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## Comparative Analysis of Social Media Literacy Model Among Young Adults in Malaysia

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### Abstract

With approximately 33.59 million internet users in Malaysia, concerns have arisen over users' ability to ethically and effectively analyse and engage with diverse digital media content. This study examines social media literacy models among young adults in Malaysia, focusing on the relationships between functional consuming, functional prosuming, critical consuming, and critical prosuming. Using a quantitative research approach, findings reveal that Malaysians possess moderate social media literacy skills, indicating a pressing need to identify effective ways to enhance literacy, especially for Malaysians in East Malaysia who may not access information as consistently as those in West Malaysia. The findings also show that all hypotheses are supported, emphasizing the importance of improving media literacy to help individuals navigate the digital space responsibly, effectively, and ethically. The study suggests that strengthening functional consuming skills can foster better prosuming abilities, ultimately enhancing individuals' critical evaluation of diverse online content. Practical implications for decision-makers, educators, and community leaders are highlighted, encouraging efforts to improve social media literacy and promote digital citizenship among young adults across varied socio-economic backgrounds in Malaysia. This analysis contributes valuable insights to digital literacy research and offers essential guidance for strategies to foster informed and responsible online behaviour among young adults.

**Keywords:** social media literacy, young adults, functional consuming, functional prosuming, critical consuming, critical prosuming.

### 1. Introduction

Media literacy has gained importance, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which the WHO called an “infodemic” due to the spread of misinformation. The need for media literacy is underscored by findings that fake news constituted 60-70 % of content on social media during the pandemic (Al Zou'bi, 2022). Social media algorithms also promote sensational content to drive traffic, where such posts outperform quality news (Dujeancourt, Garz, 2022). Scholars also emphasize how algorithms influence news consumption, making it crucial for individuals to discern trustworthy content (Adeline, Ahmad, 2022).

Previous research has delved into the social media literacy of adolescents and young adults, exploring their ability to navigate media messages, acquire knowledge, and develop skills within the realm of social media usage (Drake et al., 2023; Geraee et al., 2015; Wendt, 2023). Additionally, some studies have concentrated on undergraduate students, examining the influence of media literacy on their capacity to analyse media content critically (Moore, 2015) and the impact

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of media literacy skills on learning outcomes (Tran-Duong, 2023). However, most studies have primarily concentrated on Western and English-speaking populations (Facciani et al., 2023).

There are few studies in the Malaysian context which examine the impact of social media information literacy on Malaysian youth's emotional intelligence (Abdul Rahman et al., 2023) and explore teachers' perceptions of challenges related to integrating digital information literacy in students (Salsuhaida et al., 2023). Some studies are related to applying a social media literacy model but focus on crime prevention (Jamilah et al., 2015), the interpretation of violent media messages (Leong, Kho, 2022). Furthermore, past studies have also examined the levels of new media literacy among university students in Malaysia, measuring the relationship between media use and new media literacy (Chin, Hasmah, 2019; Chen et al. 2022; Ahmad Syakir et al. 2024; Abdul Rahman et al., 2023).

However, they have predominantly focused on a single private university rather than the broader Malaysian population. Consequently, it is necessary to comprehensively assess social media literacy levels across Malaysia. The study samples should encompass individuals residing in both urban and rural areas, particularly those in rural regions with internet access, such as the Orang Asli, as well as those residing in East Malaysia, to enhance the reliability and validity of the data.

Malaysia is a unique country with a diverse, multiracial society, boasting rich cultural traditions and various religious practices. Evolving from its colonial past, Malaysia has rapidly transitioned into a fast-growing industrial nation, propelled by the ambitious goal of achieving high-technology status by 2030 (iNews Asia Team, 2021). Nevertheless, given Malaysia's status as a multiracial country rich in various religions and cultural practices, there is a heightened risk of misinformation inciting animosity and jeopardising the nation's harmony and democracy. Therefore, examining the understanding of media literacy among Malaysians is imperative to assess their critical roles in consuming media content. This study examines Malaysian social media literacy using the proposed social media literacy model by Lin et al. (Lin et al., 2013). It aims to assess functional consuming, critical consuming, functional prosuming, and critical prosuming aspects of social media literacy among young adults in Malaysia using the mean and standard deviation scores. The initial evaluation in this study investigates whether functional consumption positively impacts functional prosuming within the framework of the social media literacy model. Subsequently, this research will ascertain if functional consumption positively affects critical consumption within the same literacy model. The third evaluation recommended by the social media literacy model aims to reveal whether functional prosuming has a beneficial influence on critical prosuming. Lastly, the final assessment examines the positive correlation between critical consuming and critical prosuming, posited by the social media literacy model (see Figure 1).

