
INDIVIDUAL MEDIA DEPENDENCY, SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE PARENTING GROUPS IN MALAYSIA

Cynthia Lau Pui-Shan
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
laups@utar.edu.my

Hamed Mohd. Adnan
Universiti Malaya
hamed@um.edu.my

Amira Firdaus
Universiti Malaya
amira_firdaus@um.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This research paper examines new mothers' dependency on parenting social networking sites particularly Facebook in Malaysia by adopting the Individual Media Dependency theory. Due to the ambiguity of the phenomena of transitioning into parenting for new mothers, it is apparent that new mothers rely on parenting social networking sites for support and information. This research is based on parenting social networking sites in Malaysia namely The Breastfeeding Advocates Network and The Parenting Network. Findings from this research suggests that social environment, media systems activity and interpersonal network activity are fundamental intervening conditions in today's new media environment to fulfil an audience's goal-oriented needs of *orientation, understanding and play*.

Keywords: *Individual Media Dependency Theory, parenting, social networking sites, netnography, online communities, Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

Post-pregnancy is one of the most challenging and daunting time in a mother's life (Price et al., 2018). New mothers are known to face challenges such as uncertainty, anxiety, and isolation (Barclay & Lloyd, 1996; Grant, McMahon, & Austin, 2008; Lupton, 2000; Nyström & Öhrling, 2004) upon giving birth to their first child. In trying times like these, new mothers are often seen to fall into depression and extreme stress (Archer & Kao, 2018). The first few months of motherhood brings great change as families adjusts into their new roles. This upheaval could lead to possible isolation and self-blame for not being able to cope with the demands of a new baby.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the dependency goals of Malaysian urban new mothers on parenting social networking sites from the lens of the Individual Media Theory on their quest for problem-solving in the context of parenting. Therefore, this research attempt to answer what are urban new mothers' dependency goals on parenting social networking sites.

In Malaysia, women are getting married at a later stage in their lives (Subramaniam et al, 2010), between the ages of 30 to 39 years old, while working longer working hours (Aruna, 2012). It is also reported that women are also spending more time in the workforce instead of becoming housewives. The rise in the cost-of living as well as the need to have dual-family incomes has forced young families to move away from their extended family and support system (Zaimah et al., 2013). With social and work demands as well as expectations of a perfect mother, it is evident that new mothers are turning to social media for support, source of information and advice (Hoelzel, 2015; Morris, 2014; Sensis, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

With Malaysian women spending more time at work and getting married at a later stage in life, there is a corresponding increase in the risks of isolation, postpartum depression, and anxiety (Leigh & Milgrom, 2008; Madge & O'Connor, 2006; Ngai & Chan, 2011). In modern society, not only are women getting married at a later stage, but families are also living farther away from their relatives, friends, and parents (Regan & Brown, 2019). Geographical distance from family members and friends also means that new mothers are finding it increasingly hard and challenging to seek advice and emotional needs as their geographical communities are not meeting the needs of these new mothers (Madge & O'Connor, 2004; Parry, Glover, & Mulcahy, 2013). This is further magnified by the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) which emphasizes on mothers dedicating as much energy as possible to nurture their child at the expense of their own interests.

To be specific, these mothers are living up to the expectation of providing the best developmental outcome for their children, demanding all their physical, emotional, and financial resources (Crowley, 2014). Therefore, with work demands, time constraints, geographical separation as well as pressure of being a "perfect mom", more new mothers are going online to seek information, advice, and emotional support (Johnson, 2015; Kallem et al, 2018). In recent years, technological advances such as social media has created a "safe place" for new mothers transitioning into parenthood to connect online for support and information with other new mothers who are in similar situations (Valtchanov et al, 2016). This research seeks to examine the phenomena of new mothers transitioning into parenthood with regards to the Individual Media Dependency theory.

In Gibson and Hanson's (2013) research, it was evident that technology has played an important role in a new mother's life. Technology was used not only to improve new mothers' lives (Gibson & Hanson, 2013) but also to provide new mothers with a sense of social inclusion (Meadows, 2011). As technology becomes more advanced, mobile technology has now provided new mothers the opportunity to gain access to social media without relocating to the computer (Gibson & Hanson, 2013). As information becomes more widespread, new mothers are known to be more dependent on the affordances provided by these new media (Carillo et al, 2017). This has resulted to a need to understand the role of dependency of new mothers towards these ubiquitous media systems.

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1989) explains that Dependency Model is centred around (i) audience dependence on media information, and (ii) when society undergoes a major change or conflict in society occurs. Ball-Rokeach (1998) concluded that with rapid growth of technology, the internet has changed the media landscape allowing individuals to control media resources where once, it was restricted to media producers. Ball-Rokeach (1998) also suggests that the media takes on a more complex role as the media environment changes from information gathering, processing and delivery. This Individual Media Dependency Theory has been used by various researchers in the past particularly in the areas of media and social networking sites (Bahk, Sheil, & Lin, 2010; Jung, 2008; Jung et al, 2013; Kim & Jung, 2017; Lee, 2013; Lee, 2008; Melton et al, 2005; Riffe et al, 2008; Tai & Sun, 2007). However, literature review on parenting and social networking sites from 2003 to 2016 found little research adopting the Individual Media Dependency theory.

