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**THE EFFECT OF INSTAGRAM USAGE FOR
SEEKING MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION
AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ON HELP
SEEKING ATTITUDES VIA MENTAL
HEALTH AWARENESS**



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IDZREEN NUR FATHENNADWA BT MOHAMAD

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2024



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**DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A MASTERS OF ARTS
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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

2024



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In this world, she is my world. To the woman of my life, the person who gave me my name, my guiding light and my best friend. I hope you know how much I love you. The unwavering love and care that you have given me has painted me to become the person I am today, this one's for you Ma.

To my person, Mohd Hafiz. For all that you do and for who you are, it was comfort and relief to know that at the end of the day, I will come home to you. Thank you for always being there for me when I needed you. For walking this journey with me, hand in hand with immensurable love and devotion, Thank you *Sayang*.

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the role of the Instagram (IG) platform in shaping users' perceptions towards help-seeking among university students in Malaysia, who are mostly active IG users and claimed to have stigma towards seeking mental help. Using the survey research method, data were collected using an online questionnaire. Purposive sampling was employed involving 364 undergraduate students at two universities in Perak, namely Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) and MARA University of Technology (UiTM). Descriptive Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling Analysis were carried out to answer the research questions and draw conclusions for the research. The results showed a moderate level of IG usage for seeking mental health information and emotional support, a high level of mental health awareness, and positive help-seeking attitudes among the students. It was also found that IG usage for seeking mental health information had an indirect effect on help-seeking attitudes via the mediation effect of mental health awareness, while IG usage for seeking emotional support had a direct effect on help-seeking attitudes but was not mediated by mental health awareness. Based on the findings it can be concluded that Instagram usage can have positive effects towards help seeking attitudes through mediation of mental health awareness. The study contributes by providing two important insights. First it describes ways how to promote accounts, gain more followers and spread mental health awareness among university students in Malaysia. Second, it provides students with the knowledge of how social media can be used to learn more about mental health, and reduce their stigma about help-seeking.





KESAN PENGGUNAAN MAKLUMAT KESIHATAN MENTAL DAN SOKONGAN EMOSI TERHADAP SIKAP Mencari BANTUAN MELALUI KESEDARAN KESIHATAN MENTAL DI INSTAGRAM

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peranan platform Instagram (IG) dalam membentuk persepsi pengguna terhadap mencari bantuan di kalangan pelajar universiti di Malaysia yang kebanyakannya pengguna IG aktif dan mendakwa mempunyai stigma untuk mendapatkan bantuan mental. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dalam kajian ini di mana data diperolehi melalui soal-selidik. Kaedah persampelan bertujuan melibatkan 364 pelajar daripada dua universiti terpilih di Perak, Malaysia iaitu Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) dan Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) telah dijalankan. Analisis Deskriptif dan Model Persamaan Struktural dijalankan untuk menjawab persoalan kajian dan seterusnya memperolehi rumusan kajian. Implikasi kajian mendapati pelajar mempunyai tahap penggunaan IG yang sederhana untuk mencari maklumat kesihatan mental dan mendapatkan sokongan emosi, tahap kesedaran kesihatan mental yang tinggi, dan sikap mencari bantuan yang positif. Selain itu, perkaitan secara tidak langsung di antara penggunaan IG untuk mencari maklumat kesihatan mental dengan sikap mencari bantuan melalui pengaruh mediasi kesedaran kesihatan mental. Penggunaan IG untuk mendapatkan bantuan emosi pula mempunyai impak secara langsung ke atas sikap mencari bantuan, namun tidak dimediasi oleh kesedaran kesihatan mental. Berdasarkan dapatan kajian tersebut, dapat disimpulkan bahawa penggunaan Instagram boleh memberi kesan positif ke arah membantu mencari sikap melalui mediasi kesedaran kesihatan mental. Kajian ini memberi dua pandangan penting. Pertama, kajian menjelaskan cara bagaimana untuk mempromosikan akaun, memperoleh lebih ramai pengikut dan menyebarkan maklumat kesedaran kesihatan mental di kalangan pelajar universiti di Malaysia. Kedua, kajian ini memberi pengetahuan tentang bagaimana media sosial boleh digunakan untuk mengetahui lebih lanjut mengenai kesihatan mental, dan mengurangkan stigma mereka tentang sikap mencari bantuan.