## 2. Materials and methods

A cross-sectional survey was conducted in Malaysia utilising an online method, targeting individuals aged 18 to 35 who spend at least two hours daily on social media platforms. The non-probability judgmental sampling technique was employed, consistent with established research practices suggested by Sekaran and Bougie (Sekaran, Bougie, 2019). The minimum sample size was calculated using G\*Power 3.1.9.7 software, requiring a sample size of 129 when effect size is 0.15 by 80 % power level (Hair et al., 2022). In total of 270 questionnaires were distributed, with 221 questionnaires were considered useful, while 49 incomplete surveys were not analysed. The respondents were primarily female, living in urban area, students, and had at least a Bachelor's degree, as illustrated in Table 1. The Structural Equation Modelling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was utilised in analysing the measurement model and the structural model. SmartPLS 4.0 proposed by Christian Ringle and his team (Ringle et al., 2024), and SPSS software version 29 were then used in analysing the data. Indicator items for the constructs were adapted from prior research and tailored to the context of social media literacy. A 5-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree was used in measuring all the variables.

**Table 1.** Demographic Profiles of Respondents

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender	Male	71	32.1
	Female	147	66.5

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Classification</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Hours spend on social media platforms	Prefer not to say	3	1.4
	2-3.99 hours	24	10.9
	4-5.99 hours	53	24.0
	6-7.99 hours	68	30.8
	Above 8 hours	76	34.4
Area	Urban	172	77.8
	Rural	49	22.2
Education Level	SPM or lower	21	9.5
	STPM or Matriculation	3	1.4
	Foundation or Diploma	71	32.1
	Bachelor's Degree	108	48.9
	Master's Degree	11	5.0
	Doctoral Degree	7	3.2
Employment	Private sector	24	10.9
	Public sector	6	2.7
	Self-employed	3	1.4
	Unemployed	5	2.3
	Freelance	1	0.5
	Housewife	1	0.5
	Student	181	81.9

### 3. Discussion

#### *Overview of Social Media Literacy*

Media literacy involves engaging with, understanding, and creating media content. Traditionally focused on passive consumption of media like newspapers and TV (Kara et al., 2018), it has evolved with the rise of new media, allowing active participation and critical engagement (Luan et al., 2020). McLuhan's concept, "the medium is the message," highlights how the platform shapes content perception. This shift emphasizes the need for both functional and critical skills, including digital content creation, collaboration, online safety, and problem-solving (Brown, 2018).

A framework transitioning from consuming to "prosuming" literacy, where critical literacy builds on functional literacy, was introduced, with functional literacy focusing on media tool use and critical literacy involving the analysis and critique of content (Chen et al., 2011). This framework was further expanded to redefine literacy as encompassing technical and socio-cultural aspects of new media (Lin et al., 2013). Higher new media literacy, which has been shown to lead to greater engagement with media and influence both usage frequency and purpose, was also identified as significant (Xu et al., 2022).

As pointed out by (Xu et al., 2022), individuals with higher levels of new media literacy tend to exhibit greater interest in new media than those with lower literacy levels. This implied that new media literacy can influence the frequency and manner in which we utilise media for various purposes.

Lin et al. (Lin et al., 2013) built upon this framework, retaining Chen et al. (2011) four types of new media literacy but adding ten detailed indicators to further elaborate on functioning consuming (FC), critical consuming (CC), functional prosuming (FP), and critical prosuming (CP). Each type represents a different proficiency level, from basic consumption to critical engagement and content creation (Chen et al., 2011; Lin et al., 2013) (see Figure 1).

#### *Functional Consuming*

Functional consuming literacy is the initial starting point in developing the model because users must at least be familiar with the technical characteristics of new media technology and new media language to engage with it actively (Lin et al., 2013). This involves both consuming skill and understanding. (a) Consuming skills focus on an individual's ability to interact with media content, specifically how they utilise information technology and the internet on social media. This requires technical skills such as hardware and software proficiency to consume media content. (b) Understanding means comprehending ideas presented in different media types and interpreting the format's meaning. As supported by scholars, users must be able to comprehend and utilise

different media forms before critically analysing the hidden message within a media text (Chen et al., 2011). Therefore, functional consumption is essential to determine whether an individual can operate and engage with various types of media forms and understand the textual meaning of a media text.

