

## The Role of New Media in Chinese Undergraduates' Academic Adaptation in Malaysia

MEILIAN JIANG

ABDUL LATIFF AHMAD\*

*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*

### ABSTRACT

New media has become an essential part of the daily lives of students studying abroad, it plays a crucial role in their process of adapting to different cultures. It provides significant benefits for international students regarding their ability to adapt to different cultures. However, it can also impede their long-term adaptation. Whether this continuous and potential communication through social media with host national, co-national, and multinational relationships contributed to a more successful adaptation to a new cultural environment is a matter of debate. The study aims to examine the role of new media in the cross-cultural academic adaptation process of Chinese international undergraduates in Malaysia. The study utilized qualitative methodologies and organized eight focus group discussions, with a total of 40 Chinese undergraduate students who are enrolled in four public and four private universities in Malaysia. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. The result examined the types, motivations, intensity, advantages, and disadvantages of Chinese undergraduate students' utilization of new media for their academic adaptation while studying in Malaysia. The utilization of host and ethnic new media significantly improved the academic and social involvement of Chinese undergraduates. Nevertheless, an over-reliance on new media for academic pursuits adversely affected their academic achievement. This study will contribute to the rational and effective use of new media, especially social media, for social network construction and communication among Chinese international students, thereby facilitating their cross-cultural adaptation to a new environment.

**Keywords:** *New media, academic adaptation, social network, Chinese undergraduates, Malaysia.*

### INTRODUCTION

The number of international students in Malaysia has experienced significant and rapid growth in recent years due to the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education. There were about 26,232 international students in Malaysia in 2012, peaking at 172,886 in 2016 and dropping back to 159,545 in 2023 due to the Covid-19 situation (MoHE, 2012, 2016, 2023). The number of Chinese students has been growing, and since 2019, it has been ranking first among original countries, reaching 44,043 in 2023 (MoHE, 2023). Chinese international students account for nearly 28 per cent of all international students in Malaysia. However, most of them received an academic education in China before undergraduate study in Malaysia, so they lack living and learning experience in an overseas context. Chinese overseas students in the host country have psychological, sociological, and academic adjustment issues (Bi & Ahmad, 2024; Guo, 2024; Rui & Wahab, 2022). The level of coping and adjustment to these issues will ultimately affect their cross-cultural adaptation outcomes.

New media is crucial in facilitating social connections among individuals from different cultures throughout the process of cross-cultural adaptation (Ahmad et al., 2014; Hsu & Chen, 2021). Understanding how the use of new media affects the development of relationships

\*Corresponding author: alba@ukm.edu.my

E-ISSN: 2289-1528

<https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2025-4101-10>

Received: 2 November 2024 | Accepted: 4 December 2024 | Published: 30 March 2025

among individuals living in unfamiliar cultural environments is essential for a thorough understanding of adaptation (Hamzah & Esa, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2024). International students experience a substantial increase in their usage of new media while studying abroad, enabling individuals to engage in global communication with their friends and family members, as well as local interaction with their recently formed connections (Hendrickson & Rosen, 2017). Furthermore, the widespread use of new media greatly influences the occurrence of international students adapting to a new cultural environment by helping them learn the language, improve intercultural communication competence, and build friendships and social connections (Li & Peng, 2019).

Many scholars have already concentrated on the utilisation and significance of new media in the process of cross-cultural adjustment among international students. New media platforms are also pervasively utilized in the educational context, which offers immense advantages for international students' intercultural transition, such as online resources acquisition, rich information sharing, entertainment and relaxation, accessible academic communication, and abundant opportunities to construct social networks and maintain social ties (Alamri, 2018; Dwumah Manu et al. 2023; Hettige et al., 2022). However, The overutilization of new media has an adverse effect on the adaptation process, leading to reduce the time allocated for studying (Foroughi et al., 2022), undermining the ability to solve problems independently (Tang et al. 2022), influencing the decision-making processes (Baram-Tsabari & Schejter 2019), and trigger academic anxiety (Pang et al., 2024a). In addition, the majority of research has employed quantitative methodologies to verify the impact of new media use or social media use on the psychological and sociocultural adjustment of international students in a new educational environment. Only a limited number of research have examined the influence of new media on the academic adaptation of overseas students. An in-depth examination is warranted to understand how these international students utilise new media for academic and social engagement in their academic adaptation processes. Therefore, the study applies online focus group discussion to examine the role of new media in the cross-cultural academic adaptation process of Chinese undergraduates in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Academic Adaptation*

Adaptation is defined as the degree of connection between sojourner students and the academic environment (Andrade, 2006). Bastien et al. (2018) argue that academic adaptation encompasses not only a student's ability to attain academic success, but also elements such as motivation and achievement, taking action to meet academic demands, and overall satisfaction with academic life. Anderson et al. (2016) proposed three conceptual elements of academic adaptation: academic lifestyle, academic achievement, and academic motivation. According to Young and Scharfner (2014), academic adjustment refers to the process of adapting to the requirements of academic life, such as the teaching and learning methods used at the university. Academic adaptation is assessed based on achieving satisfactory academic results and earning a degree.

