



Intercultural the Role of Social Media Use in Intercultural Adaptation: A Review of Literature

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Abstract. This paper presents a review of the literature on the role of social media use (SMU) as a strategy for facilitating intercultural adaptation (IA) among international students. 69 articles were retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science databases using a systematic literature review. After reviewing and removing some irrelevant and duplicate documents, 25 articles were finally identified as meeting the inclusion criteria. It explores various conceptions and types of SMU as well as existing models on intercultural adaptation. The review identifies three critical roles that SMU plays in the IA process for international students: (1) Establishing and sustaining connections between the host and the home countries, (2) Providing a platform for cultural communication and reinforcing cultural identity. (3) Serving as a language tool to improve communication skills in the host country's language. This paper presents a review of the literature on social media use and intercultural adaptation in the context of international students.

Keywords: Intercultural Adaptation, Social Media Use, Cultural identity, international students, Language.

1 Introduction

Intercultural adaptation is a complex process involving the psychological, social, and cultural adjustments that individuals undergo when exposed to a new cultural environment [4,2] This adaptation process is particularly relevant for international students, migrants, and expatriates who must navigate the challenges of adjusting to a different culture while maintaining their cultural identity. The concept of intercultural adaptation has been extensively studied, with researchers exploring various factors that influence this process, including cultural distance, social support, and coping strategies [3].

In recent years, social media has emerged as a critical tool in facilitating intercultural adaptation. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and WeChat, provide users with access to a vast network of contacts, both in their home and host countries, which can significantly impact their adaptation experience [1]. These platforms enable individuals to maintain ties with their home culture while also engaging with the host culture, thus creating a dual cultural presence that can ease the adaptation process [5]. Dual culture is the adaptation and integration of an individual while maintaining the connection to the home culture and participating in the host country culture [6].

In view of the important role of social media in Intercultural adaptation, the purpose of this literature review is to explore the role of SMU in this process, with a special focus on international students who face cultural and educational adaptation challenges. This review will answer two main research questions:

- 1) How are social media use and intercultural adaptation defined in literature? How are these constructions understood and characterized in existing studies?
- 2) What roles does social media use play in intercultural adaptation in the context of international students? How does social media influence the adaptation process of international students in a new cultural environment?

In the following sections, the paper starts by emphasizing some important terms and definitions related to intercultural adaptation and social media use and then reviews the literature on the role of social media use in the development of intercultural adaptation. The paper provides the role of SMU in intercultural adaptation processes to help international students adapt to cultures in different countries.

2 Methodology

2.1 Sources

Currently literature reviews are searched electronically. Electronic research was mainly carried out on the Web of Science and Scopus databases. The main reason for the choice was that these two databases contain many different types of articles such as journals, books and conference papers and cover a wide range of topics, thus providing as much literature as possible.

2.2 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Based on the current research question, the selected articles had to meet the following criteria: (a) included in the study with international students as subjects, (b) examined cross-cultural adjustment, including psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adjustment, (c) published research articles in journals between 2013 and 2023, (d) published in English. In addition, review papers, books, preprints, book chapters, and conference proceedings were excluded.

2.3 Search Procedure

International students, intercultural adaptation, and social media were the focus of this review, and all possible combinations and derivations related to these three terms were searched as keywords. Specifically, search terms were used to identify articles focusing on international students, including international students. Since the terms ‘cross-adaptation,’ ‘adjustment,’ and ‘acculturation’ are often used interchangeably in research, all three terms were included as keywords. Three terms were included as keywords.

In addition, acculturation was also included as a keyword because it has been used as a synonymous alternative to cross-cultural adaptation in some studies. Cross-cultural adaptation, adaptation, adjustment, cultural adaptation, psychological adaptation, psychological adjustment, sociocultural adaptation, academic adaptation, life satisfaction,

depression, and well-being were used to identify articles related to cross-cultural adaptation (see Table 1).

