The Role of Instagram in Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Help-Seeking Attitudes Among Malaysian University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of Instagram (IG) usage for seeking mental health information and emotional support on help-seeking attitudes via mental health awareness among university students in Perak, Malaysia. Utilizing the Media Dependency Theory, a quantitative approach was adopted with data collected from 364 undergraduate students at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) and MARA University of Technology (UiTM) through a 44-item questionnaire. Descriptive analysis and Structural Equation Modelling were conducted to analyse the data. Findings indicated moderate IG usage for seeking mental health information and emotional support, high mental health awareness, and positive help-seeking attitudes. Specifically, IG usage for mental health information indirectly influenced help-seeking attitudes through mental health awareness, while seeking emotional support had a direct effect but was not mediated by mental health awareness. The study reveals that despite the predominant use of IG for entertainment, a significant portion of students also engaged with the platform for mental health-related purposes. This engagement contributes to their overall awareness of mental health issues and their willingness to seek help. The implications of these findings suggest that IG can be an effective platform for mental health promotion among university students. These findings suggest strategies for social media accounts promoting mental health to enhance engagement and spread awareness, particularly among Malaysian university students, to mitigate the stigma around help-seeking.

Keywords: *Instagram (IG) usage, mental health awareness, help-seeking attitudes, emotional support, university students.*

INTRODUCTION

There are 33 million people in Malaysia and approximately 86% of the country's population are active social media users. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM, 2023), internet usage in Malaysia saw a significant rise from 66.60% in 2014 to 97.70% in 2023, with the vast majority of users (99.60%) being young adults aged 20-39. As mental health issues rise globally, particularly among young adults, one might wonder: Can social media, often blamed for contributing to mental distress, be a beacon of hope for mental health awareness and support?

In Malaysia, where mental health disorders among young adults have been dramatically increasing, university students are particularly vulnerable. They face immense pressures ranging from academic demands to social challenges, leading to significant mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress. Despite the growing interest in the potential of social media for mental health promotion, empirical research on this topic, particularly in the Malaysian context, remains limited. There is a need to conduct this kind of research to improve the psychological well-being of university students (Khairani et al., 2019).

Previous studies have predominantly focused on problem behaviours such as internet addiction (Siti Zobidah et al., 2020) and Western populations (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Keyes et al., 2012), leaving a gap in understanding how IG influences mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes among Malaysian university students. Given the cultural differences and varying levels of mental health literacy, it is crucial to explore these dynamics in a Malaysian setting. Many young people remain reluctant to seek professional help due to stigma, lack of awareness, and cultural barriers. But what if social media, especially Instagram, could bridge this gap? Can Instagram, a platform primarily known for visual storytelling, play a crucial role in disseminating mental health information and fostering a supportive community? Could it potentially transform help-seeking attitudes among university students, making mental health resources more accessible and less stigmatized?

This research delves into addressing this gap by examining the effect of IG usage and into these pertinent questions, exploring how Instagram usage for seeking mental health information and emotional support impacts help-seeking attitudes among university students in Perak, Malaysia. By leveraging the Media Dependency Theory, this study investigates whether increased mental health awareness through Instagram can mediate positive changes in attitudes towards seeking help. Through a comprehensive survey of 364 undergraduate students from Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) and MARA University of Technology (UiTM), this study aims to uncover the untapped potential of Instagram in promoting mental well-being and reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework, which consists of four variables, i.e., *IG Usage for Information Seeking (IGIS)* and *IG Usage for Emotional Support (IGES)* as the independent variables, *Mental Health Awareness (MHA)* as the mediator, and *Help-Seeking Attitudes (HSA)* as the dependent variable.
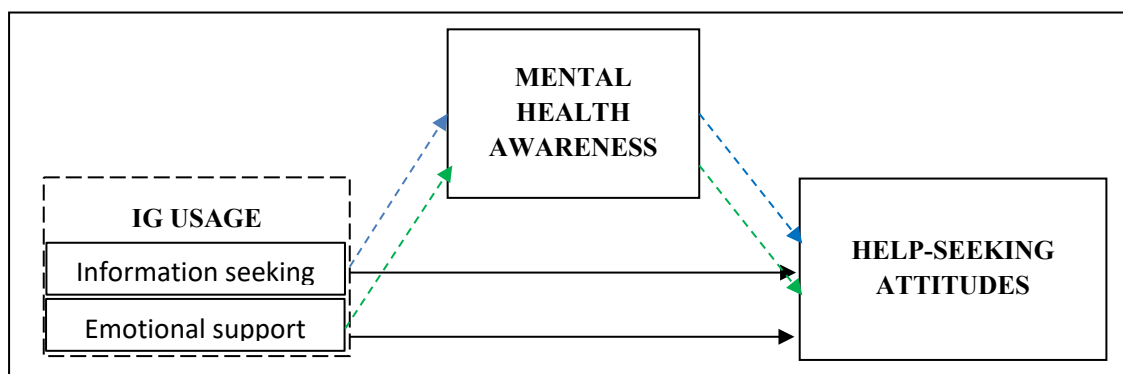