In Malaysia however, research was done in the areas of special needs as well as breastfeeding practices among Malaysian mothers. Mustafa (2016) conducted a research on a support group on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) on Facebook in Malaysia. The study indicates the parents of children with ASD use Facebook for interaction with other parents, social support and sharing emotions. Similar to this research, netnography was used as its methodology to explore Facebook use by parents. Both mothers and fathers were sampled. Prior to this, Mohd Roffeei, Abdullah, and Basar (2015) conducted research on parents of ASD children seeking social support on Facebook by comparing two groups in Malaysia, namely Autism Malaysia (AM) and Autism Children's Club (ACA).

Mohd Roffeei et al.'s (2015) findings were comparable to Mustafa's (2016) where findings suggests that parents relied on Facebook groups for information and emotional support. In 2019, research was conducted on exclusive breastfeeding practices among new mothers of Taman Maharani in Muar (Marzo, Rou, Yin, Gill, & Salam, 2019). Findings from this study found that knowledge was insufficient to promote breastfeeding practices. However, the study suggests that knowledge coupled with good behaviour and family support is key for a successful breastfeeding journey. In a recent study by Lau et al (2021), new mothers in Malaysia were found to be dependent on technology such as blogs, bulletin boards and Facebook for information and support.

This is further confirmed by several studies by Ball-Rokeach (1985) and Hirschburg, Dillman and Ball-Rokeach (1986) whereby findings show that media dependency relations intensify during a major crisis when people are actively seeking information and solution to the situation. The inception of the internet and social media has altered the original concept of media dependency because users are also acting as content producers and social networking sites allow for interaction among users which is different from traditional media dependency (Lee, 2013). Tai and Sun (2007) noted that research is done when information is not available on mainstream media. Like the current research topic in hand regarding first-time mothers and parenting, information is scarcely available on mainstream media and first-time parents are faced with the ambiguity of parenthood.

Further research by Tai and Sun (2007) suggests that examination should be done media dependency and new media under different circumstances. This was also supported in Kim and Jung's (2017) research on social networking site dependency and storytelling by encouraging future research on emerging forms of media (social media) by applying the concept of media dependency. In essence, the Individual Media Dependency theory will be used as the theoretical framework of this research by extending its literature into new media

usage in order to understand urban mother's dependency on online parenting groups for information on childcare.

Morris and Ogan (1996); Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and Flanagin and Metzger (2001) have also applied this theory to study motivations of internet use to gratify needs. In her research, Lee (2008) justified the media system dependency theory to uncover the relationship between individual media dependency and attitude toward social networking sites through the usage of six types of Individual Media Dependency motivations by stating that the study of media dependency has been done across media such as newspapers, radio and magazines (Grant et al, 1991; Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998) but no studies investigated the relationship between Individual Media Dependency Theory and the internet.

Another application of individual media systems dependency theory was conducted by Patwardhan and Yang (2003) to understand the impact of people's dependency relationships between the internet and the activities they pursue online which also suggests that further research be done on communal networks on areas such as health, online news, political information, commercial information, or advertising. Riffe et al. (2008) explores people's use and evaluation of the internet for detailed, in-depth information about specialized topics by applying the micro-dependency theory on the internet. Riffe et al. (2008) concurred along with other researchers cited above that little research has been done using media system dependency theory as a framework to explore how the internet has become integrated into individuals' lives. Upon further reading, Jung et al. (2013) applied the media dependency theory by studying East Asian students' use of the internet.

In 2017, Kim and Jung did a study to conceptualize social media dependency and its effects on online and offline storytelling. Results from this shows that social media dependency has direct and indirect effects on an individual's level of engagement and interactive activities. In 2017, Kim and Yung focused on online community engagement and participation activity whereby findings suggest that social networking sites were positively associated with dependency variables and closed groups are more likely to facilitate community engagements. Due to the rapid development of parenting practices to intensive parenting where couples are having lesser children but investing more time in their upbringing (Hays, 1996) and new media, specifically online media which is now accessible to many, making anyone with an internet connection a media owner, it is hoped that this research paper would take the traditional approach of Individual Media Dependency theory into the online realm of parenting social networking sites.

Individual Media Dependency Theory

According to Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1989), the relationship between media, audience and society determines the effect a media has on an individual. In this paper, focus will be given on new mothers' dependence on media information in steering them through the challenging time of transitioning into parenthood. Parenting in the modern society is seen as an ambiguous situation and dependency on the media happens when new mothers fulfil the satisfaction of needs and attainment of goals. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1989) propose that as media evolves, it takes on more unique information functions which includes information gathering, processing and delivery. In today's media environment, as social media becomes increasingly significant in usage and consumption, it has been documented

that dependency on mass media has declined while dependency on new emerging forms of media has increased (Kim & Jung, 2017).