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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATSPPHS	Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
HSA	Help-Seeking Attitudes
IG	Instagram
IGU	Instagram Usage
IGIS	Instagram Usage for Information Seeking
IGES	Instagram Usage for Emotional Support
MCO	Movement Control Order
MHA	Mental Health Awareness
MIASA	Mental Illness Awareness Support Association
MMHA	Malaysia Mental Health Association
RO	Research Objective
RQ	Research Question
SNS	Social Networking Site
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
UAE	United Arab of Emirates
UiTM	MARA University of Technology
UPSI	Sultan Idris Education University





APPENDIX LIST

- A Survey Form
- B Content Validity Form
- C Face Validity Form





CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



Due to the popularity of social media among the younger generation, many scholars believe that it has the potential to be utilized as an effective medium for young people to learn more about mental health and thus shape more favourable attitudes towards seeking help. Based on this notion, the present study aimed to investigate the effect of using Instagram (IG) for seeking mental health information and emotional support on help-seeking attitudes through the mediation of mental health awareness among university students in Perak, Malaysia.





1.2 Background Research

As technology continues to evolve, social media has become one of the most popular online activities among users. According to Kepios, an advisory firm specializing in digital behaviour research, 59.3 percent of the world population, or 4.74 billion people, were social media users as of October 2022 (DataReportal, 2022). Over the past year, the number of social media users has been increasing, with 190 million new users joining social media since 2021. It was also reported that an active social media user normally spends about 2½ hours per day on social media and visits about 7 different social platforms every month (DataReportal, 2022). Among the most popular platforms among youths are Instagram (IG), Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube. These social media platforms let users share information about their personal lives, experiences, pictures, relationships, social events, meetings, and gatherings; observe other people's lives; acquire knowledge about certain issues; purchase goods and services; express their opinions, emotions, and preferences; and fulfil their needs to fit in with society (Ivcevic & Ambady, 2012; Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Ross, & Neuberger et al., 2018; Mohamad & Al Majdhouh, 2020; Wang, Chen, Ou, & Ren, 2019).

As of January 2021, 28 million people in Malaysia, which is about 86 percent of the country's population, were active social media users (Statista, 2021; The Rakyat Post, September 22, 2021). The number had increased by 24 percent from 62 percent of the total population in 2020. According to Statista (2021), an organization specializing in market and consumer data, Malaysia was placed fifth after the UAE, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Netherlands in social network penetration as of January 2021. It was also reported by DataReportal (2021) that social media users in Malaysia





typically spend about three hours and one minute per day on social media. The highest users are youths between 13 and 34 years old, which makes up the largest percentage of 80.3 percent of social media users in Malaysia (Ahmad, Ismail, & Nasir, 2015). Malaysian youths, especially university students, are active in social media for many reasons, including communication with family and friends, information seeking, information sharing, entertainment, and education, among others (Hamid, Ishak, & Yazam, 2015).

Previous studies have shown that social media can be a useful tool to spread mental health information to users (Niu, Hu, Jeong, Brickman, & Stapleton, 2020; Latha, Meena, Pravitha, Dasgupta, & Chaturvedi, 2020; O'Reilly, Dogra, & Hughes, 2018; Prochaska, Coughlin, & Lyons, 2017), especially to young people who are susceptible to all kinds of mental disorders yet tend to be reluctant to seek psychological help (Raaj, Navanathan, Tharmaselan, & Lally, 2021; Vasugi & Hassan, 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2019). Nevertheless, studies that investigate the use of social media platforms, particularly IG, in educating young people in Malaysia about mental health are limited. Based on the review of existing literature, only one conceptual paper was published by Rahman, Mohd Sukor, and Sabran (2019), which provided a brief assessment of social media use for spreading mental health awareness in Malaysia. The paper, however, did not provide any empirical evidence regarding the effect of social media use on users' mental health awareness and their attitudes towards seeking help. Therefore, this paper aimed to fill in this literature gap to better understand in what way IG can be used to increase mental health awareness and endorse favourable help-seeking attitudes in the context of social media users among university students in Malaysia.





1.3 Problem Statement

Over the past decade, the prevalence of mental disorders among young adults in Malaysia has been dramatically increasing (Raaj et al., 2021). The epidemiological data published by the Ministry of Health (MOH) in 2015 reported that 29 percent of adults in Malaysia suffered from mental disorders, a three-fold increase compared to 10 percent in 1996 (MOH, 2015; Ning, 2020). The latest statistics also revealed that 11 percent of young adults of age between 18 and 24 years old in Malaysia have experienced mental health issues, compared to 2 percent of those aged 55 years old and above (Statista, 2022). The top three mental conditions identified include depression, anxiety, and stress (Trusted Malaysia, 2022), which are associated with rapid changes in lifestyle and culture caused by increased globalisation and urbanisation as Malaysia is transitioning towards becoming a high-income country. Other than that, the suicidal ideation rate is also high in Malaysia. 6.9 percent of Malaysian adolescents reported having attempted suicide one or more times in 2017, which is a fivefold increase in comparison with the 1.7 percent who tried to carry out suicide in 2011 (Institute for Public Health, 2017).

