

The Frequency Distribution of Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioural Control on Media Usage in Reducing Moral Decadence Among Malaysian Youth

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ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the moral decadence prevalent in the current millennial era, where the flow of modernisation can impact the moral decadence of the Malaysian population, especially among the youth. The ethical problem, particularly among youths, has expanded and could jeopardise the country's future. Despite a plethora of research on this relationship, minimal research has examined the act of social media usage as a correlate of this behaviour. Therefore, this study tested whether attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control lead to moral decadence. This factor analysis solves the challenge of determining the number of constructs required to describe a set of measured relationships. The findings of the study show that the attitude could shape towards behaviour of using social media among youth. Therefore, the instrument designed is legitimate and reliable for assessing targeted variables in the context of social media users among youth in Malaysia. This research contributed to the growing discourse on the social media's psychological impact on how youth behave towards lowering the moral decadence among Malaysian youth.

Keywords: social media usage, moral decadence, theory of planned behaviour, technology, youth

INTRODUCTION

The usage of digital technology has grown rapidly over the past decade (Burr et al., 2020; Korte, 2020), causing fundamental adjustments in how people interact with one another, such as acquiring knowledge and accessing services (Bach et al., 2018). More than any other demographic group, youth have increasingly adopted technology and the Internet as preferred tools for communication, socialisation, recreational activities, and education (Bach et al., 2018; Pandya & Lodha, 2021). From social media apps to online games and instructional materials, technological innovation has become an integral part of many young people's daily lives around the world (Perez-Escoda et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, disparities exist in digital platform use and, more importantly, digital literacy levels among young people inside and across countries (Bandura & Leal, 2022; Copaja et al., 2022). In Malaysia, these disparities are particularly pronounced, with a national 'digital divide' driven by considerable cross-country inequalities in digital access and literacy level (Chinedu et al., 2020; Hadziristic, 2017). Personal and social identities are created during one's youth (Erikson, 1950), and social media has begun to play an important role in that process. Youth may be unable to escape the potentially harmful consequences of social media use due to their limited ability for self-regulation and vulnerability to peer pressure, making them more likely to develop moral decadence.

The number of youths who use social media has skyrocketed in recent years. Youth's academic performance suffers when they frequently use social media for entertainment. This is corroborated by the findings of Karpinski and Duberstein (2009), who revealed that internet access increases the number of students who use social media and have more problems than benefits. Furthermore, online harassment has been thoroughly documented since the inception of social media. Approximately 40% of young people who use social networking sites have reported experiencing harassment online via offensive comments. Although it is acknowledged that social media use among the youths might alter their conduct and perceived behavioural control in reducing and influencing their morals.

The primary purpose of this study is to look at the relationship between attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on media usage and influences moral decadence among Malaysian youth. This study is conducted because there is a lack of studies regarding moral decadence among Malaysian youth in this Malaysian context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Icek Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) incorporates a fundamental concept known as perceived behavioural control (PBC). It refers to a person's impression of their ability to perform a given hustle and bustle, which reflects their ideas about how easy or difficult it is to carry out that behaviour under different conditions. Ajzen (1988) extended his theory of planned behaviour by incorporating the idea of perceived behavioural control as a predictor of both behavioural intention and behaviour itself. Attitudes are assessments of the usefulness of executing the activity that rely on assumptions that behaviour will lead to specific outcomes and the value assigned to those consequences. Perceived behavioural control directly affects actual behaviour. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), perceived behavioural control (PBC) is not only connected to an individual's intentions but also has a direct impact on their behaviour. Individuals who feel they have significant control over their ability to carry out an activity are more likely to do so, even without a clear purpose. This involves a direct influencing technique that utilises control beliefs.

PBC is shaped by control beliefs, which reflect an individual's perceptions of the factors that either facilitate or hinder their ability to engage in a behaviour. If these beliefs are accurate and mirror actual control, they can lead to specific behavioural outcomes. The TPB emphasises conscious decision-making. When people believe they have adequate resources and fewer obstacles, their perceived behavioural control increases, enhancing their likelihood of performing the intended action. Additionally, when individuals make realistic assessments of their abilities and the challenges they encounter, PBC can serve as a substitute for actual control over behaviour, directly influencing it.

