

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

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Abstract

The digital marketing is growing rapidly as its most convenient and reliable method of analyzing or changing the consumer behavior. To develop the 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, these relationships were investigated with mediating role of innovation. To analyze the comprehensive model of this research, AMOS software was used. The results highlighted that the digital labor activities and social networks significantly effect the performance. In addition, the innovation significantly mediates these relationships. This research is helpful for marketing analysts, freelancers, leaders and digital marketing managers for making effective strategies to increase the marketing performance with help of digital labor activities and innovation. The study has used the overall aspect of innovation and future studies can use the future innovation to address the digitalization in small and medium 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 are actively using 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 to get a sense of 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 an ideal place for brands looking to learn more about their customers' interests and preferences (Tuten, 2020). To achieve long-term and sustainable business growth, smart businesses will carry on investing in social media. Whether launching a new business or product, social media networks are an ideal place or excellent launch-pad for the companies (Pourkhani, Abdipour, Baher, & Moslehpour, 2019). The development in e-commerce highlight 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 a variety of benefits, such as expanding the reach of whatever company offering by engaging in two-way dialogues with prospective customers (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Social media marketing offers tools and tactics that enable businesses to reach out to customers and potential customers easily.

Digital labor refers to the value-added activities that people do on the internet or online platforms. In simple words, it can be said 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, online advertisers, online marketers, high-tech professionals, and all other people who offer their service through online sources are considered as digital labor. In early times, digital labor was thought 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 are all contributing 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. In Thailand's economy, the IT sector is growing at an extraordinary speed for the last few years. 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 being an industrial economy to a digital economy (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 (IT) market is expected 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 have the largest increase of 34 percent. By 2030, the Technology sector is predicted to contribute 30% of Thailand's GDP, up from 10% currently (Vatanasakdakul, Aoun, & Chantatub, 2020). In the evolving dynamics, IT has gained an important role in the formulation of a knowledge economy and knowledge society. 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 role of innovation.

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

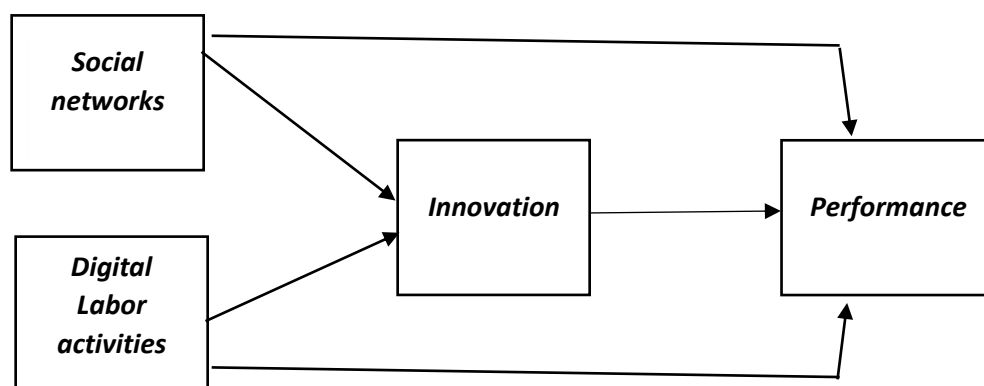


Figure 1: Research Model

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, Deveci-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 are their impact on 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 great 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 great impact on the performance of emerging industrial markets. Base on the above literature discussion, it can be hypothesized that:

H₁: 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 a variety of other services over the internet. With platforms 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 the 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, following hypothesis is designed:

H₂: Digital Labor activities have a significant impact on Performance.

2.3. *Social Networks, Innovation, and Performance*

Consumer behavior and business practices have both changed as a result of 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 focus on the development of newly introduced innovations has steadily changed away from aggregate-level dispersion and toward investigating 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 reduces the risks of increasing time and development costs, enables companies to significantly reduce the amount of field testing, and 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

stages of the product lifecycle, as well as the formation of new business lines, plays a key role. Internal effects are linked to the improvement of different aspects of the company's life and economic performance at the same time. External factors have an impact on a company's customer relationships, profitability, and market position (Kurilova & Antipov, 2020). Social networks facilitate digital innovations that significantly affect the outcomes and performance of the companies, transforming business models, market expansion, and new customer attraction (Hanelt, Firk, Hildebrandt, & Kolbe, 2021). In consistent with the past studies, following hypothesis is developed:

H₃: Innovation significantly mediates the relationship between Social Networks and Performance.