Academic adaptation in a cross-cultural environment differs from academic adaptation within an individual's country and familiar educational systems. The academic adaptation of international students is a challenging process due to the multitude of obligations and challenges involved in comprehending new systems and cultures. Taking Kim's (2001) theory of integrative communication and cross-cultural adaptation as the theoretical

framework, the present study focuses on the academic adaptation process of international students in the host universities over time. Thus, cross-cultural academic adaptation, defined here as a learning process of academic student sojourn that can be explored over time and student sojourners' cognitive and behavioural changes in the new academic environment. That means cross-cultural academic adaptation not only contains the adjustment process of academic life, including teaching, learning, communicating, and writing, but also involves implementing measures to satisfy academic requirements, improve academic ability, and acquire an academic degree in the host university settings (Bastien et al., 2018; Young & Schartner, 2014).

#### *New Media and Academic Adaptation*

New media, as described by Baram-Tsabari and Schejter (2019), refers to a set of digital platforms that enhance active engagement behaviours, and facilitate interactive communication and content sharing, contrasting with traditional outlets like television, radio, and newspapers. The educational setting extensively incorporates new media, which offers numerous advantages, including simplicity and flexibility (Hettige et al., 2022). The rapid progress of new media has enabled international students to explore different curriculums, access up-to-date information about their institution, and utilise extensive academic resources at any time and from any location (Loh et al., 2021; Qi, 2019). The purposeful usage of social media enhances academic achievement and emotional well-being while fostering an advanced awareness of the local culture (Guo, 2024). While online communication tools like email and video meetings are useful for exchanging information and connecting with others, they do not fully meet the requirements for an effective online intercultural learning experience (Zhang et al., 2023). Excessive information and communication can indirectly hinder the educational achievement of overseas students through the effects of social media exhaustion and academic anxiety (Pang et al., 2024a).

Researchers have extensively examined the interconnected relationship between the use of new media by international students and their ability to adapt academically in a cross-cultural context (Baines et al., 2022; Cao et al., 2024; Çömlekçi, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2024; Wong & Liu, 2024). Baines (2022) addressed that social media satisfies several roles that are connected to emotional, informational, and instrumental social functions. Social media not only serves as a means of communication with individuals in one's home country, but it also offers practical assistance to international students. According to Çömlekçi (2020), students have utilised social media as a tool for language acquisition. This has allowed them to broaden their social circle, minimise cultural uncertainty, enhance interactions with other cultures, and sustain connections with their home country. However, excessive use of social media for communication with people from home culture restricts the time available for engaging in the present moment. It also hinders the formation of new social connections and interpersonal relationships in the host culture, thereby impeding the acquisition of knowledge about the social norms of the new culture (Schwartz et al., 2024).

Currently, scholars' research on social media and cross-cultural academic adaptation focuses on the following areas: social media use motivation, intensity, and platform in academic adaptation, social media use and social network. Social media use motives encompass the underlying inclinations that drive individuals to utilise social media platforms to satisfy their various needs. These needs may include interpersonal utility, leisure, knowledge acquisition, convenience, and entertainment (Al-Menayes, 2015). Some studies

have revealed that social media use motivation has played a significant role in promoting sojourners' transition into a new cultural environment (Dwumah Manu et al., 2023; He, 2024). He (2024) provided empirical observations on how social media assists international students in overcoming practical obstacles and meeting their educational requirements, as well as facilitating their cultural comprehension and the formation of ethnic and peer communities for emotional and social assistance. Social media use intensity refers to the frequency of social media use. Multiple scholars have demonstrated a positive relationship between social media use frequency and cross-cultural adaptation (Park & Noh, 2018; Zhao et al., 2022). Some experts have suggested that the excessive usage of social media has negative effects on both academic achievement and societal adjustment (Pang et al., 2024b). It can significantly lead to academic anxiety in overseas students (Pang et al., 2024a). Several studies have found that the utilisation of various social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and WeChat, has provided a convenient means of communication for individuals to interact with their relatives, classmates, friends, and other networks of support in both their home nations and the host nations (Cao et al., 2024; Li & Peng, 2019; Yang, 2018). In addition, a group of scholars has started to focus on how international students manage their ethnic and host social networks with social media usage to acquire social support and adjust to the new cultural environment (Billedo et al., 2020; Hofhuis et al., 2023; Sheng et al., 2022).

#### METHODOLOGY

Focus group discussions conducted in this study could provide a greater understanding of the different insights, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of participants towards the same research questions (Hennink, 2017). The study conducted eight online focus group discussions among Chinese undergraduates in Malaysia. Focus group discussions are particularly effective for exploring various views on the cross-cultural academic adaptation experience of Chinese international undergraduates in Malaysia. In addition, focus group discussions provide a unique forum for Chinese international undergraduates to describe their beliefs, behaviours, or attitudes when studying in Malaysia.

The study adopted a hybrid approach for sampling, integrating with purposive sampling to ensure diversity and representation and snowball sampling to access additional participants through referrals. The participants of focus group discussions consisted of 40 Chinese undergraduates from eight Malaysian universities. The eight focus group discussions conducted in this study were held in four research Malaysian universities and four Malaysian private universities in Kuala Lumpur. They are highly ranked in the QS World University Rankings 2024. First, most Chinese students prefer Kuala Lumpur as a study destination in Malaysia due to its convenient location and internationalisation. Second, the eight universities in Kuala Lumpur have a large number of Chinese students. Third, Chinese students in Kuala Lumpur have a similar living and social environment.

To ensure a focused and diverse participant representation, the selection criteria for this study included: a) Participants are mainland Chinese students enrolled in undergraduate programs at Malaysian universities. b) Participants are full-time enrolment in undergraduate programs at the selected universities in Malaysia. c) Participants are undergraduate students who must have been in Malaysia for at least one year and are from various academic years who can provide information about different stages of academic progress. d) Participants are to be representatives from different disciplines to capture the potential differences in experience across research areas. Table 1 displays the demographic data of the participants.

