

YOUTH SOCIAL MEDIA DYNAMICS: TRENDS, INFLUENCES, AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION

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Abstract: The rising popularity of social media rise in popularity has changed how individuals acquire information, interact, and communicate. Even though social media can provide self-belonging feelings of social connectivity and well-being, there are some concerns about the potential downsides of this behaviour especially when excessive use of social media overshadows its numerous benefits. The growing concerns with regards to the effects of social media addiction on Malaysian youth served as the driving force behind this study. This study investigated the factors that drive social media addiction and its impact on the youth. This study conducted two focus group interviews (12 participants) with students from three different universities and the data was analysed using qualitative analysis. The findings revealed that the key factors for social media addiction include Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO), obtaining timely pertinent information, and following trends. However, social media can be considered as a positive, as a platform for acquiring new knowledge and generating income from online sales. But excessive social media use can negatively affect and individuals' ability to carry out the necessary day-to-day activities and can also adversely affect his or her well-being. Notably, religion has emerged as a factor that promotes responsible social media use and prevents addiction. This research sheds light on the complex interplay between social media, youth behaviours, and religious influences, offering insights into mitigating the adverse effects of social media addiction.

Keywords: Social media, addiction, youth, influence, religion.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has significantly transformed the means by which users communicate, establish connections, and access information (Mohd Dali *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, the emergence of social media addiction has garnered significant attention from scholars, professionals, and society. The impact of social media participation on an individuals' sense of social connectedness and well-being has been thoroughly investigated.

More attention has been paid in recent research, to investigating the possible it is excessive use (Casale *et al.*, 2018; Liu & Ma, 2018; Chen & Xiao, 2022). The motivation for doing this study is growing concern about the effects of social media addiction on the general health and effectiveness of Malaysian youth. Notwithstanding its many benefits, social media

addiction has become a major social issue (Alhusban *et al.*, 2022). The main goal of this research is to improve the understanding of the many factors that leads to social media addiction in Malaysian youth and the possible effects it may have on their mental health and general well-being.

Social media's pervasive influence has revolutionised the way people interact, communicate, and access information within the complex web of contemporary society (Xu, 2019; Arora & Mehta, 2023). Social media addiction has gained traction, which calls for in-depth research ahead of the advent of the digital age. This study seeks to go beyond surface-level answers by exploring the multifaceted phenomena of social media addiction among Malaysian youth. However, as we commence

this endeavour of comprehension, a noticeable gap in the available literature has drawn the research focus.

The addiction to social media has a wide range of effects on sustainability, with a special focus on financial, cultural, social, and psychological well-being. The excessive use of social media frequently results in financial vulnerability (She *et al.*, 2023) due to an uptick in spending on digital devices, data plans, and digital content, which can strain financial resources and hinder long-term economic stability.

In addition, the widespread impact of social media extends to cultural and social spheres, where it moulds norms and behaviours. The excessive use may eventually adversely impact cultural sustainability by progressively increasing individual isolation and loneliness (Marttila *et al.*, 2021) undermining long-standing cultural values and reducing in-person social interactions.

Furthermore, social media addiction often leads to worry, psychological discomfort, and depression (Yoon *et al.*, 2019), the psychological effects of this addiction should not be undervalued (Keles *et al.*, 2020). Dealing with social media addiction is an essential step towards helping people become healthier and more psychologically resilient, which will help sustainable communities flourish.

The Social Factors of Social Addiction

In the case of young people, social factors, peer influence in particular, have a major impact on the development of social media addiction. Social media platforms serve as venues for peer groups to display and enforce social norms. Motivated by a strong need for social acceptability and a feeling of belonging, youth often adopt the online habits of their peers. The influence exerted by existing tendencies within one's social circles plays a key role in the formation of addictive behaviours, as individuals want to preserve a sense of affiliation and inclusion. Available literature shows that the social factors

can be further divided into the family setting (Topino *et al.*, 2023) social comparison and the cyberbullying phenomenon (Lee *et al.*, 2023).

