Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)
Volume 12, Issue 7 July 2021:13782 - 13794

Research Article

# Digitalization of Labor and Marketing Performance; A Perspective of Digital Era

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**Abstract**

Digital marketing is increasing as its most convenient and reliable method of analyzing or changing consumer behavior. To develop efficient digital marketing campaigns, digitalization of labor is mandatory. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the effect of digital labor activities and social networks on performance. Moreover, digital labor activities and social networks relationships investigated with mediating role of innovation. AMOS software was used for analyzing the comprehensive model of this research. The results highlighted that digital labor activities and social networks significantly affect performance. In addition, innovation significantly mediates these relationships. This research is helpful for marketing analysts, freelancers, leaders, and digital marketing managers to make effective strategies to increase marketing performance with the help of digital labor activities and innovation. The study used the overall aspect of innovation and future studies, which can be used frugal innovation to address the digitalization enterprises.

**Keywords:** Social Networks; Digital Labor; Innovation; Performance; Digitalization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms are rapidly becoming an integral part of modern business development strategies. Whenever it comes to developing meaningful relationships with customers, you can't ignore the power of "social." When consumers want to discover more about a company or product, they turn to social media since that's where they'll find other people talking about it (Yahia, Al-Neama, & Kerbache, 2018). According to the statistics of the largest online shopping app "Oberlo," in 2020, about 71% of the customers having positive brand experience on social media have a great tendency to recommend that brand to others. Moreover, Oberlo statistics reveal that more than 48 percent of Baby Boomers, 78 percent of Generation X, and more than 90 percent of Millennials actively use social media networks. Facebook alone has more than 2.7 billion active users worldwide (Oberlo Statistics, 2021; Blakyta & Vavdiichyk, 2021). These Oberlo statistics help marketers understand why a solid social media marketing plan is critical to today's business success. With every passing day, the number of social media users is rapidly increasing, and every day, numerous times a day, our consumers and prospects use social media networks. Social media networks have become ideal for brands looking to learn more about their customers' interests and preferences (Tuten, 2020). To achieve long-term and sustainable business growth, which intelligent businesses would carry on investing in social media.

Whether launching a new business or product, social media networks are ideal or excellent launch-pad for the companies (Pourkhani, Abdipour, Baher, & Moslehpour, 2019). The development in e-commerce highlights that social media marketing is no longer merely a choice, it has become compulsory (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Companies and brands simply cannot ignore social media in this increasingly competitive economy. Over time, the concept of social media marketing has developed. The main goal of using social media channels a few years ago was to increase website traffic. It has evolved into something more than merely a platform for online entertainment. One may use a social media marketing strategy to reap various benefits, such as expanding the reach of whatever the company is offering by engaging in two-way dialogues with prospective customers (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Social media marketing provides tools and tactics that enable businesses to reach out to customers and potential customers quickly.

Digital labor refers to the value-added activities that people do on the internet or online platforms. In simple words, it can say that people who work or perform their jobs on online platforms are known as digital labor (Kokina & Blanchette, 2019). For example, online content writers, web bloggers, online data entry operators, online consumer service providers, advertisers, marketers, high-tech professionals, and other people who offer their service through online sources are considered digital labor. In early times, digital labor was to be unpaid or free (Terranova, 2012). The evolution of digital labor in the market context is highlighted by Trebor Scholz (2012). Work performed through process automation technologies is referred to as digital labor. Cloud computing, social media, big data, smartphones, digital marketing, and artificial intelligence contribute to the digitalization of labor. The current study focuses on the digital labor or freelancers who use social media platforms for marketing companies or products, especially in the context of the emerging IT industry of Thailand. For the last few years, the IT sector has been growing extraordinarily in Thailand's economy.