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

GN	Univ.	Pseud	Major	Gender	Age	EA
1	RU1	IN1	Computer system & network	F	21	N
	RU2	IN2	Business Administration	M	22	Y
	RU3	IN3	Computer Science	F	21	N
	PU1	IN4	Creative Media	F	22	N
	PU2	IN5	Electrical & Electronic Engineering	M	19	Y
2	RU3	IN6	Accounting	M	21	N
	PU2	IN7	Mobile Computing & Networking	M	21	N
	RU2	IN8	Human Development Science	F	22	N
	RU1	IN9	Computer Science	M	22	N
	PU4	IN10	Music Performance	F	22	N
3	RU2	IN11	Communication	M	22	N
	RU3	IN12	Business management	F	21	N
	RU4	IN13	Human Resources Development	M	21	N
	PU3	IN14	Traditional Chinese Medicine	M	23	N
	PU2	IN15	Business management	F	21	N
4	RU4	IN16	Industrial Design	F	21	N
	RU3	IN17	Psychology	M	21	N
	RU2	IN18	Economics	F	22	N
	PU1	IN19	Business Administration	M	20	Y
	PU3	IN20	Marketing	F	20	N
5	RU1	IN21	Sport Management	M	20	N
	RU4	IN22	Psychology with Human Resource	F	22	N
	PU1	IN23	Advertising & Brand Management	F	21	N
	PU3	IN24	Business Administration	M	21	N
	PU4	IN25	Computer science	M	20	N
6	RU1	IN26	English Language & Linguistics	F	21	N
	RU3	IN27	Communication	M	20	N
	PU4	IN28	Communication	M	21	N
	PU3	IN29	Business management	F	20	N
	PU2	IN30	English Language & Communication	F	20	N
7	RU2	IN31	Economic	F	21	N
	RU4	IN32	Management	M	20	N
	PU3	IN33	Fashion Management & Communication	F	22	N
	PU1	IN34	Digital Media	M	20	N
	PU4	IN35	Design Communication	M	21	Y
8	RU1	IN36	Social Administration	M	20	N
	RU4	IN37	Electronic Systems Engineering	M	22	N
	PU1	IN38	Digital Media	F	22	N
	PU2	IN39	Mass Communication	F	20	N
	PU4	IN40	Business management	F	20	N

Note. GN=Group Number, Univ.=University, RU=Research University, PU=Private University, Pseud=Pseudonym, EA=Experience Abroad, M=Male, F=Female, Y=Yes, N=No

Eight focus group discussions were conducted in eight universities with 40 participants by Tencent Meeting tool in Chinese. The forty participants were divided into eight groups by mixed management. Five participants come from two public universities and three private universities, or three public universities and two private universities. Each group comprises five persons, two males and three females, or three males and two females. Mixed university and gender groups can enhance the quality of discussions and enrich their outcomes (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021), thus eight mixed focus groups were conducted. It took approximately 90 minutes to complete for one group. In the process of focus group discussions, the author as the moderator utilised facilitation skills to facilitate discussion and manage group dynamics. The note-taker wrote down the critical information in the discussion process and reminded the moderator to control the time for discussion and facilitate further discussion about the topic. The Tencent Meeting tool synchronised and recorded all panel discussions online.

In the data analysis process, managing the language, cultural and communication challenges is crucial. The entirety of the focus discussions was captured via digital means, then transcribed word for word in the Chinese language, and subsequently translated into English. The author preserved some Chinese terminology that is not easily translatable into English or that may lose important nuances in translation. The Atlas. Ti 9 was adopted in this study to analyse the transcript data. A thematic analysis was conducted in which two panellists independently reviewed selected transcripts and then met as a group to develop a code set to code all transcripts. Differences in coding were resolved by group consensus. To further analyse the coded data, the study employed co-occurrence analysis to identify the frequent co-appearance of codes and reveal the relationships between new media and cross-cultural academic adaptation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the participants' discussion of their experiences with new media for cross-cultural academic adaptation, the study performed code analysis and theme analysis. As a result, a total of five themes were identified: a) types of new media usage, b) motivation of new media usage, c) intensity of new media usage, d) advantages of new media usage, and e) disadvantages of new media usage). Results demonstrate the types, motivations, intensity, advantages, and disadvantages of Chinese undergraduate students' utilization of new media for their academic adaptation while studying in Malaysia. Furthermore, new media has been essential in facilitating the cross-cultural academic adaptation of Chinese undergraduate students in Malaysia. However, excessive utilisation of new media has a negative impact on the academic adaptation of Chinese undergraduates.

### *Theme 1: Types of New Media Usage*

The study identified five distinct types of new media utilised by the participants. Social media tools and educational tools are the two types used most frequently by the participants followed by transportation tools, E-commerce tools, and communication tools. This study incorporated the suggestions of Hendrickson and Rosen (2017), and utilised host new media communication and ethnic new media communication as two fundamental components inside the theoretical framework. The participants mostly employed three host social media platforms, including WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram. WeChat, Little Red Book, and Douyin were the three most common ethnic social media used by participants.

Among the educational tools used by participants, Chat GPT was the most primarily used, with Google Scholar and the University attendance apps being the subsequent choices. Communication tools like Google Mail, Microsoft Outlook, and Microsoft Teams were the main choices of participants who were studying in Malaysia. Grab and Google Maps were the primary transportation tools adopted by Chinese undergraduates when staying in Malaysia. It is worth noting that most of these adopted educational tools, transportation apps, and communication tools originated from the host country. In addition, E-commerce tools such as Touch Go, Lazada, and Alipay, were employed by participants for payment and online shopping.