Marengo *et al.* (2022) investigated how individual propensities for social media addiction among Italian youngsters during the COVID-19 outbreak were affected by smartphone and social media use. The study looked at the prevalence and causes of social media addiction in Italy considering the pandemic's consequences. Sümen (2021) talked about how social media addiction impacts high school students' sleep patterns and mental well-being. The cross-sectional study looked at the relationship between high school students' psychological well-being and how they used social media and how well they sleep. Luo *et al.* (2022) studied the prevalence and underlying causes of social media addiction among Chinese healthcare professionals, placing special attention on the effects of burnout and general self-efficacy.

From the perspectives of information quality and system quality, Qin *et al.* (2022) investigated the addictive behaviour of the short-form video app TikTok using the S-O-R model as a theoretical framework by comparing and validating Facebook and TikTok's problematic use metrics. Social media has ingrained itself into contemporary life, especially among teenagers and its effects on mental health have attracted attention. The relationship between social media addiction and adolescent orthorexia nervosa, eating habits, and body image was examined by Yurtdaş-Depboylu *et al.* (2022). The study emphasised a link between social media addiction and eating disorders, propensities for orthorexia, and poor body image. There was a relationship noted between higher risk and regular exposure to inaccurate nutrition-related posts and unrealistic body images.

The impact of the home environment is crucial in shaping the way youth use social media platforms. People's views towards technology and the level of parental supervision over online activity have an impact on the dynamics of social media use. Addiction-related problems may be less likely to arise in families who foster

an atmosphere of open communication and set explicit rules on proper online activity.

However, Zhang *et al.* (2019) discovered that a lack of parental involvement or the imposition of restrictive measures may lead to a rise in the use of social media platforms as a vehicle for disobedience or asylum-seeking. One fundamental feature of human activity is social comparison, which is further intensified on social media sites. The constant exposure to well-chosen and idealised depictions of the lives of one's peers promotes the development of a culture that is based on comparison.

The act of social comparison, which is an intrinsic aspect of human behaviour is significantly amplified when it occurs on social media platforms. The continuous exposure to carefully selected and idealised portrayals of one's peers' lives contributes to the development of a culture centred around comparison. As shown by research conducted by Wang *et al.* (2023) and Leijse *et al.* (2023), adolescents may feel pressured to engage excessively on these platforms to comply with perceived cultural standards, driven by a desire for social affirmation. The prevalence of addictive tendencies seen in this group is significantly influenced by the existence of emotions of inadequacy and the need for validation. As users navigate the complexities of Internet social connections and try to balance negative experiences, the site becomes more addictive and acts as a haven for those seeking acceptance.

The Psychological Factors of Social Addiction

The internal processes and influences that mould a person's ideas, feelings, and actions are referred to as psychological factors. According to research, escapism, poor self-esteem, and FOMO are some of the main causes of social media addiction. Suhud *et al.* (2023) claimed that psychological characteristics like narcissism and low self-esteem play a role in the development of social media and travel addiction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Di Blasi *et al.* (2022) conducted longitudinal research to look at the relationship between psychological distress and

problematic social media use. The results of that research paper showed that the link between the two is driven by changes in characteristics rather than state-like changes throughout time. This made the complex relationship between using social media and mental health clearer.

When evaluating the characteristic that correlates to Internet and social media addiction, Lyvers *et al.* (2022) focused on three traits: Alexithymia, narcissism, and social anxiety. They found that whereas narcissism and social anxiety are associated with Internet and social media addiction, alexithymia is only associated with online addiction. This suggests that various personality traits may influence different forms of Internet addiction.

Additionally, Huang (2022) conducted a meta-analysis examining the relationship between personality traits and social media addiction. Research indicates that social media addiction is strongly correlated with neuroticism, however, conscientiousness and agreeableness act as buffers against this relationship. Dilawar *et al.* (2022) examined the relationship between extraversion and neuroticism and social media addiction by using social media usage as a mediator. They found that although the impact of neuroticism is entirely mediated by use, the effect of extraversion is only partially mediated by use. This research highlighted the mediating role that consumption plays and the many personality traits that influence addiction.