After the initial search, 24 articles and 45 articles were retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science databases, respectively. After manually removing some irrelevant and duplicate documents, a total of 55 articles were identified for full-text review. The titles, abstracts and full texts of all articles were carefully read and 25 articles that met the inclusion criteria were identified. The article selection process is shown in Figure 1.

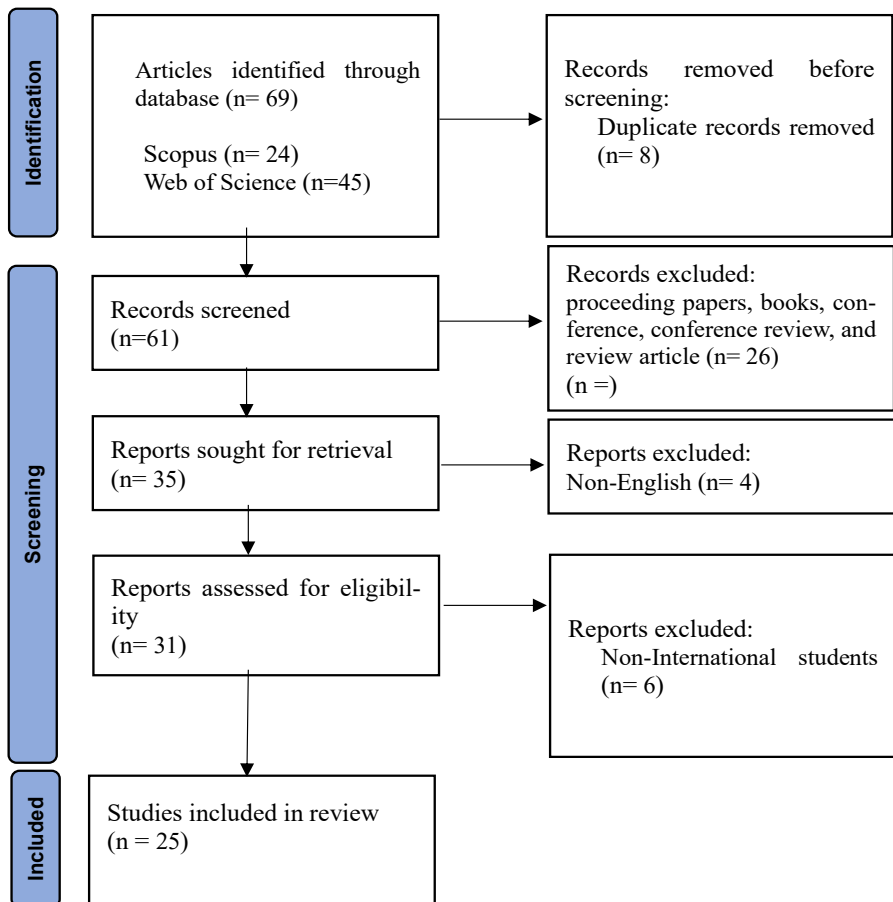


Fig. 1. Article selection process

Table 1. Keywords of article retrieval.

Database	Search keywords
Scopus	Title, Abstract, Key: ["social media" OR "social networking sites" OR "online communication" OR "digital media" OR "social media platforms"] AND ["intercultural adaptation" OR "cross-cultural adaptation" OR "cultural adjustment" OR "psychological adaptation" OR "acculturation" OR "sociocultural adaptation" OR "sociocultural adjustment" OR "cultural exchange" OR "global communication" OR "intercultural sensitivity"] AND ["international student*" OR "exchange student*"]
Web of Science	Title: ["social media" OR "social networking sites" OR "online communication" OR "digital media" OR "social media platforms"] AND ["intercultural adaptation" OR "cross-cultural adaptation" OR "acculturation" OR "cultural adjustment" OR "sociocultural adaptation" OR "sociocultural adjustment"] AND ("international student*" OR "exchange student*")

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2013-2023	< 2013
Literature Type	Research paper	proceeding papers, books, conference, conference review, and review article
Language	English	Non-English
Research Object	International students	Non-International students

3 Intercultural Adaptation

Intercultural adaptation is a multifaceted process that involves psychological and socio-

cultural adjustments when individuals encounter a new cultural environment. This process is particularly relevant for international students, who often face unique challenges as they transition into a different educational and social context. The literature identifies two primary dimensions of intercultural adaptation: psychological adaptation, which pertains to emotional and mental well-being, and socio-cultural adaptation, which involves the ability to navigate daily life and social interactions in the host culture [7].