### *Theme 2: Motivation of New Media Usage*

Many studies have demonstrated how various motives for using social media might affect psychological, social, and academic adaptation (Dwumah Manu et al., 2023; Ma, 2017; Pang, 2018; Sleeman et al., 2020). This study conducted focus group discussions to examine participants' utilisation of new media in adapting to learning. As a result, four primary motivations for the use of new media were discovered. The first motivation is mainly for academic purposes, such as conducting academic communication, accessing academic resources, seeking academic assistance, completing course assignments, participating in online class learning and course attendance. Sleeman et al. (2020) proposed that international students can utilise social network sites for educational purposes to establish digital connections with their classmates, hence enhancing engagement and academic performance. Chinese undergraduates always like to use WhatsApp, Telegram, and E-mails to connect with their teachers and classmates for academic communications, assignment notifications, information sharing, and group work discussion. As mentioned by IN3 and IN11.

First, some of the specialised classes at our university have WhatsApp groups. The second way we talk to our teachers is through WhatsApp and Telegram. Next is Google Mail, since our university gives us student accounts and we use it to communicate with our teachers (IN3, RU2, G1).

...It's on WhatsApp when our teachers announce any updates, such as new assignments, meeting schedules, or modifications. Our classmates typically use WhatsApp for group messaging and exchange (IN11, RU3, G3).

When students face difficulties in their coursework and homework, they not only rely on WhatsApp to seek guidance from their teachers, but they also have a strong inclination towards using chat GPT for learning assistance and homework completion. Some students even utilise it to directly generate their homework. IN9 (RU1, G2) stated, "In this case, I forgot to do my homework one day, so I generally use Chat GPT to make it up". Also, IN20 argued that:

...We have a lot of homework. If the teacher did not give clear points in class, I would use the Chat GPT 4.0 for seeking help. It has a certain degree of help for writing assignments, and will directly give the point of view, data, and some references (IN20, PU3, G4).

New media platforms also offer immediate and unlimited access to a vast range of educational resources, including digital libraries, academic journals, electronic publications, and instructional websites. Participants from five groups indicated that they used Google Scholar to search and download papers. Due to the language barrier and course study difficulty, Chinese undergraduates often use online video platforms for course learning. IN24 and IN14 stated that YouTube and Bilibili are the main channels for them to search related courses and assist in their learning in Malaysia.

The programming course is harder in our major. Sometimes, I could not understand the math content, so I would go to Bilibili after class to search for related courses. I didn't expect that there would be a lot of programming and math courses, so I relied on Bilibili at the beginning to assist me in my learning (IN24, PU3, G5).

...YouTube, because there's not a lot of research on Chinese medicine. I'm mainly interested in learning about spinal adjustments, and then I'll search for a lot of videos from YouTube to assist in my learning, mainly from American and Australian therapists, who have done a number of these popular videos, including videos of therapeutic manipulation (IN14, PU3, G3).

The second motivation of Chinese undergraduates for adopting new media is primarily for their daily life, including daily transportation, online consumption life information seeking, and entertainment. Participants exhibit a preference for utilising the Grab platform to book taxi services and purchase takeaways while relying on Google Maps for navigation during outings or trips. Most Chinese undergraduates adopted Touch Go for daily bill payments, such as utility expenditures, expenses for catering, and purchases of household products. It is important to mention that there is a highly popular social media platform called Little Red Book, which is employed by Chinese undergraduate students. They frequently utilise the Little Red Book to access local information, travel details, restaurant recommendations, marketing insights, and residence advertisements in Malaysia. As mentioned by IN4. In addition, participants also adopted some social media platforms, such as Douyin, for entertainment. Participants from six groups stated that they enjoy using Douyin as a means of relaxation and entertainment.

Little Red Book is also used by many Malaysian Chinese. It is a great app. There's everything we don't know, just use it. Such as travelling, business, restaurants, or looking up travel advice. Little Red Book has lots of restaurant descriptions that indicate what to step on and what not to step on. I occasionally use Little Red Book to hunt for appropriate housing information, internships, etc (IN4, PU1, G1).

The third motivator of Chinese undergraduates to embrace new media is socialising. Pang (2018) discovered a positive correlation between the utilisation of social networking platforms for social purposes and enhancements in the well-being of overseas students. All the participants stated that they utilise WeChat to maintain social connections with their family and friends in China, thereby mitigating emotions of isolation and seeking emotional support. As stated by IN20. Part of the participants revealed that they like to have social



interaction with local friends and international friends through WhatsApp and Instagram. Social media promotes interaction with individuals in one's home country (Baines et al., 2022), establishes friendly relationships with locals (Wong & Liu, 2024), and offers practical assistance to overseas students. As mentioned by IN21 and IN14. The study also found respondents are looking for jobs and communicating at work as their last motivation. According to IN2 (RU3, G1), "I've been using Facebook a lot lately because I'm looking for an internship". Also, IN28 (PU4, G6) argued that "There are some jobs posted on Little Red Book. I was recently looking for an internship at a graphic design company in Malaysia".

When I need to get in touch with my family back home, it is usually through a WeChat group. I would post some new pictures and travel photos with the family group on WeChat. Sometimes I would also use WeChat to video call my parents and tell them about some troubles I'm having (IN20, PU3, G4).

