

Chapter in Book

# Digital Inheritance Exploration (DIE) Through Digital Inheritance Model (DIM) - A Guideline for Digital Assets Planning After Death

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**Abstract:** *When a user passes away in today's digital world, they may have more than just physical assets or property; their footprint extends into cyberspace. This has resulted from the materialisation of digital communication tools like mobile phone as memobilia has transformed the device as a memory storage tool; where the growth of personal digital data are created, stored and accessed. These digital data are digital asset in today's data driven society, as the data has numerous values like monetary value, sentimental value, privacy value and sensitivity value. However, users are aware that they are creating permanent online archive of their life but they have never thought of managing the data after death. Therefore, this innovation explores the concept of digital inheritance as future digital legacy plan. The development of this project involved empirical study include qualitative method and quantitative method. Qualitative study used in-depth interview as the data collection technique. The informants for this investigation include 10 informants of young adults and 10 informants of expert related to the new media industry. Quantitative study used survey with PLS-SEM analysis and targeted to 395 respondents. Results depict that majority of users and experts have strongly agreed with the relevant of planning for digital assets in this 21<sup>st</sup> century through a concept of digital inheritance. This project manages to explores valuable findings for the development of a Memobilia and Digital Inheritance Guidelines designed through Digital Inheritance Model (DIM). This guideline can be commercialised as it works practically as reference to various area of interest include digital media, religion, law and policy. Thus, the results of designing this guideline have implications towards the awareness of young adults, government and policy makers in protecting individual's digital assets through the formulation of strategies, acts and policies that allow digital rights to take place through the digital inheritance concept.*

*Keywords:* Memobilia, Digital Memory, Media Dependency, Digital Assets, Digital Inheritance



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Developments and transformation in the field of communication technology have given implications to the way individual users manage digital data and information. The importance of data management and digital information is increasingly focused when the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) was gazetted by the Malaysian government in 2010 (Sidi Mohamed & Sonny Zulkhuda, 2019). The gazetted of this act aims to regulate data processing activities and personal information by any individual who has control over the ownership of individual user data in Malaysia. Along with the gazetted of this act, the government established the Personal Data Protection Department (JPDP) in

2011 as an agency under the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia Malaysia (MCMC). This agency is responsible for protecting personal data so that it is not misused by data users in commercial transactions that also involve the daily communication activities of individual users (Ruzian Markom et al., 2019).

The formation of this act and agency clearly proves that data and digital information belonging to individual users is indeed valuable and needs to be well managed. In order to manage digital data and information, the exploration of how this digital data and information is formed should be examined in more detail. A critique of Selwyn and Pangrazio (2018) regarding the smartphone as a communication tool that has changed the way data, information and digital memory formation occurs among individual users deserves attention. This is proven when smartphones are now not just a technological tool used to communicate solely. Even its use has grown into a tool for digitizing data, information and memory (Kalokyri et al., 2018). The digitization of data, information and memory in this context refers to the ability of smartphones to function like human cognitive capabilities. This ability includes the activities of remembering, processing and storing digital information belonging to individual users (Nijssen et al., 2018).

Moreover, Reading (2009) has classified the smartphone as 'memobilia' with reference to its role as a digitizing tool that helps individual users digitize data, information and memory. Prathap and Singh (2021) also agreed with this statement and asserted that the ability of smartphones to function as digitization tools has affected human cognitive capacity and ability. According to Reading, this happens when its use also reduces the human ability to process and remember a certain amount of data, information and memory at one time. Katuk et al. (2019) also stated that the role of the smartphone as a digitization tool also gives advantages to individual users due to its ability to record, store, edit and manage data in digital form more efficiently.

This phenomenon has directly influenced the formation of various types of data, information, memory and digital platforms owned by individual users (Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2019). For example, the use of smartphones has formed a variety of digital data and information including personal information, health information and financial information (Muhammad Ehatisham ul Haq & Muhammad Awais Azam, 2018). In addition, the memory of individual users can also be recorded in the form of pictures and videos when the sophistication of smartphone technology is equipped with high-resolution camera technology (Soares & Storm, 2021). While Internet connectivity with smartphones also encourages the formation and management of various personal digital platforms including online banking platforms and online business platforms (Wasiul et al. 2020). Even with the help of Internet connectivity, smartphones have become an important medium in connecting individual users with cloud storage. This cloud storage functions as additional storage space for them to manage digital content online (Munivel & Kannammal, 2019).