Miceli *et al.* (2022) looked at neuroticism and time perspective in connection to Facebook addiction. They found that Facebook addiction is well predicted by past-negative time perspectives, especially when combined with high levels of neuroticism. This demonstrates that those who are very neurotic and tend to focus on the negative parts of the past are more prone to develop a Facebook addiction. Marengo *et al.* (2020) examined the connection between extraversion and neuroticism and social media addiction by analysing posting frequency and likes received. Their findings revealed distinct associations between personality, activity, and addiction.

Modrzynski's (2021) researched social media looking at the phenomena of popularity, its effects, and the hazards associated with social media addiction. Al-Samarraie *et al.* (2022) investigated the origins, effects, and possible preventative measures of social media addiction among young users. The study's objective was to comprehend and treat addiction problems that young people who use social media endure. Dalvi-Esfahani *et al.* (2021) investigation of the relationship between personality qualities and high school students' addiction to social media centres on empathy and other psychological elements as moderating variables. Stănculescu and Griffiths (2022) employed latent profile analysis to analyse the profiles of social media addiction and associated risk factors while Smith and Short (2022) explored needs affordance as a key factor in the probability of problematic social media use.

Reduced self-esteem and overuse of social media platforms have a complicated relationship. Teens who have low self-esteem may actively look for approval and validation from others on social media. The need for approval turns into a driving force that leads to more compulsive use of these platforms.

One important psychological factor that has been linked to the emergence of social media addiction in young people is FOMO (Fabris *et al.*, 2020; Fang *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2022). A psychiatric disorder known as FOMO is characterised by a person's anxiety or discomfort at missing opportunities, experiences, or social events. Research was conducted on one important psychological factor that has been linked to the emergence of social media addiction in young people is FOMO (Fabris *et al.*, 2020; Fang *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2022). A psychiatric disorder known as FOMO is characterised by a person's anxiety or discomfort at missing out on opportunities, experiences, or social events.

The research was conducted on young people in Türkiye by Bakioglu *et al.* (2022) revealed that FOMO often coincides with the extensive use of social media. The constant barrage of information about the lives of others

feeds feelings of inadequacy and fear of being excluded. Driven by the need to stay informed and connected, people overuse social media as a coping mechanism for FOMO (Zhu & Xiong, 2022). Recent research conducted by Ngo *et al.* (2024) suggested that FOMO functions as a mediator between peer influence and social media addiction. This points out the significance of FOMO in the correlation between peer influence and social media addiction. The anxiety of being outpaced by peers in adhering to contemporary trends could lead youths into an addictive pattern of social media obsession. The addiction tendencies associated with social media use are made worse by the general prevalence of this fear.

Escapism refers to the psychological phenomenon in which individuals seek to avoid or improve their reality. Social media platforms provide a digital refuge for young individuals who are facing genuine difficulties and are under a lot of pressure in their everyday lives. The appeal of online spaces as other worlds provides a transient respite from the troubles and burdens of everyday life. Lonely individuals (Zhang *et al.*, 2022) or in search of relief from stressors may display escapist tendencies by engaging extensively with social media (Bae, 2023), which can lead to the development of addictive behaviours as the platform progressively becomes a relied-upon coping technique.

The concept of social validation refers to the psychological phenomenon in which individuals seek confirmation and acceptance from others to validate their beliefs. The quest for social affirmation serves as a primary psychological motivator behind the development of addiction to social media. Büttner *et al.* (2023) investigated the desire to publicly display belonging on social media, revealing a novel dimension influencing social media use.

Studies on the gender component of social media addiction abound. There are gender disparities in the onset of Internet addiction and its associated variables emphasise the necessity for specialised therapies (Mari *et al.*, 2023). To shed light on how university students' online

behaviour and physical activity interact, Huang *et al.* (2022) looked at the correlations between physical activity and various forms of problematic Internet use. Caner *et al.* (2022) investigated how social media addiction affects adolescents' worry over their looks in public. The research revealed a few variables that may contribute to adolescents worry about appearance, including gender, perceptions of income, and exposure to social media influencers.

