



**EFFECTS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IDENTIFICATIONS IN THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USE MOTIVATIONS AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL ADAPTATION OF CHINESE STUDENTS IN
MALAYSIA**

By

ZHAO WENWEN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

July 2024

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Social media has been deeply integrated into the lives of international students, serving as a powerful tool for their adaptation in the host country. However, the use of social media also has negative effects, particularly on psychological well-being. As the world becomes increasingly globalized and communication and transportation systems rapidly develop, the number of international students is growing remarkably. Consequently, the influence of social media on the psychological adaptation of international students has become a matter of concern. However, the relationship between social media use and psychological adaptation remains inconclusive. Moreover, there is a scarcity of studies investigating the influence of social media use motivations on the psychological adaptation of international students. Additionally, previous research has evidenced that the relationship is indirect, but limited studies have identified psychological mechanisms such as cultural identity identification. Chinese students have become the largest group of international students in Malaysia. Yet, there is a dearth of research examining social

media use motivations, cultural identity identification, and psychological adaptation of this group in Malaysia. Therefore, based on the uses and gratifications theory and acculturation theory, the general objective of this study is to identify the mediating effect of cultural identity identification in the relationship between social media use motivations (information seeking motivations, social motivations, entertainment motivations, and acculturation motivations) and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia. An online survey was conducted using a multi-stage sampling method, and data were collected from Chinese international students at eight universities in Malaysia. A total of 438 self-administered questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software and AMOS software. The results demonstrated that four types of social media use motivations can help Chinese international students improve their psychological adaptation in

Malaysia. Moreover, acculturation motivations contributed the most. Likewise, two types of cultural identity identification also benefited psychological adaptation, with Malaysian cultural identity identification having a stronger contribution. Furthermore, this study reported an indirect mechanism whereby information seeking motivations and social motivations influenced psychological adaptation through Malaysian and Chinese cultural identity identification. Malaysian cultural identity identification can also explain how acculturation motivations influence psychological adaptation. Thus, cultural identity identification is an important mechanism when examining the relationship between social media use motivations and psychological adaptation. In view of the theoretical contribution, this study demonstrates the mediating role of cultural identity identification in the relationship between social media use motivations and psychological adaptation of Chinese

students in Malaysia based on uses and gratifications theory and acculturation theory framework. The findings suggested that Chinese students can use social media purposefully to obtain a better psychological adaptation in Malaysia. Relevant departments and educators in Malaysia should appreciate the role of social media in helping international students have a better experience and enhance Malaysia's competitiveness in the international education market.

Keywords: Cultural Identity Identification, International Students, Psychological Adaptation, Social Media, Social Media Use Motivations

SDG: GOAL 4: Good Health and Well-being

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KESAN PENGENALAN IDENTITI BUDAYA DALAM HUBUNGAN
ANTARA MOTIVASI PENGGUNAAN MEDIA SOSIAL DAN
PENYESUAIAN PSIKOLOGI PELAJAR CINA DI MALAYSIA**

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Media sosial telah disepadukan secara mendalam ke dalam kehidupan pelajar antarabangsa, berfungsi sebagai alat yang berkuasa untuk penyesuaian mereka di negara tuan rumah. Namun begitu, penggunaan media sosial turut mempunyai kesan negatif khususnya terhadap kesejahteraan psikologi. Apabila dunia menjadi semakin global dan sistem komunikasi dan pengangkutan berkembang pesat, bilangan pelajar antarabangsa semakin meningkat dengan ketara. Akibatnya, pengaruh media sosial terhadap penyesuaian psikologi pelajar antarabangsa telah menjadi satu perkara yang membimbangkan. Walau bagaimanapun, hubungan antara penggunaan media sosial dan penyesuaian psikologi masih tidak dapat disimpulkan. Selain itu, terdapat kekurangan kajian yang mengkaji pengaruh motivasi penggunaan media sosial terhadap penyesuaian psikologi pelajar antarabangsa. Selain itu, kajian terdahulu telah membuktikan bahawa hubungan itu adalah tidak langsung, tetapi terdapat kajian yang terhad yang mengenal pasti mekanisme psikologi seperti pengenalan identiti budaya. Pelajar Cina telah menjadi kumpulan terbesar pelajar antarabangsa

di Malaysia. Namun, terdapat kekurangan kajian yang mengkaji motivasi penggunaan media sosial, pengenalan identiti budaya, dan penyesuaian psikologi kumpulan ini di Malaysia. Oleh itu, berdasarkan teori kegunaan dan kepuasan dan teori pembudayaan, objektif umum kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti kesan pengantara pengenalanpastian identiti budaya dalam hubungan antara motivasi penggunaan media sosial (motivasi mencari maklumat, motivasi sosial, motivasi hiburan, dan pembudayaan. motivasi) dan penyesuaian psikologi pelajar Cina di Malaysia. Tinjauan dalam talian telah dijalankan menggunakan kaedah persampelan pelbagai peringkat, dan data dikumpulkan daripada pelajar antarabangsa Cina dari lapan universiti di Malaysia. Sebanyak 438 soal selidik yang ditadbir sendiri telah dianalisis menggunakan perisian Statistical Package for the Social Sciences dan perisian AMOS. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa empat jenis motivasi penggunaan media sosial boleh membantu pelajar antarabangsa Cina meningkatkan penyesuaian psikologi mereka di Malaysia. Selain itu, motivasi pembudayaan