2.4. Digital Labor Activities, Innovation and Performance

Digital labor activities have changed the entire business practice (Scholz, 2012). Organizations can benefit from online digital labor by lowering expenses, increasing brand awareness, and increasing revenues in a very short time (Horton, Kerr, & Stanton, 2018). Digital labor significantly influences the marketing performance of the companies, which is transformed from traditional marketing to online/internet/digital. Digital labor facilitates digital innovations that have a significant positive impact on overall business performance (Cárdenas-García, De Mesa, & Castro, 2019). Therefore, we can hypothesize that:

H₄: Innovation mediates the relationship between Digital Labor and Performance.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The hypothesis were tested by focusing on a single industry (i.e. Information Technology). Digital labor manifests itself in different ways in different industries. Therefore, the analysis of a single industry 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 Vrande, De Jong, Vanhaverbeke, & De Rochemont, 2009; Zollo & Winter, 2002).

The study utilized online data collection using a survey questionnaire. A questionnaire was anchored 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). In the survey method, a questionnaire can be managed in an interactive mode (Bell, Hartup, & Crowell, 1962). The questionnaire has been sent to the managers of the companies. The questionnaire was completely comprehensible 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 proceed to the development of 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 the creation of a scale of measurement, with only a few discrepancies in the details of the phases (Bolaji, Olanipekun, Adekunle, & Adeleke, 2018).

In order to test the hypotheses, a questionnaire strategy was used and the questionnaire comprises of 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 performance of the organization and mediating effect of Innovation 28 and 19 item questionnaire respectively is adapted from (Škerlavaj, Štemberger, & Dimovski, 2007) which was 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*

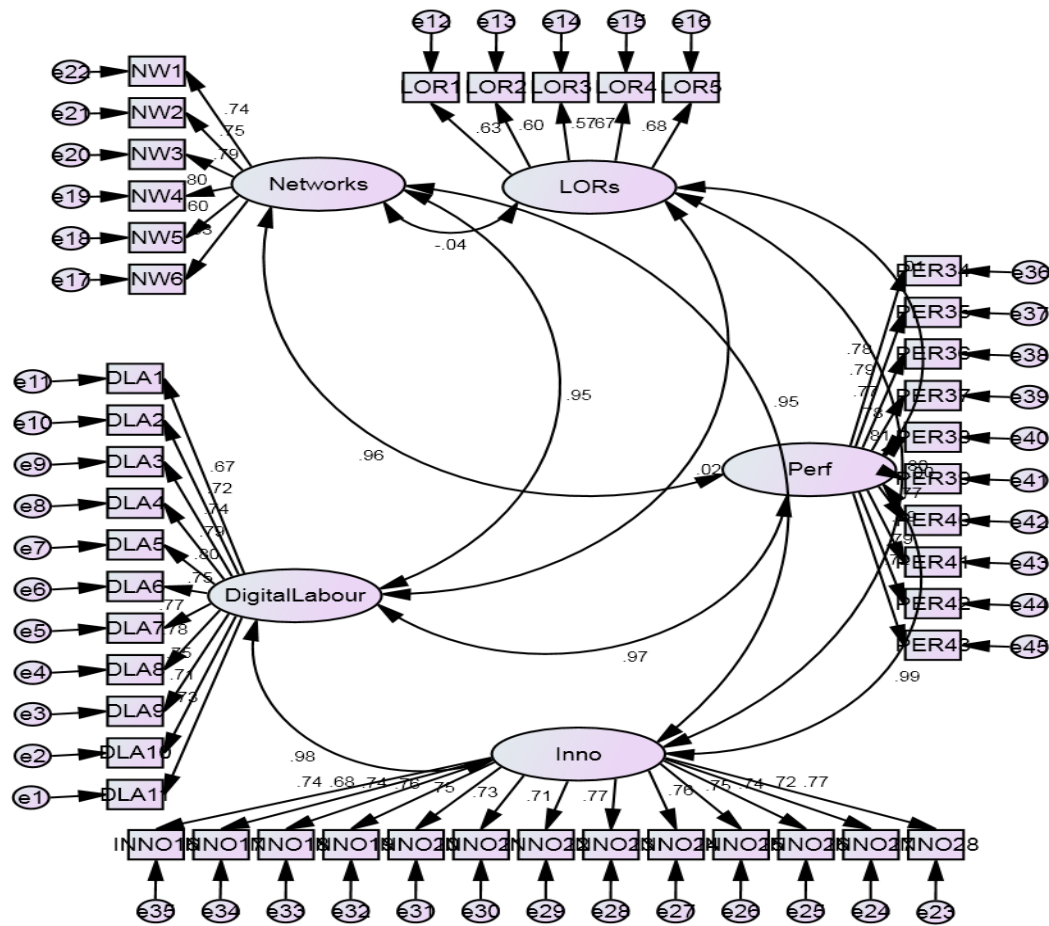
The statistics of the reliability test show the value of Cronbach's Alpha for all the variables is more than 0.70 which is considered to be good for internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha for Digital Labour is .932 where the number of items are 11, Cronbach's Alpha for Social Networks is .854 where the number of items are 6, Cronbach's Alpha for Innovation is .940 where the number of items are 13, Cronbach's Alpha for Level of Reward is .765 where the number of items were 5, whereas the value of Cronbach's Alpha for Performance is .939 where the number of items are 10.