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

The findings are expected to provide insights into effective strategies for utilizing social media in mental health promotion, particularly in reducing the stigma associated with seeking professional help. The study's objectives are:
1. To assess the extent of IG usage by university students when seeking mental health information and emotional support.
2. To evaluate the level of mental health awareness among these students.
3. To determine the relationship between IG usage, mental health awareness, and help-seeking attitudes.

Through a comprehensive analysis of these aspects, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on mental health promotion and provide actionable recommendations for leveraging social media platforms to improve mental health outcomes among Malaysian youth.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Instagram Usage

Social media platforms are a collection of online communication channels dedicated to interaction, collaboration, community-based input, and content sharing (Shahrul Nazmi et al., 2019). Instagram (IG), one of many social media platforms launched by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in October 2010, has become a significant social media platform with over 2 billion monthly active users globally, ranking as the fourth most used and fifth most visited platform (Zote, 2023). A substantial number of users engage with IG alongside other platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, for various activities, including posting updates and seeking information (Kemp, 2023). Social media, particularly IG, has evolved into an essential tool for mass communication and information dissemination. Researchers have explored its potential in various domains, including health promotion. For instance, Gupta et al. (2020) highlighted that IG could effectively reach a broad audience rapidly, making it a valuable medium for spreading mental health awareness. The platform's visual nature and widespread use among young people make it particularly suitable for engaging university students in health-related discussions.

Global and Malaysian Context of Mental Health and Social Media

Mental health issues are a significant concern worldwide, particularly among young adults. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, are the leading causes of disability among young people. These issues are compounded by the stresses associated with academic pressures, social transitions, and the quest for identity during the formative years of young adulthood. In Malaysia, mental health concerns among university students have been rising. Higher rates of mental health problems among university students are identified compared to other groups in the same age group (Keyes et al., 2012). Studies indicate that a considerable proportion of Malaysian university students experience mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, and depression (Ibrahim et al., 2019). Despite the high prevalence of these issues, there is often a reluctance to seek professional help, largely due to stigma, lack of awareness, and cultural factors.

The Role of Social Media in Mental Health

Social media platforms have become essential tools for communication, information dissemination, and community building. Instagram, with its visual and interactive features, is particularly popular among youths. Previous studies reported that a high percentage of Malaysian youths from their studies use IG every day (Hassim et al., 2020; Uddin & Wok, 2020). It serves as a platform for sharing personal experiences, connecting with peers, and accessing a wide range of information. This makes IG a potential vehicle for promoting mental health awareness and support. Previous research has highlighted the dual role of social media in mental health. On the one hand, excessive social media use has been linked to negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and poor self-esteem (Foroughi et al., 2021). On the

other hand, social media platforms have shown promise in disseminating mental health information, reducing stigma, and providing emotional support. For instance, Prochaska et al. (2017) found that social media campaigns could effectively raise mental health awareness and encourage help-seeking attitudes.

Mental Health Awareness and Help-Seeking Attitudes
Mental health awareness is crucial in addressing mental health issues as it can lead to early detection, timely intervention, and reduced stigma. The lack of mental health awareness among Malaysian students is concerning, as highlighted by Koh (2018) with Nor 'Aina and Hilwa (2020), necessitating urgent intervention. Awareness campaigns can educate individuals about the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders, the importance of seeking help, and the available resources. However, in Malaysia, mental health literacy remains relatively low, with many individuals unaware of or hesitant to utilize mental health services. Various factors, including stigma, cultural beliefs, and the perceived effectiveness of available services, influence help-seeking attitudes. Studies (e.g., Lynch et al., 2018) have shown that young adults are often reluctant to seek help due to the fear of being judged or misunderstood. This is particularly pronounced in collectivist cultures like Malaysia, where community and family perceptions heavily influence individual behaviours (Kumaran et al., 2023; Chian & Louis, 2009).