...I like to play badminton. I ask local classmates and international friends from other countries to play badminton on weekends, and I usually use WhatsApp to communicate with them (IN21, RU1, G5).

I'm a big Instagram user. I enjoy using Instagram to talk and exchange videos with my more local pals. I enjoy sharing videos and having conversations with them on Instagram (IN14, PU3, G3).

The majority of participants using new media platforms to seek academic and social guidance consistent with previous research highlighting the versatility of these digital tools in enhancing educational experiences, fostering academic collaboration, and managing social networks among international students (Billedo et al., 2020, Hofhuis et al., 2023). The study noted that new media platforms are utilized for obtaining online academic resources, participating in academic and social activities, sustaining connections with family and friends in their home country, and fostering relationships with host nationals and international peers in the context of cross-cultural adaptation.

### *Theme 3: Intensity of New Media Usage*

The intensity of new media usage refers to the frequency of using new media (Boer et al., 2020). Based on group discussion, it was found that WhatsApp and WeChat were the new media platforms that Chinese international undergraduate students used most frequently in Malaysia. Every participant confirmed that they typically utilise WhatsApp for academic communication and group discussions with their faculty members and their classmates. They choose to utilise WeChat as their primary means of communication with family and friends in China for emotional support and social contact. Furthermore, they commonly utilise WeChat as a means of connection with Malaysian Chinese individuals for intellectual discussion and social engagement. Align with the research of Pang (2020), found that Chinese overseas students who use social networking sites more often for social purposes seem to have better levels of well-being compared to those who use them less frequently for such purposes.

Many participants expressed that they regularly utilise the Little Red Book for their everyday study and daily life. When faced with difficulties in academic writing, they frequently turned to Little Red Book to discover academic writing content given by educational

influencers. In addition, the platform contains a plethora of Malaysian lifestyle and vacation tips. According to Forbush and Foucault-Welles (2016) and Yang (2018), more engagement in social media activities by the host resulted in greater social and academic adaptation to the unfamiliar culture. Several participants mentioned their preference for sharing daily life updates on Instagram, as it is a popular platform among local Malaysian and Malaysian Chinese who regularly interact with them on this social media platform. Google Mail is utilised primarily for the routine reception of university notification emails and regular academic communications with teachers. Transportation Apps and E-commerce Apps were used to regularly travel, shopping, and payment. Additionally, certain students have reported utilising chat GPT occasionally for finishing their assignments, particularly when approaching the deadline for submission. IN24 (PU3, G5) stated, "...Sometimes when I forget an assignment, it's almost too late for the deadline, so I rush to use Chat GPT to generate one".

Our investigation revealed that compared to Chinese students attending private universities, research university students utilized academic resource software more frequently and in larger quantities. For instance, five of the groups discussed the use of Google Scholar, with all five members coming from public universities. However, Douyin is more commonly used by Chinese students at private institutions for leisure and entertainment than at public universities. Eleven participants of six groups stated that the use of Douyin, just two of them were from public institutions, and nine of them were from private universities.

#### *Theme 4: Advantages of New Media Usage*

Based on the participants' discussions, we learnt that new media could facilitate Chinese international undergraduate students' academic adaptation and social adaptation. Hsu and Chen (2021) revealed that host internet use may enhance the proficiency of newcomers in managing their routines and enhance their overall satisfaction in a new setting. However, there was no correlation between ethnic internet use and cross-cultural adaption. This study found that both host new media and ethnic new media contribute to the process of cross-cultural adaptation among international students. Individuals who use new media are able to access online learning resources and academic assistance at any time and from anywhere. They can communicate with their teachers, have group discussions with their classmates, get help with their assignments from their teachers, or get help from educational and social media sites like Little Red Book, YouTube, Chat GPT, and more. The Chinese undergraduates had a high evaluation of the online academic resources, especially on online course learning. As stated by IN16, IN35 and IN37.

...Little Red Book can not only give me guidance on life and entertainment but also help me a lot with some thesis framework, literature reading and study aid software. For example, there is a very detailed tutorial on how to install, download and use the Zotero plugin on the Little Red Book. It's very detailed and well-explained, and it's one of the main media software I use over here (IN16, RU4, G4).

I'll search for relevant videos on YouTube. Because I'm not good at science, sometimes I find some Indian professors on YouTube, and they speak very clearly, which helps me learn so much. I'm especially thankful to them (IN35, PU4, G7).

I believe that new media has been very helpful to me since I wrote most of my thesis with the help of Chat GPT. My tutor told me I could use Chat GPT to get ideas and help with my thesis, but I should never let it take over my thoughts...Most of the time, Chat GPT has been positive for my study (IN37, RU4, G8).