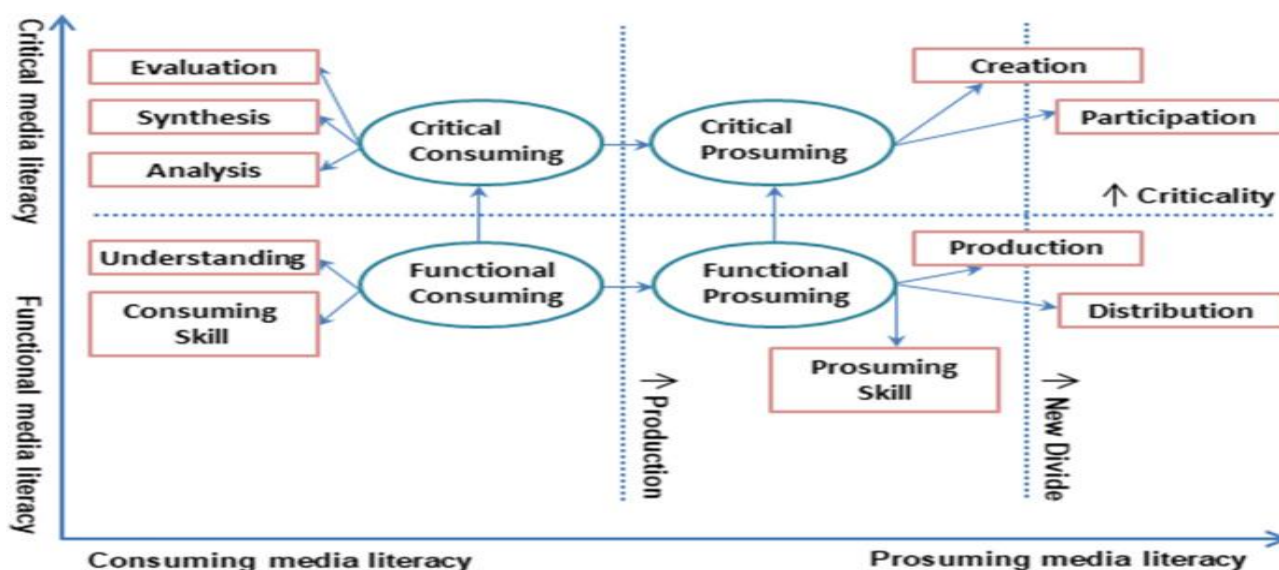


Fig. 1. Social Media Literacy Model

#### *Critical Consuming*

Critical Consuming Literacy involves the audience's ability to evaluate, synthesise, and analyse media content. (a) Analytical skills require a higher level of comprehension, not merely understanding the message in general but deconstructing the hidden meanings through techniques such as semiotic analysis, which involves analysing the language, genre and code. As alluded by past researchers, a critical consumer can analyse and interpret media content's socio-cultural, economic, and political consequences, including underlying ideologies, social values and power dynamics (Chen et al., 2011). (b) Synthesize requires individuals to combine different ideas to create something new or to form a coherent whole. (c) Evaluation deals with an individual's ability to question and criticise media content. It is at a higher level than analysis and synthesis, as evaluation involves the ability to reconstruct and consider issues of uncertainty, such as verifying and clarifying dubious news. These evaluations include the ability to examine the reliability and credibility of media content (Lin et al., 2013).

#### *Functional Prosuming*

Functional prosuming literacy involves users' capacity to create media content across various platforms (Chen et al., 2011). It can be divided into three components: (a) Prosuming skills pertain to individuals' technical proficiency in producing or generating digital content. For example, utilising applications available on devices to create digital artefacts. (b) Distribution focuses on the ability to disseminate information across various channels. (c) Production refers to the capability to replicate content. This encompasses tasks such as writing texts in digital formats and creating videos by combining images and audio (Lin et al., 2013).

#### *Critical Prosuming*

Critical prosuming literacy represents the highest level of understanding of media. A Critical prosumer can express their thoughts while engaging with others' ideas, and they consider the potential impacts of media creation and participation (Chen et al., 2011). Compared to basic prosuming, critical prosuming involves creating and engaging, like joining interactive media discussions and thinking critically about media content in different situations. "Interactive" means that people engage in a two-way exchange, speaking and listening to each other equally. (a) Creation and (b) Participation requires participants to have social skills for communicating and working with others online. A critical media user can identify deception, improve others' comments, or negotiate with others by sharing their ideas while respecting different viewpoints and beliefs (Lin et al., 2013).

The discussion of the social media literacy model led to the following hypotheses that can be proposed in this study:

H1: Functional consuming literacy positively influences critical consuming literacy among young adult social media users in Malaysia.

H2: Functional consuming literacy positively influences functional prosuming literacy among young adult social media users in Malaysia.

H3: Critical consuming literacy positively influences critical prosuming literacy among young adult social media users in Malaysia.

H4: Functional prosuming literacy positively influences critical prosuming literacy among young adult social media users in Malaysia.

#### *The Present Studies*

Social media literacy has been a topic of intense debate since the advent of the World Wide Web. The global village has interconnected people, providing access to vast amounts of information across numerous social media platforms. While interest in media literacy, particularly social media literacy, has grown worldwide, some argue that there is still limited understanding of the prevalence of instructional practices in this area. Studies focusing on secondary schools, for instance, suggest that implementation is lacking due to challenges like technological limitations (Hobbs et al., 2022), highlighting the need for further attention. This concern is underscored by research on the risks of misinformation, particularly on platforms like WhatsApp. A study on Kenyan adults found that many perceive sharing misinformation as a way to inform others about events, but they hesitate to correct it due to concerns about family dynamics, fear of embarrassment, beliefs that the misinformation hasn't spread widely, and seeing certain misinformation, like memes, as harmless (Mudavadi et al., 2024). This is echoed by research, which shows that fake news spreads more quickly, with greater diffusion speed, and exhibits more broadcast influence and person-to-person transmission compared to true news (Chiu, et al., 2022). The real dangers posed by social media, especially in specific contexts, highlight the urgent need to examine social media literacy levels among young adults. While we live in a technology-driven era and are generally tech-savvy, it does not necessarily mean we are experts in all forms of social media.