Impact of Media Usage

In contrast, media and social media platforms are commonly viewed as valuable resources for individuals of all ages, especially children and youth. During the lockdown, access to the internet enabled peer communication and continued activities like school instruction. Social media services allow for numerous verbal or visual communications via internet-based networking, connecting people and encouraging quick connections and participation, such as liking or leaving feedback on something (Carr, 2015). Throughout lockdown, smartphones and social media were additionally employed as "school" information and education tools (Britwum & Aidoo, 2022). The significant rise in problematic social media use among youngsters raises serious worries about the consequences for them.

Previous research indicated that problematic social media users had lower mental and social well-being and were more likely to take drugs than non-problematic or non-users. If this trend persists, it could have serious implications for youth growth and future health. Furthermore, irresponsible social media use has been linked to lower sleep and later bedtimes, which could influence youths' overall well-being and academic performance. Social media can have both beneficial and bad effects on children's health and well-being, which is why technological education is essential.

One of the most significant effects of media consumption is its ability to enhance communication and social connections. According to Omar et al. (2019), Malaysian youth primarily use the Internet and social media platforms to interact with family and friends, highlighting the importance of these tools in their social lives. Mobile devices, particularly smartphones, have become essential for maintaining existing connections and establishing new ones, acting as a vital means of socialisation among youth. This social aspect of media usage boosts their emotional well-being by facilitating group involvement and support during challenging times.

Moral Decadence

Moral decadence among youths is characterised by a significant decline in moral values and ethical norms within society, especially affecting young people. This phenomenon is marked by behaviours and attitudes that diverge from accepted moral standards, often involving various social vices. Moral decay refers to the breakdown of moral ideals, leading to immoral or socially unacceptable conduct (Chima, 2020). This includes dishonesty, substance misuse, prostitution, and other abnormal behaviours that conflict with societal norms. Indicators of moral decline in youth encompass drug abuse, theft, dishonesty, and involvement in cults or gangs. Such moral decay can have serious societal repercussions, such as increased crime rates, family breakdowns, and a lack of community cohesion. Moral decadence among youths is a complex issue influenced by interpersonal relationships, peer influence, media exposure, and cultural trends. Addressing this problem requires comprehensive programmes involving families, colleges, universities, and non-profit organisations to strengthen the ethical foundations of young people.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative approach adhered to the research design of this study. Data were collected from questionnaire forms distributed among Malaysian youths. The researcher designed survey questions based on the research purpose. After consulting various sources, the researcher devised a series of well-organised inquiries that effectively assessed the following variables: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. These variables are adapted and adopted from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The construct variable that was tested in this study is attitude, subjective and perceived behavioural control. Additionally, this survey collected demographic information from participants, including gender, age, race, occupation, and types of social media they have used to engage in this study. Participants in this study were recruited through a multistage random sampling method. The respondents involved in this study were 432 youth from Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Kedah, and Terengganu. The sample calculations are based on the Krejci and Morgan table, which results in a minimum sample size of 432 respondents.

The reliability of the survey instrument was assessed through Cronbach's alpha, a commonly used measure of internal consistency, as shown in Table 1. Additionally, the study has certain deficiencies in methodology. While employing an online survey platform proved efficient, it may have resulted in an underrepresentation of respondents who have restricted access to digital tools or prefer alternative data collection methods. Furthermore, although the multistage sampling method covered a diverse group of youths in this Malaysian country, certain subgroups, such as those in urban or rural areas, may have been underrepresented. Ethical standards in social science research were maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed about the nature of the study, their right to withdraw, and confidentiality measures, including data anonymisation and the use of aggregated reporting of results to protect their identities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 presents the results of the reliability test for the construct variables using Cronbach's Alpha (α). The reliability coefficients indicate a high level of internal consistency for each construct. Specifically, the Attitude variable has a Cronbach's Alpha value of .931, suggesting excellent reliability. The Subjective Norm variable shows a reliability score of .928, which also reflects excellent consistency. Similarly, the Perceived Behavioural Control variable records a Cronbach's Alpha of .916, indicating strong reliability. Overall, all three constructs demonstrate a high level of internal consistency, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of .70, thus confirming the reliability of the measurement instruments used in the study.