The mental health statistics are also consistent with several prior studies that found a high prevalence of mental disorders among young adults, particularly university students in Malaysia. According to Vasugi et al. (2019), 10.7 percent of students at University Putra Malaysia (UPM) experienced severe depression, 24.6 percent experienced severe anxiety, and 60.9 percent experienced moderate stress. Mohammed, Shahar, and Salmiah (2016) claimed that the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress was 32.1 percent, 64.6 percent, and 29.2 percent, respectively,





among students at the same university. Other studies, like Mohamed Izam, Abdul Khaiyom, and Nawawi (2019), Islam, Low, Tong, Yuen, and Abdullah (2018), and Nordin, Abu Talib, Yaacob, and Sabran (2010), also revealed that a fairly high percentage of university students in Malaysia often experience anxiety and worries, confronted with issues of social dysfunction and confidence levels in their daily lives. Furthermore, the mental disorder prevalence rates were higher among the population of university students in Malaysia compared to studies that used similar instruments in the context of university students in other countries (Latiff, Aszahari, Ab Khalek, Fang, & Ibrahim, 2014; Shamsuddin et al., 2013; Gan, Taib, Nasir, Mohd Shariff, & Abu Saad, 2011).

University students are subjected to all kinds of mental and psychological disorders because they usually face many problems throughout their university years, such as academic pressure, peer pressure, social demands, a stressful university environment, family or relationship problems, health issues, financial problems, and future uncertainties (Habibah, Wong, & Maria Chong, 2011; Uehara, Takeuchi, Kubota, Oshima, & Ishikawa, 2010; Kessler et al., 2007). These problems, if left untreated, could lead to more serious repercussions such as self-abuse, violent behaviours, conflicts, the feeling of hopelessness, or even suicidal ideation (Chen, Yu, Ran, & Gilson, 2009; Kay, Li, Xiou, Nokkaew, & Park, 2009; Puskar & Bernardo, 2007). Moreover, their learning efficiency could be hampered, causing long-term behavioural consequences such as poor attendance, skipping class, poor academic performance, dropout, and expulsion (Chen et al., 2009), all of which could jeopardize their future employment (Soudabeh, Majid, Arash, Mehdi, & Amir, 2014; Aris Safree & Dzulkifli, 2011).





However, previous studies indicate that many young people who suffer from mental problems tend to be reluctant to seek help in assessing their mental state, receiving a proper diagnosis, and consequently undergoing intervention or treatment by mental health professionals (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Lynch, Long, & Moorhead, 2018; Rafal, Gatto, & DeBate, 2018; Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2016). Instead, most of them tend to choose avoidant coping strategies when faced with psychological problems by venting, using humour, being in denial, using substance abuse, and adopting behavioural disengagement (Mohammed et al., 2016). Among the reasons for the negative attitudes towards help-seeking include lack of mental health literacy (Milin et al., 2016; Kutcher, Wei, & Morgan, 2016), mental illness stigma (Taylor & Kuo, 2018; Schnyder, Panczak, Groth, & Schultze-Lutter, 2017), social pressure (Taylor & Kuo, 2018), masculinity norms (Mahalik & Di Bianca, 2021; Seidler, Dawes, Rice, Oliffe, & Dhillon, 2016), perceived difficulties associated with seeking professional help (Taylor & Kuo, 2018), and preference of spiritual diagnosis or traditional treatment by clergy or *bomohs* over medical help-seeking (Shoemith et al., 2018).

Prior mental health studies have identified social media as an effective medium that can be utilized by users to seek mental health information (O'Reilly et al., 2018; Bucci, Schwannauer, & Berry, 2019; Naslund, Aschbrenner, Marsch, & Bartels, 2016). Social media platforms like IG, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter provide users with easy access to a wealth of information on mental health topics, including symptoms, coping strategies, treatment options, and resources (O'Reilly et al., 2018). Furthermore, users can seek and share mental health information anonymously on social media, which can be crucial for those who are hesitant to discuss their mental health issues openly due to stigma or privacy concerns (Bucci et al., 2019; Naslund et al., 2016). As people are





more exposed to mental health information on social media, they will have better mental health knowledge and become more aware of various mental health issues. This, in turn, will empower them to take charge of their mental well-being and seek help if needed (Kim, Yu, & Kim, 2020; Moss, Gorczynski, Sims-Schouten, Heard-Laureote, & Creaton, 2022; Cheng, Wang, McDermott, Kridel, & Rislin, 2018). Moreover, several studies like Curran, Ito-Jaeger, Perez Vallejos, and Crawford (2023), Alonzo and Popescu (2021), Thompson et al. (2020), and Sampogna et al. (2017) also indicate that disseminating mental health information through mental health campaigns on social media platforms helps promote mental health awareness, eradicate mental health stigma, and encourage help-seeking, particularly among young people.