Meanwhile, data, information, memory and digital platforms belonging to individual users can be classified as digital assets due to having important value to their owners (Cahn, 2011). This value includes privacy value, sensitivity value, sentimental value and monetary value (Almotairi et al. 2020; Holt et al. 2021; Malgieri et al. 2018; Winegar et al. 2019). In the context of Malaysia, approximately 11 million smartphone users are always faced with the risk of losing data and personal information (Ilah, 2018). Bank account information belonging to individual users with monetary value also always faces the risk of data leakage (Khoa, 2020). A study by Muhammad Adnan Pitchan and Siti Zobidah Omar (2019) clearly proves that this has a close relationship with individual users' awareness of the importance of cyber security. He pointed out that most of the individual users do not have knowledge and awareness about the importance of cyber security and law. Individual users, especially the youth group, think that legal matters such as cyber laws cause their lives to be unfree.

However, there are still a few users in Malaysia who have experience, awareness and understanding of security issues involving the importance of managing digital content online (Mohd Azul Mohamad Salleh & Ilham, 2017). However, this experience, awareness and understanding is still at a low level and is focused only on the implications of communication technology for users who are still alive. Most individual users also rely on the use of communication technology such as smart phones without thinking about the implications that have caused the formation of digital assets to occur rapidly (Cahn 2011). Therefore, Sudan et al. (2020) assert that awareness and knowledge about data management is not only important for individual users who are still alive. In fact, its importance should be detailed for the purpose of digital asset management through a digital inheritance concept in preparation for death in the 21st century.

This is important as the practice of digital communication through the speed of technology has given implications to leaving a digital legacy by individual users when they die. The concept of digital after death details that individual users also leave data, information, memories and digital platforms that need to be managed best by heirs after they die (Savin-Baden & Mason-Robbie, 2020). Death in the 21st century has challenged the process of managing digital assets owned by individual users. This follows that the data, information, memory and digital platform belonging to an individual also have value and can be managed and utilized by the new owner. Apart from ringgit money, real estate, houses and possessions, digital assets have become a form of property that is valuable to individuals around the world (Panetta, 2018).

## **2. METHOD & MATERIAL**

Therefore, this study aims to identify the dimensions of memobilia and its influence on the awareness of digital inheritance to face death in the 21st century. Relying on a mixed method through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, the results of the study are seen as important in providing knowledge and awareness about the implications of practicing communication technology that occurs after the death of an individual user. This implication does not only focus on the management of digital data and information for individual users who are still alive. However, the importance of managing digital assets through the concept of a digital inheritance is very relevant in preparation for the challenge of digital economic transformation that is happening rapidly around the world.

Following that, this study has used a sequential exploratory design as the research method chosen to explore the phenomenon under study. This sequential exploratory design is suitable for studies that have no available variables, no overarching framework or guiding theory (Creswell, 2007). In addition, this sequential exploratory design is the most appropriate design to explore the phenomenon in depth and comprehensively when the study in the first phase begins with a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). According to Morse (1991) the sequential exploratory design is very suitable for the process of generalizing the results of the study because it can also be done to different groups. Quantitative data is used to explain phenomena through variable relationships that have been identified at the qualitative level.

In general, this process has started with the first phase involving the collection of qualitative data. An in-depth interview approach was chosen for the data collection process. This qualitative data involves an in-depth interview approach with 10 youth and 10 experts with knowledge in the phenomenon under study. The selection of informants was done through snowball sampling. Next, these 20 transcripts were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) through the Atlas.ti 8 software. Based on the results of the study, four important variables were identified, namely memobilia, smartphone dependency, digital assets and digital inheritance awareness. Some of the

constructs through these four variables have been adapted in the process of developing instrumentation for the quantitative method that occurs in the second phase of the study.

For the second phase of the study, a quantitative study was used to test and explain the relationship between the variables that had been identified through qualitative methods in the first phase. Therefore, a survey approach was chosen for the data collection process. This survey approach was conducted on 395 youth including urban youth and rural youth categories in Selangor. The selection of respondents was done through purposive sampling. Next, the survey data was analyzed using the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) procedure which is able to test and explain the relationship between the variables through the systematic structuring of the study model. Therefore, through this two-phase approach, the results of the study can be interpreted in stages with more emphasis given to qualitative data than quantitative data.

### 3. FINDINGS

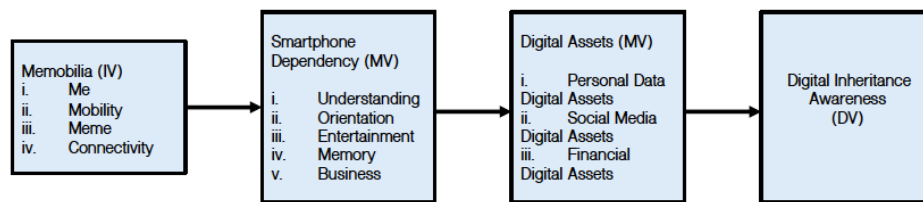
Overall, a guideline has been successfully translated through the structuring of the model and concept of memobilia, smartphone dependency, digital assets and digital inheritance awareness. The main importance for the formation of these guidelines is as a reference source targeted at the youth aimed at providing knowledge about memobilia and its influence as well as fostering digital inheritance awareness among the youth.