Research has demonstrated that cultural intelligence plays a significant role in facilitating intercultural adaptation. Cultural intelligence refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings. Studies indicate that higher levels of cultural intelligence are associated with better psychological and socio-cultural adaptation among international students [8]. For instance, a study conducted in China found that cultural intelligence positively influenced the adaptation process, with psychological resilience acting as a mediating factor [9]. This aligns with findings that suggest behavioral aspects of cultural intelligence are crucial for successful adaptation in foreign environments.

Moreover, the socio-cultural adaptation of international students has been linked to their academic performance. In a Thai context, a significant relationship was observed between socio-cultural adaptation and academic achievement, highlighting the importance of adjusting to the new cultural environment for academic success [10]. This relationship underscores the necessity for educational institutions to provide support systems that enhance cultural adaptation, such as orientation programs and peer mentoring, which can significantly ease the transition for international students.

The adaptation process is also influenced by various individual factors, including language proficiency, prior intercultural experiences, and social support networks. Language skills are particularly critical, as they facilitate communication and integration into the host culture [11]. Furthermore, social support, whether from peers or family, has been shown to enhance both psychological and socio-cultural adaptation, providing emotional resources that help mitigate the stress associated with cultural transitions. Intercultural adaptation is a complex interplay of psychological and socio-cultural factors, significantly influenced by cultural intelligence, language proficiency, and social support. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective strategies to assist international students in their adaptation journey, ultimately leading to improved academic outcomes and overall well-being.

4 Models of Intercultural Adaptation

Intercultural adaptation is a complex process that involves various models of acculturation, each offering unique insights into how individuals from different cultural backgrounds adjust to new environments. The understanding of acculturation has evolved significantly, moving from unidimensional models to more nuanced, bidimensional frameworks that recognize the simultaneous adaptation to both the host culture and the preservation of one's original culture.

One of the foundational models in this field is Berry's model of acculturation, which categorizes strategies into four types: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. This model emphasizes that individuals can adopt the host culture while maintaining their original cultural identity, which is crucial for positive psychological

outcomes. Research has shown that integration, where individuals embrace both their heritage and the new culture, often leads to better mental health and social outcomes compared to other strategies [12]. For instance, studies indicate that higher educational attainment can serve as a protective factor against acculturative stress, facilitating a smoother transition and adaptation process.

The transition from unidimensional to bidimensional models has been supported by various studies that highlight the limitations of earlier frameworks. For example, argue that unilinear models fail to capture the contextual variations in adaptation of acculturation, advocating for a bilinear approach that allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals navigate their cultural identities. Similarly, conducted a comparative analysis demonstrating that bidimensional models better predict personality, self-identity, and adjustment outcomes than unidimensional models. This shift underscores the importance of recognizing the complexities of cultural identity and the multifaceted nature of adaptation processes.

Moreover, the role of social support and community engagement in the acculturation process cannot be overstated. Research has shown that social capital significantly influences adaptation experience, as individuals who are more connected to their communities tend to experience lower levels of acculturative stress [13]. For instance, highlight the importance of social support in mitigating mental health challenges among young immigrants, suggesting that supportive relationships can buffer the negative effects of acculturative stress. This is echoed in studies focusing on specific ethnic groups, such as Arab Canadian families, where strong family ties can alleviate the distress associated with perceived acculturation gaps.

Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Model posits that individuals undergoing cultural transitions experience a series of stages that influence their adaptation process. Central to this model is the interaction between personal attributes and the sociocultural environment. Kim identifies two primary components: individual communication competence and the host environment's receptivity.

The model outlines a cyclical process involving three key stages: the initial encounter with the new culture, the adaptation phase characterized by increased interaction and integration, and the eventual re-entry into one's original culture. Successful adaptation is contingent upon the individual's ability to navigate cultural differences and establish meaningful connections within the host society.

5 Social Media Use

Social media has become an integral part of youth culture, influencing various aspects of their lives, including health, political engagement, and social interactions. The pervasive use of social media among young people, particularly in the United States, has been documented extensively. For instance, highlight that Latino youth exhibit nearly universal engagement with social media, making it a critical tool for public health initiatives aimed at this demographic [14]. This trend is echoed in research by, which emphasizes that social media serves as a vital platform for reaching homeless youth, facilitating connections with family and case workers, and providing educational resources on health-related issues [15]. The ability of social media to bridge gaps in communication and access to information is crucial for engaging hard-to-reach populations.

Moreover, social media plays a significant role in political participation among youth. Studies indicate that platforms like Facebook and Twitter have transformed how young people engage with political issues, allowing them to share information and mobilize for civic activities. For instance, research suggests that social media not only serves as a medium for news consumption but also fosters political engagement and civic participation [16]. This is further supported by findings from those who argue that social media can provide a new voice for youth, enhancing their political engagement through increased access to information and networks [19]. The meta-analysis reinforces this notion, demonstrating that digital media use has a positive correlation with youth engagement in civic activities.

In addition to political engagement, social media also impacts the mental health and well-being of young people. While it can serve as a platform for positive interactions and support, it also poses risks, such as the potential for negative experiences and the exacerbation of feelings of isolation [17]. For example, research indicates that social media can both invite social support and contribute to self-injurious thoughts and behaviors among youth, highlighting the dual nature of these platforms [18]. Furthermore, studies have shown that social media can facilitate mental well-being through authentic self-presentation and community engagement, particularly among marginalized groups [20].

The implications of social media use extend to public health as well, where it is increasingly utilized for health promotion and behavior change campaigns. For instance, campaigns targeting youth obesity and smoking cessation have effectively leveraged social media to disseminate health messages and engage young audiences. The ability of social media to reach large audiences quickly and interactively makes it a powerful tool for public health initiatives. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns often depends on the strategies employed, including the use of behavioral change techniques.

6 The Impact of Social Media Use on Intercultural Adaptation

Social media plays an increasingly vital role in the intercultural adaptation process, offering significant benefits to individuals, particularly international students, and expatriates, who are navigating new cultural environments. This section explores three primary purposes of social media use in intercultural adaptation: establishing and maintaining connections between host and home countries, enhancing cultural identity, and improving communication in the host country's language.

6.1 The Purpose of Establishing and Maintaining Connections Between Host and Home Countries

The use of social media plays a significant role in the intercultural adaptation of international students, facilitating connections between their home and host countries. Research indicates that social media platforms, such as WeChat and Facebook, are crucial for maintaining relationships and providing social support, which positively impacts

mental health during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic [21]. Furthermore, social media usage helps mitigate feelings of isolation and anxiety by keeping students informed and connected with their peers and families [22].

Moreover, the relationship between social media use and cultural adaptation is complex; it can enhance students' social capital and facilitate their integration into the host culture, although it may also lead to acculturative stress if not managed properly [23]. The ability of social media to foster a sense of belonging and community is particularly vital for students navigating the challenges of living abroad [24]. Thus, while social media serves as a bridge for international students, its impact on their adaptation process is multifaceted and requires careful consideration.

6.2 The Purpose of Enhancing Cultural Identity

Social media also plays a critical role in helping individuals reinforce and enhance their cultural identity while adapting to a new cultural environment. For many, particularly those from minority or expatriate communities, social media provides a space to express and celebrate their cultural heritage. This reinforcement of cultural identity is vital in multicultural settings, where individuals may experience pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture.