merupakan penyumbang paling banyak. Di samping itu, dua jenis pengenalan identiti budaya juga memberi manfaat kepada penyesuaian psikologi, dengan pengenalan identiti budaya Malaysia mempunyai sumbangan yang lebih kuat. Tambahan pula, kajian ini menunjukkan terdapatnya mekanisme tidak langsung di mana motivasi mencari maklumat dan motivasi sosial mempengaruhi penyesuaian psikologi melalui pengenalan identiti budaya Malaysia dan Cina. Pengenalpastian identiti budaya Malaysia juga boleh menjelaskan bagaimana motivasi akulturasi mempengaruhi penyesuaian psikologi. Oleh itu, pengenalan identiti budaya merupakan mekanisme penting apabila mengkaji hubungan antara motivasi penggunaan media sosial dan penyesuaian psikologi. Berdasarkan kepada

sumbangan teori, kajian ini menunjukkan peranan pengantara pengenalpastian identiti budaya dalam hubungan antara motivasi penggunaan media sosial dan penyesuaian psikologi pelajar Cina di Malaysia berdasarkan teori kegunaan dan kepuasan dan kerangka teori akulturasi. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar Cina boleh menggunakan media sosial dengan tujuan untuk mendapatkan penyesuaian psikologi yang lebih baik di Malaysia. Jabatan dan pendidik yang berkaitan di Malaysia harus menghargai peranan media sosial dalam membantu pelajar antarabangsa mendapat pengalaman yang lebih baik dan meningkatkan daya saing Malaysia dalam pasaran pendidikan antarabangsa.

Kata Kunci: Pengenalpastian Identiti Budaya, Pelajar Antarabangsa, Adaptasi Psikologi, Media Sosial, Motivasi Penggunaan Media Sosial

SDG: MATLAMAT 4: Kesihatan dan Kesejahteraan yang Baik

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGFI	Adjusted Goodness ofFit Index
AM	Acculturation Motivations
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BBS	Bulletin Board System
CCI	Chinese Cultural Identity Identification
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fitting Index
C.R.	Critical Ratio
CR	Composite Reliability
EA	English Ability
EM	Entertainment Motivations
EMGS	Education Malaysia Global Services
GFI	Goodness ofFit Index
H	Hypothesis
HTMT	Heterotrait–Monotrait
ISM	Information Seeking Motivations
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
M	Mean
MCI	Malaysian Cultural Identity Identification
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MSRI	Maritime Silk Road Initiative
NFI	Normalized Fitting Index
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PNFI	Parsimony Normed Fit Index

PA	Psychological Adaptation
QS	Quacquarelli Symonds
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SD	Standard Deviation
SM	Social Motivations
SNS	Social Networking Sites
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SRMR	Standardized Root Mean Square Residual
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
TOL	Tolerance
U&G	Uses and Gratifications
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VIF	Variance Inflated Factor
WTO	World Trade Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter mainly analyzes the research background, addressing the problem statement, research questions, objectives, significance, scope of the research, and definitions of key terms. It begins by clearly presenting the research background, followed by an emphasis on the problem statement for the current study. Subsequently, research questions and research objectives are formulated. The significance of the research is discussed from four aspects: theory, method, practice, and policy. The scope of the study is also discussed. Furthermore, a brief explanation of the main concepts is provided to facilitate further understanding of the present study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary.

1.2 Background of the Study

Nowadays, social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, have become indispensable and play an essential role in people's daily lives (Mican et al., 2020). There are about 4.80 billion social media users worldwide in 2023, accounting for 59.9 percent of the world's population (We Are Social, 2023a). Significantly affected by COVID-19 in recent years, the number of social media users has increased rapidly (Cauberghe et al., 2021). For example, Facebook reported a 70% increase in

Times spent on the platform and more than 50% increase in messages sent since the pandemic's start (Schultz, 2020). Likewise, social media has also become critical in

the lives of international students (Larnyo et al., 2020). For instance, using social media to stay in touch with family, friends, and others is an integral part of daily life for many international students (Zheng & Ishii, 2023).

Notably, with the escalating speed, intensity, frequency, and number of human mobility increases, the international student population is experiencing rapid growth (Yang et al., 2022). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the number of international students studying globally in 2020 exceeded 6.3 million, significantly increasing from 2.1 million in 2000 (UNESCO, 2022) (see Figure 1. 1). By 2030, the number of students studying in higher education institutions abroad is expected to reach 6.9 million (International Consultants for Education and Fairs, 2019).

