

# Theorizing Social Media Political Information Dependency (SMPID) in a Networked World

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Electronic distribution via inventive information and communication technologies led by the Internet is changing receiver patterns and thus raised new questions about existing media dependency relations. Given that the Internet and conventional mass media are different significantly in the scope of information provided as well as each possessing distinctive functionalities in fulfilling users' needs and goals, media dependency on social media is idiosyncratic from the traditional media. On this ground, this study revisits the newly emerging digital-individual media system dependency (MSD) to theorize political information dependency within a social media environment. Drawing upon data from a survey on 379 politically participative net generation Malaysians aged between 18 and 24, the study develops and tests a theoretical concept and measure of social media political information dependency (SMPID). SMPID is conceptualized as the extent to which social media is perceived as helpful in fulfilling a range of political informational goals in everyday life. The six-dimensional SMPID emerged when individuals seek political information on social media to achieve three main goals, with both its individual and social aspects: understanding (to stay informed), orientation (to act) and play (to be amused or relax). The methodology was carried out in three stages. First, a content validation exercise was embarked to check on the face and content validity of the SMPID measurement model. This was followed by a pilot test to determine if the operational definitions of variables reflect the true theoretical meaning of concepts via parallel analysis (PA) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Cronbach's alpha value was computed from the pilot data to determine internal consistency reliability of the scale. In the final stage, an actual survey was administered. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was consulted to validate the SMPID measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Results of the current study suggest that the emergence of the Internet and new media affordances has not merely expanded existing media systems, but also introduces new sources of dependency for information (in our case, political information). The six-dimensional SMPID was proven to be a valid and reliable measure. The model is meaningful as it offers new insights into emerging and future understanding of political information seeking/dependency in our contemporary context of an increasingly social (i.e., participatory and collaborative) media environment.

**Keywords:** *Media System Dependency (MSD), Net Generation, Political Information Goals, Social Media, Social Media Political Information Dependency, Youths*