Following the increasing dissemination of the internet and the Thai government's vigorous drive towards digital transformation through its Thailand 4.0 project, Thailand, the second-largest economy in the ASEAN region, has shifted its focus from industrial to digital (Kohpaiboon, 2020). Big data, advanced robotics, cloud, web services, IoT, and smart devices like Cameras and Bluetooth are among the primary technology efforts in emphasis. Thailand's information technology market expects to grow by more than 13% year over year in 2019, reaching Bt527 billion by the end of the year 2021. With Bt234 billion, hardware will be the major contributor, while online technologies would significantly increase 34 percent. By 2030, the Technology sector predicts to contribute 30% of Thailand's GDP, up from 10% currently (Vatanasakdakul, Aoun, & Chantatub, 2020). IT has gained an essential role in formulating a knowledge economy and society in the evolving dynamics. It is a significant determinant of economic growth. The IT industry of Thailand is establishing itself as a unique source for software development, business process outsourcing, and freelancing. The main objective of this study is to explore the role of digital labor and social networks in the growth of the Thai IT industry with the mediating part of innovation.

The research model of this research study is below (See, figure-1):

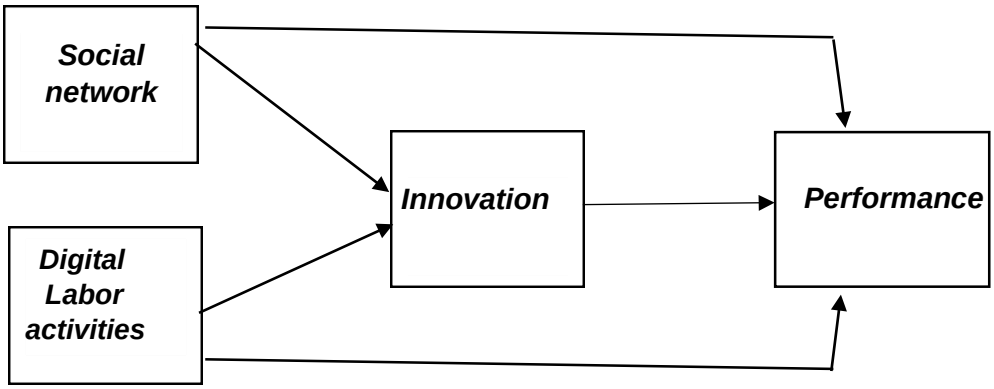



Figure 1: Research Model

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

### *2.1. Social Networks and Performance*

Online social networks enable organizations to be innovative (Palacios-Marqués, Merigó, & Soto-Acosta, 2015). Numerous past studies have established that online marketing using social media networks have a significant positive effect on the performance of organizations. For example, Palacios Marqués, Device Carañana, and Llopis & Albert, (2016) established that online social networks have a significant impact on the innovation performance of the hotel industry. Palacios-Marqués, Gallego-Nicholls, and Guijarro-García (2021) also studied online social networks impact organizational performance and found significant impact. An empirical study of Franco, Haase, and Pereira (2016) about online social networks is their role in the performance of small and medium enterprises, established positive relationships. There is a significant influence of online social networks on the marketing of products and services (Litterio, Nantes, Larrosa, & Gómez, 2017). Zhu (2013) also studied the powerful user-oriented marketing grounded on online social platforms. Shaltoni (2017) explored the adoption of online social media marketing in emerging markets and found that online social networks have a significant impact on the performance of emerging industrial markets. Based on the above literature discussion, it can be hypothesized that:

$H_1$: Social Networks have a significant impact on performance.

### *2.2. Digital Labor Activities and Performance*

Digital labor platforms have become an integral aspect of modern life, allowing us to hire transport, order meals, and access various other services over the internet. With media like “Uber, Gojek, Deliveroo, Rappi, Upwork, and Topcoder," the global rise of "gig workers" or "platform workers" has occurred during the last decade (Heeks et al. 2020). By launching innovation on a vast global scale, digital labor platforms have offered new potential for individuals, corporations, and society (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017). Digital technologies have revolutionized and permeated various areas of the economy in recent times, shaking the conventional underpinnings of labor markets to their base (Berg et al., 2018). As a result, digital labor platforms have emerged as a new way of organizing work and business. From 2010, the number of

digital labor platforms that promote online work or directly hire people/freelancers to provide services has increased fivefold globally (Berg et al. 2018). The internet and the communication and information technology transformation have brought in a slew of new procedures and products, boosting competitiveness and Performance (Świątkowski, 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is designed:

$H_2$: Digital Labor activities have a significant impact on performance.