Other studies provided a detailed exploration of specific aspects. Based on psychological characteristics, Stănculescu and Griffiths (2022) used latent profile analysis to establish various social media addiction profiles. They distinguished between various levels of addiction risk and emphasised the impact of social anxiety, gender, and age as these profiles' antecedents. Furthermore, they stressed how crucial it is to consider each person's unique circumstances while tackling social media addiction. Zhang *et al.* (2022) looked into the demographics, family environment, and psychosocial aspects that Chinese teenage Internet addiction is influenced by.

They discovered that detrimental psychological components like anxiety and sadness play a substantial role in a variety of behavioural addictions, including addiction to social media, smartphones, and online gaming. Bouffard *et al.* (2022) studied the impact of excessive social media use on romantic relationships, finding that increased use of platforms like Instagram could lead to conflicts, negative outcomes, and even addiction. The study also highlighted the role of relationship satisfaction and personal sacrifice in mitigating the negative effects.

The measurable indicators of online engagements, such as the number of likes, comments, and shares, function as concrete assessments of one's sense of value and self-esteem.

Xu *et al.* (2023) in their study confirmed that individuals with low self-esteem are at higher risk of becoming social media addicts

due to seeking social validation. Adolescents, driven by a desire for external validation, engage in extensive social media interactions to obtain favourable affirmations. The addictive quality of this endeavour is emphasised by the constant need to maintain or increase one's social validation metrics through ongoing and frequently excessive involvement with the site. Zarate *et al.* (2023) investigated the psychometric characteristics of the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale.

Motivations, flow, and a sense of belonging were noted by Miranda *et al.* (2023) as key determinants in the emergence of social networking site addiction. The Metacognitions about Social Media Use Scale (MSMUS), which explores metacognitive elements and their connections to problematic social media and Internet gaming behaviours was also developed (Akbari *et al.*, 2023).

The Impacts of Social Media Towards the Youth

Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of individuals, especially among young adults. Research has shown that social media addiction can have both positive and negative impact on individuals. On the positive side, engagement with social media platforms can enhance feelings of social connectedness and well-being (Chen & Xiao, 2022). Moreover, social media can serve as a coping mechanism for individuals in psychological distress.

Keles (2020) a nurse specialising in psychiatric patients found that social media addiction can provide a sense of comfort and distraction for individuals dealing with stress or emotional challenges (Piteo & Ward, 2020). Additionally, social media can facilitate communication and information sharing, allowing individuals to connect with others around the world and stay updated on current events.

However, a study conducted by Prieto and Reyes (2021) exhibited a contrasting outcome since they did not find any correlation between

social media addiction and psychological well-being. The excessive use of social media can also have detrimental effects on individuals. Research has shown that social media addiction is associated with negative mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety (Alhusban *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, the disproportionate use of social media platforms like Facebook has been linked to problems at work (Zivnuska *et al.*, 2019), academics (Azizi *et al.*, 2019), and interpersonal relationships (Siyana & Zinna, 2018). Social media addiction has also been found to negatively impact self-esteem and decision-making abilities among students (Alhusban *et al.*, 2022).

Moreover, studies have highlighted the negative effects of social media addiction on academic performance, health, interpersonal connections, and general well-being among students (Caratiquit & Caratiquit, 2023). An investigation conducted by Oumaima Alaika *et al.* (2020) revealed that social media addiction detrimentally affects the academic performance, physical and mental health, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being of university students in Morocco.

Religion and Its Roles in Social Media Addiction

Literature shows that religion has a significant impact on consumer behaviour (Mohd Dali *et al.*, 2019) and plays a vital role in curbing social media addiction. A study found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, university students in Indonesia who were more addicted to social media were more likely to experience mild depression, but those that practised a religion or faith and had strong family bonds were more disciplined and had better mental health, which highlighted the importance of promoting family relationships and religiosity as a means of reducing social media addiction for students' well-being (Sujarwoto *et al.*, 2023).