In today's reality, with multiple contexts requiring different levels of understanding, we need to cultivate a deeper knowledge to effectively navigate and critically engage with social media content. This becomes especially relevant when considering media literacy programs designed for youth, many of which lack experiential learning environments that could better support the development of social media literacy. In a study on social media literacy conducted across eight European countries, the scholars emphasize that young users share similar abilities, motivations, and behaviours related to online participation. They also stress the need to improve digital literacy research, noting that most existing programs lack empirical evaluation, which makes it unclear whether young users are able to develop the intended aspects of digital literacy in the short or long term (Wendt et al., 2023). The findings of recent studies also highlight that active participation plays a crucial role in improving learning outcomes (Zou et al., 2024) and that critical thinking dispositions are closely linked to the ability to detect fake news (Orhan, 2023). This reinforces the importance of translating theory into practice in order to fully understand the challenges of consuming and producing information on social media.

Recent studies have increasingly utilized data-driven methods to reduce misinformation on social media. For example, researchers have proposed a "competitive concern minimization" model, which seeks to decrease users' concerns about misinformation by deploying agents to share accurate information (Ni et al., 2024). Another study focuses on assessing the credibility of Twitter users to identify misinformation, leveraging user behaviour patterns and tweet propagation to assign credibility scores (Saxena et al., 2023). In addition, a study also found that enhancing skepticism, perceived accuracy, and content diagnosticity can help users better identify fake news (Alon, et al., 2024). Furthermore, the study also indicates the importance of news trustworthiness attributes in assessing students' new media literacy levels to discern fake news while interacting with media (Luo, et al., 2022). These efforts demonstrate the practical application of social media literacy to enhance its effectiveness. However, most of these studies have focused on Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding the dynamics of Asian developing countries. This highlights the need for more research to address this gap within the local context.

### *The Social Media Literacy in the Malaysian Context*

The incorporation of social media into daily life has significantly changed the way individuals consume and receive information. As of 2024, approximately 28.68 million Malaysians, or about 83 % of the population, are active social media users. The most popular platforms include YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Twitter. Malaysia's social media landscape is continually evolving, with platforms like TikTok and Instagram experiencing notable growth (Ashraf, 2024). This trend is generally seen as positive, as the expansion of globalization has fostered connectivity among people worldwide. The emergence of a global village has also enhanced interactivity and access to information. This is because individuals are no longer just passive consumers but actively participate in content creation and production. However, this shift raises concerns about individuals' ability to distinguish between facts and misinformation, as well as their capacity to interpret content in different contexts. The importance of these skills is further underscored by the increasing prevalence of cyber scams and misinformation. According to a news report the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) blocked 24,277 websites from 2018 to August 2024, classifying these sites into categories such as online gambling, obscene content, copyright infringement, unregistered product sales, incitement, defamation and unlawful investment and scams (Bernama, 2024). This highlights the urgent need for individual to navigate the digital landscape thoughtfully, critically evaluate information, and engage responsibly with media content.

The intersection of social media and media literacy has emerged as a critical area of study, with past research extensively exploring their relationship. Most studies in this area have relied on survey questionnaires; however, many are limited in scope, often focusing on individual universities or primarily on university student populations. For instance, a study found that students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia spend considerable time browsing the internet for entertainment. The study also emphasized the need to monitor social media usage to mitigate its negative impact on students' social lives (Chen et al., 2022). Likewise, research on social media literacy among students at a Malaysian university revealed that most students have a moderate level of new media literacy, with a positive correlation between social media use and both functional and critical prosumption. This study highlighted the necessity of critical thinking to combat the harmful effects of widespread misinformation and misleading content (Chin, Hasmah, 2019). However, since it focuses exclusively on University Tunku Abdul Rahman, its findings may not accurately reflect the broader Malaysian context.

Similarly, a study found that higher levels of media literacy among Universiti Teknologi Mara students promote more responsible information behaviour, which is essential for navigating today's information-rich digital environment (Ahmad Syakir et al., 2024). As social media serves as both an information source and a potential channel for misinformation, the ability to distinguish credible information is crucial to reducing susceptibility to fake news. Another Malaysian study highlighted a relationship between social media literacy and emotional intelligence, stressing the importance of fostering emotional intelligence in digitally savvy youth to help mitigate issues like cybercrime (Abdul Rahman et al., 2023). This underscores the growing importance of strong social media literacy skills, especially as more people rely on social media for up-to-date information. While these insights offer valuable understanding of students' perspectives on media usage, they are constrained by the single-university sample, where respondents share a similar academic background. Unlike these previous studies, this research aims to address this limitation by focusing on a broader Malaysian population, including participants from East Malaysia, thus offering a more comprehensive view of social media literacy across different regions.