### *2.3. Social Networks, Innovation, and Performance*

Consumer behavior and business practices have both changed due to the internet and social media's use. Organizations can benefit from social and digital marketing by lowering expenses, increasing brand awareness, and increasing revenues. The research focuses on developing newly introduced innovations that have steadily changed away from aggregate-level dispersion and investigates how growth or performance is influenced by the peculiarities of a specific social network structure. Muller and Peres (2019) characterize this new wave of research on innovation growth as the effect of social network structure on innovation performance. The introduction of digital innovations enables companies to develop much quicker, cheaper, and with a much smaller number of employees, significantly reducing the risks of increasing time and development costs, enabling companies to reduce the amount of field testing significantly. Finally allows them to dynamically and efficiently manage changes in target characteristics and consider new constraints that arose. At the same time, the impact on the digitalization of processes at all.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The hypothesis was tested by focusing on a single industry (i.e., Information Technology). Digital labor manifests itself in different ways in different sectors. Therefore, the analysis of a single drive can be advantageous for evaluating benefits in innovation since the knowledge and learning involved in the innovation processes will probably be more homogeneous (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998). Therefore, the analysis of a single sector has the advantage of avoiding a common problem in inter-sectorial innovation studies: that of technological and economic diversity in innovations (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998; Van de Grande, De Jong, Vanhaverbeke, & De Rochemont, 2009; Zollo & Winter, 2002).

The study utilized online data collection used a survey questionnaire. A questionnaire was on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5 where (1) for strongly disagree (5) for strongly agree is used. A questionnaire was distributed to the randomly selected employees and stakeholders of the IT industry (Bowling, 2005; Hardre, Crowson, & Xie, 2010). A questionnaire can be managed interactive (Bell, Hartup, & Crowell, 1962). The questionnaire has been sent to the managers of the companies. The questionnaire was completely understandable in the context of the IT industry, and 282 complete questionnaires were received from IT companies operating in Bangkok, Thailand. The sample obtained represents around 50% of the study population (Mercieca-Bebber, Calvert, Kyte, Stockler, & King, 2018).

### *3.1. Measurements*

Starting from the concept of the digital labor capacity adopted in our theoretical review, we develop a measurement instrument that encompasses a set of scales that represent the theoretical dimensions or the latent variables through their items. There is broad agreement in the bibliography about the steps to follow in creating a scale of measurement, with only a few discrepancies in the details of the phases (Bolaji,

Olanipekun, Adekunle, & Adeleke, 2018).

A questionnaire strategy was used to test the hypotheses, and the questionnaire comprised 45 questions, which were adapted from a review of the literature. Brace (2008) has recommended, selection of a previously established questionnaire when suitable is preferred. To measure the organization's performance and mediating effect of Innovation 28 and 19 item questionnaire is adapted from (Škerlavaj, Štemberger, & Dimovski, 2007), tested and validated by (Škerlavaj, Song, & Lee, 2010). Digital Labor of the IT industry was measured through 10 items adopted from (Chen, Duan, Edwards, & Lehaney, 2006).

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### *4.1. Reliability of Measures: Cronbach's Alpha*

The statistics of the reliability test show the value of Cronbach's Alpha for all the variables is more than 0.70, which is considered suitable for internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha for Digital Labor is .932 where the number of items is 11, Cronbach's Alpha for Social Networks is .854 where the number of items is 6, Cronbach's Alpha for Innovation is .940 where the number of items is 13, Cronbach's Alpha for Level of Reward is .765, where the number of items was 5. In contrast, Cronbach's Alpha for Performance value is .939, where the number of items is 10.

