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The Impact of Social Media Use Motives on Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustment of International Students

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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE MOTIVES ON
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL
ADJUSTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

BY

YIPING MA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

Social media exerts tremendous influence especially on the young generation. Previous research has investigated the important function social media plays in the process of intercultural adjustment. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to the impact of social media use motivation. While numerous studies of media use motivation centers around mass media, very few examine the impact of social media use motives on intercultural adjustment. To extend this line of research, this study investigates the relationship between social media use motives and intercultural adjustment of international students in the United States. Findings from t-test, correlation, and regression analyses are reported. Directions for future research are also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

With the development of global economic integration and increasing human mobility, the boundary between countries has become blurred, and the world has gradually become a “global village”. In an increasingly globalizing world, intercultural communication is inevitable for millions of people, and studying abroad is becoming a popular choice. As *the Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange* (2016) released by the Institute of International Education indicates, “the number of international students at U.S. colleges and universities surpassed one million for the first time during the 2015-16 academic year”. In the process of studying abroad, international students experience a variety of cultures and face challenges from intercultural adjustment. The trend has attracted scholars in different disciplines to study intercultural adjustment process of international students in a host culture.

The rapid development of social media has accelerated the trend of globalization in recent years. The dramatic evolution of technology, especially new media, has greatly impacted every facet of human society, including the way people use time and space, the perception of media, and the ability to control the media (Chen, 2012). Thus, more and more scholars have started to examine the influence of social networks sites on human life (e.g., Piotrowski, 2012). Scholars basically agree that immigrants and international students prefer to use social media to facilitate their intercultural adjustment process (e.g., Croucher & Rahmani, 2015). Research also shows that social media helps immigrants not only adapt to host cultures (Hwang & He, 1999; Roman & Harwood, 2008), but also keep connected with their friends and

families in the homeland (Durham, 2004; Lee, 2004). As social media continues to develop and the number of international students keeps increasing in the United States, it becomes important for scholars to study how social media affects international students in their intercultural adjustment process.

Previous studies have explored the relationship between the use of social media and adjustment process in the host culture. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to the impact of social media use motives on intercultural adjustment of international students. To extend this line of research, this study attempts to examine the impact of social media use motives on international students' intercultural adjustment by focusing on psychological and sociocultural aspects.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Intercultural Adjustment

The advancement of communication and transportation technology has made intercultural communication a daily activity for millions of people. Some of them are long-term immigrants and refugees, and others are students and business people who just move to another country with a specific purpose for a shorter term. Among them, international students have received considerable attention from scholars. International students constitute a large portion of higher educational institutions in the americia. They are constantly exposed to conflicting cultural values and beliefs, and face the issues of cultural identity, lifestyle, social network, and studying method in the host culture (Stephenson, 2000). Living in the new environment, some of them prefer to stay in a familiar lifestyle and are reluctant to accept the differences, while others tend to live with the differences in a positive way and finally become competent sojourners. Thus, scholars have started investigating the adjustment of international students in different cultural contexts (e.g., Bochner & Furnham, 1986; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

There are two approaches to conceptualizing intercultural adjustment. First, intercultural adjustment was conceptualized as a unidimensional phenomenon, which refers to the degree sojourners integrate into the new culture or keep their previous belief, norms, and values in the host culture (Phinney, 1996). This approach treated identity as a continuum with the cultural identity for individuals who adapt well to the host culture on one end and those hold their original identities on the other.

The second approach argued that intercultural adjustment should be treated as a bi-dimensional or multi-dimensional concept. The bi-dimensional model pointed out

that “home and host cultural identities are situated on two separate continua” (Chen & Hanasono, 2016, p. 47). The multi-dimensional model includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes as sojourners attempt to achieve a higher level of psychological comfort in a new culture (e.g., Anderson, 1994; Kim, 1995; Ward, 1996). Ryder, Alden, and Pauhus (2000) agreed that comparing to the unidimensional model, the bi-dimensional model is more inclusive and valid for describing intercultural adjustment. As Anderson (1994) and Kim (1989,1995) indicated, intercultural adjustment is an ongoing, dynamic process in which sojourners and host cultures are deeply intertwined and mutually modifying.