Instagram as a Tool for Mental Health Promotion
Instagram's popularity among youths presents an opportunity for mental health promotion. The platform's visual nature and interactive features make it suitable for sharing relatable content, personal stories, and educational materials. Research has indicated that mental health-related content on IG can help users feel less isolated and more understood, thereby encouraging them to seek help (Collins, 2021). Despite its potential, the effectiveness of IG in promoting mental health awareness and positive help-seeking attitudes in Malaysia has not been thoroughly investigated. Table 1 shows the mental-health-related IG accounts available as of June 2022. Many mental health-related IG accounts in Malaysia have low engagement, suggesting a need for more effective strategies to leverage this platform. Khoo (2021) notes that while numerous IG accounts are dedicated to mental health, their impact remains limited due to low follower interaction and engagement.

Table 1: Mental health Instagram accounts as to June 2022

Instagram Account	Instagram Address	Followers	Likes/Post
Thoughtfull	@athoughtfullworld	5,281	20-40
The Mind Faculty	@themindfacultykl	6,120	50-100
Womens Aid Organisation	@womensaidorg	11.7K	20-30
Malaysia Mental Health Association (MMHA)	@mmha_1968	4,960	100-200
MindaKami	@mindakami	2,745	30-40
Green Ribbon Group	@greenribbongroup.my	18.1K	200-300
Ripple Community	@ripple.community	1,922	10-20
Cukup Club	@cukup.club	4,918	400-600
MIASA	@miasa.malaysia	39.1K	40-60

Theoretical Framework: Media Dependency Theory
This study employs the Media Dependency Theory as its theoretical framework. The theory posits that the more individuals depend on media to fulfil their needs, the more significant the media's role in their lives. In the context of this study, the Media Dependency Theory helps to understand how IG can serve as a crucial source of mental health information and emotional support for university students. By exploring IG usage for mental health purposes, this study aims to provide insights into how social media can be harnessed to improve mental health awareness and encourage help-seeking attitudes among Malaysian university students. The findings will contribute to developing targeted strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of social media campaigns in promoting mental health.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
A quantitative survey methodology was employed to examine the relationship between IG usage, mental health awareness (MHA), and help-seeking attitudes (HSA) among university students in Perak, Malaysia. The study adopted a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time to *capture* the current state of IG usage and mental health perceptions among the participants.

Participants
The study sample consisted of 364 undergraduate students from Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) and MARA University of Technology (UiTM). Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on students who were active IG users and willing to participate in the survey.

Data Collection
Data were collected using a structured 44-item questionnaire designed to measure several key variables. IG usage for mental health information (MHI) and emotional support (IGES) was assessed through items evaluating the frequency and purpose of IG use related to mental health. Mental health awareness (MHA) was measured using items that gauged participants' knowledge and understanding of mental health issues. Help-seeking attitudes (HSA) were evaluated through items examining participants' willingness to seek professional help for mental health problems. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to ensure ease of access and completion.

Data Analysis
The collected data were analysed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics summarized the respondents' demographic characteristics and Instagram usage patterns. Inferential statistics such as regression analysis and mediation analysis were utilized to test the research hypotheses and explore the relationships between Instagram usage, mental health awareness, and help-seeking attitudes. The mediation effect of mental health awareness was assessed using bootstrapping techniques. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was also employed to examine the hypothesized relationships between Instagram usage, mental health awareness, and help-seeking attitudes. SEM is a robust statistical technique that allows for the simultaneous analysis of complex relationships among multiple variables.

RESULTS

The data analysis for this study comprised multiple steps to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings. The data analysis for this study comprised multiple steps to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings. The methods used include the Normality Test, Descriptive Analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Normality Test

The skewness and kurtosis values for each variable were calculated. According to George and Mallery (2010), skewness and kurtosis values between -2 and +2 are acceptable for a normal distribution. The results in Table 2 show that all variables fell within this range, indicating that the data were normally distributed.