Table 1 Reliability Test for Construct Variable

Construct Variables	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Attitude	.931
Subjective Norm	.928
Perceived Behavioural Control	.916

Table 2 illustrates the demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the study. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female (67.6%), while males accounted for 32.4%. The age distribution shows that most participants were aged between 18 to 21 years (73.8%), followed by 22 to 25 years (12.3%), 30 to 35 years (8.6%), and 26 to 29 years (5.3%). Regarding race, a significant majority were Malay (91.2%), with smaller representations from Chinese (2.3%), Indian (1.9%), and other ethnic groups (4.6%). As for occupation, the overwhelming majority of respondents were students (85.6%), while others were employed in the government sector (4.2%), private sector (5.6%), unemployed (2.3%), or self-employed (2.3%). In terms of social media usage, TikTok was the most frequently used platform (49.8%), followed by Instagram (32.9%), Twitter (7.9%), Facebook (6.7%), and Telegram (2.8%). This demographic profile reflects a youthful, student-dominated sample with high engagement in social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram.

Table 2 Demographic profile of respondents.

Profile of Respondents		<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	140	32.4
	Female	292	67.6
Age	18-21 Years	319	73.8
	22-25 Years	53	12.3
	26-29 Years	23	5.3
	30-35 Years	37	8.6
Race	Malay	394	91.2
	Chinese	10	2.3
	Indian	8	1.9
	Others	20	4.6
Occupation	Students	370	85.6
	Government Employed	18	4.2
	Unemployed	10	2.3
	Private	24	5.6
	Self-Employed	10	2.3
Social media	TikTok	215	49.8
	Instagram	142	32.9
	Facebook	29	6.7
	Twitter	34	7.9
	Telegram	12	2.8

Table 3 presents the main predictors of change in impact media usage, specifically examining three psychological variables: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. The results show that attitude towards

media usage has the highest mean score ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.73$), indicating that individuals generally have a positive perception or favourable attitude towards using media. This is followed by perceived behavioural control with a mean score of 4.11 ($SD = 0.73$), suggesting that individuals feel they have a relatively strong ability to control or manage their media usage. Subjective norm, which reflects social pressure or influence from others, has the lowest mean score ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.79$), indicating that social influence plays a less prominent role compared to personal attitude and perceived control. The findings suggest that attitude is the most influential predictor in shaping media usage behaviour, followed by perceived behavioural control and subjective norm.

Table 3 Main Predictors of Change in Impact Media Usage

Variables	Mean Score	SD
Attitude	4.33	0.73
Subjective Norm	3.95	0.79
Perceived Behavioural Control	4.11	0.73

Table 4 presents the respondents' attitudes toward social media use, as measured through various statements. Each item includes the frequency and percentage of responses across a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. The table also provides the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each item. The highest mean score was recorded for the item "Social Media Is Enjoyable" with a mean of 4.57 ($SD = 0.85$), showing that the majority of respondents find social media to be an enjoyable experience. This is supported by 71.3% who strongly agreed. Similarly, "Use Social Media During Free Time" ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.88$) and "Attempt Negativity While Browsing Social Media" ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.92$) also scored high, suggesting frequent engagement with social media during leisure and active cognitive filtering of negative content. Items such as "Social Media as Daily Activities" ($M = 4.36$) and "Feel Positive About Myself" ($M = 4.25$) reflect that respondents associate social media use with daily routines and self-perception. Moreover, a significant portion of respondents agreed on the "Negative Impact of Social Media" ($M = 4.28$), indicating awareness of its downsides despite its enjoyment and utility. The lowest mean scores were for "Check News Content" ($M = 4.17$) and "Spread Information by Social Media" ($M = 4.17$), suggesting these may be less prioritised functions among users. Overall, the total mean score of 4.33 ($SD = 0.73$) reflects a generally positive attitude toward social media, with a majority expressing agreement or strong agreement across most items, highlighting its role in daily life, enjoyment, and personal reflection, while still recognising potential negative effects.

Table 4 Attitude in Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Score

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	M	SD
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
Use social media During Free Time	9 (2.1)	12 (2.8)	23 (5.3)	120	268	4.45	0.88
				-27.8	-62		
Check News Content	8 (1.9)	13 (3.0)	62	162	187	4.17	0.91
			-14.4	-37.5	-43.2		
Gather Information from Media	7 (1.6)	14 (3.2)	31 (7.2)	177 (41.0)	203 (47.0)	4.28	0.56
Feel Positive About Myself	13 (3.0)	9 (2.1)	57 (13.2)	130 (30.1)	223 (51.6)	4.25	0.97
Social media Is Enjoyable	11 (2.5)	10 (2.3)	7 (1.6)	96 (22.2)	308 (71.3)	4.57	0.85