In addition, new media is beneficial for participants' emotional and social interaction. Most of the participants indicated that social media platforms are significant tools for them to acquire emotional support and engage in social contact. They typically use WeChat to contact their friends and family in China for emotional support when they encounter obstacles and hurdles in their academic and daily lives. This aligns with previous research (Pho & Schartner, 2021; Schwartz et al., 2024) that underscores ethnic social media's role as a vital resource for overseas students alleviating homesickness and navigating the stress of acculturating in an unfamiliar cultural environment. However, they have a preference for using WhatsApp to interact with local classmates or friends in Malaysia while making plans to go out and play. Additionally, they use Instagram to share moments and videos as a means of socialising. Several participants also acknowledged that social media platforms are essential and irreplaceable tools for entertainment. IN30 (PU2, G6) stated, "...Douyin, which is the most popular one, and I usually use it for entertainment because sometimes I find it quite boring here, and I don't go out much, so I just hold my mobile phone and brush Douyin". This discovery aligns with the research conducted by Hendrickson and Rosen (2017), which suggests that new media consistently affect the relationships of international students. This impact extends beyond their connections with family and friends in their home countries and influences their daily interactions with individuals from the host country. International students who stay abroad for their education often face several challenges, including academic and emotional pressures, which might potentially hinder their academic and psychological growth. Typically, these newcomers rely on their social networks in their home and host countries to help them handle these challenges (Billedo et al., 2020). The significant findings for usage of social media tools are consistent with previous studies, emphasising the crucial importance of social media platforms in the studies and lives of Chinese undergraduates in Malaysia, functioning as an essential instrument for communication, relationship connection, and information seeking (Guo, 2024). Social media has been extensively employed as an academic resource to foster active and collaborative learning (Cao et al., 2024), facilitate engagement with persons in their home country (Baines et al., 2022), enhance social interaction with locals and international peers (Hofhuis et al., 2023)

#### *Theme 5: Disadvantages of New Media Usage*

There were a few disadvantages of using new media for Chinese undergraduates when studying in Malaysia. The main challenges encountered by Chinese undergraduates when using new media are their dependence on it, the excessive time spent on it, being distracted by it, and reservations about its accuracy. Excessive dependence on the media might undermine an individual's capacity for independent thinking. IN4 (PU1, G1) and IN7 (PU2, G2) claim that a drawback of utilising Chat GPT is the tendency to develop laziness, a diminished inclination for independent thinking, and an excessive reliance on Chat GPT for completing every assignment. According to McNicol and Thorsteinsson (2017), excessive internet use can result in the development of avoidance and depressive issues. Some participants in this study

indicated that they dedicated an excessive amount of time to watching short videos, both while engaged in homework and during their leisure time and were unable to control the period that they spent watching, which led to a significant waste of time. IN22 and IN28 provided the following details. Sometimes, the utilisation of social media resulted in distractions for the participants, impacting their academic development (He, 2024). IN3 (RU2, G1) stated, "If someone sends me some messages while I'm studying, I might just go off chatting with someone else, which will affect my progress on my homework".

...I'll watch the WeChat video while I'm doing my homework or writing my thesis. I think this is a waste of time, but I can't stop. Especially at night when I don't want to go to bed, I will watch videos until I doze off and then go to sleep... (IN22, RU4, G5).

I spend too much time in Douyin. Sometimes, when I come back from university and have nothing to do in the evening, I watch Douyin videos from eight o'clock in the evening to two o'clock in the morning. And then the next morning, I was sleepy as hell because I had to go to university at nine o'clock in the morning (IN28, PU4, G6).

Chinese international undergraduate students are also concerned about the accuracy of the information offered by new media platforms. New media channels frequently contain misleading information and false data. IN2 (RU3, G1) disclosed that numerous individuals' fake academics in the Little Red Book to spread fraudulent advertisements, such as "three days with ChatGPT to assist you in writing SCI articles." Additionally, numerous participants remarked that while the Chat GPT can enhance their academic pursuits and increase their efficiency, it might also produce inaccurate details. As mentioned by IN14.

...Chat GPT is primarily used for translation and literature research, it is not appropriate for writing on Chinese medicine. Because it will create some incorrect literature for you on its own...There are situations when the GPT is inaccurate, and a translator is still required (IN14, PU3, G3).

Similar to prior studies, excessive new media usage could increase academic anxiety and indirectly affect the academic performance of international students (Foroughi et al., 2022; Pang et al., 2024a). The findings reported that Chinese undergraduate students depended excessively on new media platforms for academic tasks, impairing their capacity for independent problem-solving, raising concerns about academic integrity and ethics, and leading to potential academic and practical errors with inaccurate information (Tang et al., 2022). Moreover, Chinese undergraduates rely heavily on new media platforms for socialisation and leisure, which affects the time they allocate to their academic pursuits (Foroughi et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

The study revealed five different kinds of new media platforms employed by the participants. The participants most commonly utilise social media tools and educational tools, followed by transportation tools, E-commerce platforms, and communication technologies. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that Chinese international undergraduates are motivated to utilise

new media platforms for academic, social, daily life, and work communication. As a result, Chinese undergraduates prefer to engage in academic communication with local teachers, local and international classmates when studying in Malaysia. They prioritise communicating with family and friends in China for social and emotional reasons. The specific new media platforms employed for academic communication, group work, and social interaction with host nationals include WhatsApp, Google Mail, and Instagram. They also utilise WeChat as a means of communication with co-nationals for various purposes such as maintaining social connections, seeking emotional support, and engaging in recreational activities.

Kim (2001) categorizes such communication by host interpersonal or mass communication and ethnic interpersonal or mass communication. In the new context, new media technologies have made it possible to engage in both host and ethnic communication simultaneously. The study implemented the recommendations of Hendrickson and Rosen (2017) and employed host new media communication and ethnic new media communication as two essential elements within the theoretical framework. International students not only can interact with individuals from the host country or home country, but they may also utilise new media platforms to access academic information and daily life information, and engage in social interaction.