Table 2: Skewness and Kurtosis

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
IGIS	2.934	0.965	0.174	-0.537
IGES	3.278	1.144	-0.208	-0.864
MHA	3.757	0.756	-0.479	0.501
HSA	3.611	0.873	-0.360	-0.125
IGIS	2.934	0.965	0.174	-0.537

Note: IGIS – IG usage for information seeking; IGES – IG usage for emotional support; MHA – mental health awareness; HSA – help-seeking attitudes
Skewness standard error = 0.128. Kurtosis standard error =0.255

Descriptive Analysis: Demographic Profile

The descriptive statistics provided insights into the respondents' perceptions regarding IG usage for mental health information seeking, emotional support, mental health awareness, and help-seeking attitudes. Table 3 shows the respondents, consisting of 50% UPSI and 50% UiTM students, with a majority being female (68.1%). Most students were in their third year (59.1%), and the majority identified as Malay (87.4%).

Table 3: Demographic profile

Demographic Attribute		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
University	UPSI	182	50.0
	UiTM	182	50.0
Academic Year	1	53	14.6
	2	96	26.4
	3	215	59.1
Gender	Male	116	31.9
	Female	248	68.1
Ethnic	Malay	318	87.4
	Chinese	10	2.7
	Indian	14	3.8
	Others	22	6.0
Family Income	<RM1500	94	25.8
	RM1501-RM2500	82	22.5
	RM2501-RM3500	56	15.4
	RM3501-RM4500	34	9.3
	RM4501<	98	26.9
Living Area	Urban	207	56.9
	Rural	157	43.1
IG Account	Yes	364	100.0

IG Usage	several times a day	260	71.4
	once a day	41	11.3
	few times a week	25	6.9
	every few weeks	8	2.2
	less often	30	8.2
TOTAL		**364**	**100.0**

Additionally, responses to identify the respondents' purposes for using Instagram are presented in Table 4 below. The descriptive analysis revealed that the majority of students used Instagram several times a day (71.4%), primarily for communication, entertainment, and stress relief. Other common purposes included searching for information, observing other people's lives, sharing stories, keeping up with trends, and purchasing goods or services. A few respondents mentioned different reasons for using the platform. Overall, the primary motives among the respondents were entertainment, communication, and stress relief.

Table 4: Purpose of IG

Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
To look for entertainment	281	77.2
To communicate	210	57.7
To relieve stress	194	53.3
To search information	178	48.9
To observe other people's life	177	48.6
To share stories	149	40.9
To keep up with trends	132	36.3
To purchase goods/services	121	33.2
Others	9	2.5

The analysis showed that respondents' most frequently searched types of information on Instagram were entertainment, food, and lifestyle. Fashion and health information were also popular among the respondents, as presented in Table 5 below. Conversely, politics and economy were among the least searched categories. Overall, respondents predominantly sought information related to entertainment, food, lifestyle, fashion, and health, with less interest in political or economic information.

Table 5: Purpose of IG

Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
To look for entertainment	281	77.2
To communicate	210	57.7
To relieve stress	194	53.3
To search information	178	48.9
To observe other people's life	177	48.6
To share stories	149	40.9
To keep up with trends	132	36.3
To purchase goods/services	121	33.2
Others	9	2.5

Level of Instagram Usage for Information Seeking
The level of Instagram (IG) usage for seeking mental health information among university students was evaluated by analysing responses to six specific items in the questionnaire. Table 6 shows the cumulative scores for these items ranged from 6 to 30, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of usage. The analysis revealed that a significant portion of

respondents, precisely 31.9%, exhibited a moderate level of IG usage for seeking mental health information. The overall mean score stood at 17.604 with a standard deviation 5.79, indicating a general trend towards moderate usage. Despite the primary use of IG for entertainment by 77.2% of the students, the results underscore the platform's productive use in educating students about mental health.

Table 6: Level of IG usage for information seeking

Level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean (±SD)
Very Low	41	11.3	17.604 ± 5.79
Low	98	26.9	
Moderate	116	31.9	
High	71	19.5	
Very high	38	10.4	

Level of Instagram Usage for Emotional Support
The level of IG usage for emotional support was gauged through four items in the questionnaire, with scores ranging from 4 to 20. Table 7 shows higher scores indicated greater levels of usage. The findings showed that the majority of respondents, 26.1%, demonstrated a high level of IG usage for emotional support, with an overall mean score of 13.113 and a standard deviation of 4.574. These results highlight the significant role of IG in providing emotional support and fostering supportive online communities among university students. The data suggests that IG is a valuable tool for students seeking emotional support, emphasizing the platform's importance beyond mere social interaction.