Some studies take a different approach by examining digital reading practices within rural communities that have lower literacy rates. These studies highlight the necessity of enhancing digital literacy to develop digital reading skills, aiming to close the digital divide between urban and rural populations (Samsul Farid et al., 2021). This emphasis aligns with Malaysia's 10-year National Reading Decade program (2021-2030), which seeks to promote a culture of reading nationwide (Abas, 2018). Moreover, some studies investigated the digital competencies of secondary students and found that, although young people generally felt capable when handling information, they encountered difficulties with content creation and lacked problem-solving skills. Their research indicated that secondary students often struggle to evaluate the relevance and usefulness of information and to express their ideas through visual communication (Ambigapathy et al., 2020). This underscores the increasing significance of the issue.

While news literacy is significant, some scholars aptly noted that most research has predominantly focused on Western and English-speaking populations (Facciani et al., 2023). Therefore, this study is crucial in addressing this gap in the literature. By deepening our understanding of social media literacy skills among Malaysians, it can enhance the effectiveness of educational programs aimed at improving digital competencies, ultimately empowering individuals to navigate the complexities of the digital landscape in Malaysia more effectively. Furthermore, this study will adopt the social media literacy model proposed by Lin et al. (2013), providing a detailed assessment of functional consuming, critical consuming, functional prosuming, and critical prosuming within Malaysian populations. Through this comprehensive analysis, the research aims to cultivate a more informed and engaged society capable of critically engaging with digital content and effectively utilizing social media platforms.

#### 4. Results

##### *Descriptive Analysis*

Descriptive analysis is a statistical tool used to summarise and present key features of a dataset, providing a clear and concise overview of its main characteristics (Sekaran, Bougie, 2019). This technique involves the calculation of central tendency measures, such as mean and standard deviation. Descriptive analysis helps researchers and analysts to understand the central trends, patterns, and variability within the data. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for all significant variables. The critical prosuming (CP) variable has the lowest mean score of 3.453, while the functional consuming (FC) variable has the highest mean score of 3.942, which is close to a rating of four. All variables have mean scores above 3.4, indicating that respondents generally agree with the item statements. The standard deviation ranges from 0.789 to 0.869, suggesting the absence of extreme values.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics

<i>Major Variables</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Functional Consuming	3.942	0.793
Critical Consuming	3.776	0.789
Functional Prosuming	3.860	0.869
Critical Prosuming	3.453	0.836

##### *Common Method Bias*

This study employed the SmartPLS 4 version as its statistical tool (Ringle et al., 2024), using partial least squares (PLS) modeling to test the measurement and structural model since it does not require normality assumption, with survey research seldom being normally distributed (Chin et al., 2003). As all data were collected from a single source, multicollinearity may exist. Therefore, full collinearity testing was first tested in order to explore the issue of Common Method Bias, through the method enlightened by Kock and Lynn, 2012 (Kock, 2015). In this way, all variables are regressed on a common variable and if their VIF is  $\leq 3.3$ , then there is no bias from the single source data. Table 1 shows the VIF for the analysis was less than 3.3, therefore the data of this study is not seriously clouded by single source bias.

**Table 3.** Full Collinearity Testing

FC	CC	FP	CP
1.229	1.654	1.525	1.724

Notes: FC – Functional Consuming, CC – Critical Consuming, FP – Functional Prosuming and CP – Critical Prosuming

##### *Measurement Model*

The model tested in this study has been developed in a manner similar to the advised 2-step approach by Anderson and Gerbing for testing models (Anderson, Gerbing, 1988). The researchers tested the measurement model first using criteria provided by Hair et al. and Ramayah et al. to ensure the validity and reliability of instruments (Hair et al., 2022; Ramayah et al., 2018). Next, the data was assessed by a structural model which tested the hypotheses developed.

For the measurement model, the study first assessed the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR). The values of loadings should be  $\geq 0.5$ , the AVE should be  $\geq 0.5$  and the CR should be  $\geq 0.7$ . As shown in [Table 2](#), the AVEs are all higher than 0.5 and the CRs are all higher than 0.7. The loadings were also acceptable with all the loading more than 0.5 ([Hair et al., 2022](#)).

Then in step 2, we assessed the discriminant validity using the HTMT criterion suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) and updated by Franke and Sarstedt ([Henseler et al., 2015](#); [Franke, Sarstedt, 2019](#)). The HTMT values should be  $\leq 0.85$  the stricter criterion and the mode lenient criterion is it should be  $\leq 0.90$ . As shown in [Table 3](#), the values of HTMT were all lower than the lenient criterion of  $\leq 0.90$  as such we can conclude that the respondents understood that the 4 constructs are distinct. Taken together both these validity test has shown that the measurement items are both valid and reliable.