An empirical case study documented that a patient adhered to her religious doctrine by abstaining from social media. During that

week, she experienced an increase in happiness, a decrease in anxiety, and a greater sense of satisfaction with life. Nevertheless, when resuming her customary engagement with social media, her anxiety and depression symptoms resurfaced, leading to a further decline in her overall satisfaction with her life (Bettmann *et al.*, 2020).

The addiction to social media does not only harm individuals but also adversely affects the future of society as a whole, leads to a decline in both morality and spirituality. Hence, Islam (2019) argued that religion has a substantial impact on the use of social media and firmly advocates the imperative of instilling religious awareness in youth, as no religion promotes moral bankruptcy. While studies by Charlton *et al.* (2013), Atwood *et al.* (2017), Lu *et al.* (2018), Malinakova *et al.* (2018), and Koo *et al.* (2021) also found religion to be a protective factor against Internet addiction. However, Durkee *et al.* (2012) and Ekşi and Çiftçi (2017) discovered otherwise. This discrepancy between the findings requires more investigation.

The existing body of literature provides a substantial amount of study on the topic of social media addiction, including a wide range of views from across the globe. However, there is a noticeable absence of literature in the Malaysian context, which necessitates a thorough and systematic examination. The existing body of literature provides insights into the general dynamics of social media addiction. However, there is a need for a more detailed examination that delves into the specific reasons and consequences within the distinct socio-cultural and religious context of Malaysian adolescents. Hence, this study's research questions are posed as follows:

- (1) What are the elements that contribute to the propensity of young individuals to develop an addiction to social media?
- (2) What are the effects of social media on the younger generation?
- (3) How does religion play a role in social media addiction?

Materials and Methods

The data collection methodology in this study employed a focus group technique combined with purposive sampling, following a similar approach to that used in the study by Kahar *et al.* (2023). Participants were selected based on their responses to an online screening survey, which identified individuals who may exhibit signs of online addiction. The interpretation of youth in this study was based on the definitions provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). These organisations present differing meanings of the phrase's "youth", "adolescents", and "young people", which demonstrate variations in the defined age ranges.

Adolescents, commonly aged between 10 and 19 years, undergo a phase of transformation marked by the transition from childhood to adulthood, even though they may still be attending educational establishments. In this study, the term "youth" is used to denote individuals between the ages of 18 and 21. This demographic primarily comprises individuals who have recently completed high school and are engaged in pre-university coursework or jobs. The present stage bears considerable significance in the exploration of one's personal identity.

The focus of this study revolves around a group of pre-university students in Malaysia. This cohort includes students from Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), offers insights into the experiences of youth transferring to higher education within these institutions. Although not entirely representative of the wider youth demographic, the sample provides significant insights pertinent to this subset. Subsequent studies may build upon these results by integrating a broader array of institutions to improve generalisability.

As shown in Figure 1, the screening survey items utilised in this study were derived from the Internet Addiction Diagnostic Questionnaire

(IADQ) (Young, 1998). Potential participants who exhibit a favourable answer to a minimum of five out of the eight inquiries have fulfilled the prerequisites for acceptance and possess the necessary qualifications to participate in the targeted group discourse. Subsequently, individuals who satisfy the prescribed criteria were contacted. A total of 12 participants, divided into two focus groups were involved in the study. The initial group comprised of five participants from Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, two females, and three males. The second group comprised of seven male respondents from Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin and Universiti Teknologi MARA. The individuals in question were drawn from diverse academic backgrounds, except for Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia students, who primarily pursued religious studies. Content analysis was employed in this study to analyse the collected data.

Results and Discussion

Each participant typically uses Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Twitter as their primary social media platform. Depending on how much power a phone uses, the time spent on social media was estimated at more than six hours. Additionally, WhatsApp application is crucial for staying connected with classmates to discuss assignments and other things since students must take classes online following the COVID-19 pandemic. The other platforms on the other hand are only used to play games, buy, and sell items, and acquire information. The participants expressed their view on the drawbacks of social media.

