The Role of Conception on Mental Illness and Social Media in Reducing Social Distance toward People with Mental Illness

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Social distance added challenges to people with mental illness in facing their diseases. It impacted the seeking help attitude of people with mental illness that make them lose their social function to society. This study aimed to examine the significant relationship between the conception of mental illness and social media with social distance towards people with mental illness among public university students. A cross-sectional survey was conducted on public university students in Selangor (n=384). Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale. Bootstrapping tests were used to determine the relationship between the conception of mental illness and social media with social distance toward people with mental illness. The Result showed that conception of mental illness and social media have a significant relationship with social distance toward people with mental illness. This shows that negative conception of mental illness and negative views regarding mental illness person on social media impact social distance toward people with mental illness. Therefore, reducing social distance toward people with mental illness can enhance the seeking help attitude and social function of people with mental illness.

Keywords: social distance, conception of mental illness, mental illness person, social media

People that have been diagnosed with mental illness have experienced social distance from their society. This is due to misconception or false conceptions of mental illness that has been portrayed in society. Conceptions are a basic understanding of a situation or principle. In easier words, the conception of mental illness means how far we understand people with mental illness. This conception normally is derived either from their background, education, belief, or attitude itself. Besides that, factors that contribute to this type of illness also influence their view on this matter as a whole. The conception one mental illness differs in each country. In China, for example, the conceptions were more on mind-body and nature equilibrium (Chan, Cau & Gau, 2015). An article written by Dieu Ngo (2020) stated that 36% of students in Kinshasa believe that mental illness can occur due to mental imbalance and 29% believe mental illness was caused by severe stress. In addition, in Yoruba, mental illness has been deemed to derive from: (1) nature sources such as accidents, (2) Mystical sources like a good punishment, (3) pre-nature sources like Jinn, and lastly (4) Inheritable; genetically transmitted (Jegede, 2005). All in all, the conceptions of mental illness can be shaped by their background itself.

Furthermore, the conception of mental illness can also be shaped by religion.

In the Malaysian context, every religion has its own beliefs on mental illness issues. Malay culture or Muslims believed that mental illness is caused by a supernatural power that is done to harm others, meanwhile Chinese believed that it was due to lacking Yin and Yang for both mental and physical and lastly Indians were influenced by their book (Vedas) regarding this types of illness and treatment (Cheng…et.al. 2013). In addition, in Malay culture or perspectives, psychiatric illness or "sakit mental" is a concept that links with negative connotations (Asreene, 2016). Besides that, the concept of mental illness was also shaped by the knowledge that we have acquired through reading, etc. (Choudhry et. al, 2016). These consequences derived from the conception of mental illness have affected mental health services in a long term (Leong, Kim & Gupta 2011).

Due to these conceptions, people with mental illness are unable to recover entirely and this has been proven by the article written by Bagchi, Sarkar, and Basu (2020), it stated that only a few of respondents from the study believed that people with mental health illness can be fully cured. The stigma about mental illness has led to only 9.3% of university students being willing to see counselors if they encounter any problems. (Salim, 2020). Moreover, according to Haynes (2010), counseling services has not been fully utilized and the worst scenario is, that students especially male are unaware about this type of service existed in university. (Getachew, 2019). It is clearly shown that students refuse to seek help from counselors if they have problems during or throughout their studies. In conclusion, the conceptions of mental illness are shaped by religions, knowledge as well as culture and it does affect mental health services in general.

With the advancement of technology nowadays, social media also play a major role in creating social distance toward people with mental illness. Moreover, recently, many reported crime cases involving people suffering from mental illness. This has been proven by the article written by Milby (2015) who has found that in 2013, 28 murder cases were reported in mass media and 14 cases which are equal to 50 percent were caused by people with mental illness. These situations have widened the social distance gap between people with mental illness. In addition, social media tend to use negative words in reporting cases that involved a mental illness person. This has added more negative views towards mental illness sufferers as society or community are scared to come close to them. Besides that, teenagers especially, tend to believe images or news displayed on social media wholeheartedly (Pfister, 2014). This situation has worsened as many crimes that have been reported in the media are significant with mental illness disorders which also include murder cases. This has resulted in the stigmatization of mental illness persons becoming severe and this is evident in society's attitudes towards them. Besides that, social media tend to demonstrate negative attitudes regarding mental illness people that give an impact on social distance toward mental illness sufferers (Dupont &Reyes, 2019). Not only that, but social media also misleading and focuses on medical perspectives regarding mental illness issues (Liljeqvist, Kling, Hallen &Jormfeldt, 2020). Even though positive media coverage can reduce stigmatization, the intervention in mitigating the negative impact on news reports is still very limited (Ross, Morgan, Jorm& Reavley, 2019). It cannot be denied that people with mental illness are also involved in criminal activities, however

from the 429 cases reported only 4% is related to psychosis, 3% related to depression, and 10% involved bipolar disorder (Peterson et al., 2014). It showed that only a small percentage of people with mental illness are involved in criminal activity. All in all, media have strong potential as a medium to reduce mental illness stigma (Zexin, 2016) however when this situation happens social distance will become bigger due to media is deemed to be very powerful tools; as the message send able to gain society trust (Smith 2015).