**Table 4.** Measurement Model for the All Constructs

Construct	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR
Functional Consuming	FC1	0.845	0.690	0.939
	FC2	0.838		
	FC3	0.882		
	FC4	0.827		
	FC5	0.779		
	FC6	0.772		
	FC7	0.864		
Critical Consuming	CC1	0.831	0.629	0.942
	CC2	0.804		
	CC3	0.778		
	CC4	0.815		
	CC5	0.795		
	CC6	0.631		
	CC7	0.789		
	CC8	0.810		
	CC9	0.808		
	CC10	0.821		
	CC11	0.825		
Functional Prosuming	FP1	0.847	0.685	0.923
	FP2	0.828		
	FP3	0.881		
	FP4	0.860		
	FP5	0.829		
	FP6	0.755		
	FP7	0.785		
Critical Prosuming	CP1	0.788	0.626	0.936
	CP2	0.801		
	CP3	0.819		
	CP4	0.809		
	CP5	0.783		
	CP6	0.783		
	CP7	0.768		
	CP8	0.815		
	CP9	0.721		
	CP10	0.820		



### Structural Model

As suggested by past researchers, this study assessed the multivariate normality skewness and kurtosis (Cain et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2022). The results showed that the data of this study collected was not multivariate normal, Mardia's multivariate skewness which greater than  $+3$  ( $\beta = 3.600$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Mardia's multivariate kurtosis which greater than  $+20$  ( $\beta = 35.476$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). As the data is not normal distribution, the researchers reported the path coefficients, the standard errors, t-values and p-values for the structural model using a 10,000-sample re-sample bootstrapping procedure (Ramayah et al. 2018). Also based on the criticism, p-values are not good criterion for testing the significance of hypothesis and suggested to use a combination of criterions such as p-values, confidence intervals and effect sizes (Hahn, Ang, 2017). Table 4 shows the summary of the criterions used in this study to test the hypotheses developed.

**Table 5.** Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1. Functional Consuming				
2. Critical Consuming	0.893			
3. Functional Prosuming	0.808	0.797		
4. Critical Prosuming	0.669	0.737	0.776	

First, the researchers tested the effect of the Functional Consuming on Critical Consuming, the  $R^2$  was 0.697 which shows that this predictor explained 69.7 % of the variance in Critical Consuming. Functional Consuming ( $\beta = 0.835$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), positively related to Critical Consuming, thus H1 was supported. Next, this study tested the effect on Functional Consuming on Functional Prosuming, with an  $R^2$  of 0.558 which indicates that Functional Consuming explains 55.8 % of the variance in Functional Prosuming. Functional Consuming ( $\beta = 0.747$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), positively related to Functional Prosuming which gives support for H2. Then, the study tested the effect of the 2 predictors on Critical Prosuming, the  $R^2$  was 0.587 which shows that all the 2 predictors explained 58.7 % of the variance in Critical Prosuming. Functional Prosuming ( $\beta = 0.472$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Critical Consuming ( $\beta = 0.347$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) were all positively related to Critical Prosuming, thus H3 and H4 were also supported.

**Table 6.** Hypothesis Testing Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	t-values	p-values	BCI LL	BCI UL	f2	VIF
H1	Functional Consuming → Critical Consuming	0.835	0.032	26.504	$p < .001$	0.774	0.878	2.301	1.000
H2	Functional Consuming → Functional Prosuming	0.747	0.049	15.222	$p < .001$	0.654	0.816	1.265	1.000
H3	Functional Prosuming → Critical Prosuming	0.472	0.074	6.406	$p < .001$	0.343	0.585	0.241	2.238
H4	Critical Consuming → Critical Prosuming	0.347	0.080	4.341	$p < .001$	0.217	0.479	0.130	2.238

Notes: We use 90 % confidence interval with a bootstrapping of 10,000

The findings indicate that Malaysians have moderate social media literacy skills, with mean scores ranging from 3.7 to 3.9. However, critical prosuming shows a slightly lower mean score of

3.4 compared to the other three variables. As the highest level of social media literacy, critical prosuming requires the ability to create and participate meaningfully within diverse social media contexts. Past scholars have supported the idea that critical prosuming skills are influenced by both critical consuming and functional prosuming skills (Lin et al., 2013). Therefore, strengthening these skills could contribute to improved critical prosuming abilities among Malaysians.

The widespread dissemination of technology-related misinformation on social media has become a pressing concern for security experts, likely due to users' challenges in discerning underlying meanings in social media content, which increases susceptibility to fake news. This issue is particularly significant during crises, when every piece of information is crucial for public response (Yeoh, 2024). Notably, during the pandemic, the amount of fake news circulated was approximately three times higher than verified news (Chee, 2023), underscoring the need for strong social media literacy to navigate the vast amount of information available on social platforms."