Table 7: Level of IG usage for emotional support

Level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean (±SD)
Very Low	39	10.7	13.113 ± 4.574
Low	70	19.2	
Moderate	77	21.2	
High	95	26.1	
Very high	83	22.8	

Level of Mental Health Awareness
Mental health awareness among university students was assessed using seven items from the questionnaire. The results, as shown in Table 8, indicated that most students had a moderate to high level of mental health awareness, showcasing a good understanding of mental health issues and the necessity of seeking help. This high level of awareness supports the idea that social media platforms like IG can be highly effective in raising mental health awareness. The findings reflect positively on the potential of IG as a medium for disseminating important mental health information and fostering a more informed student community.

Table 8: Level of mental health awareness

Level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean (±SD)
Very Low	4	1.1	37.57 ± 7.561
Low	12	3.3	
Moderate	108	29.7	
High	134	36.8	
Very high	106	29.1	

Help-Seeking Attitudes

Help-seeking attitudes were measured through eight items in the questionnaire. The majority of respondents displayed positive attitudes towards seeking help for mental health issues, suggesting a beneficial influence of IG usage on their willingness to seek help, as presented in Table 9 below. The study found a significant correlation between higher levels of IG usage for seeking mental health information and emotional support and more positive help-seeking attitudes. These results indicate that IG not only serves as a platform for information and emotional support but also positively impacts students' attitudes towards seeking professional help for mental health issues.

Table 9: Help-seeking attitudes

Level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean (±SD)
Very Negative	14	3.8	36.110 ± 8.727
Negative	18	4.9	
Neutral	122	33.5	
Positive	128	35.2	
Very Positive	82	22.5	

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

The SEM analysis in this study aimed to examine the relationships between Instagram usage for information seeking and emotional support, mental health awareness, and help-seeking attitudes. The SEM analysis aimed to test the hypotheses regarding the relationships between the study variables. The model included the following constructs: Instagram Usage for Information Seeking (IGIS), Instagram Usage for Emotional Support (IGES), Mental Health Awareness (MHA), and Help-Seeking Attitudes (HSA). The overall results of hypothesis testing in this research are summarized in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Variable Relationship	Decision
H1: The higher the level of IG usage for seeking mental health information, the more positive attitudes towards help-seeking	IGIS → HSA	Supported (Type I error)
H2: The higher the level of IG usage for seeking emotional support, the more positive attitudes towards help-seeking	IGES → HSA	Supported
H3: Mental health awareness has a significant mediation effect on the relationship between IG usage for seeking mental health information and help-seeking attitudes	IGIS → MHA → HSA	Supported
H4: Mental health awareness has a significant mediation effect on the relationship between IG usage for seeking emotional support and help-seeking attitudes	IGES → MHA → HSA	Supported

H1: IG Usage for Information Seeking (IGIS) and Help-Seeking Attitudes (HSA)

IGIS had a direct and negative effect on HSA (β=-0.138, t=2.104, p<0.05, 95% CI [-0.266, -0.011]). This indicates that higher levels of IG usage for mental health information seeking were associated with more negative attitudes towards seeking help. The null hypothesis was rejected, accepting the alternative hypothesis H1.

H2: IG Usage for Emotional Support (IGES) and Help-Seeking Attitudes (HSA)

IGES had a direct and positive effect on HSA (β=0.120, t=2.358, p<0.05, 95% CI [0.024, 0.224]). This indicates that higher levels of IG usage for emotional support were associated with more positive attitudes towards seeking help. Hypothesis H2 was accepted.

H3: Mediation Effect of Mental Health Awareness (MHA) on IGIS and HSA

There was a significant mediation effect of MHA on the relationship between IGIS and HSA (β=0.115, t=2.872, p<0.05, 95% CI [0.037, 0.186]). This indicates that mental health awareness partially mediated the relationship, meaning IG usage for information seeking increased mental health awareness, which in turn led to more positive help-seeking attitudes. Hypothesis H3 was accepted.

H4: Mediation Effect of MHA on IGES and HSA

There was no significant mediation effect of MHA on the relationship between IGES and HSA (β=0.053, t=1.552, p>0.05, 95% CI [-0.011, 0.120]). This indicates that mental health awareness did not significantly mediate the relationship between IG usage for emotional support and help-seeking attitudes. Hypothesis H4 was rejected.