Individual Media Dependency Theory helps explain an individual's dependency relationship with the media to acquire specific goals (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1989) and in the case of this research, dependency relationships exist within a specific medium – social networking sites from the internet. This is because the internet functions as an interactive and informative medium (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Goals in the context of dependency of urban mothers on social networking sites are categorized based on Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's (1989) typology of three main dependency relations categories: understanding (self-understanding and social understanding), orientation (action orientation and interaction orientation), and play (solitary play and social play).

Table 1: Individual Media Dependency Typology

Individual Media Dependency		
Understanding	Orientation	Play
<i>Self-Understanding:</i> Understanding of individuals themselves	<i>Interaction Orientation:</i> Behavioural decisions based on interactions	<i>Solitary Play:</i> Relaxation activities when individuals are alone
<i>Social-Understanding:</i> Understanding of social environment	<i>Action-Orientation:</i> To have guidance on interaction with others	<i>Social Play:</i> For relaxing with other people

Social understanding dependencies develop when urban new mothers utilize media information resources to comprehend cultural factors that influence parenting methods. Self-understanding refers to media relations that adapt own beliefs on parenting with information obtained. Action orientation refers to urban new mothers deciding on preferred parenting methods best suited for her child. Interaction orientation refers to understanding types of parenting methods from other mothers within the online community and obtaining social support through interaction with members of the parenting social networking site. Solitary play dependencies refer to enjoyment in surfing through parenting social networking sites to obtain parenting information or parenting tips; and finally, social play in this research refers to dependency of the media for arrangement of 'play-dates' for kids or 'mummy-only' sessions for recreational purposes.

METHODOLOGY

This study takes on a netnographic method approach using the participant observation method to analyse new mothers' dependency on online parenting groups, particularly posts from two online parenting groups namely The Breastfeeding Advocates Network (TBAN) and The Parenting Network (TPN). These are Malaysian based online parenting groups with 149.7k members and 19.4k respectively as of 26 February 2021.

TBAN is a Facebook online group that supports breastfeeding mothers. This is an "open" group where posts and comments can be seen by the public, but non-members are not able to comment or post. The group is very strict on content posted as it must adhere to house rules

within the group. This group is strictly for breastfeeding topics and group administrators will remove posts which are considered out of topic. TPN is another Facebook group which supports parents for anything pertaining to parenting. It is a “closed” group where content is not visible to non-members and the public.

TPN and TBAN were selected for this research as these are one of the more popular parenting groups in Malaysia (Little Steps, 2017). This research uses purposeful sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) where I combed through posts with these criteria in mind: These groups have a large member following as well as active postings. Posts and comments were collected from May 2015 to September 2015 on posts from new mothers with the matching criteria below:

- Mothers whose comments mentioned parentage of a child aged 5 and below with no mention of second or third.
- Facebook profile photo featuring newlywed photos or with only one child. It is common for mothers to include all her children in their Facebook profile photo if they have more than one child.
- Posts with keywords such as “new mom”, “1st child”, “new working mom”

The data was gathered through netnographic thematic analysis from posts and comments from members who fulfilled the criteria above. Field notes were taken and documented via NVivo12. Cases and Memos were created for each sample to document the observations and potential themes. Kozinets’ (2015) netnographic approach through participation observation emphasizes interactions within an online community rather than the medium itself as a platform. According to Kozinets (2015), the unique characteristics of the field site, in this case, Facebook, provides communication connectedness which is developed through media interactions and social spaces. A “participant observer” stance (Gold, 1958) was taken in this research whereby initial relationship was built prior to the research as the researcher was already part of the online community. Trust was then built between the researcher, group members and its’ administrator so as to facilitate the data collection process. Members and group admin were already acquainted with the researcher prior to the posting of the notice of intent for this research. Data was combed through the 12 phases of netnographic data collection method of introspection, investigation, information, interview, inspection, interaction, immersion, indexing, interpretation, iteration, instantiation, and integration

Prior to data collection, a letter of acknowledgement was issued by University of Malaya to acknowledge that this research will be conducted. Together with the acknowledgement letter, a letter of introduction was also sent to administrators of various parenting Facebook groups via Private Message on Facebook messenger. A letter of introduction was also served as a permission letter to seek consent to observe members in the group. This was posted on the group in a pinned post. The members’ reaction to the research intention was encouraging even if privacy issues remain an important issue for mothers who are members in Facebook parenting groups (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

New mothers’ face challenges such as social isolation, stress and anxiety when transitioning into parenthood. Women are also getting married at a later stage in life and have full time

jobs unlike their mothers who are homemakers and can care for their child at home after giving birth. Therefore, it can be safely said that new mothers are turning to online parenting groups for information, support, and advice (Moon, Matthews, Oden & Carlin, 2019). From the data, findings suggests that new urban mothers' dependency goals on parenting social networking sites corresponds with Ball-Rokeach's (1985) dependency goals.