Previous studies have also shown that social media can help people seek emotional support online (Mohamad & Al Majdhouh, 2020; Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2018; Wong, Amon, & Keep, 2019; O'Reilly et al., 2018; Naslund et al., 2016). Since it facilitates social interaction, social media helps users feel more connected with their friends (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Clark, Algoe, & Green, 2018) and seek and/or offer support for problems that they face in real life (Liang & Scammon, 2011). Moreover, young people often use social media platforms to share stories about their personal lives, experiences, concerns, opinions, emotions, preferences, etc. (Mohamad & Al Majdhouh, 2020). As they are open to discussing and sharing their emotional problems on social media, they are more likely to have a greater awareness of mental health issues and understand that mental health struggles are common and can affect anyone (Niu et al., 2020; Vostanis, Svirydzenka, Dugard, Singh, & Dogra, 2013; Clement et al., 2015). This may help reduce feelings of shame or embarrassment about seeking help.





Based on the discussion above, it can be said that social media can be used productively to promote positive help-seeking attitudes among young people by encouraging them to seek mental health information or emotional support online. Nevertheless, not everyone is aware of the potential role of social media as a practical tool to obtain mental health information and support. According to O'Reilly, Dogra, and Hughes (2018), social media is still 'massively under-used' by young people for seeking mental health information. Furthermore, those who experience mental illness might be reluctant to use social media for fear of negative comments, online aggression, threats, hostility, or being hurt (Naslund, Bondre, Torous, & Aschbrenner, 2020). In line with this notion, this research aimed to investigate to what extent social media is being used by young people, particularly university students in Malaysia, to seek mental health information and emotional support online.



The focus of social media in this research would be on IG, considering its popularity among young people (Collins, 2021; PiperJaffray, 2018). According to the Pew Research Centre, about 71 percent of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 were IG users, compared to 65 percent who used Snapchat and about 48 percent who used TikTok. One of the reasons for its appeal is that this platform not only allows them to send text-based posts and direct messages but also express themselves through visual content (Collins, 2021). Another reason is that IG has several interesting key features like photo sharing, video sharing, live feed or live streaming, and IG stories, which can be used effectively as a learning platform (Abdulaziz Al Fadda, 2020), community building platform (Thomas, Chavez, Browne, & Minnis, 2020), and promotional tool for raising awareness (Claretta, Arsy, Komarullah, & Hanan, 2022; Latha et al., 2020).



Furthermore, in the context of IG, many mental health IG accounts in Malaysia have less than 10K followers, thus being considered nano-influencers. As shown in Table 1.1, only a few accounts like Womens Aid Organisation, Green Ribbon Group, and MIASA Instagram accounts have a following between 10K and 100K, which makes them micro-influencers. The low number of likes per post for most of the accounts also implies low participation and engagement among their followers. This indicates that many IG users in Malaysia may not be aware of the existence of these accounts or not fully utilize them to gain more knowledge about mental health.

Table 1.1

Mental Health Instagram Accounts

Instagram Account	Instagram Address	Followers	Likes/Post
Thoughtfull	@athoughtfullworld	5,281	20-40
The Mind Faculty	@themindfacultykl	6,120	50-100
Womens Aid Organisation	@womensaidorg	11.7K	20-30
Malaysia Mental Health Association (MMHA)	@mmha_1968	4,960	100-200
MindaKami	@mindakami	2,745	30-40
Green Ribbon Group	@greenribbongroup.my	18.1K	200-300
Ripple Community	@ripple.community	1,922	10-20
Cukup Club	@cukup.club	4,918	400-600
MIASA	@miasa.malaysia	39.1K	40-60

Adaptation from BURO 24/7, 2019



This research would also focus on students from two selected public universities in the state of Perak, Malaysia. By understanding their IG usage for seeking mental health information and online emotional support, mental health agencies and content providers could come up with better ways to encourage young people to make full use of the IG platform to improve their mental health literacy and create supportive online communities. Besides that, by gaining an overview of their mental health awareness levels and attitudes towards help-seeking, the Malaysian government, policymakers, and practitioners can devise a better plan to improve the delivery of mental health services to students, especially those with mental health concerns.

In addition, this research aimed to investigate the direct and indirect effects of IG usage for seeking mental health information and IG usage for seeking emotional support on mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes. This is because little is known about how IG usage is linked to mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes in Malaysian settings. Based on the literature review, only one conceptual paper was published by Rahman et al. (2019) to discuss initiatives taken by mass media and new media in creating mental health awareness among Malaysian teenagers. The paper, however, did not provide any empirical evidence on the relationship between social media usage, mental health awareness, and help-seeking attitudes.