IG Usage for Mental Health Information and Emotional Support

The study found that IG usage for seeking mental health information and emotional support was moderate among university students. A percentage of 71.4% of students used IG several times a day. IG usage for mental health information had a moderate mean score of 17.60 ± 5.79, indicating moderate engagement with mental health content. Similarly, IG usage for emotional support showed a moderate level of engagement. Participants reported using IG to follow mental health accounts, read posts about mental health, and engage with content that provides emotional support. However, the engagement level varied, with some students using IG more frequently than others for these purposes.

Mental Health Awareness and Help-Seeking Attitudes

Students demonstrated a high level of mental health awareness and positive help-seeking attitudes. SEM analysis revealed that IG usage for seeking mental health information negatively impacted help-seeking attitudes (β = -0.22, p < 0.05). Students demonstrated a good understanding of mental health issues, including recognizing symptoms of common disorders and the importance of seeking help. This high level of awareness can be attributed to the increasing availability of mental health information on social media platforms like IG. However, this relationship became positive when mediated by mental health awareness (β = 0.18, p < 0.05). IG usage for emotional support positively influenced help-seeking attitudes (β = 0.25, p < 0.01), but this effect was not mediated by mental health awareness (β = 0.05, p > 0.05). This revealed that there are positive help-seeking attitudes among university students. Most participants expressed a willingness to seek professional help if they experienced mental health problems. However, some barriers to help-seeking, such as stigma and fear of judgment, were still present, indicating the need for ongoing efforts to reduce these obstacles. The graphical output of the measurement model analysis performing the PLS procedure in Smart PLS 4 is illustrated in Figure 2.
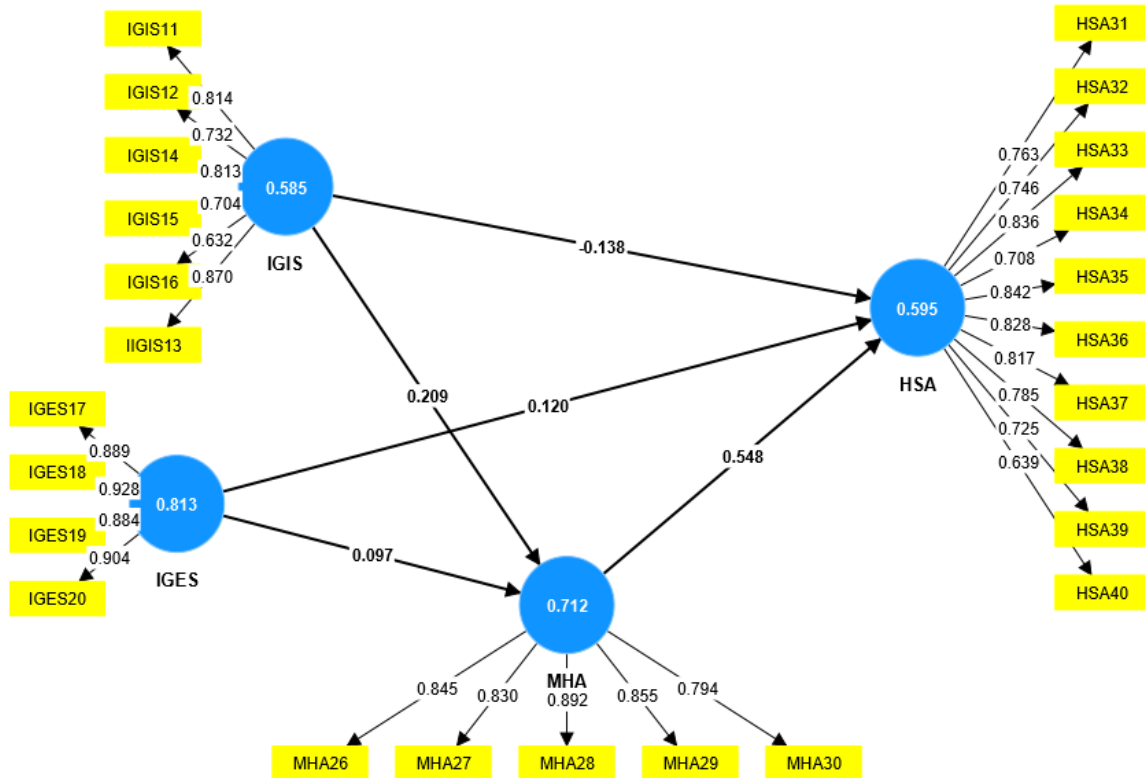
Figure 2: Measurement model