The first stage of the formation of the conceptual framework of this study is based on the research problem, exploration through the Phenomenology approach and micro elements of IMD in MSD Theory. There are four variables including memobilia, smartphone dependency, digital assets and digital inheritance awareness. These four variables are examined conceptually and operationally so that the understanding of this phenomenon can be done comprehensively and in parallel with the scope of the study which is focused on data digitization and aspects of digital data management after death. Meanwhile, Figure 2.3 in Chapter II shows the conceptual framework of the initial study formed as a result of the exploration of literature highlights through the Phenomenological approach and micro elements of IMD in MSD Theory. This initial exploration found that the concept of memobilia by Reading (2009) represents three sub-constructs namely 'personality', 'mobility' and 'editing'. The IMD micro element in the MSD Theory has three sub-constructs namely 'understanding', 'orientation' and 'entertainment'. Next, the concept of digital assets by Cahn (2011) represents three sub-constructs that include 'personal data digital assets', 'social media digital assets' and 'financial digital assets'. While digital inheritance awareness represents the dependent variable.

Based on the conceptual framework of the study, the exploration of the phenomenon continues with data collection through mixed methods using a sequential exploratory design. Through qualitative research, personal experiences and informant opinions are explored to understand the phenomenon through IPA analysis. This exploration has successfully developed the initial conceptual framework of the study by providing information, refinement and new discoveries about the concept of memorabilia. There are four suggested dimensions of memobilia, namely 'personality', 'mobility', 'editing' and 'connectivity'. In addition, information preparation and refinement of IMD microelements in MSD Theory also took place. There are five goals in the context of smartphone dependency as a digitization tool include 'understanding', 'orientation', 'entertainment', 'memory' and 'business'. While there are three categories of digital assets which are 'personal data digital assets', 'social network digital assets' and 'financial digital assets'.

Next, the conceptual framework of this hierarchical study was evaluated through the PLS-SEM procedure using a two-stage method. The evaluation of the relationship for each variable has gone

through six systematic procedures including structural model determination, measurement model determination, survey response evaluation, PLS-SEM result evaluation for the first-level structured model measurement, PLS-SEM result evaluation for the second-level structured model measurement and evaluation of PLS-SEM results of the structural model. Figure 1 shows the DIM Model (Digital Inheritance Model). Quantitative data analysis shows that memobilia requires smartphone dependence and digital assets to create awareness of digital inheritance among youth. The results of this study give implications to the awareness of youth, government and policy makers in protecting the digital assets of individual users through the formulation of strategies, acts and policies that allow the transfer of digital rights to occur through the concept of a digital inheritance awareness.



**Figure 1.** The Digital Inheritance Model (DIM) developed through exploratory sequential mixed method study involves qualitative and quantitative research design.

**Table 1.** The example of excerpts analyzed in qualitative method through IPA

Digital Inheritance Awareness	Examples of excerpts
users are not aware and have never thought of managing these digital assets through the digital inheritance concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The will itself is not really a practical here in Malaysia. But when the government is promoting digital economy, we should consider this concept of digital inheritance because this is something that will be interesting as PDPA said we can not reveal any personal data to anyone. But to be honest, I do not think about this before having this discussion (User 8)</i></li> <li>• <i>" I never thought of this digital inheritance, but I do aware about privacy and surveillance issue online." (User 6)</i></li> <li>• <i>" As a young adults I do aware on the online privacy issue. But I do not think about data management system after death. But considering that my social media accounts or banking account should be deleted after death, I think I am ready for that innovation exactly like I nominate my EPF to the first nominee and second nominee" (User 10)</i></li> <li>• <i>" I never heard about digital inheritance concept. Yes, we can have something like digital inheritance management system. It sends a notification to the next of kin, that this account still exists, do you want to access or delete this account. But I don't think the users are aware about this issue" (User 9)</i></li> </ul>

