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**MEASUREMENT MODEL OF EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS
USING SOCIAL MEDIA**

Norsiah Abdul Hamid, Mohd Sobhi Ishak & Norhafezah Yusof

ABSTRACT

The trend in social media usage among a group at risk in Malaysia, particularly women and girls has shown a significant increase in few years back. The utilization of social media by this group has created benefits that should be taken into consideration, which relates to empowerment. Studies on social media benefits to women and girls find that these tools can help the group to improve their life status, particularly in entrepreneurship, knowledge and skills enhancement, and economic and career improvement. This article discusses findings from a research conducted in Malaysia on social media as an empowerment tool which focuses on five important dimensions namely economy, social and cultural, legal, political, and psychology. The study employed a survey that uses a set of printed questionnaire distributed to women and girls who use social networking sites, particularly Facebook. Using a sample of 88 responses in an exploratory study, the researchers developed a 5-factor 24-item instrument to measure empowerment comprising of the five hypothesised dimensions. A second-order model of empowerment was also proposed as a measure of overall social media empowerment. Results confirm factor structures of the empowerment model and suggest a more parsimonious instrument for each; a 5-factor 14-item scale for social media empowerment. Goodness-of-fit indices for putative models of factor structures and the second-order model are presented. The result shows that the five dimensions are significant to the empowerment model of women and girls. The findings can contribute greatly to a better understanding of the empowerment mechanism behind social media issue pertaining to women and girls.

Keywords: Women, girls, social media, empowerment, measurement model.

INTRODUCTION

Women and girls usage of social media has increased as compared to men and boys (Hicks, 2010; Lenhart, 2009; Maul, 2010). A Google survey of 17 social networks in 2009 found that male users outnumber female in only one, Digg, a social news site (Hicks, 2010). The gender balance is equal in only two, LinkedIn and YouTube. Women make up 57 per cent of Facebook and Twitter, 64 per cent of MySpace, and 68 per cent of Bebo. This positive trend has also given rise to the issues of empowerment of social media towards this group. When women and girls are

exposed to social media, they could turn it into something beneficial or something that might give them risks. Many women success stories proved that social media is beneficial if it were used wisely, while many other incidents shown that women and girls were being trapped by social media. One of the examples is the exploitation of Facebook to trap women and girls to be the drug mules (Kong, 2010). This article discusses a research conducted to investigate the empowerment opportunities of social media to women and girls in Malaysia. This group is chosen as they are at risk and vulnerable to the many risks and threats of social media available on the Internet and other platforms. In contrast, social media could also be used by this group to give benefits and empowerment opportunities, such as entrepreneurship, relationship, career development and skills improvement (Quizon, 2010; Taubenheim, Long, Smith, Jeffers, Wayman & Temple, 2008).

The agenda on women empowerment has been a major concern by organizations and national governments. On 2 July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly approved a new entity to accelerate progress in meeting the needs of women and girls worldwide which is known as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, or UN Women (Villar, 2010). UN Women exclusively focuses on the important work on gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition, the World Bank has also identified empowerment as one of the key constituent elements of poverty reduction, and as a primary development assistance goal. In Malaysia, in line with the National Women Policy, empowerment agenda is one of the prime concerns of the nation and has been emphasised in the Tenth Malaysia Plan (RMK-10) (Prime Minister's Department, 2010). In order to fulfil this agenda, ICTs play an important role in ensuring the success. As part of the ICT applications, social media are nowadays recognized and accepted as tools to facilitate the empowerment of women (Quizon, 2010). Neglecting to give women access to these tools not only deprives them and their income but also reduces the skill levels of the nation, limits productivity, and bars a country from being competitive in the global market (ITU, 2003).

Furthermore, empowerment is a process of transition from a state of powerlessness to a state of relative control over one's life, destiny, and environment (Sadan, 2004). This transition can manifest itself in an improvement in the perceived ability to control, as well as in an improvement in the actual ability to control. A sense of powerlessness leads to a lack of self-worth, to self-blame, to indifference towards and alienation from the environment, beside inability to act for oneself and growing dependence on social services and specialists for the solution of problems in one's life. The empowerment theory emphasizes the powerlessness as a social problem and not an individual problem, and criticizes the conservative tendency to diagnose manifestations of powerlessness, dependence, despair, and self-blame as the personal (at times cultural) problems of individuals (Sadan, 2004). Disempowerment of people who belong to a particular population group produces powerlessness that influences the lives and futures of the individuals and the fate of the entire community. This is why women and girls empowerment in Malaysia is very critical in the ICT era (and also by utilizing the ICT tools) as their future will also determine and influence the entire society. And in optimizing the ICT, the social media can be used to empower women and girls, as being emphasized by Safko and Brake (2009), social media is exponentially more effective in connecting and building relationships with others.