This study also continues to serve as guidance and reference in understanding society's attitude towards people with mental illness. Therefore, this study will bridge the gap in the lack of research conducted on the social distance to mentally ill people in Malaysia when there is only one study by Zubaidah & Norfazilah (2014) in Tampoi, Johor that focuses only on attitude and knowledge of the local community. While in the present study, the aim is to determine the impact of conceptions on mental illness, social media, and attitude of social distance toward people with mental illness. According to National Health Mobility Survey (2017), Selangor was the highest prevalence of these three common illnesses with 8.4% of students are suffering from it and the public universities have recorded the highest percentage with 37.2%, 63.0%, and 27.3% for depression, anxiety and stress repetitively compared to private university (Shamsudin et al,2013) and (Teh et al., 2015). Furthermore, university students have a higher percentage of showing social distance attitudes toward people with mental illness (Lundquist & Gurung, 2019) and university students in Selangor are the highest with 8.4% have the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress (NHMS, 2017). Selangor have been chosen because it is one of the major city in Malaysia and provide the most comprehensive psychiatric care (Hanifah and Bortel, 2015). Therefore this study focus on public university students in Selangor.

There are many factors associated with social distance toward people with mental illness in the general population. These include conception on mental illness and social media. Conception on mental illness and social media is deemed to have a significant relationship with social distance toward people with mental illness. These conceptions of mental illness were supported by Einstenin & Klepacz (2017) and Stuber et al (2014), while media was supported by McGinty, Webster & Barry (2013) and Rohm, Hastall & Ritterfeld (2017).

So, the main purpose of this study was:

1. To examine whether the conception of mental illness and social media have a significant relationship with social distance toward people with mental illness.

2. To identify the variance of variables (conception on mental illness and social media) that influence social distance toward people with mental illness.

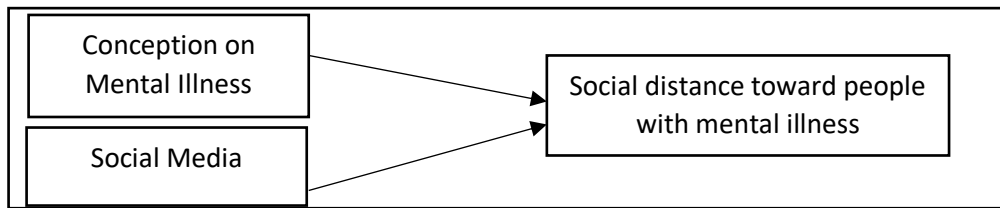Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study:

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

The figure above knows the researcher's direction in this study. It shows one by one direction of the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable.

Method

A survey was conducted in three public universities located in Selangor namely the National University of Malaya (UKM), University of Putra, Malaysia (UPM), and University of Technology Mara (UiTM) Shah Alam. Convenience sampling was used to verify the number of samples used for this survey. The researcher went to each university to distribute the questionnaires. Respondents in this study had to fill up the consent column before they participated in this survey. The data collected included the conception of mental illness, social media portrayal of mental illness person, and social distance toward people suffering from mental illness. To analyze the data, the researcher used SmartPLS. Ethics approval was granted by the university to the researcher to carry out this study. The reference number for ethics approval was (UPSI/PPPI/PYK/ETIKA(M)/014(33).

Materials

This study used questionnaires that were adopted and adapted from past researchers. The social distance instrument was adapted from Stuart. H (2005). It has two subscales that are social relationships and private relationships. An instrument for conception on mental illness was adapted from Bagasara and Mackinem (2014) which consists of 15-items, 5-point Likert scale each regarding opinion statements about conceptual that consist three focus areas that are; western biological conception, traditional Islamic, and spiritual conception, while for social media it also adapted from Fisher (2019) that also consists of 20- items and 5-point Likert scale. Social media also has three subscales that are; perception of the representation of mental illness on social media, social media use, and lastly social media view. This means it has three different measurements to measure one dependent (social distance) and two independent variables (conception of mental illness and social media). Before the collected data researcher does a pilot test to look at the understanding of respondents in answering the questionnaire. During the pilot study, 50 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the students of Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) at the end of March 2020. Below is the result of the pilot test that has been done.