Understanding Goals

Understanding goals emerged from this research's findings. Urban new mothers in parenting groups such as The Breastfeeding Advocates Network and The Parenting Network utilise these groups for better social understanding and self-understanding. According to Kim and Jung (2017), media audiences act as social curators, often obtaining information from various places to be channelled to social media platforms. From the data collected, feeding areas, milk pumping, child discipline, and culture were widely discussed. Feeding has been an important topic of discussion among new mothers (Kallem et al., 2018) especially pertaining drop of yield; feeding of water to new-born babies under the age of 6 months; and substitution of breast milk with formula milk. Take Mummy K (TBAN,2015) for example on understanding of substitution of breast milk with formula milk:

Hello parents, I fully bf my daughter who is 16 months and I'll have to send her to daycare due to work. I can't pump cause supply is low and wondering if its okay to just drop her and feed her when I'm back? Or would it be better to give her formula?

It was found that generational gap was one of the most widely discussed topic between new mothers whereby mothers were observed complaining about their own mothers, mother-in-law or confinement carer in trying to understand their need to feed the baby with water. An example from Mummy S (TBAN, 2015) below:

Why everyone wants to feed my lo with water? She is now 7 weeks old now. Since she was born she has been offered water after feeding by CL, my parents, baby sitter, everyone said must feed water?! She is 90% bf baby.. just started to send to baby sitter few days ago (day time only) but I don't have any stock for bm yet therefore she has been fed with FM then with water afterwards.

New mothers were seen to be seeking emotional support and information about the feeding of water to infants. Therefore, whenever faced with uncertainties or third-party interference in giving water, mothers would turn to parenting social networking sites to seek emotional support or information to reassure themselves that they were doing the right thing. Take Mummy A (TBAN, 2015) for example:

I gave birth 2wks ago to a full term baby. I've been adhering to OBGYN, Paediatrician & Lactation Consultants' guidance of No ginger & No alcohol in my food, Strictly No water & No bottle feeding of EBM to baby. However, such practices attracted lots of judgemental criticism from concerned relatives & friends. I'm exhausted from d 3-hourly feeding/pumping schedule, so I'm fedup of being regarded as a "bad mum" or "disobedient", despite repeated explanations on why I can't eat ginger, shouldn't consume alcohol & reasons why no water for baby!!

New mothers were also observed widely discussing the yield of breastfeeding milk and becoming stressed with the situation. Breastfeeding mothers mostly found it challenging to increase their milk supply and diet was one of the factors that influence yield supply. They were also found to be depressed when their yield drops and would find ways to understand methods to improve their milk supply. Like Bridges, Howell and Shmied's (2018) research, these matters were found to be important for mothers in Australia. Take Mummy L (TBAN, 2015) below:

Feeling depressed. I'm a low milk supply mommy. LO poor weight gain at her 1st moon. Currently supplement formula to her and she gain weight back. Visited a lactation consultant, and she comment that I have blockage at breast. Cleared the blockage now by pump every 2 hours.

Mummy L above expressed her feelings of depression in the group. However, she took the initiative to seek assistance from a lactation consultant on her situation and is now finding ways to increase her milk supply. From her post, it is also clear that Mummy L is sharing her experience with other new mothers on being a low supply mother in hopes that this would help them understand the cause rather than to self-blame. Her experience could also generate a hopeful message that breastmilk can be increased after consulting a lactation specialist.

Orientation Goals

As new mothers with limited face-to-face interaction due to work demands, it is often challenging for them to obtain support from their fellow friends or family members. Therefore, upon researching these two groups, new moms were seen to utilise these groups for the purpose of deciding on the parenting methods best suited for their child as well as understanding various parenting methods through interaction with members of these groups. As supported by Alessia and Rodriguez (2017), Facebook brings upon important communication relationships within an online community. Findings from this research shows that urban new mothers depend on parenting social networking sites through interaction for areas such as development, sleep, health, feeding, education and breast milk storage. Take Mummy B (TBAN, 2015) for example on baby's development:

Good morning mommy...I am breastfeeding mummy too.. My lo just turn 8 months 2 days ago. Her weight only 6.3kg and Dr. Said that she overweight...So sad. She is premature baby. Born on 35weeks with 1.64kg only. I've already try to feed her with bottle but she refuse, she only know to direct feed and my breastmilk very2 low now... Help me.. Advise me...Thank you.

The post above garnered 45 comments from members and members were participative in the discussion. Mummies were seen to be sharing their own experiences to comfort Mummy B for example Mummy 1 (TBAN, 2015) below:

My lo is now 16mo and she's only 8kg++... She is active and cheerful all the time. Li got worried too of her weight at first but dr ensures me that she is ok as long as she is active...

These experiences are usually from mothers who went through the same underweight situation with their babies. By sharing their experiences, these mothers hope to comfort Mummy B by reassuring her that as long as her baby is healthy and active, then she should not be too worried and should continue to direct latch her baby. Mothers were also not supportive of Mummy B's doctor's comment on her baby being underweight and advised her to seek a second opinion.

Mummy B (TBAN, 2015) was also active in responding to members. The initial comments from members saw Mummy B responding to each comment and queries on her doctor's advice and also her baby's behavior on whether she is active or not. This indicates that Mummy B responds to initial comments because she wants accurate advice from members of the group, and she also hopes to give clear explanation on her situation. Mothers usually hope to obtain accurate advice from group members either by providing photos or by detailed explanation via text. However, as more members commented, Mummy B slowed down on her response. This could be because the advice given were somewhat similar and she may have already obtained her understanding in this matter through orientation goal. Mummy B finally thanked everyone for their advice and experiences below:

To all lovely mommy... i really appreciate ur advise.. now iam feeling ok and more motivate... Thank you so so much.. God bless us and our baby..