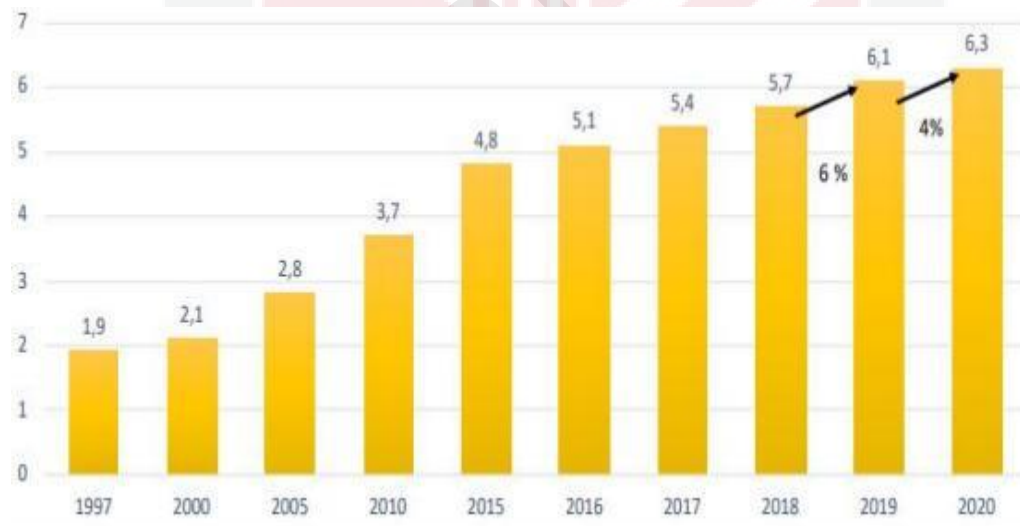


Figure 1.1 : The Number of International Students Worldwide from 1997 to 2020
(Source : UNESCO, 2022)

As representatives of a growing group of the cross-cultural mobile community, international students temporarily leave their countries of origin to pursue higher

academic pursuits in other countries (Billedo et al., 2019). Studying abroad can broaden international students' perspectives, enhance their knowledge and skills, and improve career prospects (Astarita & Patience, 2020). Nonetheless, international students moving to an unfamiliar cultural environment experience stress and challenges as they simultaneously deal with two cultures (Xie & Chao, 2022). This situation seriously affects their psychological adaptation, which refers to psychological well-being or individuals' psychological condition in a foreign country, including positive emotions (e.g., life satisfaction) and negative emotions (e.g., homesickness).

Furthermore, international students are a significant financial source for the education sector (Pekerti et al., 2020). For example, international students contributed RM7.2 billion to Malaysia's revenue, including tuition fees, living expenses, and other services (Malay Mail, 2019). In addition, the different cultures that international students bring help to promote cultural diversity in universities (Zhai & Razali, 2022). At the same time, the number of international students is an essential indicator of the competitiveness of higher education in the international education market (Wit, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to help international students have a good psychological adaptation (Pang & Wang, 2020).

Social media plays a key role in promoting good psychological adaptation of international students (Pang & Wang, 2020). For instance, by serving as a channel for connecting with their families, friends, and the local community, social media can effectively diminish homesickness, mitigate stress, and facilitate the formation of social support networks (Hofhuis et al., 2019). However, the side effects of social

media use, such as anxiety and depression, have been demonstrated (Wu, 2023). Furthermore, one of the most concerning issues in social media research is its influence on users' mental health (Li & Peng, 2019). Therefore, considering the increasing popularity of social media in international students' daily lives and the substantial increase in the number of international students, it is crucial to acknowledge social media use and its influence on their psychological adaptation.

In addition, research should also focus on how social media influences psychological adaptation (Pang & Wang, 2020). An essential issue related to social media and psychological adaptation is cultural identity identification. International students may utilize social media to connect with their ethnic cultural community and affirm their original cultural identity identification even in a new cultural context (Omori & Schwartz, 2022; Xie & Chao, 2022). Besides, social media provide a platform for international students to get in touch with the host culture and learn about its values, norms, practices, and language (Lai et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2018).

Additionally, cultural identity identification significantly influences psychological adaptation (Schotte et al., 2018). Limited research has found that social media may play a significant role in shaping cultural identity identification, subsequently influencing psychological outcomes (Du & Lin, 2019; Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2022). Understanding the mediating role of cultural identity identification is crucial as it can provide valuable insights into how social media influences the psychological adaptation of international students. By examining this mediating process, researchers can develop targeted interventions and support systems that effectively

address the unique needs of international students, promoting their overall well-being and successful adaptation in the host country.

As the world's largest source of international students, China sent 6.56 million students from 1978 to the end of 2019 (China Daily, 2020). As an emerging education center in Asia, Malaysia has also become a popular choice for Chinese students (Zhai & Razali, 2022). As reported by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Malaysia, the year 2021 saw 28,593 Chinese students pursuing higher education in Malaysian institutions, constituting 29.4% of the total international student body in the country (MoHE, 2021). Chinese students have become Malaysia's most prominent international student group (MoHE, 2021).

Chinese students constitute a substantial proportion of the international student population, and this particular generation is born as "digital natives" (Wu, 2023).

However, most studies on the adaptation of Chinese international students have been conducted in Western countries, and few studies have concentrated in Malaysia. Moreover, limited research has focused on the interplay relationship between social media, cultural identity identification, and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia. Therefore, it is of great significance for this study to focus on this issue.

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

International students entering into a new environment are accompanied by various challenges, such as homesickness, language barriers, unfamiliar cultural

environments, lack of social support, and academic pressures (Hua et al., 2018; Kee et al., 2022), which may negative influence their psychological adaptation in the host country (Al-Jaberi et al., 2020). Poor psychological adaptation may lead to severe consequences, such as dropping out of their courses (Pusztai et al., 2019). The high dropout rate of international students has also become a significant problem for international education development (Pusztai et al., 2019).

In an unfamiliar environment, international students are more likely to use social media to connect with friends and family, build new social networks, obtain necessary information, learn about the host culture, and thus better adapt to the host country (Çömlekçi, 2020). Consequently, international students use social media more actively (Wen, 2020). Social media has become an indispensable media consumption choice for international students and profoundly influences their experience in a new environment (Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the negative consequences of social media use on international students have been documented. Ma and Chen (2019) discovered that social media facilitated online communication while reducing face-to-face communication, which may cause obstacles to their adaptation. This opinion aligns with Hassan's (2019) assertion that social media's prevalence diminishes real-world human connection, fostering social isolation. Likewise, intensive use of Facebook led to information overload, deterioration of social skills, and disconnection from previous social circles among students (McEwan, 2011).