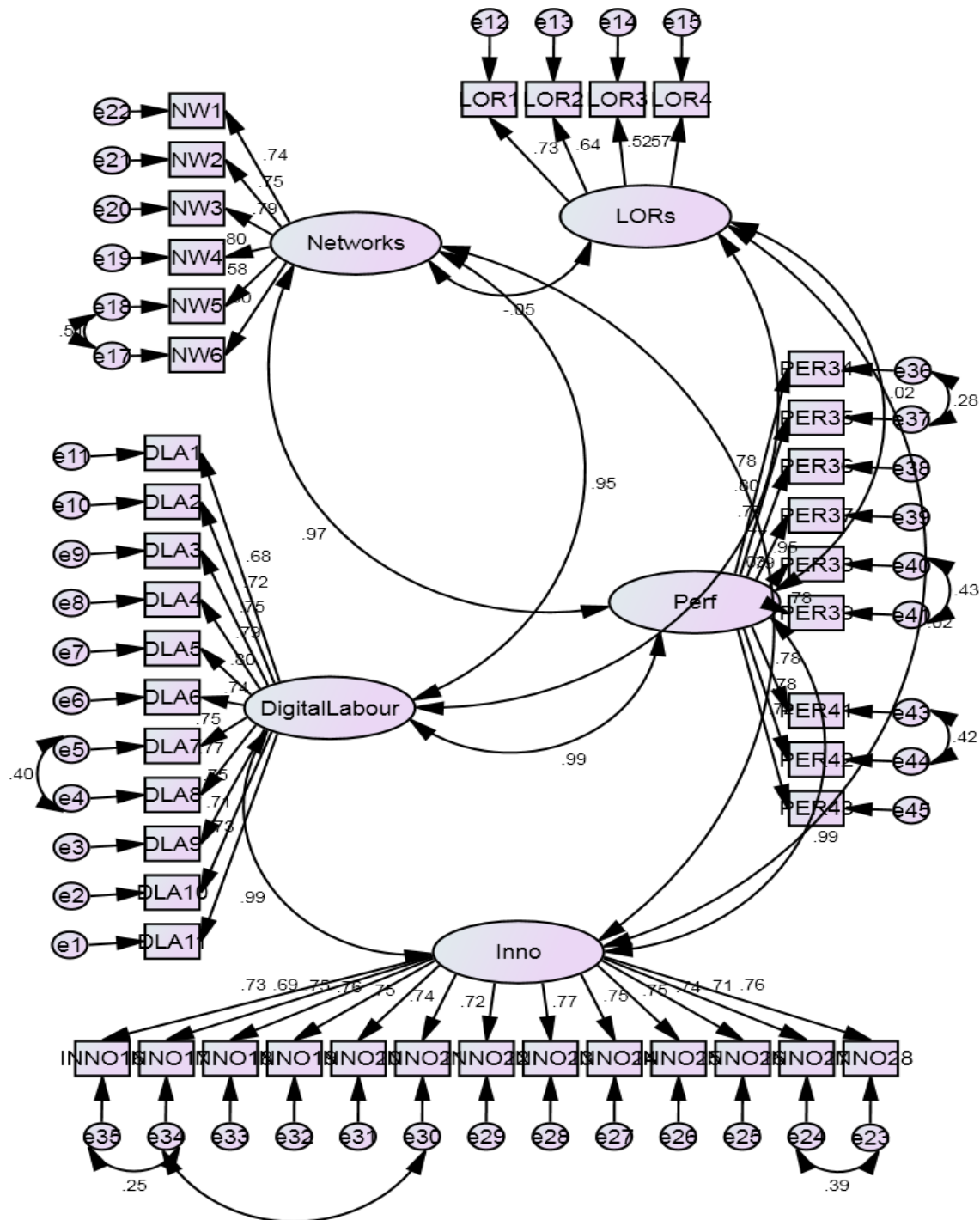
4.2. *Model Fit*

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 actually provides evidence for the acceptance and rejection of research model based on theory. With wide disagreement of which fit indexes measures to report, Jaccard & Wan (1996) have suggested using at least "three" fit indexes of satisfactory values. It is very hard to get all significant values, but there are number of ways through which the proposed model can bring at significance level.

As the scale values of a good fit index 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, but they can be brought to a significance level and got meaningful results. However, the GFI, NFI, CFI, values close to 1 indicate a very good fit, except that the values fall in the range of 0 to 1, for CMIN/DF researchers recommended that ratios of low as "2" or high as "5" indicate a reasonable 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" in the relation to degrees of freedom. This figure value is actually based on subjective judgments. This cannot state that it is as perfect or Significance that has a perfect measure, but is more sensible, than the condition of "exact fit" that the RMSEA = 0.0. There is also an opinion that the 0.08 or less RMSEA value states adequate fit having "a reasonable error of approximation" but the model with a greater than 0.1 RMSEA value, would not be employing (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 shows 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 is 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: 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 1839.378 with 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 highlightd that the correlation between all the variables was more than .80 which means a good correlation (See table-1).

Table: 1

Correlations					
		DLA	SNW	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 the developing and even in developed economies. Therefore, this study has highlighted an important issue of digital labor and social networking which can improve the marketing performance. First hypothesis of the study, investigated the effect of digital labor activities on performance. The results highlighted that the marketing performance can be enhanced by the digitalization of labor or involvement of labor in digital activities. The traditional marketing is now getting replaced by digital marketing, thus, the digitalization in marketing is possible with digital labor or digital labor activities. Second hypothesis, H2, aimed to identify the effect of social networks on performance and findings revealed that the social networks can also lead to better performance. In addition of these relations, the research explored the effect of innovation as mediator between 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 mediator between the digital labor activities and performance. Similarly, H4 was developed to investigate the role of innovation as mediator between the social networks and performance. The third and fourth, both hypothesis were accepted by this research. This research is unique in its context as it has identified several unexplored relations and added significant literature in area of digitalization of labor.