By thanking members in the thread, this indicates that Mummy B has already achieved the objective of her post which is to obtain support and advice from members of the group and is ready to end the conversation.

Play Goals

Play goals pertaining to dependency of new moms using parenting social networking sites for leisure or seeking play dates for their kids was not evident. However, the usage of play in the context of parenting social networking sites is seen in the form of postings of bonding with little ones. This can be seen often in The Breastfeeding Advocates Network where mummies will post photos of their little ones after their milk session and will then urge other mummies to do the same. Posts like this generate a lot of likes and attention as mothers demonstrate their pride over their babies. Take Mummy C (TPN, 2015) for example:

the day I was waiting for is finally here...today marks my 2 years breastfeeding journey...wasnt easy..as all the mother's here know..with a minimal support n a gigantic determination ..I made it through..of course not by all myself..

The post from Mummy C generated 34 comments and 226 likes. Members were very supportive and congratulated her with lots of congratulatory messages. There were also members who took the opportunity to share what they are currently going through to indicate that they are all together in going through this. Take for example Mummy 2 (TPN, 2015) below:

Heartful congrats... mine going thru but my Lo always not well..feeling sad why me... now my lo was just recovering frm fever,cough n flu..keeping my fingers crossed for better situation on bf journey.tc n all the best to sis..

Mummy 3 (TPN,2015) however was found to take the opportunity to seek advice and share her current stressful situation as she sees Mummy C as a successful breastfeeding mother.

Omg congratulations !! U should be very proud of urself. I really want to try and feed my baby for 2 years. How did u do it. Share tips. He is 10 months now and bites me when he feeds 😞 how can I cope with another 14months. That seems too long

Mummy 3 may have found that her current situation was related closely to Mummy C's experience and therefore felt the affinity with her. Seeing that Mummy C was a successful breastfeeding mother, Mummy 3 would see it as reliable and credible to seek advice from her as she also plans to breastfeed her child for the next 14 months.

DISCUSSION

As the theory is developed based on ambiguity (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1989), this research helps support the theory in this user-related phenomenon context. Therefore, Ball-Rokeach's (1985) goals for individual media dependency were found to be relevant in the context of new mothers' dependency on online parenting sites. Through its findings of participant observation of posts and comments on The Breastfeeding Advocates Network and The Parenting Network, Ball-Rokeach's individual dependency goals are very much applicable in the context of parenting social networking sites. Findings from the paper suggest that:

- Social understanding dependencies develop when urban new mothers utilize media information resources to comprehend cultural factors that influence parenting methods. Take for example understanding generational practices which were culturally passed down such as feeding of water to babies which is practiced by confinement ladies and grandmothers. Through information obtained from members' comments, new mothers are somewhat comforted to know that they are not alone when going through this. Members also gave advice on solutions to this issue which helped ease worried new mothers. Self-understanding develops when new mothers adapt own beliefs on parenting with information obtained through media interactions. New mothers are empowered with knowledge and information on parenting practices especially in breastfeeding. The preferred choice of feeding of infants are always breastmilk. However, new mothers tend to become emotional and depressed when they realize that they are low supply mothers. Through media interactions with other members of the parenting group, they begin to understand the reason behind the low yield and discover solutions to increase their milk supply. This will inevitably reduce their self-blame and feel better about themselves.
- Action orientation develops when urban new mothers decide on preferred parenting methods best suited for her child while interaction orientation develops when new mothers try to understand types of parenting methods from other mothers within the online community; and obtaining social support through interaction with members of the parenting social networking site. This is apparent when new mothers were seen posting on the development of their child particularly in terms of weight gain. Through interaction between members of the parenting group, mothers with

underweight child will show indication of her preferred parenting practices such as the continuation of breastfeeding as opposed to substitution of breastmilk for formula milk. This interaction further justifies and solidify her decision to persist in her breastfeeding practices.

- Solitary play dependencies refer to enjoyment through parenting social networking sites in sharing parenting tips or sharing joy. Solitary play was mostly found in the form of postings of mother and child bonding sessions through breastfeeding. This was apparent because mothers found it gratifying to receive a lot of encouraging comments from members as well as the high amount of likes for the post. Therefore, can be deemed a leisurely and enjoyable activity. Finally social play refers to dependency of the media for arrangement of 'play-dates' for kids or 'mummy-only' sessions for recreational purposes. From the findings, social play was not present in both parenting social networking sites. This could be due to the nature of Facebook whereby ties between members were weak. Despite being within the online community, the depth of the relationship between members were weak and therefore did not encourage social play. Safety reasons were also considered seeing that members may not know each other personally and members were probably staying at varying geographical locations.