Fear of Missing Out, Acquiring New Information and Following the Latest Trends

The comprehensive examination of data in these focused-group interviews has revealed three crucial variables that significantly contribute to the motivation of youth to actively engage in social media participation. The initial factor

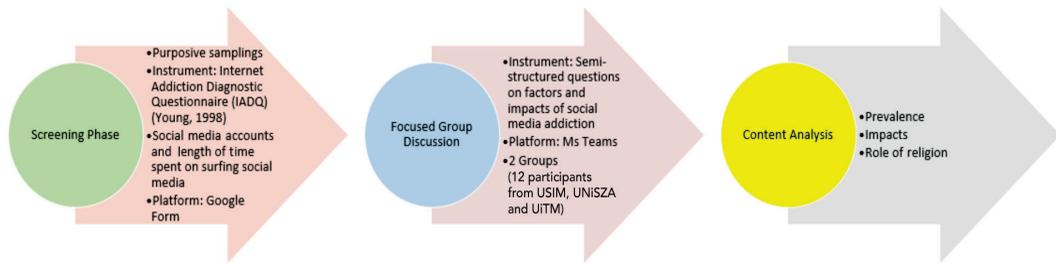


Figure 1: Research design

that arises as a notable catalyst is the impact of peer pressure, FOMO, which suggests that individuals are frequently motivated to embrace and employ social media platforms as a result of the dissemination of shared material within their social networks, as per the comments:

“The peer influence. Earlier, someone mentioned that they didn’t have TikTok, but because a friend shared a TikTok video link, they felt compelled to download TikTok.”

(Participant 1, Group 2)

“Yeah. Because there were already groups and majority of my friends were on Facebook at the time. There are typically class groups like that on Facebook.”

(Participant 2, Group 1)

The adoption of media driven by peers emphasises the social aspect of consuming media and emphasises the major influence of interpersonal interactions on digital behaviours. Furthermore, the appeal of obtaining timely and pertinent information emerges as an additional significant incentive. The participants demonstrated a clear inclination towards social media platforms as their primary sources for up-to-date news updates, instructional materials, and current events, as shown by the comment below:

“When it comes to spreading information, it is really good, especially for those who do not watch TV. For example, Twitter can provide the latest information about COVID and so on.”

(Participant 5, Group 1)

They emphasised the platforms’ significance as dynamic hubs of information. Finally, the motivation to conform to prevailing trends becomes apparent, as individuals strive to associate themselves with the most recent cultural, fashion, or technological advancements as shown below:

“Nowadays, trends are getting newer and newer. For example, if we do not have Instagram, people will say; seriously, you do not have Instagram?”

(Participant 4, Group 2)

“On IG if you do not follow the latest trends, it feels like life is really boring. If you go anywhere people will talk about IG, even put their phone number on IG.”

(Participant 2, Group 2)

The tendency demonstrates the impact of sociocultural factors on the utilisation of social media, wherein remaining informed about current trends is a fundamental component of engaging in digital platforms. The recognition and comprehension of these motivational variables brings significant insights into the intricate dynamics of social media interaction, providing a holistic viewpoint on the many determinants that underlie youth involvement in the digital domain.

Impacts – Time Deficiency and Financial Loss vs. Income Generation and Knowledge Acquisition

The focused-group discussion revealed two primary ramifications that the participants shared. The negative consequences linked to the

use of social media extend beyond the immediate timeframe, comprising significant investments of time and money that can potentially lead to addiction and behavioural complexities. The ubiquity of social media platforms frequently prompts individuals to dedicate substantial amounts of time to searching through material, immersing themselves in a range of activities including scrolling, watching videos, and participating in online debates, as evident below:

“Wasting money also because we frequently top up Internet packages. You need the Internet to use social media. So, in the end, it is somewhat of a monetary loss as well. Some people’s bills go up to 80 or 100 every month, so in a year; that’s around 1,200 just for Internet used for social media.”