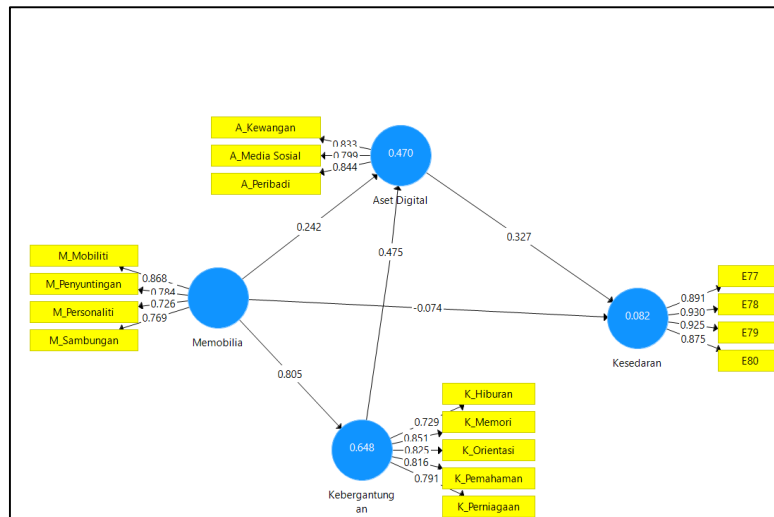


Figure 2. The structural model analyzed in quantitative method through PLS-SEM

### 3.1 Memobilia

The first concept refers to the term memobilia. The concept of memobilia is an idea that has been conceptualized by Reading (2009) to explain the role of the smartphone as a tool for digitizing data, information and human memory. There are three important dimensions that make up the concept of memobilia, namely 'me', 'mobility' 'meme' and 'connectivity'. The first dimension 'me' means the smartphone as a tool that represents the user's personality. The second dimension of 'mobility' explains that the process of digitization through smartphones happens everywhere. The third dimension 'meme' explains that this communication tool is capable of storing and editing digital data produced through the process of digitizing data, information and memory (Reading, 2009). Operationally, the concept of memobilia explains that a smartphone is a digital communication tool capable of representing the user to carry out human cognitive functions in the process of digitizing data, information and memory through digital communication activities (Reading, 2009). Digitization of data, information and memory by smartphones is happening all the time through mobile features. This communication tool is also able to save and edit the data resulting from this digitization process.

### 3.2 Mobile Phone Dependency

The second concept refers to the term smartphone dependency. This definition is done by referring to the micro element of IMD in the MSD Theory, introduced by Ball-Rokeach (1985) which focuses on individual users. Smartphone dependency in this context refers to the goal of using a smartphone at the individual user level which causes the user to rely on this communication tool to digitize data in order to manage daily life. There are three goals proposed by Ball-Rokeach (1985) for the issue of dependency at the individual user level which includes understanding, orientation and entertainment. In detail Ball-Rokeach (1985) suggested that the first goal of understanding refers to the purpose of individual users relying on smartphones is to obtain information to understand the surrounding situation. The second goal of orientation refers to the purpose of individual users relying on smartphones for the purpose of socializing and connecting with society. While the third goal refers to the purpose of individual users relying on smartphones is to entertain. There are two new findings represent the goals of individual users relying on smartphones; memory and business. Operationally, the dependence of the smartphone as a digital communication tool occurs due to its ability to meet

various goals for individual users to manage their lives more efficiently. This dependence does not mean that a user is addicted to smartphones because this dependence only occurs because individual users want to realize a goal in their daily lives (Kim, 2020).

### *3.2 Digital Assets*

The third concept refers to the term digital assets. The concept of digital assets is an idea that explains that data, information and memory in digital form is a form of asset belonging to a valuable individual user (Bassett, 2022). Cahn (2011) emphasizes that there are three categories of digital assets which include personal data digital assets, social media digital assets and financial digital assets. These three assets have different values based on privacy value, sensitivity value, sentimental value and monetary value. Cahn (2011) suggests that the first category of personal data digital assets refers to the form of personal data and information translated into digital form. According to him, the second category, which is social media digital assets, refers to online public spaces that have been registered as private spaces by individual users to realize social activities online. While the third category, which is financial digital assets, refers to digital currencies and digital platforms that are used for any matter involving finance and online business. Operationally, this concept of digital assets is a form of property in the context of data, information, memory and digital platforms owned by an individual user through the practice of online communication. Data, information, memory and digital platforms are very valuable due to having privacy value, sensitivity value, sentimental value and monetary value (Almotairi & Bataineh, 2020; Holt et al., 2021; Malgieri & Custers, 2018; Winegar & Sunstein, 2019).