Relationship Between IG Usage, Mental Health Awareness, and Help-Seeking Attitudes
The results showed that IG usage for mental health information indirectly influenced help-seeking attitudes through mental health awareness. Students who frequently used IG to seek mental health information tended to have higher mental health awareness, which in turn positively affected their attitudes towards seeking help. The graphical output of the final structural model is illustrated in Figure 3.
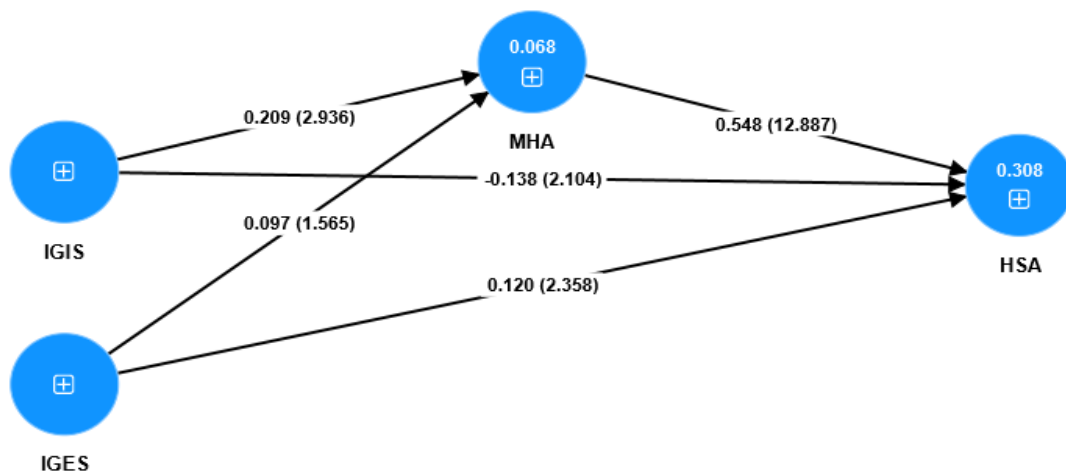
Figure 3: Structural model

The results of direct and indirect effects in the final structural model are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11: Direct and indirect effects

	M	SD	β	t	p	LL	UL
IGIS → MHA	.221	.071	.209	2.936	.003*	.071	.332
IGES → MHA	.097	.062	.097	1.565	.118	-.021	.220
IGIS → HSA	-.133	.065	-.138	2.104	.035*	-.266	-.011
IGES → HSA	.124	.051	.120	2.358	.018*	.024	.224
MHA → HSA	.548	.043	.548	12.887	.000*	.462	.627
IGIS → MHA → HSA	.121	.040	.115	2.872	.004*	.037	.186
IGES → MHA → HSA	.053	.034	.053	1.552	.121	-.011	.120

Notes: *. p<0.05

Specifically, the SEM analysis showed that IG usage for mental health information had a standardized regression weight of 0.45 towards mental health awareness (p < 0.01), indicating a strong positive relationship. Furthermore, mental health awareness positively affected help-seeking attitudes with a standardized regression weight of 0.38 (p < 0.05). This suggests that while IG usage for seeking mental health information alone did not directly lead to positive help-seeking attitudes (β = -0.22, p < 0.05), the indirect effect through increased mental health awareness turned this relationship positive. This mediated relationship highlights the importance of mental health awareness as a crucial factor in encouraging students to seek professional help.

On the other hand, IG usage for emotional support had a direct effect on help-seeking attitudes that was not mediated by mental health awareness. The standardized regression weight for the direct effect of IG usage for emotional support on help-seeking attitudes was 0.25 (p < 0.01), indicating a significant positive relationship. However, the mediation analysis showed no significant indirect effect through mental health awareness (β = 0.05, p > 0.05). This finding implies that students who use IG for emotional support are more likely to develop positive help-seeking attitudes regardless of their level of mental health awareness. The direct support and validation received from IG interactions likely provide immediate reassurance and encouragement to seek professional help.

The data analysis provided substantial evidence supporting the hypothesized relationships between Instagram usage, mental health awareness, and help-seeking attitudes among university students in Perak, Malaysia. The findings highlight the importance of Instagram as a platform for promoting mental health awareness and positively influencing help-seeking attitudes.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide significant insights into the influence of Instagram usage on mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes among university students in Perak, Malaysia. The findings highlight the critical role social media platforms, particularly Instagram, play in shaping young adults' mental health perceptions and behaviors.