(Participant 5, Group 2)

“Yeah, so the downside of it, is that when we, let’s say, spend too much time on a single application, we tend to forget to eat, bathe, we might not shower for three days. So, that is the downside of it.”

(Participant 7, Group 2)

The increased level of time devoted to digital activities, although facilitating the sharing of information and social engagement, might unintentionally result in the development of addictive behaviours, wherein individuals find themselves consistently engaging in extended periods of digital interactions. Furthermore, it is important to highlight the financial consequences associated with the use of social media. Users may be subject to various costs such as data consumption, Internet subscriptions, and in-app purchases, which could lead to a substantial expenditure of funds. The complicated interaction between excessive time and financial expenses in social media usage gives rise to addiction and adds to behavioural difficulties. This sheds light on the delicate connection between the digital domain and personal welfare.

Nevertheless, the study also identified several positive consequences associated with the widespread utilisation of social media platforms. The participants articulated their conviction that individuals utilise social media platforms not solely for personal gratification, but also to create additional revenue, particularly through influencer marketing or online sales. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that consumers regard social media platforms as a significant and advantageous resource for obtaining information and expanding their knowledge base. As emphasised by a participant:

“Lots of business folks and influencers use social media to promote stuff. They do it right to make more money and create economic opportunities. Users can also learn a lot of new things, like... doctors sharing their knowledge on prevention and cure for diseases via TikTok. Or teachers share their teaching materials...”

(Participant 6, Group 2)

Social media activities encompass more than just enjoyment; they represent a strategic approach to augment one’s earnings and acquire novel knowledge. This implies that, in addition to the potential disadvantages, there is an acknowledgement of the beneficial effects of social media on economic prospects and the acquisition of knowledge.

The Role of Religion

With regards to the influence of religious our faith-based considerations on social media use, a predominant number of participants underscored the importance of religion, contending that it assumes a pivotal position in directing individuals utilising the Internet to discern between ethical and unethical behaviours as evident in the comments below, which was supported by all the participants:

“Religion does not let us talk about stuff we’re not sure about because we do not want to spread any bad rumours... I

think religion is pretty important when it comes to using social media the right way.”

(Participant 6, Group 2)

“In my opinion, I feel that religion plays an important role in all aspects of life. The same goes for social media. For instance, there are some people... for example, like me, I enjoy watching forums and sometimes people who speak or write about freedom of speech or human rights, it sometimes feels strange. How do they have the courage to say things like that if they are Muslims? So, for me, religion is important to constantly remind ourselves. Regarding certain limits... like when we talk about freedom of speech on social media, within religion, we need to remember the boundaries we can reach before exceeding what is proper.”

(Participant 4, Group 1)

“A lot of people just throw around mean words and end up being cyberbullies... I hope they can be more ethical when using social media.”

(Participant 3, Group 1)

“We often get angry and say things on Twitter, right? But if we refer to the teachings of the Prophet, he reminded us that if there’s nothing good to say, it’s better to remain silent. We are taught to be patient. This is where the role of Islam comes in, teaching us to stay silent rather than saying something bad. If we do want to speak, it should be something good. However, it’s better to stay silent than to cause slander. That’s my opinion.”

(Participant 1, Group 2)

“Okay, regarding the religious factor, in my opinion, I want to emphasise more on its usage. The use of social media should focus on spreading religious elements or elements of preaching. For

example, TikTok, which was previously known by people as... people say TikTok is a place for dancing and so on. But now, we can see that there are many beneficial things. For instance, even religious figures now have TikTok accounts. Like our university board member, Ustaz X, who uses TikTok to share his knowledge. Many other religious scholars also use the platform as a medium for preaching. This means it depends on how it’s used, to instil Islamic values and spread them to society through social media. So, as we can see, the use of social media now can be considered a primary aspect of life. They utilise this main aspect of life to make it a cause for non-Muslims to become more interested in Islam and for Muslims to seek deeper knowledge about Islam.”