In addition, the findings also indicate that all hypotheses are accepted. Specifically, hypothesis 1 suggests that functional consuming literacy is positively correlated with critical consuming literacy. Hypothesis 2 posits that functional consuming is positively related to functional prosuming, while hypotheses 3 and 4 are closely associated to critical prosuming skill.

The results suggest a strong correlation between high levels of functional consumption and critical consumption, implying that these skills are essential for critically evaluating, synthesizing, and analysing social media content. Although Malaysia has approximately 33.59 million internet users (Data Reportal, 2024, February 23), indicating a certain level of media usage skills, Associate Professor Dr. Mohd Khairie expresses concerns about users' ability to analyse, evaluate, and use media ethically (Basir, 2024). These concerns are further underscored by a report showing that Malaysian e-commerce crime in 2023 resulted in RM204 million in losses, with online fraud alone accounting for 34,397 cases and RM1.2 billion in damages (Camoens, 2024).

This situation highlights the urgent need for improved media literacy among Malaysian internet users, particularly in their ability to navigate the digital landscape responsibly. This is supported by past researchers, who explain that functional consumption involves not only accessing recently generated media content but also fully comprehending its conveyed significance, which requires cultivating a comprehensive array of technical proficiencies (Hilyati et al., 2024). Engaging in functional consumption necessitates the ability to actively and analytically interact with content, fostering a more knowledgeable and discerning media consumer in the digital era. This foundational skill set is crucial before individuals can effectively engage in critical consumption, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of social media content. Therefore, the findings recommend prioritizing the enhancement of functional consumption skills while also focusing on strengthening critical consumption.

The second hypothesis posits that functional consuming literacy can positively influence functional prosuming literacy. The skills involved in understanding and consuming media encompass not only the ability to create accounts on social media but also to navigate its functionalities effectively. Additionally, these consuming skills include reading and writing proficiency, which enable users to comprehend and utilize various forms of media (Chen et al., 2011). Some argue that consumption skills should also integrate critical thinking, allowing individuals to connect meaningfully with their social environment and context on social media (Polanco-Levican, Salvo-Garrido, 2023). Thus, it becomes evident that functional consuming is closely linked to functional prosuming skills, which involve the ability to produce, distribute, and engage in both creating and consuming content.

This concept underscores the active role users play in the content creation process, emphasizing that they are not merely passive consumers but also active contributors to the media landscape. Supporting this view, some scholars found that functional consumption and functional prosuming can influence each other interchangeably among Turkish students (Tugtekin, Koc, 2019). This suggests that the ability to consume is a prerequisite for critical media literacy. Indeed, a media prosumer is both a producer and a consumer when an individual creates or revises content. When media consumption is integrated into the process of media prosuming, it encompasses production and participation (Chen et al, 2011). Therefore, this research suggests that cultivating strong functional consuming skills can enhance functional prosuming skills among young adults in the country.

The third hypothesis posits that critical consuming literacy can positively influence critical prosuming literacy. Critical consuming, which involves evaluating, synthesising, and analysing

information, significantly enhances an individual's ability to engage thoughtfully on social media. Critical prosuming is one of the most complex and essential aspects of media literacy, as reflected in indicators of participation and creation (Koc, Tugtekin, 2016). Participation in content creation is not a passive endeavour; rather, it is an active process that demands a higher level of critical engagement from individuals, enabling them to contribute to discussions and critiques within new media environments. This engagement requires the ability to produce original media content while incorporating socio-cultural values and ideological issues. Such participation also necessitates social skills for effective communication and interaction online. Critical prosuming has been shown to significantly impact learning outcomes among Vietnamese students (Tran-Duong, 2023). Hence, it is crucial to train young adults to evaluate and analyse the posts or articles they encounter on social media, rather than merely following others or passively receiving information, which may contribute to the spread of fake news. By emphasising critical prosuming skills, this study highlights the importance of proactive content creation that goes beyond simply sharing or forwarding information. Critical media users possess the ability to identify deception and negotiate various ideas that may present differing viewpoints (Lin et al., 2013).

The last hypothesis suggests that the ability to produce and distribute content on social media significantly enhances one's capacity to engage critically with the platform. This ongoing process encompasses both functional prosuming and critical prosuming skills. The relationship between these skills suggests that the ability to create, modify, and share content (functional prosuming) leads to a deeper, more critical engagement with media. As users become more proficient in content creation and distribution, they tend to develop a more nuanced understanding of media operations, which encourages them to critically evaluate the content they both consume and produce. In addition, critical prosuming represents higher-order thinking, designed to help individuals engage in reflective reasoning and sound judgment to address various situations (Zhao et al., 2024). This is especially relevant in the context of social media, where diverse viewpoints can easily mislead or distort understanding. Critical prosuming involves identifying hidden meanings within texts, requiring an understanding of the social and cultural contexts influencing content creators. In this regard, research and comparative analysis skills are essential. As scholars emphasize, it is crucial to incorporate design-based studies to develop effective curricula aimed at fostering critical prosuming, thereby enhancing new media literacy among students in Singapore (Chen et al., 2018). Consequently, developing foundational functional consuming skills is vital before individuals can effectively engage in critical prosuming. Mastering functional consumption serves as the groundwork for users to critically produce and evaluate the content they encounter in the digital landscape.