Table 1
Result of reliability test of pilot test

NO OF ITEM	STUDY VARIABLE	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	REMARK
5	Social Distance	0.85	Very good
15	Conception on Mental illness	0.87	Very good
20	Social Media	0.81	Very Good

The reliability result for the dependent variable of this study; social distance toward people with mental illness was 0.71. According to the rule of thumb, if the value is that much; it was good Cronbach alpha. For conception on mental illness and social media, the value of Cronbach alpha is 0.80 and 0.73 repetitively and it can be remarked as very good and good according to the rule of thumb.

Results

Since the questionnaire was adapted and adopted, the reliability of the instrument is important to be looked at. The reliability of the survey was determined by Cronbach's alpha. It is used to measure internal consistency. Most scores are above the acceptable level of 0.70 as suggested by Tavakol and Dennick (2011). In addition to Cronbach's alpha, internal consistency also can be seen in Composite Reliability (CR). The composite reliability (CR) value also must be greater than 0.70 Hair et al. (2018). Next, the researcher looked at the convergent reliability. Convergent reliability refers to the consistency shown by various items in measuring the same construct. The common measure of convergent reliability is Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Hair et al. (2014). The AVE value must be greater than 0.5. The table below shows the composite reliability for social distance is 0.90 and the AVE value is 0.64. The composite reliability values for conceptual on mental illness and media were 0.94 respectively and the value of AVE was also greater than 0.5. The table shows the summary of the values.

Table 2
Result of reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Social Distance	0.86	0.90	0.64
Conception on Mental Illness	0.96	0.96	0.61
Social Media	0.95	0.95	0.50

The composite reliability value is more accurate than Cronbach's alpha. Then, we verify the loading value in the Smart PLS. The loading value must exceed 0.60. The value below 0.60 we can either remove it or it can remain there if

the AVE value exceeds 0.5 (Ramlan, 2019). Then, the researcher also searches for Fornell & Lacker's Criterion. It is for validity purposes. The value must be greater than the correlation between the contract and other constructs in the model. The result also passes the Fornel &Lacker criterion validity. This is for CFA and EFA. Once the requirements of CFA and EFA has been authorized, the researcher was able to continue the analysis as the evidence was sufficient for reliability and validity purposes. The researcher starts by looking at the demographic information from the survey. 382 respondents completed this survey. To facilitate the demographic results of female students, undergraduate students and those under 25 years of age are the most involved in this survey.

Then, the researcher will continue with the objectives of this article. First, we look at the contribution of conception on mental illness and social media toward social distance by sing bootstrapping analysis in SmartPLS.

Table 3
Result of path coefficients

	Original Sample (O)	Sample means (M)	Standard deviation (STDV)	T- Statistics	P-Value
Conception on mental illness -> social distance	0.19	0.19	0.03	5.92	0.00
Social Media -> Social Distance	0.13	0.14	0.05	2.85	0.00

From the table above, the result showed that the conception of mental illness and social media have a significant relationship with social distance toward people with mental illness. This is because the value of the t-statistics was 5.92 and 2.85 respectively while the p-value is less than 0.01 (P<0,01; t-5.92) and (P<0.01; t=2.85). The biggest contribution to the social distance of a mental illness person is conceptions of mental illness. This is because the original sample value (O) is the highest. The value was 0,19. All the relationship is a positive way of relationships because no negative signs in the Original Sample (O). Concerning the results obtained in terms of social distance toward mental illness person, it showed that conception of mental illness and social media has a significant influence on social distance towards people with mental illness. Then, the researcher moves to the second objective in this article which is the variance of the variables. Below is the result:

Table 4
Result of descriptive analysis

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Social Distance	382	14.59	4.34	18.67
Conception On Mental Illness	382	51.93	13.52	182.89
Social Media	382	48.28	12.94	167.24

The table above showed the mean and standard deviation of the variables. For social distance mean value shown is 14.59. This value means that social distance toward people with mental illness is moderate, however, some respondents have high social distance towards people with mental illness. Meanwhile, the mean for conception on mental illness is 51.93. This indicates that the students' conceptions of mental illness toward people suffering from mental illness are mostly negative. Lastly, the mean of social media is 48.28. This value represents the respondent who mostly agrees that social media always view negatively people with mental illness. Then, the researcher will explain the variance. The variance for social distance indicates a high variance. This shows that respondents do not want to take the risk of establishing social relationships with people suffering from mental illness, they can maintain relationships, talk, and do the same job with people suffering from mental illness but have no intention to involve in a marriage or share a room with them. At the same time, variance value for conception on mental illness and social media also showed high variance. This showed the spread of data was high. This explains that there are people who have very negative conceptions of mental illness and there are several respondents who have a very positive conception of mental illness towards people with mental illness. In terms of media, most respondents agreed that the media are more prone to show negative side on mental illness sufferers, but a few respondents tend to disagree on this matter.