However, in Malaysian context, many of the research on this aspect were not theoretically grounded. Current scenario in Malaysia indicates that despite obtaining higher education qualification, women do not fully participate in the workforce. This has been emphasized by the National Economic Advisory Council (NEAC) of Malaysia which stated the labor market participation rate for Malaysian women is lower than in other countries, despite a higher level of education (NEAC, 2010). Thus it is timely for policymakers to reflect on the impact of this situation to the economic and social growth of a nation. National Women Policy also gives emphasis on the women empowerment particularly in the workforce, decision making and leadership (RMK-10). The 2011 budget also seen RM30 million was allocated by the Malaysian government to increase women's participation in entrepreneurship (Bernama, 2010). Therefore, based on the findings of this study, we will design and develop a social media model integrating social and cultural, economy, politics, legal and psychology dimensions for a group at risk, i.e. women and girls. Our findings can contribute greatly to a better understanding of the mechanism behind social media issue pertaining to women and girls. By understanding the ways the group manages their empowerment opportunities and strategies, we can come up with a social media model that is designed in such a way that it can contribute to the value-based knowledge society which should be achieved by the year 2020.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

1. The theoretical importance

The theoretical importance comes from the attempt to derive and validate a model of empowerment for women and girls using social media as a context of study in relation to empowerment theory. As has been mentioned earlier, the empowerment theory emphasizes the powerlessness as a social problem and not an individual problem, and criticizes the conservative tendency to diagnose manifestations of powerlessness, dependence, despair, and self-blame as the personal (at times cultural) problems of individuals (Sadan, 2004). Moreover, this theory argues that individual empowerment creates a reservoir of community and professional empowerment. The researchers see that social media is crucial towards empowerment agenda for women and girls in various aspects of life.

2. The scientific importance

The scientific importance of this study derives from the analysis of five empowerment dimensions as proposed by Malhotra and Schuler (2005), namely social and cultural, economy, politics, legal, and psychology, focusing on the Malaysian context based on social media platform.

METHODOLOGY

The survey methodology was used to gather data and the survey instrument was developed based on dimensions suggested by Malhotra and Schuler (2005). The survey included multiple scale items for each of the research constructs. The survey instrument was pre-tested with thirty women and girls, to review the questionnaire to ensure readability, eliminate ambiguity, and identify any other concerns that came to their attention. Minor modifications were made to the research instrument based on the pilot study. The finalized questionnaire was then used for conducting the actual survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study, we developed our research model based on the sample of 88 respondents collected from Malaysian women and girls who use social networking sites (SNS), specifically the Facebook users. The statistical analysis performed was Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in which the relationships among the variables were examined. In CFA, the measurement models were drawn to represent the hypothesised relationships between the variables. The specified measurement model was estimated using AMOS 19.0 statistical program. The validity of an item (i.e. observable or indicator variable) of a latent variable was determined by the magnitude of the standardised regression estimates (β) value for the path from an indicator variable to the latent variable in the measurement model. The measurement model specifies the linkages between the observed variables and the underlying theoretical factors (latent constructs), which are presumed to determine the responses to the observed variables (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The measurement model is “that component of the general model in which latent variables are prescribed” (Hoyle, 1995:3). In the present study, the five dimensions of empowerment, namely social and cultural, economy, politics, legal, and psychology, are exogenous latent constructs, which serve as independent variables in the measurement model for exogenous constructs. Employing measurement model, we investigated the fit of the generated model as shown in Figure 1, based on fit criteria suggested by various scholars (Babin & Anderson, 2010; Garson, 2009; Hair, Black, Medsker, Williams & Holahan, 1994; Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