Additionally, international students' increasing use of social media might prompt them to reject rather than integrate into the host culture (Croucher & Rahmani, 2015; Wu, 2023). Wu (2023) further concluded that excessive use of social media could cause negative effects such as cyberbullying, anxiety, and depression. Social media use also leads to distractions, sleep disruptions, and peer pressure among international students (Manu et al., 2023). Besides, the use of social media can result in information overload and hinder international students' ability to focus on their studies (Xie & Chao, 2022).

Communication with family and friends can help international students get social support and relieve stress (Xie & Chao, 2022). However, photos, posts, and other information from family and friends on social media might make students feel homesick, further increasing their psychological alienation (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Indeed, numerous risk factors for psychological well-being are linked to the utilization of social media. Furthermore, international students play a significant role in host countries' economic and cultural development (Zhai & Razali, 2022). Therefore, ensuring international students' successful psychological adaptation is paramount (Li & Ma, 2018). Thus, it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the influences of social media use on international students' psychological adaptation. However, a scarcity of studies exists on the issue (Hofhuis et al., 2019; Mitra & Evansluong, 2019; Pang & Wang, 2020).

Notably, scholars have different conclusions about whether social media benefits or harms psychological adaptation. Social media is not inherently positive or negative; rather, it depends on how users use it (Gao et al., 2023). Therefore, the pressing issue

lies in addressing how to effectively utilize social media and maximize its positive influence on the psychological adaptation of international students. Previous research has highlighted that the relationship between social media and psychological outcomes is influenced by use motivations (Pang, 2018a; Yu et al., 2019). Different motivations expose users to different media content. Valkenburg et al. (2022) suggested that future research on social media and psychological outcomes should focus on content-based social media use. However, research in this area remains limited (Ma & Chen, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to give more attention to understanding the motivations behind the use of social media and its influence on the psychological adaptation of international students (Li & Ma, 2018).

Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory is a critical theory to study the motivations or reasons behind users' media use. However, its application to studying international students' social media practices within a cross-cultural context remains limited (Ma & Chen, 2019). Therefore, to better understand the influence of social media on psychological adaptation and to provide valuable insights into the actual use of social media by international students, the primary purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the social media use motivations and psychological adaptation based on U&G theory.

Besides, scholars considered that the existence of mediators between social media use and psychological adaptation leads to inconsistent results (Hsu & Chen, 2020; Pang, 2018a). However, few studies examine how social media influences adaptation (Hsu & Chen, 2020; Pang & Wang, 2020). While some previous studies have suggested potential mechanisms like social support (Cachia & Maya Jariego, 2018;

Pang, 2018a) and uncertainty (Hsu & Chen, 2020), the exploration of significant psychological mechanisms, such as identity remains relatively understudied (Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2022). Besides, research on the relationship between social media use motivations, cultural identity identification, and psychological outcomes of international students is limited (Du & Lin, 2019).

Individuals should strive to solve two problems in the cross-cultural context: one is to maintain their identification with the ethnic culture (ethnic cultural identity identification), and the other is to identify with the host culture (host cultural identity identification) (Du & Lin, 2019). These considerations align with acculturation theory. Acculturation mainly refers to the changes experienced by individuals after exposure to two or more different cultures (Sam & Berry, 2016), such as changes in language, food consumption, and cultural identity identification (Yu et al., 2019).

Moreover, cultural identity identification is a critical issue in the cross-cultural adaptation process and significantly influences adaptation outcomes, such as psychological adaptation (Pekerti et al., 2020). However, research on the relationship between cultural identity identification and psychological adaptation has produced inconsistent findings (Balidemaj & Small, 2018). Furthermore, most previous studies have primarily focused on long-term immigrant experiences, with limited attention given to international students (Hofhuis et al., 2019; Pang & Wang, 2020).

Social media has been found to shape users' cultural identity identification by creating a cultural environment (Radwan, 2022). However, the existing research on the relationship between social media use and cultural identity identification is

insufficient (Dumitrica, 2019; Xu, 2022), particularly within the cross-cultural context. Additionally, it is unclear what kind of social media use behaviors promote cultural identity formation (Li & Tsai, 2015). Therefore, another aim of this study is to investigate whether host and ethnic cultural identity identification mediate the relationship between social media use motivations and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia. By exploring this mediation, this study attempts to uncover the underlying mechanisms by which social media influences psychological adaptation.

MoHE has been working to promote Malaysia as a center of excellence in education in Southeast Asia (Othman et al., 2020). Despite the rapid growth of international education, Malaysia has witnessed a decline in the number of international students in recent years. In 2020, the number of international students in Malaysia decreased by 28% compared to 2016 (UNESCO, 2022). A substantial reason for the issue may be that international students face significant challenges in adapting to the Malaysian cultural, academic, and social environment (Rathakrishnan et al., 2021). Language barriers, differences in teaching methodologies, homesickness, adapting to unfamiliar cultural environment in the host country, and difficulties in forming social connections can all contribute to a negative study abroad experience (Kee et al., 2022). These challenges can lead to dropout rates, early returns, or poor academic performance, which in turn can affect the reputation of Malaysian institutions and discourage potential students.