### *4.2. Model Fit*

The model outcomes are to state the validity of data analysis. The "model fit" summary is" the combination of different measures to assess whether our research model fits the data or not. It provides evidence for the acceptance and rejection of a research model based on theory. With wide disagreement of which suitable indexes measures to report, Jaccard & Wan (1996) have suggested using at least "three" fit indexes of fair values. It is tough to get all significant importance, but there are several ways through which the proposed model can bring at significance level.

As the scale values of a good fit index are not easy to interpret as in the example of (Bentler & Bonett, 1980, p. 600, referring to both the NFI and the TLI), it was experienced that all the values of the overall model index were less than .90. Still, they can be brought to a significant level and get meaningful results. However, the GFI, NFI, CFI values close to 1 indicate a perfect fit, except that the values fall in the range of 0 to 1; for CMIN/DF researcher recommended that low ratios as "2" or high as "5" indicate a good fit. Model Chi-Square (CMIN) Model chi-square, or the discrepancy function, generally, a chi-square value of lower than the range of "2" to "5" shows "goodness of fit, "and lower the value, is better. However, the researcher also suggests that the value in the range of 2 to 5 also shows a reasonable fit model, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) also called as a discrepancy function, value of about "0.05" or Smaller a "close fit of model" with degrees of freedom. This figure value is based on subjective judgments, which cannot state that it is perfect or significance has a perfect measure, but it is more sensible than the "exact fit" condition that the RMSEA = 0.0. There is also an opinion that the 0.08 or less RMSEA value states good fit having "a reasonable error of approximation," but the model with a greater than 0.1 RMSEA value would not be employed (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). As given in note for Interpretation by Jennifer et al., (RMSERA): 0.05 and less show poor fit: and (SMSEA) having a value of less than 0.08 offers a good fit.

The RMR (root mean square residual), the "square root of the average squared amount by which

the sample variances and covariance differ from their estimates," obtained results of our model are correct because the researcher's assumptions have suggested value. The smaller the RMR is, the better, while RMR of 0 values indicates a perfect fit.