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The digital marketing is now replacing the traditional marketing and this era of technology has emphasized a lot on modern ways of business digitalization. Since last decade, digital marketing is hot debate among researchers and policy makers but still the literature has ignored the digital labor and digital labor skills which can be critical in digitalization of marketing and business. Therefore, this research has focused on broad and trending area of digitalization and provided significant theoretical, methodological and practical implication. In terms of theoretical implications, this research has explained the relationship of digital labor activities and social networks with marketing performance. 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.

The digital marketers are actually the digital labors and innovation in their skills can improve the marketing performance. Similarly, the study has highlighted that the innovation in social networks and digital marketing activities can lead to better marketing performance. The research has directed the attention towards emphasis on digital marketing to get rid possible errors occur 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 study has included the complex and broad variables to comprehensively address the actual issue of marketing performance. The study adopted the unique way to analyzing the data collected from freelancers doing the digital marketing. The questionnaire used for the study was adopted from previous studies and few questions were changed to align with the context of the research. Further, the

study is quantitative in nature 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 as due to complexity of variables under consideration. The researchers can quote the findings of this research as reference while studying the digital marketing or business digitalization. The digitalization is essential for every business to survive in this competitive world and it must include the digitalization of labor to enhance the 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 emerging stage and the study indicated that the digitalization of labor and social networking can enhance the marketing performance of businesses. 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. The future studies can use these limitations for further research. The limitations and recommendations are given below:

7.1. Further studies on digital labor

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

7.2. Perspective, Population and context

The data for study were taken from Thailand, which is developing country and future studies can gather the data from developed countries to know that how they are actually involved in digitalization of labor for improvement of marketing performance. In addition, the future studies can gather the data from industrial experts rather than the freelancers.

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