Thus, ensuring international students' successful adaptation is critical to the development of international education (Shafaei & Razak, 2018). Therefore,

improving the adaptation of international students has become an ongoing topic in the development of Malaysian higher education. However, research on the adaptation of international students in Malaysia is still in its early stages (GulRaihan & Sandaran, 2017). Additionally, China is the largest source of international students (Statista, 2022). Accordingly, the social media use and adaptation of this group have attracted the attention of some scholars (Hsu & Chen, 2020; Yang, 2018). However, studies have mainly been conducted in the Western environment (Ahrari et al., 2019).

All these gaps in the literature highlight the need to shift the research focus toward Chinese students in Malaysia, a significant yet often overlooked group. This study is of great significance to explore their social media use motivations, cultural identity identification, and psychological adaptation through an online survey. Specifically, this study combines the U&G theory and acculturation theory to identify whether social media use motivations can help Chinese students improve their psychological adaptation by enhancing Malaysian and Chinese cultural identity identification.

1.4 Research Questions

The main issue studied in this research is to examine the mediating role of cultural identity identification in the relationship between social media use motivations and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia. The following research questions can be addressed based on the discussions concerning the problem of the study.

- 1) What is the social media use motivations among Chinese students in Malaysia?
- 2) What is the cultural identity identification of Chinese students in Malaysia?
- 3) What is the level of psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia?
- 4) What is the relationship between social media use motivations and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia?
- 5) What is the relationship between cultural identity identification and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia?
- 6) What is the relationship between social media use motivations and cultural identity identification of Chinese students in Malaysia?
- 7) What is the mediating effect of cultural identity identification in the relationship between social media use motivations and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia?

1.5 Research Objectives

1.5.1 General Objective

The general objective is to identify the mediating effect of cultural identity identification in the relationship between social media use motivations and psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia.

1.5.2 Specific Objectives

- 1) To determine the social media use motivations among Chinese students in Malaysia.
- 2) To investigate Chinese students ' cultural identity identification in Malaysia.

- 3) To examine the level of psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia.
- 4) To identify the relationship between social media use motivations and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia.
- 5) To identify the relationship between cultural identity identification and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia.
- 6) To identify the relationship between social media use motivations and cultural identity identification of Chinese students in Malaysia.
- 7) To examine the mediating effect of cultural identity identification in the relationship between social media use motivations and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia.

1.6 Significance of the Study

With the rapid development of social media and international education worldwide, how to use social media to improve the psychological adaptation of international students remains a critical issue for researchers, students, educators, and policymakers. The findings of this study could contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics between social media use, cultural identity identification, and psychological adaptation among Chinese students studying in Malaysia. The study also contributes to the body of knowledge on social media and the psychological adaptation of international students in Malaysia, provides suggestions for Chinese students to use social media better to adapt to Malaysia, and provides some insights for Malaysian higher education practitioners and policymakers. The contributions are elaborated from four aspects: theory, methodology, practice, and policy.

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

Firstly, this study is pioneering in its combination of the U&G theory and acculturation theory, which addresses the call made by Du and Lin (2019) to integrate social media use, cultural identity identification, and psychological adaptation into the same context. Moreover, this study helps to establish the link between U&G theory and cross-cultural research. The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of the interrelationship between social media use motivations, cultural identity identification, and psychological adaptation of international students. The more specific relationships identified in this study may help to understand the mechanisms underlying the association between social media use and psychological adaptation. Furthermore, the study uses these theories to the context of Chinese students in Malaysia, which highlights the unique challenges and experiences of international students in a non-Western setting, thereby expanding the geographical and cultural applicability of these theories. This contextual innovation is crucial for developing a more global understanding of social media's role in cross-cultural adaptation.

Secondly, the study adopts the U&G theory to identify the motivations and influences of social media use among Chinese students studying in Malaysia, which enriches the insufficient research on the motivations of international students using social media and extends U&G research to a broader cultural environment. Furthermore, this study contributes to understanding the role of social media in the psychological adaptation of international students and helps clarify the ongoing debate in the literature. One of the critical questions in social media research is its

influence on users' mental health (Li & Peng, 2019). This research utilizes data from international student populations to contribute to the existing knowledge.

While the U&G theory primarily centers on how individuals utilize media, it gives comparatively less consideration to the consequences of media consumption and the underlying mechanisms by which these effects occur. The findings of this study may contribute to extending the theory. By adopting this theoretical framework, the research not only sheds light on the specific motivations that drive international students' social media engagement but also explores the implications of these motivations for their psychological adaptation and cultural identity identification.

Furthermore, a key application of the U&G theory in this study is its ability to identify and explain the diverse needs that international students fulfill through social media use. In addition to the frequently studied motivations in the previous research, namely information seeking, social, and entertainment motivations, this study adds acculturation motivations (e.g., learning about the knowledge of the host culture) based on the specific situations of international students in the process of cross-cultural adaptation, which extends this theory to some extent.

Thirdly, acculturation theory suggests that contact between different cultures influences an individual's cultural values. This study focuses on the role of social media in this process, and the research conclusions may help extend the theory in the era of social media. In line with the call made by Li and Tsai (2015), social media is acknowledged as a critical force shaping users' cultural identity identification, which should be included as an essential factor in the acculturation theory.