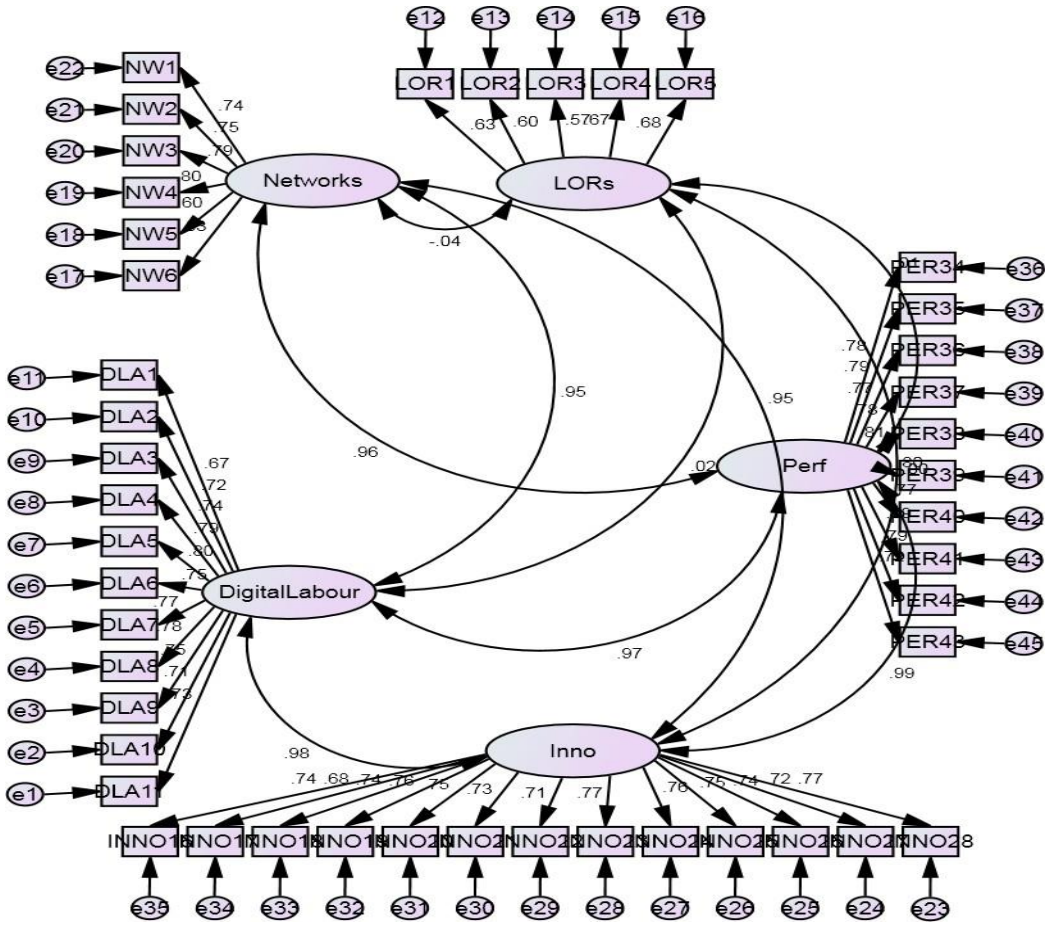
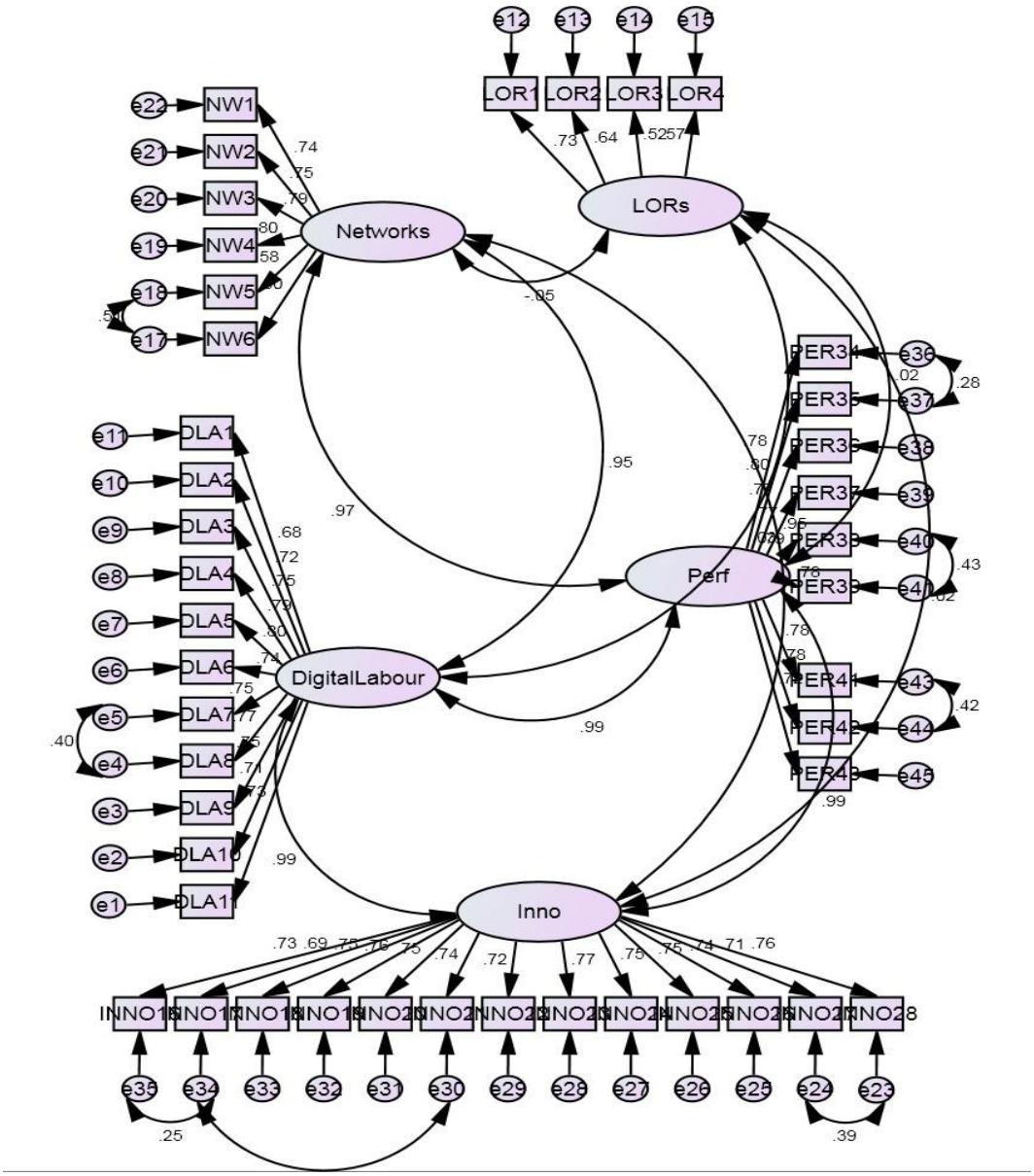