Negative Impact of social media	12 (2.8)	9 (2.1)	25 (5.8)	185 (42.8)	201 (46.5)	4.28	0.88
Attempt Negativity While Browsing	11 (2.5)	14 (3.2)	24 (5.6)	123 (28.5)	260 (60.2)	4.41	0.92
Social Media as Daily Activities	13 (3.0)	13 (3.0)	25 (5.8)	137 (31.7)	244 (56.5)	4.36	0.94
Spread Information by social media	21 (4.9)	11 (2.5)	44 (10.2)	155 (35.9)	201 (46.5)	4.17	1.04
Total M score						4.33	0.73

Table 5 presents the respondents' perceptions of social media usage among their social and professional circles. It captures how the influence of others (such as colleagues, parents, peers, and employers) impacts their view of social media, measured across eight statements using a 5-point Likert scale. Each item is reported with frequencies and percentages for each response category, as well as the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). The highest mean score was found in the item "My Peers Use Social Media" with a mean of 4.31 (SD = 0.88), indicating strong agreement, supported by 51.2% of respondents strongly agreeing and 34.7% agreeing. This suggests that peer influence is a dominant subjective norm in the context of social media usage. Similarly, "Employers Use Social Media" (M = 4.11) and "Use Social Media as a Reliable Tool" (M = 4.12) also received high agreement, indicating that respondents perceive social media as widely used and trustworthy within professional contexts. Conversely, "My Parents Use Social Media" received the lowest mean score at 3.64 (SD = 1.09), suggesting that social media use is perceived as less common among the older generation. The item "Use Social Media to Gain Respect" also had a relatively low mean of 3.69 (SD = 1.10), indicating a more neutral or divided perception on whether social media enhances social status. Items like "Use Social Media Appropriately to Educate Others" (M = 3.78) and "My Colleague Uses Social Media" (M = 3.92) also received moderate scores, suggesting some variability in attitudes depending on the context and relationship. Overall, the total mean score of 3.95 (SD = 0.79) indicates that subjective norms surrounding social media use are moderately positive. Respondents generally agree that social media use is common and acceptable in their social and professional environments, especially among peers and in work settings.

Table 5 Subjective Norms in Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Score

Items	Strongly Disagree <i>f (%)</i>	Disagree <i>f (%)</i>	Slightly Agree <i>f (%)</i>	Agree <i>f (%)</i>	Strongly Agree <i>f (%)</i>	M	SD
My Colleague Uses social media	11 (2.5)	22 (5.1)	99 (23.0)	159 (36.8)	141 (32.6)	3.92	0.92
My Parents Uses Social Media	16 (3.7)	50 (11.6)	118 (27.3)	139 (32.2)	109 (25.2)	3.64	1.09
My Peers Use Social Media	8 (1.9)	9 (2.1)	44 (10.2)	150 (34.7)	221 (51.2)	4.31	0.88
My Friends Uses social media	15 (3.5)	15 (3.5)	79 (18.3)	154 (35.6)	169 (39.1)	4.03	1.01
Employers Uses social media	10 (2.3)	13 (3.0)	65 (15.0)	177 (41.0)	167 (38.7)	4.11	0.93
Use social media Appropriately	11 (2.5)	14 (3.2)	96 (22.2)	171 (39.6)	140 (32.4)	3.96	0.95
Social media to Educate Other	15 (3.5)	20 (4.6)	122 (28.2)	161 (37.3)	114 (26.4)	3.78	1.00

Use social media to Gain Respect	17 (3.9)	43 (10.5)	116 (26.9)	136 (31.5)	120 (27.8)	3.69	1.10
Use Social Media As a Reliable Tool	11 (2.5)	6 (1.4)	69 (16.0)	180 (41.7)	166 (38.4)	4.12	0.90
Total M score						3.95	0.79

Table 6 shows respondents' perceptions of their ability to manage and control their social media use. It includes eight items assessed with a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, reporting frequencies, percentages, mean (M), and standard deviation (SD) for each item. The highest-rated statement is "Daily Usage is Up to Me," which received a mean score of 4.31 (SD = 0.88). Nearly half of the respondents (49.8%) strongly agreed, indicating that most users feel a high level of personal control over how and when they use social media. Similarly, "More Spend, More Misbehave," "Control Information," and "Perceive Good or Bad Review of Product" also scored highly, with mean values of 4.28, revealing that respondents recognise how social media influences their spending and behaviour, and that they feel capable of evaluating information and online reviews critically. The item "Easy Access Influence Decision" also received strong agreement (M = 4.08), demonstrating that while respondents believe they have control, they also acknowledge that the ease of access can influence their decisions. The statement "Free Time Influences Decision" (M = 4.04) supports this, suggesting that social media decisions are often made when users have leisure time. The lowest-rated item was "Cause A Lot of Worry," with a mean of 3.88 (SD = 1.02), indicating a relatively lower perception of stress or anxiety caused by social media, though it still shows moderate agreement. The item "Less Than 3 Hours Per Day" (M = 3.90) indicates that while many users attempt to limit their screen time, not everyone succeeds consistently. Overall, the total mean score of 4.11 (SD = 0.73) suggests that respondents generally feel confident in managing their social media use. They perceive themselves as having control over their behaviour, decisions, and the content they engage with, while acknowledging certain influences from accessibility and free time.