Furthermore, although several prior studies have shown that mental health awareness is crucial for reducing stigma towards mental illnesses (Niu et al., 2020; Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015; Clement et al., 2015), not much is known about the role of mental health awareness as a potential mediator to explain how or why social media usage, either for seeking mental health information or emotional support, is





related to help-seeking attitudes. Therefore, this research also aimed to fill in this literature gap and gain a better understanding of the mechanism by which using IG for seeking mental health information and emotional support can produce changes in help-seeking attitudes through the mediation effect of mental health awareness among young users. It is hoped that the findings will provide university students in Malaysia with some insight on how social media platforms, particularly IG, can be utilized productively to educate themselves about mental health and thus help them achieve better mental well-being.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The key objective of this research was to examine the effect of IG usage for seeking mental health information and emotional support on help-seeking attitudes via mental health awareness among university students in Perak, Malaysia. Specifically, this research aimed:

1. To measure the level of IG usage for seeking mental health information among university students in Perak, Malaysia.
2. To measure the level of IG usage for seeking emotional support among university students in Perak, Malaysia.
3. To measure the level of mental health awareness among university students in Perak, Malaysia.
4. To determine help-seeking attitudes among university students in Perak, Malaysia.





5. To investigate the relationship between IG usage for seeking mental health information and help-seeking attitudes.
6. To investigate the relationship between IG usage for seeking emotional support and help-seeking attitudes.
7. To investigate the mediation effect of mental health awareness on the relationship between IG usage for seeking mental health information and help-seeking attitudes.
8. To investigate the mediation effect of mental health awareness on the relationship between IG usage for seeking emotional support and help-seeking attitudes.

1.5 Research Questions



1. What is the level of IG usage for seeking mental health information among university students in Perak, Malaysia?
2. What is the level of IG usage for seeking emotional support among university students in Perak, Malaysia?
3. What is the level of mental health awareness among university students in Perak, Malaysia?
4. What are the attitudes towards seeking help among university students in Perak, Malaysia?
5. What is the relationship between IG usage for seeking mental health information and help-seeking attitudes?
6. What is the relationship between IG usage for seeking emotional support and help-seeking attitudes?



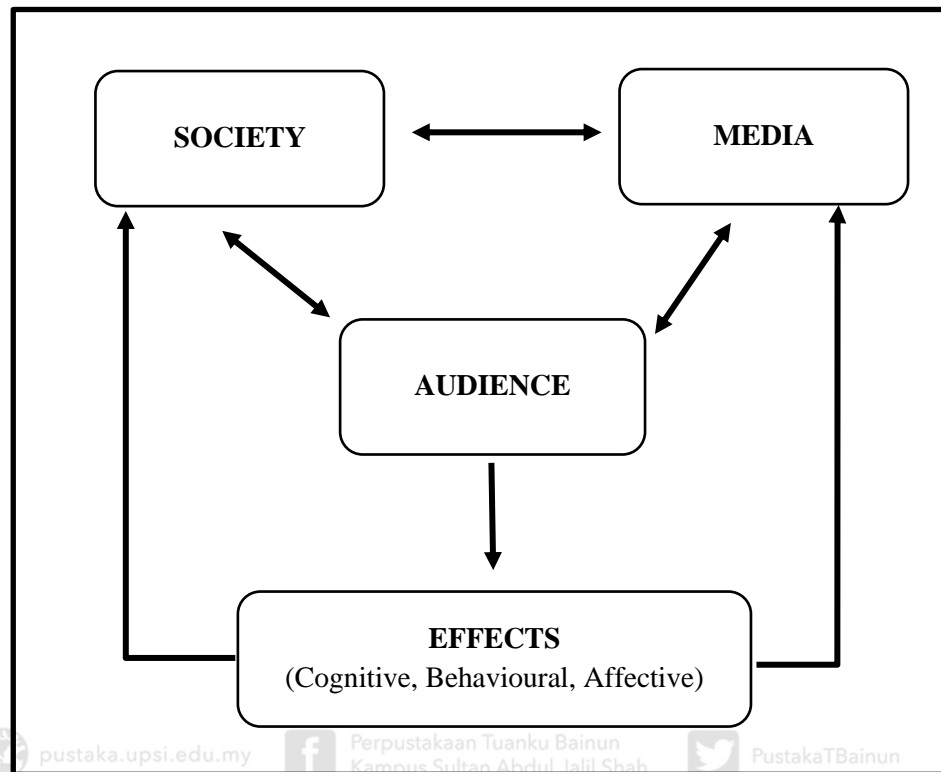


7. To what extent does mental health awareness mediate the relationship between IG usage for seeking mental health information and help-seeking attitudes?
8. To what extent does mental health awareness mediate the relationship between IG usage for seeking emotional support and help-seeking attitudes?