Figure 2: Structural Model




(Figure: 3)

Confirmatory factor analysis was run on the model to check the goodness-of-fit indices are within the acceptable level. These values indicated the acceptance of the model. Different values for these indices were: chi-square value of 1839.378with 842 degrees of freedom was statistically significant at p=0.000; CFI = 0.881; RMSEA = 0. 068; GFI = 0.743; Standardized RMR = 0.052; and CMIN/DF = 2.185. These results are sufficient evidence of reliability for constructs of the model in the confirmatory factor analysis. CFA path models for measurement and structural models have been provided in Figures 2 and 3, respectively. Similarly, correlation is provided in Table 1.

### *4.3. Inferential statistics: Pearson correlation*

The Pearson correlation matrix was made for the five interval-scaled variables. The results highlighted that the correlation between all the variables was more than .80, which means a good correlation (See table-1).

**Table: 1**

| Correlations | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | DLA | SNOW | Performance | Innovation |
| DLA | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .862** | .915** | .926** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | Sum of Squares and Cross-products | 174.734 | 153.266 | 170.731 | 162.910 |
| | Covariance | .691 | .606 | .675 | .644 |
| | N | 254 | 254 | 254 | 254 |
| SNW | Pearson Correlation | .862** | 1 | .858** | .849** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | .000 | .000 |
| | Sum of Squares and Cross-products | 153.266 | 180.880 | 162.927 | 151.939 |
| | Covariance | .606 | .715 | .644 | .601 |
| | N | 254 | 254 | 254 | 254 |
| PERFORMANCE | Pearson Correlation | .915** | .858** | 1 | .928** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | | .000 |
| | Sum of Squares and Cross-products | 170.731 | 162.927 | 199.432 | 174.409 |
| | Covariance | .675 | .644 | .788 | .689 |
| | N | 254 | 254 | 254 | 254 |
| INNOVATION | Pearson Correlation | .926** | .849** | .928** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| | Sum of Squares and Cross-products | 162.910 | 151.939 | 174.409 | 177.234 |
| | Covariance | .644 | .601 | .689 | .701 |
| | N | 254 | 254 | 254 | 254 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | | | |

### *4.4. Test of Hypotheses*

Table 2 presents the results of hypotheses testing, which reveal that all results support predicted hypotheses. As a result, all developed hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 are accepted.

