channels. Hence, understanding entrepreneurial system in students by the use intensity of social media sites would allow better management of their integration into teaching processes according to students' gender and age.

Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory

Media system dependency (MSD) theory was developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976, with the key concept that individual's media use is determined by the interrelations among society, media, and audience. In this research, Media System Dependency (MSD) theory is adopted because it explains people's dependency level on a media system. According to Ball-Rokeach (1985), MSD theory incorporates two levels of effects, namely micro-level effects and macro-level effects. At the micro-level, individuals' dependency relations stem from a desire to achieve personal goals, while at the macro-level their dependency relations are governed more by changes in the media and social systems.

Besides that, Ball-Rokeach (1998) has also mentioned the implications of mass media like social media in the study of MSD theory. He summed up by saying, "The media system dependency theorist is predisposed to an evolutionary, not revolutionary, perspective vis-à-vis new communication and information technologies". Producer-consumer dependency relations are likely to undergo changes because of the development of social media dependency relations. Changes are more likely to affect the scope of reach of the merged system into personal and social life rather than to alter the structure of producer-consumer relations. This means that social media not only changes the role of e-commerce in marketing industry, but also modifies the personal and social life of the users, which will ultimately affect the development of SMIQ among Gen Zers.

Thus, in many ways, MSD theory is more attractive than any other theory for explaining the micro-relationship between individuals and media for a variety of reasons. It is a theoretical approach to study how people interact with media. Furthermore, the theory covers a much wider range of behaviours towards media (Anuar & Yusuf, 2023; Riffe, et al., 2008). It also covers structural dependencies (i.e., relationships between media system and political system). According to a few studies on management and communication, MSD theory is more attractive than any other theory for explaining the micro-relationship between individuals and media for a variety of reasons as it covers wider range of users' behaviors and goals in using media (Boukes, 2021; Zhang & Zhong, 2020; Negin et al., 2017). This is supported by Musa et al., (2017) where they found that Millennials exhibit digital intelligence with the support of MSD Theory as a framework. Hence, as displayed in Figure 1, this study is adopting the MSD Theory as our underpinning theory.

Conceptual Model

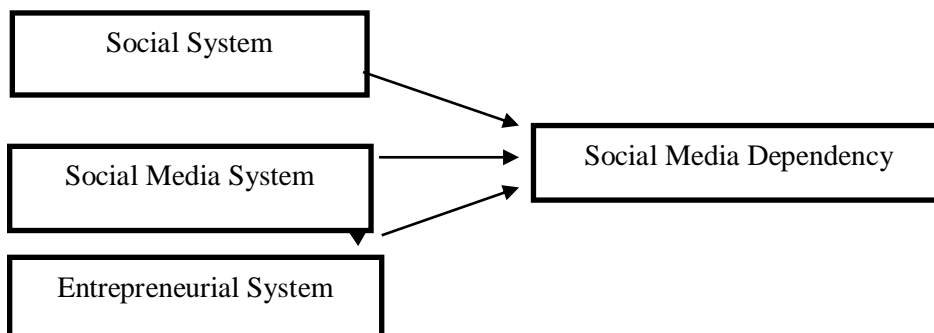


Figure 1: Research Framework

In this study, social system represents society, social media system represents media and social media dependency represents audience. Then, we extend the theory by proposing a new determinant, entrepreneurial

system as one of the influencing factors to determine SMD among Gen Zers. Social media is found to highly influence entrepreneurial self-efficacy among woman entrepreneurs (Madawala et al., 2023).

The underpinning theory of MSD adopted in this study displays three determinants of SMD that includes entrepreneurial system. These three systems become the independent variables for this research. The first determinant; social system consists of family, peers, and social media influencers. The second determinant; social media system involves social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter; entertainment-related internet use (i.e., Instagram, YouTube) and work and information related internet use (i.e., WhatsApp). Finally, for the third determinant, the proposed system in the theory; entrepreneurial system comprises of potential entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial intention and education among Gen Zers.

All of these determinant's measure SMD among the users. SMD is the latest addiction among internet users because most of Gen Zers daily activities like communication, education, networking, business, and socializing are done using social media. Therefore, some reveal that spending more time on social media does not mean they will get the adverse effect. Hence, it becomes the researchers' interest in examining SMD by combining these three systems as evaluation dimensions for this talent. Active social system or support has been shown to significantly mitigate problematic internet-related behaviors among adolescents, such as mobile phone dependency and Internet addiction (Nielsen et al., 2019; Xin et al., 2020). Therefore, active social system may decrease the risk of SMD. Based on the above literature, it is hypothesized that:

H1: The social system has a positive relationship with SMD among Gen Zers in Sarawak.

Brailovskaia et al. (2020) revealed that social media sites provide a virtual space for Gen Zers where they can shape a virtual identity to promote their self-esteem and satisfaction. They also get attention and support from their virtual followers through platform functions like photo sharing and video editing (Chou et al., 2019). Thus, this allows the researcher to develop the second hypothesis:

H2: The social media system has a positive relationship with SMD among Gen Zers in Sarawak.