## 5. Conclusion

This study underscores the significance of social media literacy skills, which encompass a spectrum from functional consuming to functional and critical consuming, as well as from functional prosuming to critical prosuming, and from critical consuming to critical prosuming. These skills are closely interconnected and essential for tackling the rising tide of misinformation in Malaysia. The surge in fake news poses a serious threat that demands immediate action to prevent its proliferation, as unchecked misinformation could undermine democracy in the country. A growing concern is that citizens can no longer rely on the authority to effectively curb fake news. The government's attempts during Najib Razak's administration were unsuccessful due to issues of trust (Neo, 2021). This scenario highlights the urgent need to enhance social media literacy skills, empowering individuals to become discerning consumers of information. Higher new media literacy has been associated with greater aesthetic interest and reduced confusion, and vice versa, suggesting that social media literacy is necessary for aesthetic experience and audience participation, particularly in a social media context where individuals encounter diverse types of media content, necessitating the ability to differentiate and negotiate these contents (Xu et al., 2022).

To address these challenges, integrating social media literacy into university curricula is crucial. For example, teaching functional skills related to tools like Google and using social media platforms for assignments can align educational goals with Malaysia's vision of becoming a technology-driven nation by 2030 (Tan, 2023). Additionally, the rise of social media has coincided with the spread of misinformation, necessitating a greater emphasis on critical thinking skills within educational programs (Gilmour, 2024). Incorporating appropriate assignments and adapting pedagogical tools are vital for reinforcing these skills. Furthermore, universities could

enhance their efforts by organizing workshops and seminars focused on media literacy, inviting experts to engage with young adult, and establishing partnerships with technology companies for practical learning experiences. By adopting a comprehensive approach to social media literacy, educational institutions can empower young adult to navigate the digital landscape more responsibly and critically, ultimately contributing to a more informed and resilient society.

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## Appendix

Survey questionnaire (Adapted from Tran-Duong, 2023)

### *Functional Consuming*

FC1. I know how to use search tools to get information on social media platforms.

FC2. I am good at catching up with the changes in social media.

FC3. It is easy for me to use various social media environments to reach information.

FC4. I realise explicit and implicit social media messages.

FC5. I notice social media content containing mobbing and violence.

FC6. I understand social media content's political, economic, and social dimensions.

FC7. I perceive different opinions and thoughts in social media.

### *Critical Consuming*

CC1. I can distinguish different functions of social media (communication, entertainment, etc.).

CC2. I can determine whether or not social media contents have commercial messages.

CC3. I classify social media messages based on their producers, types, purposes, etc.

CC4. I can compare news and information across different social media environments.

CC5. I can combine social media messages with my own opinions.

CC6. When choosing which social media content to use, I consider the social media rating system.

CC7. It is easy for me to make decisions about the accuracy of social media messages.

CC8. I analyse the positive and negative effects of social media content on individuals.

CC9. I can evaluate social media regarding legal and ethical rules (copyright, human rights, etc.)

CC10. I can assess social media regarding credibility, reliability, objectivity, and currency.

CC11. I managed to fend myself from the risks and consequences caused by social media content.

### *Functional Prosuming*

FP1. It is easy for me to create user accounts and profiles in social media environments.

FP2. I can use the hardware to develop social media content (text, images, video, etc.)

FP3. I can use software to develop social media content (text, images, video, etc.)

FP4. I can use basic operating tools (buttons, hyperlinks, file transfer, etc.) in social media.

FP5. I am good at sharing digital media content and messages on social media.

FP6. I can make contributions or comments to social media content shared by others.

FP7. I rate or review social media content based on my interests and likes.

*Critical Prosuming*

CP1. I manage to influence others' opinions by participating in social media environments.

CP2. I can contribute to social media by reviewing current matters from different perspectives (social, economic, ideological, etc.)

CP3. I collaborate and interact with diverse social media users towards a common purpose.

CP4. It is easy for me to construct an online identity consistent with real personal characteristics.

CP5. I can discuss and comment to inform or direct people on social media.

CP6. I am skilled at designing social media contents that reflect critical thinking on certain matters.

CP7. I am good at producing opposite or alternative social media content.

CP8. I produce social media content that respects people's different ideas and private lives.

CP9. I must create social media content that complies with legal and ethical rules.

CP10. I can develop original visual and textual social media content (video clips, web pages, etc.).