**Table 2: Test of Hypotheses**

| *Variables* | *β* | *Std. Error* | *Sig.* | *Results* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Digital Labor Activities → Performance | 0.728 | 0.051 | 0.00 | Supported |
| Social Networks → Performance | 0.284 | 0.050 | 0.00 | Supported |
| Digital Labor Activities → Innovation → Performance | 0.319 | 0.064 | 0.00 | Supported |
| Social Networks → Innovation → Performance | 0.179 | 0.045 | 0.00 | Supported |

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

The digitalization of business is an emerging trend in developing and even in developed economies. Therefore, this study has highlighted an important issue of digital labor and social networking, improving marketing performance. The first hypothesis of the study investigated the effect of digital labor activities on performance. The results highlighted that the digitalization of labor or labor involvement in digital activities could enhance the marketing performance. Traditional marketing is now getting replaced by digital marketing. Thus, digitalization in marketing is possible with digital labor or digital labor activities. The second hypothesis, H2, aimed to identify the effect of social networks on performance, and findings revealed that social networks could also lead to better performance. In addition to these relations, the research explored the effect of innovation as the mediator between the relationship of "digital labor activities and performance" and "social networks and performance." The third hypothesis of this research, H3, aimed to investigate the role of innovation as a mediator between digital labor activities and performance.

Similarly, H4 was developed to investigate the role of innovation as a mediator between social networks and performance. This research accepted the third and fourth hypotheses. This research is unique in its context as it has identified several new relations and added significant literature in the digitalization of labor.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

Digital marketing is now replacing traditional marketing, and this era of technology has emphasized a lot on modern ways of business digitalization. Since the last decade, digital marketing has been a hot debate among researchers and policymakers. However, the literature has still ignored the digital labor and labor skills, which can be critical in the digitalization of marketing and business. Therefore, this research has focused on digitalization's broad and trending area and provided significant theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. This research has explained the relationship between digital labor activities and social networks with marketing performance in theoretical implications. Moreover, these relationships were checked with mediating role of innovation. Thus, the study has expanded the literature on digital labor activities, social networks, innovation, and marketing performance.

Digital marketers are the digital laborers, and innovation in their skills can improve marketing performance. Similarly, the study has highlighted that innovation in social networks and digital marketing activities can lead to better marketing performance. The research has directed the attention towards an emphasis on digital

marketing to eliminate possible errors in traditional marketing. The stance of this research is unique and different from prior studies as they merely focused on digital marketing (Purwanti, 2021; De Pelsmacker et al., 2018; Islami et al., 2020) and ignored the digitalization of labor or business. In addition, the research has highlighted the multiple relationships and contributed a lot in literature to provide theoretical justifications.

The model developed by the study has included complex and broad variables to address the actual issue of marketing performance comprehensively. The study adopted the unique way of analyzing the data collected from freelancers doing digital marketing. The questionnaire used for the analysis was adopted from previous studies, and a few questions were changed to align with the research context. Further, the study is quantitative and based on the positivism approach. Many studies on digital marketing are qualitative, and some empirical studies used the SPSS, but this research has used the AMOS due to the complexity of variables under consideration. The researchers can quote the findings of this research as a reference while studying digital marketing or business digitalization. Digitalization is essential for every business to survive in this competitive world, and it must include the digitalization of labor to enhance performance. Therefore, this research has directed the attention of marketing managers, social media managers, digital marketing, and freelancing experts towards the digitalization of labor, innovation, and social networking. In developing like Malaysia, the digitalization of businesses is at an emerging stage, and the study indicated that the digitalization of labor and social networking could enhance the marketing performance of companies. Thus, this research can help the managers in making efficient strategies to digitalize their labor. The companies lacking in business digitalization can use the services of freelancers for their digital marketing.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown several practical, methodological, and theoretical implications, but still, it possesses several limitations. Future studies can use these limitations for further research. The limitations and recommendations provide below:

### *7.1. Other studies on digital labor*

Many studies have highlighted digital marketing and business digitalization, but the research on digitalization of labor is still limited. The study has highlighted the general perspective of digital labor, and future studies can research specific industry.

### *7.2. Perspective, Population, and context*

The data for the study was taken from Thailand, a developing country. Future studies can gather data from developed countries to know how they are involved in the digitalization of labor to improve marketing performance. In addition, future studies can collect data from industry experts rather than freelancers.

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