1.6 Theoretical Framework of Research

The framework of this research was developed based on the Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). This theory states that the more people depend on media to fulfil their needs, the more they perceive media as important in their life, and therefore, the more they will be affected by media. The dependency on media emerges from three relationships between: 1) society and media; 2) media and audience; and 3) society and audience. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) suggest that these relationships will lead to three types of effects: cognitive effect, behavioural effect, and affective effect, which are dependent on the characteristics of each individual and their social environment. Based on this notion, it is believed that social media can be considered a powerful tool to influence young people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours.

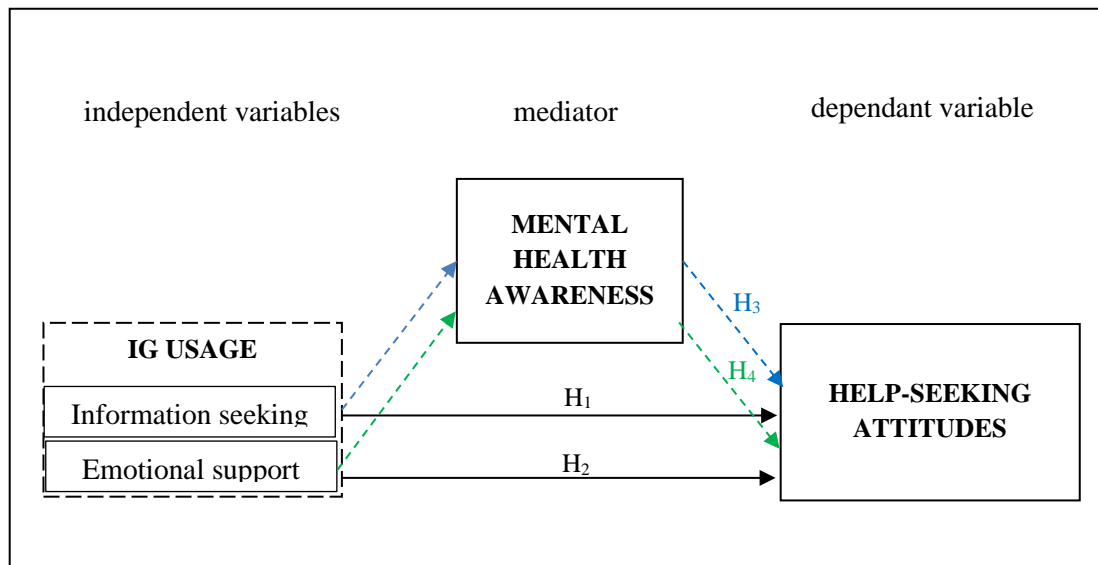


Figure 1.1*Illustrates the relationships in Media Dependency Theory***1.7 Conceptual Framework of Research**

In this research, the relationship between media and audience in the Media Dependency Theory was used to explain how using IG to seek mental health information and gain emotional support online could influence one's mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes. Figure 1.2 illustrates the conceptual framework, which consists of four variables, i.e., 'IG usage for information seeking' (IGIS) and 'IG usage for emotional support' (IGES) as the independent variables, 'mental health awareness' (MHA) as the mediator, and 'help-seeking attitudes' (HSA) as the dependent variable. This framework would be used as a guideline in this research to explain the association between the research variables, thus answering the research questions.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual framework



The hypotheses formulated for this research are listed in Table 1.2.

Hypotheses

H _a	Hypothesis Statement
H ₁	The higher the level of IG usage for seeking mental health information, the more positive attitudes towards help-seeking
H ₂	The higher the level of IG usage for seeking emotional support, the more positive attitudes towards help-seeking
H ₃	Mental health awareness has a significant mediation effect on the relationship between IG usage for seeking mental health information and help-seeking attitudes

H₄ Mental health awareness has a significant mediation effect on the relationship between IG usage for seeking emotional support and help-seeking attitudes

1.8 Operational Definition

An operational definition is a clear, concise, and specific way in which a variable is measured for data collection. In this research, the variables of interest were Instagram Usage, Mental Health Awareness, and Help-Seeking Attitudes.

1.8.1 Instagram Usage

Instagram (IG) is one of the social media platforms that focuses on image-based posts rather than text-based posts for users to communicate, interact, and share information with each other (De Vries, Moller, Wieringa, Eigenraam, & Hamelik, 2017). In the context of this research, IG usage was evaluated in two aspects, i.e., IG usage for information seeking and IG usage for emotional support.