This study revealed that, as posited by Kim (2001), heightened engagement with host media and enhanced interaction with host instructors, classmates, and peers resulted in participants experiencing improved happiness and connectedness (Hendrickson & Rosen, 2017). A significant contribution of this study is its consideration of the negative effects of host new media on the participants. The stress is caused by excessive dependence on media technology for educational tools and social media platforms in academic tasks. Another crucial contribution of the study is that highlights the beneficial function of ethnic media, particularly ethnic social media platforms, in the academic adjustment of Chinese international undergraduate students. This perspective contradicts Kim's (2001) assertion that the heavy involvement in ethnic social communication activities may impede sojourners' cross-cultural adaption. Participants in this study reported using ethnic social media to engage with family and friends in their home countries for emotional support and social assistance, which mitigated the psychological stress and homesickness experienced throughout their studies. Conversely, pursuing academic assistance and establishing social connections with co-nationals in the host nation via ethnic social media enhanced their academic and sociocultural integration. In future research, more comprehensive information will be provided regarding how Chinese international students utilise social media to construct and manage different social networks to facilitate their academic success.

#### BIODATA

*Jiang Meilian* is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Research in Media and Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Her research interest is intercultural communication. Email: p118079@siswa.ukm.edu.my

*Dr. Abdul Latiff Ahmad* is an associate professor at the Centre for Research in Media and Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. His areas of expertise include intercultural communication and internationalisation. Email: alba@ukm.edu.my

## REFERENCES

- Ahmad, A. L., Mirza, E., Mohd, R. H., Pawanteh, L., & Salman, A. (2014). Adaptation and the new media technology: A study on Malaysian students in Australia and the United Kingdom. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 30(1), 195-206. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2014-3001-10>
- Alamri, B. (2018). The role of social media in intercultural adaptation: A review of the literature. *English Language Teaching*, 11(12), 77-85. <https://doi.org/gm4vsv>
- Al-Menayes, J. J. (2015). Motivations for using social media: An exploratory factor analysis. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, 7(1), 43.
- Anderson, J. R., Guan, Y., & Koc, Y. (2016). The academic adjustment scale: Measuring the adjustment of permanent resident or sojourner students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 54, 68-76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2016.07.006>
- Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), 131-154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240906065589>
- Baines, A., Ittefaq, M., & Abwao, M. (2022). Social media for social support: A study of international graduate students in the United States. *Journal of International Students*, 12(2), 345-365. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v12i2.3158>
- Baram-Tsabari, A., Schejter, A. M. (2019). New media: A double-edged sword in support of public engagement with science. In Kali, Y., Baram-Tsabari, A., & Schejter, A. M. (Eds.) *Learning in a networked society: Spontaneous and designed technology enhanced learning communities* (pp. 79-95). Springer.
- Bastien, G., Seifen-Adkins, T., & Johnson, L. R. (2018). Striving for success: Academic adjustment of international students in the U.S. *Journal of International Student*, 8(2), 663-750. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v8i2.143>
- Billedo, C. J., Kerkhof, P., & Finkenauer, C. (2020). More Facebook, less homesick? Investigating the short-term and long-term reciprocal relations of interactions, homesickness, and adjustment among international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 75, 118-131. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.01.004>
- Bi, S. S., & Ahmad, A. L. (2024). Academic adaptation of Chinese postgraduate students in Malaysia. *Journal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 40(2), 395-412. <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2024-4002-23>
- Boer, M., Stevens, G., Finkenauer, C., & van den Eijnden, R. (2020). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder-symptoms, social media use intensity, and social media use problems in adolescents: Investigating directionality. *Child development*, 91(4), e853-e865. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13334>
- Cao, C., Meng, Q. & Zhang, H. (2024). A longitudinal examination of WeChat usage intensity, behavioural engagement, and cross-cultural adjustment among international students in China. *High Education*, 87, 661-683. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01029-5>
- Çömlekçi, M. F. (2020). Social media use among international students: Cultural adaptation and socialization. *TRT Akademi*, 5(10), 668-685.
- Djafarova, E., & Bowes, T. (2021). 'Instagram made Me buy it': Generation Z impulse purchases in fashion industry. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 59, 102345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102345>
- Dwumah Manu, B., Ying, F., Oduro, D., Antwi, J., & Yakubu Adjuik, R. (2023). The impact of social media use on student engagement and acculturative stress among international students in China. *PloS One*, 18(4), e0284185. <https://doi.org/pc3f>

- Forbush, E., & Foucault-Welles, B. (2016). Social media use and adaptation among Chinese students beginning to study in the United States. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 50, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.10.007>
- Foroughi, B., Griffiths, M. D., Iranmanesh, M., & Salamzadeh, Y. (2022). Associations between Instagram addiction, academic performance, social anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction among university students. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 20(4), 2221-2242. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-021-00510-5>
- Guo, W. (2024). Navigating cultural integration: The role of social media among Chinese students in the UK. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 1-32. <https://doi.org/pc3g>
- Hamzah, M., & Esa, I. L. (2020). Uncovering the factors influencing the technological adaptation of twitter usage among journalists in the transforming journalism practice. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 36(4), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2020-3604-01>
- He, D. (2024). Navigating academic and everyday life challenges in the US: The role of social media for international graduate students. *Information and Learning Sciences*, 125(10), 877-896. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ILS-12-2023-0200>
- Hendrickson, B., & Rosen, D. (2017). Insights into new media use by international students: Implications for cross-cultural adaptation theory. *Social Networking*, 6(2), 81-106. <https://doi.org/10.4236/sn.2017.62006>
- Hennink, M. M. (2017). Cross-cultural focus group discussions. In Barbour, R. S., & Morgan, D. L. (Eds.), *A new era in focus group research: Challenges, innovation and practice* (pp. 59-82). Springer.
- Hettige, S., Dasanayaka, E., & Ediriweera, D. S. (2022). Student usage of open educational resources and social media at a Sri Lanka medical school. *BMC Medical Education*, 22(35). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-022-03106-2>
- Hofhuis, J., van Egmond, M. C., Lutz, F. E., von Reventlow, K., & Rohmann, A. (2023). The effect of social network sites on international students' acculturation, adaptation, and wellbeing. *Frontiers in Communication*, 8, 1186527. <https://doi.org/gt5v83>
- Hsu, C. F., & Chen, J. (2021). The influences of host and ethnic Internet use on sociocultural and psychological adaptation among Chinese college students in the United States: Intercultural communication apprehension and uncertainty reduction as mediators. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 14(1), 60-75.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. SAGE.
- Li, L., & Peng, W., (2019). Transitioning through social media: International students' SNS use, perceived social support, and acculturative stress. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 98, 69-79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.03.011>
- Lister, M., Dovey, J., Giddings, S., Grant, I. and Kelly, K. (2008) *New media: A critical introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge, New York.
- Loh, X. K., Lee, V. H., Loh, X. M., Tan, G. W., Ooi, K. B., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2021). The dark side of Mobile learning via social media: How bad can it get? *Information Systems Frontiers*, 24, 1887–1904. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-021-10202-z>
- Ma, Y. (2017). *The impact of social media use motives on psychological and sociocultural adjustment of international students*. University of Rhode Island.