This research is largely based on the perspective of Individual Media Dependency theory developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1989) whereby individuals attain their goals of understanding, orientation and play via parenting social networking site. In the context of urban new mothers' usage of parenting social networking sites to navigate the challenges of becoming a new parent, this theory applies to the current media landscape whereby new mothers have become active in seeking information, sharing experiences and support.

Carillo et al. (2017) supported the Individual Media Dependency Theory in the context of social media and online groups by stating that a media-system oriented view is more appropriate in the social media context compared to a device-centric viewpoint. Carillo et al. (2017) also supports the goal-oriented model whereby the initial use of technology was for problem solving as earlier mentioned by Ball-Rokeach (1985). This research is an empirical study to the Individual Media Dependency Theory where individual goals are used to conceptualize individual-motivations which affects media behaviour (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). According to Ball-Rokeach (1985), these individual goals consist of problem-solving goals which in turn will affect how individuals use media. The typology of individual media dependency assumes that understanding, orientation and play as dimensions of motivation behind individual media behaviour.

Ball-Rokeach (1985) present an analytical framework analysing a set of intervening conditions to exhibit these media dependency between media and the individual. They are (1) social environment, (2) media system activity and (3) interpersonal network activity. These intervening conditions is befitting to this current research on new urban mothers' dependency on parenting social networking sites. When discussing social environment, Ball-Rokeach (1985) mention that this environment encompasses ambiguous environment which are considered unpredictable and in turn causes individuals to experience discomfort. This would in turn undermine their self-efficacy. Similarly, when becoming a first-time mother, women are presented with unique challenges they have not experienced before which causes stress and anxiety (Johnson, 2015). These conditions are ambiguous to a new mother as they

navigate their way through parenthood. The decisions they make are also complicated as they are pressured to conform to social norms. This is because a mother's knowledge on parenting is an important reflection on effective parenting behaviour (Elliott, 2007).

The second condition presented by Ball-Rokeach (1985) when discussing media dependency is media systems activity. Ball-Rokeach (1985) mentions that media is an essential link to the environment and the individual. Therefore, an individual's media systems activity is largely based on the messages that are disseminated and the purpose of the message. This is synonymous to the findings from this research where members of The Breastfeeding Advocates Network and The Parenting Network are exposed to information and messages on parenting within the group. New mothers were seen to participate in posting and commenting on parenting social networking sites because of shared experiences and information among members of the group. These collective resources are appreciated as new mothers go through similar experiences together. Findings from this research suggests that common topics of discussion involves feeding, health, child development, discipline education and breastmilk storage.

The third condition presented by Ball-Rokeach (1985) when discussing media dependency is interpersonal network activity. According to Ball-Rokeach (1985), the agenda of interaction shapes an individual's dependency on the media. Similarly, from this research, issues and challenges on parenting are seen as common shared agenda among mothers in The Parenting Network and The Breastfeeding Advocates Network. New mothers were seen interacting between members on these social networking sites thus creating affordances such as narration affordance, identity affordance and commenting affordance to seek advice, seek support, share experiences and seek information on areas of parenting such as health, discipline, feeding, education, development and breastmilk storage. Therefore, it can be safely said that this research contributes to the empirical study of individual media dependency theory in a new media environment where online parenting social networking sites fulfils individual goals of understanding, orientation, and play.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of social media as a platform for communication has changed the media information environment due to its ability to provide audiences with multiple ways to communicate thus providing audiences with new roles and changing its dependency on conventional media (Tai & Sun, 2007). According to Ball-Rokeach (1985), media dependency intensifies as audiences are faced with a major crisis. In the context of parenting, the transition into parenthood is a major turning point in a woman's life. One of the most challenging tasks for new mothers is breastfeeding. Breastfeeding does not only mean feeding but is also associated with new challenges such as insufficient milk, blocked milk duct, latching issues, breastfeeding jaundices, to breastmilk storage issues. These represent the scenarios that are best noticeable in the Individual Media Dependency theory. As sharing experiences, seeking information, and seeking advice have been the major themes observed, it can be safely said that the Individual Media Dependency Theory should be constantly examined as media evolves under various circumstances. This research hopes to contribute a better understanding of online communities and their usage of new media. This is important to better understand the reasons why members are joining a particular said group which could benefit the group administrators in terms of providing quality content and encouraging

stronger group participation. Healthcare professionals can also take advantage of this knowledge to utilize online communities in providing healthcare or parenting support to mothers. As this research is limited to participant observation on Facebook groups, future research could benefit from other method of data collection such as in-depth interview with online group members to evaluate the effectiveness of these parenting groups in terms of advice and information.