Moreover, acculturation theory has been widely applied and validated in immigrant groups. This study extends the theory in a new context and enriches the research results among international students group. The findings of this study may offer a valuable contribution to the current literature on the relationship between social media use motivations and cultural identity identification from the perspective of international students in a cross-cultural context.

1.6.2 Methodological Significance

First, a quantitative research method was adopted to measure the influence of different social media use motivations on the psychological adaptation and cultural identity identification of Chinese students in Malaysia. By employing a large sample size of 428 valid questionnaires, the study ensures a high level of reliability and generalizability of the findings. The use of structural equation modeling (SEM) through AMOS software allows for a sophisticated analysis of the relationships between variables, providing a robust and comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms.

The methodological rigor demonstrated in this study, through the use of advanced statistical techniques and comprehensive data analysis, significantly contributes to the existing literature. It provides a reliable and replicable framework for examining the complex interplay between social media use motivations, cultural identity identification, and psychological adaptation among international students. The methodological rigor demonstrated in this study, through the use of advanced statistical techniques and comprehensive data analysis, significantly contributes to the knowledge.

Second, this study has enriched the research on Chinese students' social media use and psychological adaptation in Asian countries. To the present understanding, there are limited studies on the adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia. One is a theoretical article based on literature analysis (Emang et al., 2015), and one is a qualitative study on the adaptation pressure experienced by this group (Yakin & Totu, 2018). Specifically, Yakin and Totu (2018) used focus groups and in-depth interviews to analyze the stress experienced by Chinese students at Universiti Malaysia Sabah and the effective ways to cope with it. Three additional studies were conducted by Shi and his colleagues. Shi et al. (2019) conducted a survey to analyze the factors affecting Chinese students' psychological and social adaptation at a Malaysian university.

Similarly, based on a survey and in-depth interview, Shi et al. (2020) analyzed the level of psychological and social adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia and the existing cross-cultural barriers. In the same year, Shi and Ek-iem (2020) conducted in-depth and focus group interviews to summarize why Malaysia attracts Chinese students. Additionally, this study investigated the adaptation of Chinese students at a college through a survey questionnaire, analyzing the factors that influence their academic and social achievements.

Third, this study contributes to the existing literature on the sampling method. Due to the large number and wide distribution of international students, the non-probability sampling method of selecting samples from a particular university is usually adopted in the relevant research (e.g., Li & Peng, 2019; Nadeem et al., 2020; Shi & Ek-iem, 2020). This study applied a multi-stage sampling method, combining simple random

sampling and purposeful sampling methods. Data were collected from four public and four private universities in Malaysia, which can enrich the sample and improve the credibility of the results (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Fourth, this study comprehensively measured psychological adaptation and social media use. One of the reasons for the mixed conclusions about the relationship between social media use and psychological adaptation is that the two variables are measured differently. On the one hand, scholars have no unified measurement methods for psychological adaptation. A literature review found that of 76 studies related to psychological adaptation, 41 used only negative indicators, 17 used only positive indicators, and 18 used both positive and negative indicators (Bender et al., 2019). According to suggestions by Tonsing (2013), the scale adopted in this study includes positive and negative indicators, which can better reflect respondents' psychological adaptation. Furthermore, it once again verifies the reliability and validity of the measurement in a new environment.

Likewise, there are variations in the measurement of social media use (Pang & Wang, 2020). Unlike most studies that focus on quantitative behaviors such as time spent and frequency of use (e.g., Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2022; Poyrazli & Devonish, 2020), this study focuses on the motivations for using social media, which is in line with scholars' suggestions (Bano et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2023). This technique can avoid the effect caused by recall bias when studying the influence of social media use and provide more holistic and detailed findings (Johannes et al., 2021). Previous research has suggested that time spent on social media does not give enough information when predicting well-being (Granic et al., 2020).

1.6.3 Practical Significance

From a practical angle, the importance of this research can be explained from both personal and national aspects. From a personal perspective, the study can guide Chinese students to use social media more purposefully to adapt well to Malaysia. By examining social media use motivations, the research provides insights into strategies that can be employed to maximize the positive influences and mitigate the negative consequences of social media use on psychological outcomes. This understanding is crucial in an era where social media has become integral to international students' lives. The findings may have broader implications for other international student groups facing similar challenges adapting to a new environment. Given the substantial number of international students studying abroad (Chen & Zhou, 2019), more research is necessary.

From another point, both the host and home countries benefit from the successful adaptation of international students. On the one hand, the main drivers of the new market players in the internationalization of higher education are the financial and cultural advantages that international students bring to the host countries (Yu et al., 2019). Understanding Chinese international students' social media preferences and use behaviors is of great value to Malaysian universities and institutions seeking to engage with and support this student population. Besides, international students can enrich the campus culture and encourage the diversification of higher education institutions in the host country (Shi & Ek-iem, 2020). The research can help relevant departments in Malaysia to use social media better to improve the adaptation of international students, thereby contributing to the development of Malaysia's economy, culture, and education.

On the other hand, although the cross-cultural adaptation process is completed in the host countries, international students' successful adaptation also benefits their home countries. For example, Chinese students in Malaysia can improve their English ability, enhance their academic qualifications, and obtain valuable cross-cultural experience, which all provide positive contributions after returning to China. In addition, with the implementation of China's "One Belt, One Road" strategy, "Maritime Silk Road" strategy, and "ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership," the exchanges between China and Malaysia are increasing (Shi & Ek-iem, 2020). Chinese students' successful adaptation can attract more students to study in Malaysia, which will benefit the future cultural, educational, and economic exchanges and cooperation between the two countries.