- McNicol, M. L., & Thorsteinsson, E. B. (2017). Internet addiction, psychological distress, and coping responses among adolescents and adults. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 20, 296–304. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2016.0669>
- Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). (2012). 2012 statistics higher education. <https://mohe.gov.my/en/download/statistics>
- Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). (2016). 2016 statistics higher education. <https://mohe.gov.my/en/download/statistics>
- Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). (2023). 2023 statistics higher education. <https://mohe.gov.my/en/download/statistics>
- Pang, H., (2018). How does time spent on WeChat bolster subjective well-being through social integration and social capital? *Telematics and Informatics*, 35, 2147-2156. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.07.015>
- Pang, H. (2020). Is active social media involvement associated with cross-culture adaption and academic integration among boundary-crossing students? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 79, 71-81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.08.005>
- Pang, H., Quan, L., & Lu, J. (2024a). How does perceived overload influence international students' educational attainment? The mediating roles of social media exhaustion and academic anxiety. *Current Psychology*, 43(9), 7794-7808. <https://doi.org/gt5v84>
- Pang, H., Ke, W., & Zhang, W. (2024b). Deciphering dynamic interactions among multidimensional psychological motivations, academic performance, and sociocultural adjustment: The critical influence of excessive WeChat use. *Heliyon*, 10(11), e32329. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e32329>
- Park, N., & Noh, H. (2018). Effects of mobile instant messenger use on acculturative stress among international students in South Korea. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 82, 34-43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.12.033>
- Pekerti, A. A., Van De Vijver, F. J. R., Moeller, M., & Okimoto, T. G. (2020). Intercultural contacts and acculturation resources among international students in Australia: A mixed-methods study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 75, 56-81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.12.004>
- Pho, H., & Schartner, A. 2021. Social contact patterns of international students and their impact on academic adaptation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 42(6), 489-502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1707214>
- Qi, C. (2019). A double-edged sword? Exploring the impact of students' academic usage of mobile devices on technostress and academic performance. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 38(12), 13371354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929x.2019.1585476>
- Rui, Z., & Wahab, N. A. 2022. The challenges and academic adaptations among Ningxia China students studying in Malaysia. *Sciences*, 12(4), 1302-1313. <https://doi.org/pc3h>
- Schwartz, M., Omori, K., & Sacramento. (2024). Communities of practice and acculturation: How international students in American colleges use social media to manage homesickness. *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, 13(1), 57-72. <https://doi.org/10/gt5v8z>
- Sheng, L., Dai, J., & Lei, J. (2022). The impacts of academic adaptation on psychological and sociocultural adaptation among international students in China: The moderating role of friendship. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 89, 79-89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.06.001>



- Sleeman, J., Lang, C., & Dakich, E. (2020). Social media, learning and connections for international students: The disconnect between what students use and the tools learning management systems offer. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 36(4), 44-56. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.4384>
- Tang, C., Mao, S., Naumann, S. E., & Xing, Z. (2022). Improving student creativity through digital technology products: A literature review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 44, 101032. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101032>
- Ward, C, Bochner, S., & Fumham, A. (2001). *The psychology of cultural shock*. Routledge.
- Wong, M. L. L., & Liu, S. (2024). The role of online social networking sites in facilitating friendships and adaptation among international students in Malaysia. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 99, 101942.
- Yang, C. (2018). US-based social media use and American life: A study of Chinese students' acculturation and adaptation in America. *Global Media and China*, 3(2), 75-91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436418783765>
- Young, T. J. & Schartner, A. (2014). The effects of cross-cultural communication education on international students' adjustment and adaptation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 35(6), 547-562. <https://doi.org/gm369z>
- Zhang, B., Goodman, L., & Gu, X. (2023). Telecollaboration tool preferences for online intercultural learning in higher education: Perspectives of Chinese international students. *SAGE Open*, 13(2), 2158-2440. <https://doi.org/gt5v85>
- Zhao, W., Osman, M. N., Omar, S. Z., & Yaakup, H. S. (2022). Effects of social media use intensity on ethnic cultural identity among Chinese international students in Malaysia. *ICCCM Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1(6), 37-52.