Table 6 Perceived Behavioural Control in Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Score

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	M	SD
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
Confident Handling social media	11 (2.5)	14 (3.2)	91 (21.1)	180 (41.7)	136 (31.5)	3.96	0.94
Free Time Influences Decision	11 (2.5)	16 (3.7)	75 (17.4)	173 (40.0)	157 (36.3)	4.04	0.96
Less Than 3 Hours Per Day	10 (2.3)	40 (9.3)	87 (20.1)	143 (33.1)	152 (35.2)	3.9	1.06
Daily Usage is Up to Me	11 (2.5)	8 (1.9)	31 (7.2)	167 (38.7)	215 (49.8)	4.31	0.88
Easy Access Influence Decision	10 (2.3)	12 (2.8)	80 (18.5)	160 (37.0)	170 (39.4)	4.08	0.95
More Spend, More Misbehave	12 (2.8)	10 (2.3)	26 (6.0)	183 (42.4)	201 (46.5)	4.28	0.89
Causes a Lot of Worry	12 (2.8)	35 (8.1)	75 (17.4)	180 (41.7)	130 (30.1)	3.88	1.02
Control Information Perceive	10 (2.3)	16 (3.7)	26 (6.0)	169 (39.1)	211 (48.8)	4.28	0.91

Good or Bad Review of Product	10 (2.3)	7 (1.6)	47 (10.9)	180 (41.7)	188 (43.5)	4.22	0.91
Total M score						4.11	0.73

Attitude as a crucial predictor in affecting media usage among kids is a complex topic of study that is influenced by psychological, familial, and societal factors. A large amount of research shows that youths' media consumption patterns are heavily influenced by their views towards media, which might derive from parental influence and the surrounding sociocultural context. Parental views influence youth media habits. According to Sorensen et al. (2022), children's screen media usage is heavily influenced by their parents' media habits and attitudes. Similarly, parental monitoring attitudes have a major impact on teenage media interactions, particularly in terms of safety and online behaviour (Cohen et al., 2023). This is consistent with those who have stressed how psychological elements, particularly pleasure from digital media, can perpetuate behavioural patterns in young buyers (Andoh-Quainoo, 2021). Furthermore, the opinions that youth form as a result of media exposure can have a significant impact on their social interactions and identity formation. Diverse media content has a considerable impact on youth value orientations and identities, implying that media functions as both a communication platform and a formative agent in forming perceptions and choices. In their study on youth attitudes towards media, the relationship between media exposure and attitudes results in a feedback loop in which media consumption reinforces existing attitudes or produces new ones.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated how social media use affects ethical behaviours among Malaysian youths. The findings show that moral standards are influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Notably, these factors had the most significant positive impact on moral principles, whereas excessive social media use has the opposite effect. The study's findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the interactions of individual, societal, and environmental influences in creating moral principles.

The findings indicate that developing moral principles among youths requires a holistic approach that takes into account the educational environment, social media use, parental participation, and peer impact. This complete strategy is critical for promoting moral growth and responsible social media use among young people. The study's findings have broad implications. Educators and governments should prioritise the creation of supportive school environments that promote moral values development. Parents and guardians should monitor and guide their children's social media use. Schools should include moral values teaching in their curricula. Further research should look into techniques for encouraging responsible social media use and moral ideals among youths.

In conclusion, the strategic use of media in reducing youth moral decadence requires a diverse approach. It entails promoting targeted ethical content that reshapes moral attitudes (Khan, 2022), developing digital platforms that improve perceived behavioural control to empower youth (Gogo, 2020), and utilising community and religion-centred media initiatives that solidify positive social norms (Efendi & Rafdiansyah, 2023). Such an integrative technique utilises both the informational and transforming capacity of media, providing a feasible path to combating moral decline among youths.

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