Platforms like Instagram, Facebook [25], and Twitter allow users to share content related to their cultural practices, languages, and traditions, thereby maintaining a strong sense of identity [26]. This process not only helps in preserving one's heritage but also fosters a community among those who share similar backgrounds, which is crucial during the adaptation phase. By connecting with others who share the same cultural background, individuals can receive social support that further strengthens their cultural identity and mitigates the stress associated with cultural adaptation. Additionally, studies by Kim [27] suggest that this process of identity reinforcement can lead to positive mental health outcomes, contributing to overall well-being during the adaptation process.

6.3 The Purpose of Improving Communication in the Language of the Host Country

Improving language skills is a critical aspect of intercultural adaptation, and social media offers a unique platform for language learning and practice. Through interaction on social media, individuals are exposed to the host country's language in practical, real-world contexts. Whether through participating in discussions, reading posts, or watching videos, social media provides continuous exposure to the language, which is essential for gaining fluency and understanding cultural nuances [28].

Research has demonstrated that active engagement in social media can lead to significant improvements in language proficiency. For instance, international students who participate in social media conversations in the host country's language tend to develop better communication skills, which facilitates smoother social integration [29]. This informal learning environment is particularly beneficial for acquiring colloquial expressions and understanding cultural nuances that are often missed in structured learning

environments [30]. Additionally, social media serves as a less intimidating environment for language practice, allowing individuals to learn at their own pace and interact with native speakers, further enhancing their language skills and confidence in communication.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, social media has emerged as an indispensable tool in the intercultural adaptation process, significantly influencing how individuals, particularly international students, and expatriates, navigate new cultural environments. Through the establishment and maintenance of connections between their host and home countries, individuals can mitigate feelings of isolation and maintain a support network that eases the adaptation process. Social media also plays a critical role in enhancing cultural identity, allowing individuals to express and reinforce their heritage while integrating into a new cultural context. Furthermore, by providing a platform for language learning and practice, social media contributes to improved communication skills in the host country's language, which is essential for successful social integration.

The research results address the research questions by highlighting the dual role of social media in intercultural adaptation. Social media is defined as a vital tool for international students to stay connected with their home culture, maintain social support networks, and reinforce cultural identity, all of which are essential dimensions of adaptation. It also aids in language learning, facilitating communication in the host country's language. However, the study acknowledges challenges, such as the potential for over-reliance on home-country networks, which may hinder meaningful relationships within the host culture and slow down the adaptation process. Therefore, while social media significantly aids in adaptation, balancing virtual connections with active cultural engagement is crucial. The findings suggest that social media plays both a supportive and potentially limiting role, shaping the adaptation process in complex ways [31, 32].

Despite the substantial benefits of social media in facilitating intercultural adaptation, the findings also highlight potential challenges. Over-reliance on home-country networks can impede the development of meaningful relationships within the host culture, potentially slowing down the adaptation process. Therefore, while social media can be a powerful tool for maintaining cultural ties, it is crucial to balance these connections with active engagement in the host culture to foster successful adaptation.

Future research should continue to explore the multifaceted role of social media in intercultural adaptation, with a focus on several key areas. First, longitudinal studies are needed to better understand the long-term effects of social media use on adaptation, particularly how sustained social media engagement impacts the development of relationships within the host culture. Additionally, research should investigate the role of specific social media platforms in the adaptation process, as different platforms may cater to different types of interactions and content sharing, influencing adaptation outcomes in diverse ways.

Another important area for future research is the exploration of the negative impacts of social media, such as the potential for reinforcing echo chambers and cultural silos that may hinder full integration into the host culture. Understanding these dynamics can

help in developing strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of social media on adaptation. Finally, future studies should consider the role of individual differences, such as personality traits and prior intercultural experience, in moderating the effects of social media use on intercultural adaptation. By addressing these areas, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how social media can be leveraged to support positive adaptation outcomes while minimizing its potential drawbacks.

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