Social media offers opportunities to any organizations big or small due its active, equal, interconnected and interactive nature (Peters et al., 2013: 281). Facebook, is preferred more frequently by small entrepreneurs for its simplistic and user-friendly nature as it requires less technical knowledge in comparison to other social networking sites such as Blogs, Google+, LinkedIn. This means that social media revolves around entrepreneurial system and that leads us to propose this:

H3: The entrepreneurial system has a positive relationship with SMD among Gen Zers in Sarawak.

Gen Zer's are "true digital natives" (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018b, p. 250). They are prolific consumers of digital technology. They can instantly find a fact or find a video tutorial on how to do just about anything. These advanced technological skills enable them to quickly look up information and navigate most any digital platform (Seibert, 2021) to do some selling and promoting. When these entrepreneurial Gen Zers interact and work together, it showed that these could lead to building a more collaborative community (Schmidt et al., 2024). They collaborate and provide meaningful support to each other which will likely develop SMD.

METHODOLOGY

From the four primary data gathering strategies, which are interviewing, observation, projective techniques, and a survey, this study will utilize survey method as its data collection method. Self-administrated questionnaire is used to gather data from university students that represent Gen Zers from selected universities. The data collected from this exercise will proceed into data analysis stage using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and path modelling approach. Quantitative research is proposed for this study; therefore, the researcher will perform descriptive statistics and frequency distribution analysis to report the attribute variables and numeric variables associated with demographic data. This research will use Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This is because Hair et al., (2017) has postulated this as a systematic procedure to conduct the data analysis.

DISCUSSION

The analytical reason for proposing entrepreneurial system as a factor behind SMD is based on the findings of earlier research which proved that entrepreneurial system is significant determinants of SMD (Wu & Song, 2019; Wang et al., 2020 & Ferdous & Huda, 2023). For students, they allocate considerable time to using social media and institutional efforts to form entrepreneurial competencies that can be positively or negatively affected by the content exposure on these digital channels. Therefore, it is predicted that entrepreneurial system can also be a significant determinant of SMD among Gen Zers. By taking the three systems of SMD namely social system, social media system and entrepreneurial system, this study proposed six hypotheses saying that these three dimensions can significantly determine SMD among Gen Zers. This model is proposed for Gen Zers benefit because it is observed that this cohort use smartphone frequently to do social networking on social media. It is suggested that the high dependence on smartphones by students may be indicative of a transition from the habitual use of smartphones into an addictive use of it (Ayandele et al., 2019). Gen Zers in this new learning environment would like to spend more time in social media and make the interactive experience memorable by creating unique experiences online. As it is general phenomenon that every Gen Zers want to get personal and organizational satisfaction. The online environment full of helpful information is also the best giving them opportunity to explore social media in a more comfortable and positive situation. As a result, social media allows students and lecturers to communicate with each other in different ways, participate in knowledge sharing activities, and connect with learning communities (Dron & Anderson, 2014). These interactions led them to get involved in dialogue for information seeking, information sharing, and information viral. Once they get higher value out of their interaction, they would also like to start sharing feedback with other students, act as a citizenship agent for the online environment and facilitate other students in getting more value out of their SMD.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on an extensive review of earlier research in the domain of social system, social media system and entrepreneurial system, a conceptual model is proposed. Drawing from the theory of MSD and examining SMD in return, entrepreneurial system variable is proposed. This study has made two specific contributions to the body of knowledge of SMD. Firstly, for theory enhancement, it will widen the existing knowledge of MSD theory by extending the application of the entrepreneurial system perspective. This study has extended the understanding of MSD theory by incorporating entrepreneurial system dimension as one of the antecedents to better understand SMD towards Gen Zers frequent online usage. As past studies are predominantly looking from both social and media interaction perspective, the addition of entrepreneurial system will enhance the understanding of SMD concepts and its importance from the Gen Zers perspective, particularly the future business graduates, in this study. The link between entrepreneurial system and SMD among the Gen Zers in Malaysia will be an extension to the MSD theory as a relationship link, which will add value to the research model.

Secondly for practitioners, marketers and the management team, this study aims to provide a conceptualisation of SMD in a more practical manner that can be enforced as a positive strategy in the future. Significant results obtained from examining all these Gen Zers. SMD can help to identify their success or setback factors. This understanding can act as a guide to determine how much freedom Gen Zers could have in using social media and not get behavioural addiction which could help to promote social media literacy later among future graduates and secure quick employment upon graduation. This is another perspective that able to add value to existing knowledge in this area.

As for future research, the penetration of social media literacy among Gen Zers will also enable them to grasp the importance of digital media and utilizing it positively to develop them to be more creative and innovative. Applying futuristic thinking, this knowledge will provide access for future researchers to explore further Gen Zers that plays a vital role that can contributes to economic success of a country. Gen Zers who adopt the characteristic of innovativeness from this digital media will foster creative energy especially in the telecommunication and advertising industry as nowadays social media education is offered in higher institutions. The potential entrepreneurs' skills will be sharpened over high intensity of using and networking through social media.

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