Furthermore, the findings offer valuable guidance for social media platform designers and managers. By identifying the motivations that positively influence psychological adaptation, the study suggests ways to enhance these features and services, potentially leading to the development of more supportive social media environments for international students.

1.6.4 Policy Significance

In order to facilitate the progress of international education, it is crucial to prioritize the needs and well-being of international students, ensuring their safe growth. Additionally, it is essential to incorporate their perspectives and input when developing and implementing policies (Shafaei & Razak, 2016). The benefits to the host country from international students encourage various countries to devise strategies for attracting international students (Sin et al., 2021).

This study can provide policymakers and relevant department administrators with valuable insights into the influences of social media use on the cultural identity identification and the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Malaysia. The conclusions of this study could provide references for the Malaysian government and educational institutions when introducing relevant policies to promote the psychological adaptation of international students to help Malaysia achieve the goal of attracting 250,000 international students by 2025 and becoming the world's leading education system (MoHE, 2015). For instance, policymakers can consider the needs of Chinese international students in terms of social media use, cultural identity identification, and psychological adaptation. They can develop guidelines for positive social media use, provide resources for psychological adaptation support, and facilitate intercultural interaction through digital platforms.

1.7 Scope of the Research

Firstly, this study's subjects are Chinese students studying in Malaysia. According to Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS), most international students choose public and private universities to upgrade their degrees (EMGS, 2021). Therefore, this study focuses on Chinese students studying in public and private universities in Malaysia. Four public and four private universities were selected as the research sites. Besides, scholars suggest that respondents must be in the host country for at least six months when studying cross-cultural adaptation (Chan et al., 2021; Manu et al., 2023). In a nutshell, the respondents in this study were Chinese students currently studying in Malaysian public and private universities and have resided in Malaysia for more than six months. Additionally, they must be social media users.

Secondly, this study specifically examines the correlation between social media use motivations and psychological adaptation among Chinese students in Malaysia. On the one hand, drawing from the U&G theory and existing literature, the study emphasized four motivations: information seeking, social, entertainment, and acculturation. In addition, Social Media Use Patterns and use intensity were also surveyed to know more about the social media use behaviors of Chinese students in Malaysia. On the other hand, cross-cultural adaptation is divided into psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. Since scholars have a unified understanding of the relationship between social media use motivations and sociocultural adaptation, this study primarily focused on psychological adaptation. By examining whether social media use motivations influence psychological adaptation, this research aims to provide insights into the utilization of social media and its influence on Chinese students' psychological adaptation in Malaysia.

Thirdly, this study also aims to identify the mediating role of cultural identity identification in the relationship between social media use motivations and psychological adaptation. According to acculturation theory, international students may develop two types of cultural identity identification in the cross-cultural process. While maintaining the cultural identity identification of the motherland (ethnic cultural identity identification), contacts and exchanges in a foreign environment may generate a new identification with the host culture (host cultural identity identification) (Verkuyten et al., 2019).

It is natural to consider cultural identity identification from the perspective of ethnic and host countries (Fang & Huang, 2020). Thus, this study focused on the mediating

role of host and ethnic cultural identity identification between social media use motivations and psychological adaptation. In this study, host cultural identity identification and ethnic cultural identity identification refer to Malaysian cultural identity identification and Chinese cultural identity identification, respectively.

Besides, this study employed a quantitative research method by utilizing an online questionnaire for data collection. Besides, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select the respondents for this study. Subsequently, data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS software and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). SEM was performed with AMOS software.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

1.8.1 Social Media

Social media is defined differently across various fields and disciplines (Devan Rosen, 2022). Nau et al. (2022) offered a comprehensive definition: “Social media are web-based and mobile services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share, and engage with content (user- or bot-generated)” (p. 15). According to Burgess et al. (2018), social media is a tool that allows for content sharing, public communication, and interpersonal communication. In most studies, social media and SNS are used interchangeably (Course-Choi & Hammond, 2021).

1.8.2 Social Media Use

Social media use refers to the activities and behaviors of individuals or groups on social media platforms. However, the use of social media is a comprehensive concept, and different studies have different explanations. Some studies believe this concept is more related to objective use behaviors, which focus on use patterns, such as the amount of time and use frequency (Pang, 2018b; Scharkow, 2016). Some scholars have suggested exploring the psychological aspects of social media use (Sigerson & Cheng, 2018), such as social media use intensity (Cao et al., 2023). Besides, some research combines social media use with motivations based on U&G theory (Chang & Hsu, 2016; Pang, 2018a).

The use patterns and use intensity can comprehensively reflect people's social media use habits (Zhang et al., 2021). According to Guo et al. (2014), use patterns and use intensity should be combined to analyze users' dependence on social media. Thus, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese students' social media use in Malaysia, the study not only focused on the social media use motivations but also investigated respondents' social media use patterns and use intensity.

1.8.2.1 Social Media Use Patterns

In this study, social media use patterns refer to objective or quantitative use behaviors, such as the most frequently used social media, frequency of checking social media accounts daily, time spent on social media daily, duration of using social media, number of active social media accounts, and number of friends on social media.

1.8.2.2 Social Media Use Intensity

In the current research, social media use intensity refers to users' emotional attachment to social media and the extent to which social media are integrated into their daily activities (Cunningham et al., 2021). In other words, social media use intensity measures how important social media is to users (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014). In some studies, use intensity is referred to as use engagement (Ni et al., 2020).