Verduyn, Ybarra, Résibois, Jonides, and Kross (2017) suggest two types of social media usage: active usage and passive usage. Active social media usage is when users have direct exchanges or engagements with other users through online behaviours such as commenting, liking, tagging, sharing, sending messages, etc. Meanwhile, passive social media usage is when users simply observe other users' social media accounts without making any direct engagement. Examples include browsing other users' posts, pictures, or feeds.



Based on the above information, IG usage for information seeking in this research was operationally defined as the extent to which IG had been used by the student population to learn about mental health, either actively by liking, commenting, or sharing mental health-related IG posts, or passively by simply searching for specific mental health information or viewing photos/videos about certain mental health-related issues. Meanwhile, IG usage for emotional support was operationally defined as the extent to which IG had been used by the students to share or talk about their concerns as a way to find solutions and get comfort, encouragement, and reassurance from IG communities.

1.8.2 Mental Health Awareness



Mental health refers to the state of an individual's psychological, emotional, and social well-being. It affects how they think, feel, and act. It also helps in determining how they handle stress, make choices, and relate to others (MentalHealth.gov). Meanwhile, awareness means the quality or state of being aware of or having knowledge and understanding of a situation or fact (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

According to Wei, McGrath, Hayden, and Kutcher (2015), mental health awareness can be defined as the state of being aware of or having knowledge about mental health topics, including types of mental disorders and available treatments, and having reduced stigma about mental illness. Nguyen Thai and Nguyen (2018) defined mental health awareness as the state of having the right knowledge and understanding about mental health that aids in the recognition, prevention, and management of mental disorders. Other than that, mental health awareness can be defined as having the ability





to recognise specific disorders, seek mental health information and professional help, and understand risk factors and causes of mental disorders (Jorm et al., 1997).

Based on the above information, mental health awareness in the context of this research was operationally defined as the extent to which the students had the right knowledge and understanding about mental health, including how to recognise, prevent, and manage mental disorders.

1.8.3 Help-Seeking Attitude

Help-seeking is defined as the action of actively looking for aid or support from other people (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005). In the context of mental health, it refers to the action of getting assistance from others, in terms of acquiring knowledge, information, or advice about mental disorder treatment and receiving general support to deal with a mental or psychological problem.

Help-seeking can be in the form of formal help from external sources such as counsellors, psychologists, doctors, therapists, etc., or in the form of informal help from family members, peers, friends, teachers, youth facilitators, or religious leaders within the community. The help provided might be in the form of medical consultation services, counselling sessions, healthcare and medical treatment, a referral for a similar service elsewhere, or talking informally about their need in question.

Based on the above information, the help-seeking attitude in the context of this research was operationally defined as the extent to which the students had positive





feelings or were open or receptive towards getting help in dealing with their mental health concerns, either from professional psychological help like counsellors, psychologists, doctors, therapists, etc., or from informal sources like family members, friends, work colleagues, etc.

1.9 Study Limitation

The objective of this research was to investigate the effect of IG usage for seeking mental health information and emotional support on help-seeking attitudes via mental health awareness among university students in Perak, Malaysia. Two limitations had been set for this research: scope limitations and respondents' limitations.



The scope of this research was limited to IG usage only, considering its popularity among young people (Collins, 2021; PiperJaffray, 2018) and its various interesting features like photo sharing, video sharing, live feed, and IG stories, which can be used effectively as a learning platform (Abdulaziz Al Fadda, 2020), community building platform (Thomas et al., 2020), and promotional tool for raising awareness (Claretta et al., 2022; Latha et al., 2020). This means that the researcher would not consider other social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, etc., or printed media like newspapers, magazines, books, etc., or digital/electronic media like tv, radio, etc., or seminars, workshops, courses, counselling programs, etc., that can be used for spreading mental health information.





This research would also focus only on two usages of IG, namely IG usage for mental health information seeking and IG usage for emotional support, which were treated as the independent variables in the study. This is based on the idea that these IG usages have been identified as having some influence on help-seeking in previous studies. This also means that the researcher would not consider other aspects of IG usage, such as practicing social skills, discovering new trends, exploring hobbies, finding inspiration, etc.

Other than that, the research would focus only on mental health awareness as the mediator variable and help-seeking attitudes as the dependent variable. This is based on several past studies like Niu et al. (2020), Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar (2015), and Clement et al. (2015) that have identified mental health awareness and knowledge as important elements to facilitate the impact of social media on users' stigma towards mental illnesses, which is a major hindrance factor to seeking psychological treatment. This also means that the research would not consider any other impact of social media usage, such as psychological well-being, actual help-seeking behaviours, health-behavioural change, etc.