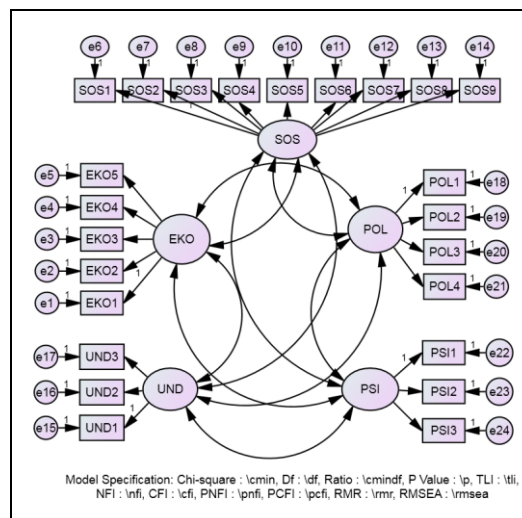


Figure 1: First-order Measurement Model – Generated Model

Figure 2 shows the first-order measurement model (final analysis) obtained as a result of model modification index based on the hypothesised model. As can be seen from Figure 2, almost all the fit criteria were achieved. The final model fit indicators show the required fit (CMIN/DF = 1.425, df = 68, NFI > 0.9, CFI > 0.9, PNFI > 0.6, and RMSEA < 0.08).

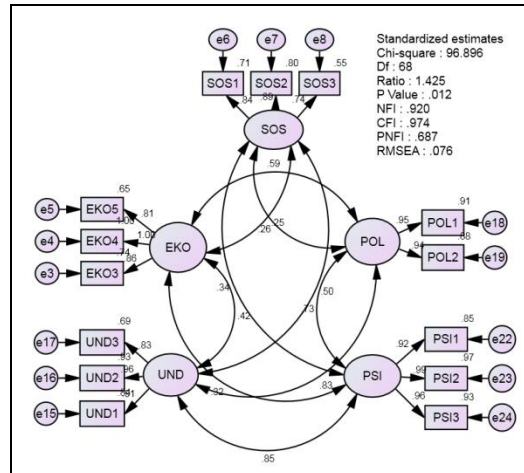


Figure 2: First-order Measurement Model – Re-specification Model

The next test was conducted on a second-order factor of empowerment comprising the five proposed dimensions. This model encompasses a combination of all measurement models of the five dimensions and was hypothesised to have a general factor of empowerment. Figure 3 exhibits the overall measurement model of empowerment with all parameter estimates resulting from the CFA tests. Results indicated that the overall measurement model of empowerment was a fairly good-fitting model with fitness values of CFI > 0.9, RMSEA < 0.08, and PNFI < 0.9. The CMIN/DF value of 1.666 also indicates a good fit where it was less than the suggested value of 3.0 (Chi-square=121.622, DF=73, p=.000).

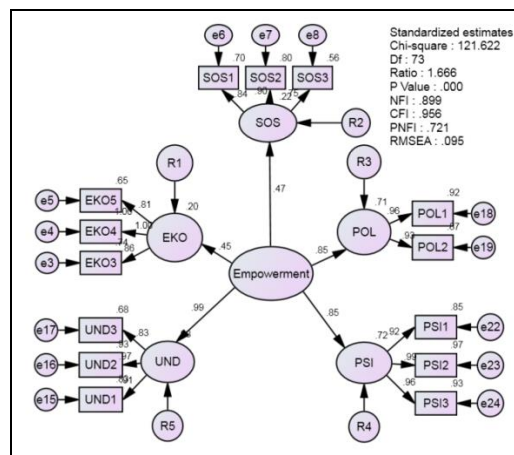


Figure 3: Second-order Model for Empowerment

CONCLUSION

This article presented a study on the involvement of a group at risk, particularly women and girls in social media setting. Women and girls increasingly involved in social media to fulfil their various needs. This involvement can be relate to the empowerment opportunity for this group by using social media. Researchers have also devoted significant attention to the use and impact of social media for this group. This paper reported on a confirmatory assessment and refinement of the empowerment measures based on five dimensions of empowerment suggested by Malhotra and Schuler (2005). The results confirmed the original five dimensions but indicated the need for improving the scales. Refinement of the measures produced a shorter 5-factor 14-item scale for empowerment. A second-order model of empowerment was also tested and supported. These measures have fairly good psychometric properties, as indicated by the goodness-of-fit indices, but need some improvement.

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Norsiah Abdul Hamid*, Mohd Sobhi Ishak & Norhafezah Yusof
School of Multimedia Technology and Communication
Universiti Utara Malaysia
E-mail address: nor1911; msobhi; norhafezah@uum.edu.my
* Corresponding author. Tel.: +604-9284814; fax: +604-9286824