### *3.3 Digital Inheritance*

The fourth concept refers to the term of digital inheritance awareness. The concept of digital inheritance awareness is an idea about preparing to manage digital assets to face death in the world of technology. Earlier, Berlee (2017) detailed the concept of digital inheritance based on the concept of a physical property will that has an original owner, transfer of rights and new ownership. These three bases represent the digital asset management process as a form of certification performed by an individual user regarding the transfer of his digital rights to a new owner. Accordingly, the concept of digital inheritance awareness refers to the knowledge of an individual user about the importance of transferring his digital rights to a new owner. Guided by the thinking of Berlee (2017), the first principle which is the original owner refers to the individual user who owns the digital asset. According to Vuckovic and Kanceljak (2019) the second basis refers to the transfer of digital rights including valuable data, information, memories and digital platforms. While the third basis refers to new ownership, which is the appointment of an individual or an organization for the purpose of managing the digital data. Thus, the awareness of digital inheritance is formed when the original owner has knowledge of the importance of transferring digital rights to new ownership in order to manage digital assets after death. Operationally, digital inheritance awareness is knowledge about the importance of the process of transferring digital rights by an individual user to an individual or organization appointed to manage data, information, memory and digital platforms that are deemed valuable as digital assets after the individual user dies (Berlee, 2017).

## **4. DISCUSSION**

DIM Model (Digital Inheritance Model) formed through this empirical study is seen to be very relevant to the field of communication and new media because it is in line with the transformation of the digital world around the world. The development of the model clearly confirms that the practice of digital communication continuously without stopping leads to the production of data, information,

memory and digital platforms that require details from the aspects of ownership and management. In fact, the research model that has been tested in two stages also brings new suggestions and knowledge to refine the implementation of the concept of data management through the concept of digital inheritance in practice. The research model also proves that Smartphone Dependency and Digital Assets are needed to create a relationship between Memobilia and Digital Inheritance Awareness.

The main importance for the formation of these guidelines is as a reference source targeted at the youth aimed at providing knowledge about memobilia and its influence as well as fostering awareness of digital inheritance among the youth. At the same time, these guidelines can also serve as a reference for academics, religious leaders, technology providers, media and communication practitioners and government agencies involved in drafting related policies, acts or laws. The following lists the importance of these guidelines in detail:

- i. This guideline serves as a reference for individual users, especially the youth group, in creating awareness about the importance of digital data management, because this issue involves their digital rights as an individual user.
- ii. This guideline serves as a source of further study for academics in related fields in expanding the concept of memobilia and its influence on the will of digital assets.
- iii. This guideline is a contribution to media and communication practitioners to plan communication strategies or advocacy campaigns to foster awareness of the importance of digital data management to face death in the 21st century.
- iv. This guideline urges communication technology providers and new media software designers to reconsider service policies that involve the importance of privacy, sensitivity, monetary and sentimental values found in digital content belonging to individual users.
- v. This guideline is a contribution to the government and other agencies involved in formulating initiatives in the aspects of data management and digital information of individual users in line with the 11th Malaysia Plan which focuses on digital infrastructure as one of the main areas of focus.
- vi. This guideline as a contribution to legal and policy practitioners in efforts to regulate issues related to data management and privacy security of users specifically after the user has died. Existing initiatives are only more focused on the protection of personal rights and the control and monitoring of online privacy while the user is still alive.
- vii. This guideline as a contribution to the perspective of Islam which is the official religion for Malaysians. This study is seen to be able to open space for religious people and the Islamic legal system in detailing the process of dividing digital assets from the aspect of Islamic religion. The speed of communication and information technology is also seen as a challenge to the practice of Islam.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Therefore, this study provides general awareness to individual users, especially the youth, about the role of memobilia and its influence on the awareness of digital inheritance. Communication technologies such as smart phones are not only challenging the active involvement of users, but their sophistication also leads to questions about the management of digital assets that will arise after an individual user dies. This research has helped outline new findings to the field of media and digital communication in Malaysia. Looking at the importance of communication technology and new media in realizing digital transformation in Malaysia, issues involving the management of digital data belonging to individual users deserve attention.

The following is a list of this guideline for digital assets planning after death and contributions that can be put into practice by stakeholders such as the government, policy practitioners, media and communication practitioners, especially in Malaysia:

- i. A guideline has been successfully formed based on the study model. These guidelines are a form of very practical contribution as a specific reference for the youth in understanding the concept of memobilia and its influence as well as fostering awareness of the importance of digital inheritance.
- ii. The results of this guideline and model can be served as a guide to other parties such as academics, government, policy practitioners, religious people, media and communication practitioners in designing initiatives from the aspect of data management and digital information for individual users. This initiative is important because it is seen in tandem with the implementation of Digital Malaysia, the 11th Malaysia Plan and the Digital Economy Blueprint which also focuses on digital infrastructure as one of the main focus areas.

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