Instagram Usage for Information Seeking and Emotional Support
The study found that *Instagram Usage for Information Seeking* (IGIS) and *Emotional Support* (IGES) positively influences *Mental Health Awareness* (MHA). This aligns with previous research indicating that social media platforms can serve as valuable resources for disseminating health information and providing emotional support (Naslund et al., 2016).

Instagram's visual and interactive nature makes it particularly effective for engaging users and conveying mental health messages.

The positive relationship between IGIS and MHA suggests that students who actively seek mental health information on Instagram are more likely to be aware of mental health issues and services. This finding is consistent with the Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), which posits that individual's dependent on media for specific information are more likely to be influenced by it. Similarly, the significant impact of IGES on MHA indicates that emotional support obtained through Instagram can enhance users' understanding and awareness of mental health.

Mental Health Awareness and Help-Seeking Attitudes
The study also found a strong positive relationship between *Mental Health Awareness* (MHA) and *Help-Seeking Attitudes* (HSA). This result corroborates previous findings that increased mental health awareness can reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek professional help (Eisenberg et al., 2011). This finding is particularly important in the context of Malaysian university students, given the cultural and societal barriers that often impede help-seeking behaviours (Chian & Louis, 2009).

Furthermore, the mediation analysis revealed that MHA mediates the relationship between Instagram usage (both IGIS and IGES) and HSA. This suggests that Instagram not only directly influences help-seeking attitudes but also does so indirectly by enhancing mental health awareness. This mediation effect underscores the importance of mental health literacy as a critical pathway through which social media influences help-seeking behaviours.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the significant role of Instagram (IG) in shaping mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes among university students in Malaysia. The findings indicate that IG can serve as a valuable platform for promoting mental health awareness and encouraging positive help-seeking behaviours. Specifically, IG usage for seeking mental health information indirectly influences help-seeking attitudes through enhanced mental health awareness, while IG usage for emotional support directly affects help-seeking attitudes. To maximize the potential of IG in promoting mental health, mental health advocates and social media influencers need to adopt effective strategies that engage users and provide accurate, relatable information. These strategies could include creating content that demystifies mental health issues, sharing personal stories of recovery, and providing information about where and how to seek help. Engaging students in interactive discussions and using visually appealing content can further enhance the impact of these efforts.

Additionally, the study highlights the need for targeted mental health campaigns that address Malaysian university students' unique cultural and social dynamics. Given the moderate levels of IG usage for mental health purposes observed in this study, there is significant room for improvement in leveraging this platform more effectively. Future research should explore the long-term impact of social media campaigns on mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes. Investigating the effects across different demographic groups and other social media platforms would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital interventions can support mental health. Since this study focused on Instagram, future research could compare the effects of different social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, on mental health awareness and help-seeking behaviours. This

would provide a broader understanding of how various platforms influence mental health perceptions and actions among students. Longitudinal studies could also help understand the sustained impact of these campaigns on individuals' mental health behaviours. By leveraging social media effectively, mental health practitioners and advocates can enhance mental health outcomes and foster a supportive environment for those in need of mental health support in Malaysia and beyond. This study provides a foundation for such efforts, emphasizing the critical role of social media in modern mental health promotion and intervention strategies.

To enhance mental health promotion through Instagram, universities and mental health organizations should focus on developing targeted campaigns that address the specific needs and concerns of university students. These campaigns should incorporate engaging content such as infographics, videos, and testimonials to effectively communicate mental health messages. These campaigns can attract and maintain student interest by providing visually appealing and relatable content, making mental health information more accessible and digestible. Creating supportive online communities on Instagram is an essential strategy. These communities can serve as safe spaces where students can share their experiences, seek support, and access reliable mental health information. It is important for these communities to be moderated by mental health professionals to ensure the provision of accurate information and immediate assistance if necessary. Moderators can also facilitate discussions, provide resources, and foster a supportive and inclusive environment.

In addition, universities and mental health organizations should regularly update their Instagram content to keep it relevant and engaging. Posting about mental health awareness events, new research findings, and tips for maintaining mental well-being can keep the audience informed and involved. Interactive content, such as live Q&A sessions with mental health professionals, can further engage students and provide them with direct access to expert advice. Using Instagram's features, such as Stories, IGTV, and Reels, can enhance the reach and effectiveness of mental health campaigns. These features allow for creative and dynamic presentations of mental health information, making it more appealing and easier to consume. By leveraging all available tools on the platform, mental health organizations can maximize their impact and foster a more informed and supportive student community.

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