Discussion

Social distance is related to the social acceptance of people that have different norms from them. Meanwhile, mental illness refers to the condition of mental state that influences ways of thinking, behavior, and feelings (National institution health, 2007). This study may contribute to a better understanding of mental illness in general. The result obtained has confirmed the assumption that to fully cured people with mental illness focus cannot be solely on the illness itself but also on the wellness of the patient itself. It is because the recovery stages experienced by patients will continue until acceptance from society has been achieved and they can live normally. The current study has shown respondents have negative conceptions of mental illness and it was agreed that social media tend to view it in the same manner which has resulted in a visible gap among mental illness patients. This probably happens due to a lack of psychological knowledge to tackle this matter.

The conception of mental illness and social media played an important role in

reducing social distance toward people with mental illness. This is because there is a significant relationship with social distance toward people with mental illness. Collaboration with the Non-Government Organization (NGO) such as Mental Illness Awareness and Support Association (MIASA) can ensure university students obtain the right information regarding mental illness person. This is because the conceptions of mental illness carry the highest contribution to social distance toward people with mental illness. This collaboration will reduce the negative conceptions and increase the willingness on helping people with mental illness In addition, it also will give ample exposure to the students in understanding mental illness better as well as ways to assist this kind of health issue in the future.

Furthermore, in the university context, it can be concluded that even some of the respondents have a background in mental illness, still it is negatively viewed, and this has to change. Besides the negative beliefs or understanding, nowadays social media also has created a negative perception toward the mentally ill person. It happens because young people mostly spend a lot of their time using social media to get information. So that variables of conception on mental illness and social media can be the important variables that can be implemented in reducing social distance toward people with mental illness. In addition, when it involves mental illness issues, it needs to be seen or viewed in a holistic view to solve it because at the end of the day people with mental illness will go back to society. To sum up, a positive conception of mental illness, as well as the ways media, portrayed people with mental illness is important in reducing social distance or gaps toward them as

it can be one of the catalysts for them to recover properly.

The current result showed a supportive environment needs to be created to help people with illness by changing the conceptions of mental illness. So that it will become normalization to seek help from professionals when facing mental health issues. Therefore, mental illness issues will not become taboo in the society anymore. Furthermore, guidelines on proper reporting regarding mental illness in social media need to be implemented. This will reduce the misunderstanding toward people with mental illness. People tend to judge mental illness sufferers harshly, so it is essential to ensure that the recovery process will not only focus on the illness itself but also the wellbeing of the person. So supportive environment and appropriate reporting in social media regarding people with mental illness is important to help them to get better. In conclusion, it has been proven that conception of mental illness and social media play an important role in reducing social distance toward people with mental illness, more attention needed to be given to these two variables so that people with mental illness will come forward to get proper treatment.

Reducing social distance toward people with mental illness will enhance the whole potential of people with mental illness. By then, society will not underestimate the ability of people with mental illness to work. In addition, negative conceptions of mental illness and negative views on social media made people with mental illness reluctant to seek help from professionals. This showed reducing social distance was important because it will reduce the bear to the government in handling people with mental illness. Besides that, reducing social distance

toward people with mental illness can provide a better future for them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a study on social distance toward people with mental illness is a study that measures the level of acceptance toward people with mental illness. In short, the index shows that the key observed variables are measured very thoroughly and this study has implications for education purposes as it can assist in creating strategies to reduce discrimination on mental illness persons among students at public universities in Selangor. This will create better guidance in understanding the attitude of social distance toward people with mental illness. In addition, the study results showed that variable conceptions of mental illness and social media can play an important role in reducing social distance toward people with mental illness because it was a significant factor in social distance toward people with mental illness. It will help people with mental illness have a better future for their life. Future research should examine the social distance of people with mental illness in other areas and with other variables such as personality as it can lead to a better understanding of the attitude of social distance toward people with mental illness.

Acknowledgments

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