(Participant 1, Group 1)

The interviews reveal a sophisticated comprehension of the relationships between religion and social media, especially in shaping ethical conduct and promoting positive online interaction. Participants often described religion as a moral foundation that assists them in addressing the issues presented by social media platforms. This ethical framework is crucial in tackling challenges like the proliferation of misinformation, cyberbullying, and the abuse of free speech. The focus on information verification, truthfulness, and harm avoidance corresponds with fundamental religious teachings, particularly those inherent in Islamic values, which highlight the need for ethical communication.

A prominent subject arising from the interviews is the equilibrium between freedom of expression and religious constraints. Participants recognised the significance of social media as a medium for self-expression, although they underscored the necessity of conforming to religious teachings that delineate acceptable boundaries. This equilibrium underscores the participants’ cognisance of their obligations

both as social media users and as individuals influenced by their faith. The influence of religion in establishing these boundaries guarantees that freedom of speech is practised within an ethical and respectful context, preventing actions that may injure others or conflict with religious principles.

Moreover, religion was regarded as a catalyst for fostering constructive communication and deterring detrimental information. Participants considered how religious doctrines promote awareness in digital communications, frequently referencing Islamic teachings, such as speaking just when possessing something positive to convey. This method highlights the significance of religion in cultivating patience, self-control, and empathy, which are vital attributes for alleviating the frequently detrimental characteristics of digital platforms.

A notable theme is the utilisation of social media as a medium for religious dissemination and propagation of Islamic teachings. Participants acknowledged the transformative capacity of platforms such as TikTok, which have transitioned from primarily entertainment-oriented to venues for disseminating religious information. Religious leaders and intellectuals were observed to be adeptly employing these venues to engage broader audiences, encompassing both Muslims desiring greater comprehension and non-Muslims investigating the faith. The dual function of social media as an educational tool and a connector of communities underscores its ability to promote spiritual development and religious academic discourse.

Furthermore, the participants recognised the inclusive potential of religion when integrated with social media. They highlighted that religious material could entice non-Muslims to investigate Islam while also strengthening the convictions of current adherents. This outreach-focused viewpoint highlights the flexibility of religious spiritual beliefs in using contemporary methods to engage varied populations. In this context, social media serves as a potent tool for promoting understanding and developing ethical communities grounded in shared values.

Conclusions

The scholarly investigation highlights the complex interaction between social and psychological variables within the realm of social media addiction among young individuals. It is crucial to acknowledge and understand the intricate dynamics involved in effectively designing interventions that specifically address the potential hazards linked to over utilisation of social media within this demographic. This study offers significant contributions in terms of understanding the frequency and repercussions of social media addiction among Malaysian youth.

The prevalence of social media addiction has been attributed to the fear of missing out, the demand for the latest information, and the compulsion to stay up to date with the current trends. The negative impact such as time deficiency and monetary loss; the positive impact of social media addiction such as income generation and knowledge acquisition, have been observed.

The study additionally demonstrates that religion exerts a significant influence in directing young individuals towards responsible social media usage and mitigating the risk of developing addictive behaviours concerning social media. The excessive use of social media has a profound effect on sustainability, affecting various aspects such as financial stability, cultural preservation, social connections, and mental health. Overuse can result in higher expenses on digital resources, putting a strain on financial stability and impeding economic sustainability. It is crucial to promote financial literacy and responsible spending habits among youth to mitigate these effects.

In addition, social media has a significant impact on cultural and social norms, which can potentially undermine traditional values and diminish face-to-face interactions. This poses a challenge to the sustainability of our culture. Promoting critical thinking and media literacy skills can contribute to aligning social media usage with sustainable cultural and social

principles. In addition, excessive use of social media can lead to significant psychological effects such as increased stress, feelings of sadness, and a sense of isolation.

These consequences can harm both an individual's overall well-being and the resilience of their community. Recognising the importance of tackling social media addiction is crucial in promoting psychological well-being and building sustainable communities. Promoting healthy digital habits and establishing effective support systems for individuals adversely impacted by social media addiction can contribute significantly to fostering a more sustainable and balanced online environment.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial, or financial conflict and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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