The target population of this research was limited to all undergraduate students at two selected universities in Perak, Malaysia, namely Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) and MARA University of Technology (UiTM). Perak was chosen as the research location setting based on an article published by Saifullah Ahmad in *Sinar Harian* (August 27, 2021) that found more than 80 suicidal cases recorded in Perak alone from March 2020 until July 2021. According to the Perak Health Department, the total mental patients registered in Perak was 5,213 cases in 2020 and 4,559 cases in





2021. The high number indicates serious mental health issues among people who live in Perak. Furthermore, some studies have shown that university students in Malaysia, like UPSI students, demonstrated poor mental health literacy scores compared to university students in the United Kingdom (Samar, 2020). There were also two cases involving UITM students who died in 2021 after experiencing burnout and extreme stress due to an unreasonable workload (The Vibes, July 12, 2021), which suggests the need to take firm action in addressing students' mental health issues.

Therefore, it is hoped that this research will encourage students, particularly at these two universities, to take advantage of social media to educate themselves about mental health and seek help if they are having mental or psychological problems. For this reason, the research outcome should not be generalized to the broader community of university students in Malaysia based on this study alone. Nevertheless, the results of the research might still be useful for future reference in the field of interest concerned.

1.10 Importance of Research

IG as a social media platform has become a significant way of life. Without a doubt, this social media platform has been growing in popularity among young users. It has the potential to help users gain more information and knowledge regarding mental health and develop positive attitudes towards seeking mental help. Therefore, it is believed that the outcome of this research will help people in many ways.





1.10.1 Practical

This study might be useful for practitioners such as mental health professionals, clinicians, psychiatrists, counsellors, etc. to gain a general overview of the current status of mental health awareness among public university students, particularly in Perak, Malaysia. This information is important to develop more effective programmes that can reach more students and empower them with the right knowledge of mental health, mental disorder symptoms, and treatment options available. They can also develop better mental health promotion and prevention strategy plans that can reduce the prevalence, incidence, or occurrence of mental disorders among university students, keeping them mentally healthy and avoiding mental illness.



practitioners improve the delivery of mental health services to those who suffer from mental health issues. For example, practitioners can use social media as an alternative platform for disseminating mental health information to the public and developing online interventions to help those who experience difficulties receiving treatment, given the constraints on the capacity of services and treatment costs. The developers of mental health social media accounts can also come up with better ways to promote their accounts, attract more followers, and engage more actively with users so that people are more aware of the existence of these accounts.

This research is also significant for the Malaysian government and policymakers to gain a better insight into the Malaysian university students' understanding of mental health and attitudes towards seeking help. This information





would help in developing measures to enhance mental health awareness among Malaysian students and to encourage them to seek help in solving mental health issues. Such measures may involve conducting mental health campaigns on campus or on social media platforms, which have been proven to be more effective in educating young people about mental health.

As highlighted by Salim (2010), Malaysian students need to understand the benefits and importance of getting help from mental health professionals. Furthermore, it is also important to reduce the existing stigma surrounding mental illness. The Ministry of Education could encourage all universities to promote mental health awareness among students through their websites and use social media platforms to make counselling services more accessible and inviting. This might reduce the stigma that Malaysian students have towards seeking help. Other than that, outreach programs, education talks, workshops, exhibitions, and seminars related to mental health can be organized and specially aimed at all students, regardless of their background and seniority level.

Finally, this research is expected to encourage young people, particularly university students, to make full use of social media platforms like Instagram to educate themselves about mental health and be more open towards seeking help should they face mental health challenges like depression, anxiety, stress, etc. Through social media, they might be able to better understand their problems and learn more about the treatment options available, either by engaging in online intervention or meeting face-to-face with mental health professionals. Ultimately, this would help young people to be more aware of the importance of taking care of their mental health, and make efforts





to prevent mental disorders by getting enough sleep, eating healthy food, exercising regularly, avoiding drugs and alcohol, and talking to someone they trust if they are feeling down or stressed.

1.10.2 Theoretical

In terms of theory, the findings might serve as empirical evidence to support previous studies and the application of Media Dependency Theory with regards to the impact of social media on users' cognitive and attitudes. The outcome of the study would also clarify the underlying mechanism or process by which the use of social media could influence users' help-seeking attitudes via mental health awareness as the mediator. Besides that, the findings could fill in the knowledge gap regarding the level of IG usage for seeking mental health information, IG usage for seeking emotional support, mental health awareness, and help-seeking attitudes within the context of IG users among university students in Malaysia, particularly in Perak.

1.11 Summary

This chapter has served as an introduction to the research topic, which is to examine the effect of Instagram usage for seeking mental health information and emotional support on help-seeking attitudes via mental health awareness in the context of university students in Perak, Malaysia. The researcher has provided a discussion about the research background, statement of the problem, research questions and objectives, significance of the research, scope and limitations, and definition of terms used in the





research. A comprehensive review of past studies in relation to the research topic will be discussed in Chapter 2.