1.8.2.3 Social Media Use Motivations

Based on the U&G theory, individuals use media for different motivations influenced by social or psychological conditions (Griffin, 2012). Motivation refers to the inner forces that drive people to use social media to fulfill their desires or needs (Gao et al., 2023). With the increasing number of international students, scholars have applied this theory to analyze the social media use motivations in cross-cultural environments. International students primarily use social media for three motivations: information seeking, social, and entertainment (Manu et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2019).

Additionally, previous studies have shown that acculturation motivations (e.g., gaining knowledge about the host culture) should also be considered in the cross-cultural environment (Wang & Quan, 2013; Yang, 2018). When exposed to unfamiliar cultures, individuals tend to search for relevant cultural knowledge on social media to solve their confusion (Li & Peng, 2019). Therefore, this study identifies four use motivations: information seeking motivations, social motivations,

entertainment motivations, and acculturation motivations. The following are the definitions of the four motivations.

Information seeking motivations refer to individuals who use social media to seek or obtain necessary information (Hu et al., 2017). International students rely on various information to adapt to their new environment, mainly including daily life information and academic information (Chang et al., 2021). Social media is a valuable resource that offers a wide range of essential information to meet their need, including financial guidance, health resources, academic support, local events, and up-to-date news worldwide (Sin & Kim, 2013; Xie & Chao, 2022).

Social motivations refer to “building and maintaining interpersonal relationships” (Hu et al., 2017, p.263). Within the scope of this study, social motivations mainly refer to contact with individuals from both the home country and the host country. This includes sustaining existing relationships with family and friends in China while simultaneously forging new connections with locals or other new people.

Entertainment motivations refer to using social media for leisure, entertainment, and to escape stress (Lee & Ma, 2012; Liu et al., 2019). In the current study, entertainment motivations mainly aim to meet international students’ emotional needs, providing them with a virtual space to obtain pleasure, relax, and pass the time.

Acculturation motivations mainly refer to using social media to acquire cultural knowledge (e.g., values, beliefs, language, and customs) about the host country (Wang & Quan, 2013; Yang, 2018). Through social media, international students can

access a wealth of cultural knowledge and language learning resources, participate in discussions with locals, and actively adjust to local culture.

1.8.3 Cultural Identity Identification

Cultural identity is a sense of belonging to specific cultural groups and feelings related to the membership of these groups (Phinney et al., 2001). Cultural identity identification refers to the behaviors which an individual actively recognizes, engages with, and aligns themselves with cultural values (Chen & Pan, 2002). It is a dynamic and subjective process, involving the conscious acknowledgment and affirmation of one's cultural background and its significance in their life. This concept encompasses how strongly an individual feels connected to their cultural roots and how actively they participate in cultural practices, traditions, and community activities associated with their culture.

This study incorporates two types of cultural identity identification: host cultural identity identification, which pertains to Malaysian cultural identity identification, and ethnic cultural identity identification, which refers to Chinese cultural identity identification. In the current study, Malaysian cultural identity identification refers to Chinese international students' sense of recognizing, engaging with, and aligning themselves with Malaysian cultural values. Similarly, Chinese cultural identity identification refers to Chinese students' recognizing, engaging with, and aligning themselves with Chinese cultural values.

1.8.4 Psychological Adaptation

Psychological adaptation is a dimension of cross-cultural adaptation (Bierwiazek & Waldzus, 2017). According to Kim (2001), cross-cultural adaptation is a “dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to an unfamiliar cultural environment, establish (or reestablish) and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (p.31). In other words, cross-cultural adaptation is an evolutionary or continuous learning process in which individuals gradually improve their ability to adapt to a new environment (Peng & Wu, 2019).

Psychological adaptation refers to “how comfortable and happy a person feels with respect to being in the new culture, or anxious and out of place” (Demes & Geeraert, 2014, p.92). Psychological adaptation and psychological adjustment are often used interchangeably. When international students enter a strange environment, they may miss their families, friends, and even the food in their hometown, which may lead to some negative results, such as stress (Xie & Chao, 2022) and depression (Zaw, 2018). On the contrary, international students may also experience happiness, life satisfaction, and other positive emotions in the host country (Hsu & Chen, 2020). In general, psychological adaptation is closely related to individuals’ cognition when entering an unfamiliar environment, including positive and negative conditions.

1.8.5 International Students

Kim (2001) indicated that people moving from one country to another are primarily divided into short-term and long-term. Long-term migrants live longer or stay permanently in the host country, with examples including immigrants and refugees.

The short-term mobile group is often referred to as sojourners, including international students and foreign employees. They temporarily reside in a foreign country and may return to their home countries. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2017) considers international students as those “who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study” (p.70). International students, overseas students, and foreign students are often used interchangeably in the research. In this study, international students refer to students from China studying in Malaysia.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the research background, research problems, research objectives, research significance, and definitions of key terms. Chinese students represent Malaysia’s largest group of international students. Still, current research on the relationship between social media use motivations and the psychological adaptation of this group is limited. In addition, there is insufficient research on whether and how social media use motivations influence international students’ psychological adaptation. On this basis, this research has discussed the significance from four aspects: theory, method, practice, and policy, which helps to understand the necessity of this research better. This chapter also has introduced some key terms involved in the study. The second chapter is a literature review.

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