REFERENCES

- Alessia, C., & Rodriguez, E. (2018). Communications and relationships: changing with new technologies. An explorative study on a thematic Facebook group. *Journal of Psychosocial Systems*, 1 (1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.23823/jps.v1i1.7>
- Archer, C., & Kao, K. T. (2018). Mother, baby and Facebook makes three: does social media provide social support for new mothers? *Media International Australia*, 168(1), 122–139. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X18783016>
- Aruna, P. (2012, November 20). Malaysians among the world's top workaholics. *The Star*. Retrieved February 11, 2015 from www.thestar.com.my/story/?file=/2012/11/21/nation/12342446
- Bahk, C. M., Sheil, A., & Lin, F. (2010). Digital media dependency, relational orientation and social networking among college students, *Communications of the IIMA*, 10(3), 69–79.
- Barclay, L. M., & Lloyd, B. (1996). The misery of motherhood: alternative approaches to maternal distress. *Midwifery*, 12(3), 136–9.
- Ball-Rokeach, S. J. (1985). The origins of individual media-system dependency: a sociological framework, *Communication Research*, 12, 485–510.
- Ball-Rokeach, S. J. (1998). A theory of media power and a theory of media use: Different stories, questions, and ways of thinking. *Mass Communication & Society*, 1 (1/2), 5-40.
- Ball-Rokeach, S. J., & DeFleur, M. L. (1989). *Theories of mass communication* (5th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Bahk, C. M., Sheil, A., & Lin, F. (2010). Digital media dependency, relational orientation and social networking among college students, *Communications of the IIMA*, 10(3), 69–79.
- Carillo, K., Scornavacca, E., & Za, S. (2017). The role of media dependency in predicting continuance intention to use ubiquitous media systems. *Information and Management*, 54(3), 317–335. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2016.09.002>
- Crowley, J. E. (2014). Staying at home or working for pay? Attachment to modern mothering identities. *Sociological Spectrum*, 34(2), 114–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.2014.878605>
- Elliott, N. L. (2007). *First-time mothers' parenting knowledge during their infant's first year: Relations with information sources, social support networks, maternal self-efficacy, and infant development*. [UMI Microform 3298715]
- Flanagin, A. J., & Metzger, M. J. (2001). Internet use in the contemporary media environment. *Human Communication Research*, 27(1), 153–181. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/27.1.153>
- Gibson, L., & Hanson, V. L. (2013). 'Digital motherhood': how does technology support new mothers? In *CHI '13: Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 313-322). Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2470654.2470700>

- Gold, R. L. (1958). Roles in sociological field observations. *Social Forces*, 36(3), 217–223. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2573808>
- Grant, A. E., Guthrie, K. K., & Ball-Rokeach, S. J. (1991). Television shopping: A media system dependency perspective. *Communication Research*, 18(6), 773–798. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365091018006004>
- Grant, K. A., McMahan, C., Austin, M. P. (2008). Maternal anxiety during the transition to parenthood: a prospective study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 108(1), 101–111.
- Hays, S., (1996). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hirschburg, P.L., Dillman, D.A. & Ball-Rokeach, S.J. (1986). Media system dependency theory: Responses to the eruption of Mt St. Helens. In Ball-Rokeach S.J. & Cantor M.G. (Eds) *Media, Audience, and Social Structure*. (pp. 117-126). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hoelzel, M. (2015). Social network demographics: here's who's on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and other top social networks now. *Business Insider Australia*. <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/update-a-breakdown-of-the-demographics-for-each-of-the-different-social-networks-2015-6>.
- Johnson, S. A. (2015). 'Intimate mothering publics': comparing face-to-face support groups and Internet use for women seeking information and advice in the transition to first-time motherhood. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 17(2), 237–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2014.968807>
- Jung, J. Y. (2008). Internet connectedness and its social origins: An ecological approach to postaccess digital divides. *Communication Studies*, 59(4), 322–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510970802467387>
- Jung, J., Lin, W., & Kim, Y. (2013). The dynamic relationship between East Asian adolescent use of the Internet and their use of other media. *Journal of Media & Society*. doi:10.1177/1461444812437516
- Kallem, S., Gruver, R. S., Virudachalam, S., & Fiks, A. G. (2018). Mothers' Facebook posts about infant health: Findings from the Grow2Gether study. *BMC Pediatrics*, 18(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-018-1315-4>
- Kim, Y. C., & Jung, J. Y. (2017). SNS dependency and interpersonal storytelling: An extension of media system dependency theory. *New Media and Society*, 19(9), 1458–1475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816636611>
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*. London: SAGE.
- Kumar, P., & Schoenebeck, S. (2015). The modern day baby book: Enacting good mothering and stewarding privacy on Facebook. In *CSCW 2015 - Proceedings of the 2015 ACM International Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing* (pp. 1302–1312). <https://doi.org/10.1145/2675133.2675149>
- Lau, C. P., A., Adnan, H. M. & Firdaus, A. (2021). New moms' use of media technology in parenting. *Jurnal Komunikasi Borneo*. 9, 81–93.
- Leigh, B., & Milgrom, J. (2008). Risk factors for antenatal depression, postnatal depression and parenting stress. *BMC Psychiatry*, 8(1), 24.
- Lee, C. S. (2013). Exploring emotional expressions on YouTube through the lens of media system dependency theory. *New Media and Society*, 14(3), 457–475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811419829>

- Lee, Y.-H. (2008). Individual Media Dependency (IMD) and social networking website: exploring relations between motivational dimensions of IMD and SNW use. In Conference Papers -- *International Communication Association* (pp. 1–31).
- Leigh, B., & Milgrom, J. (2008). Risk factors for antenatal depression, postnatal depression and parenting stress. *BMC Psychiatry*, 8, 24–35.
- Lindlof, T.R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Little Steps Asia (2017). Top Facebook groups for parents in KL (2017). Retrieved June 5, 2019 from <https://www.littlestepsasia.com/kuala-lumpur/articles/nest/top-facebook-groups-parents-kl>
- Lupton, D. (2000). 'A love/hate relationship': the ideals and experiences of first-time mothers. *J Sociol.*, 36(1), 50–63.
- Madge, C., & O'Connor, H. (2006). Parenting gone wired: Empowerment of new mothers on the internet? *Social and Cultural Geography*, 7(2), 199–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360600600528>
- Marzo, R. R., Rou, K. Z., Yin, O. Y., Gill, A. S., & Salam, A. (2019). Knowledge, attitude and practice on exclusive breastfeeding among mothers in Malaysia. *International Medical Journal*, 26(2), 77–80.
- Meadows, S. (2011). The association between perceptions of social support and maternal mental health: A cumulative perspective. *Journal of Family Issues*, 32, 181–208.
- Melton, J. L., Reynolds, R. A., & Reynolds, J. L. (2005). Anxiety/uncertainty management, cultural adaptation, and internet dependency among international students. *The Intercultural Communication Division of The International Communication Association* (pp. 0–33). Pepperdine University: New York
- Mohd Roffeei, S. H., Abdullah, N., & Basar, S. K. R. (2015). Seeking social support on Facebook for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). *International Journal of Medical Informatics*, 84(5), 375–385. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijmedinf.2015.01.015>
- Moon, R. Y., Mathews, A., Oden, R., & Carlin, R. (2019). Mothers' perceptions of the internet and social media as sources of parenting and health information: Qualitative study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 21(7), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.2196/14289>
- Morris, M.R. (2014). Social networking site use by mothers of young children. In: *Proceedings of the 17th ACM conference on computer supported cooperative work & social computing*, Baltimore, MD, 15–19 February, pp. 1272–1282. New York: ACM Press.
- Morris, M., & Ogan, C. (1996). The Internet as mass medium. *Journal of Communication*, 46, 39–50.
- Mustafa, H.R. (2016). Facebook for parents of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Malaysia. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), University of Tasmania. https://eprints.utas.edu.au/23884/1/Mustafa_whole_thesis.pdf
- Ngai, F. W., & Chan, S. W. C. (2011). Psychosocial factors and maternal wellbeing: An exploratory path analysis. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 48(6), 725–731.
- Nyström, K., & Öhring, K. (2014). Parenthood experiences during the child's first year: literature review. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 46(3), 319–30.
- Papacharissi, Z. & Rubin, A.M. (2000). Predictors of internet use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44, 175–196.

- Parry, D. C., Glover, T. D., & Mulcahy, C. M. (2013). From “stroller stalker” to “momancer”: Courting friends through a social networking site for mothers. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 45(1), 22–45.
- Price, S. L., Aston, M., Monaghan, J., Sim, M., Tomblin Murphy, G., Etowa, J., Pickles, M., Hunter, A., & Little, V. (2018). Maternal knowing and social networks: understanding first-time mothers’ search for information and support through online and offline social networks. *Qualitative Health Research*, 28(10), 1552–1563. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317748314>
- Regan, S., & Brown, A. (2019). Experiences of online breastfeeding support: Support and reassurance versus judgement and misinformation. *Maternal and Child Nutrition*, 15(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.12874>
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Varouhakis, M. (2008). Media System Dependency Theory and using the internet for in-depth, specialized information. *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research*, 11(October), 1–14.
- Sensis, (2017). *Sensis Social Media Report 2017: Australians and Social Media*. Melbourne, VIC, Australia: Sensis. https://www.sensis.com.au/asset/PDFdirectory/Sensis_Social_Media_Report_2017-Chapter-1.pdf
- Skumanich, S., & Kintsfather, D. (1998). Individual media dependency relations within television shopping programming: a causal model reviewed and revised. *Communication Research*, 25 (2), 200-217.
- Subramaniam, G., Ali, E., Overton, J. (2010). Are Malaysian women interested in flexible working arrangements at workplace? *Business Studies Journal*. 2(2), 83–98.
- Tai, Z., & Sun, T. (2007). Media dependencies in a changing media environment: the case of the 2003 SARS epidemic in China. *New Media & Society*, 9(6), 987–1009. doi:10.1177/1461444807082691
- TheAsianparent (2021). Digital Mum Survey 2021 Malaysia. <https://insights.theasianparent.com/product/digital-mum-survey-2021-malaysia>
- Valtchanov, B. L., Parry, D. C., Glover, T. D., & Mulcahy, C. M. (2016). ‘A whole new world’: Mothers’ technologically mediated leisure. *Leisure Sciences*, 38(1), 50–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2015.1043414>
- Zaimah, R., Sarmila, M. S., Selvadurai, S., Lyndon, N., Er, A. C., & Norizam Jamian, M. (2013). The history and current status of dual-career families in Malaysia. *Asian Social Science*, 9(6), 16–21. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v9n6p16>