Based on the two approaches, scholars have developed various theories and models to explain the process of intercultural adjustment. Some of them view intercultural adjustment as a learning and growth process. For example, Kim (2001) and Kim, Lujan, and Dixon (1998) proposed the “stress-adaptation-growth dynamic” model to suggest that stress and adaptation together produce a gradual psychological movement in the process of intercultural adjustment. A sojourner normally experiences changes in the new environment. As Kim (2001) pointed out, a defense mechanism is first triggered in sojourners to keep the balance of internal and external structures in the stress. Sojourners try to ignore or minimize the stress of disequilibrium through selective attention, avoidance, or cynicism. However, such defense will not last forever. All temporary stresses will lead to adaptation subsequently. The model constitutes “a three-pronged movement in the forward and upward direction of increased chances of success in meeting the demands of the host environment” (Kim, 2001, pp. 56-57). The model views cultural shock experiences as

natural responses and stress, and cultural shock is a necessary condition for adaptive transformation to activate the inner drive to adapt. It reflects a “dialectic relationship between the ‘opposite forces’ of push and pull, change and stability, and engagement and disengagement” (Kim, 2001, p. 58). However, the weaknesses of the theory are the denial of interactions between individual and environment and its argument that intercultural adjustment depends totally on sojourners’ efforts to transform and change to the new culture.

The learning model regards adjustment as a process of transformation and growth, in which sojourners as strangers are at first unfamiliar with the cultural values and beliefs of the host culture, and then get involved in a learning experience for establishing a new world view. The learning can gradually reach a new cultural identity with intercultural knowledge and competence (Kim & Ruben, 1988). Similar to the learning model, the development model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) developed by Bennett (1986) describes the adjustment process as a step-by-step psychological path. The model stipulates six stages of the increasing sensitivity to cultural differences, including “denial, defense, minimization to acceptance, adaptation, and integration” (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p.153). The first three stages are ethnocentric as individuals see their native culture as central to the reality, while the last three stages are ethnorelative indicating that a person views his or her own culture as in the context of other cultures.

Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960) proposed that the process of intercultural adjustment moves through several stages. As Lysgaard (1995) argued, the process of intercultural adaptation moves like a U-Curve, starting from a period of excitement

about new and interesting “sight and sounds” (stage 1), to a period of disillusionment as sojourners must seriously deal with living in the host culture day by day (stage 2), to a period of recovery (stage 3), and then reach the biculturalism period (stage 4). The model has been confirmed by scholars in research (e.g., Chang, 1973; Deutsch & Won, 1963; Morris, 1960; Oberg, 1960; Smalley, 1963).

Cultivating intercultural communication competence is crucial for facilitating the intercultural adjustment process. For example, Gudykunst (1995) developed the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory which aims to improve individuals’ communication competence by decreasing the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety. Gudykunst argued that uncertainty reduction, anxiety reduction, and mindfulness are key mediating variables for intercultural adjustment. He suggested that communication is not an “outcome” but a “process” of exchanging messages. The ability to manage uncertainty and anxiety will lead to effective communication. Anxiety was treated as “one of the fundamental problems” with which all individuals have to cope, and uncertainty is the “inability to predict and explain our own and others’ behavior” (Gudykunst, 1993, p. 39). Besides, mindfulness plays an important role in managing anxiety and uncertainty.

Berry (1997, 2003) further developed a dynamic adjustment model based on the two-dimensional construct, with one dimension referring to how sojourners view their own culture, and the other to how sojourners view their host culture. The combination of low and high levels of the two dimensions results in four models of intercultural adaptation, namely, assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1997). Assimilation happens when individuals engage in

interaction with their host society while discarding their original cultural identity. Integration occurs when one tries to maintain one's previous cultural beliefs and to engage in the new culture. Separation means that individuals keep their own cultural identity, but refusing integration with the new cultural environment. Finally, marginalization refers to individuals' refusal to connect with their home culture and assimilate to the host culture.

Based on previous research on cultural shock, Searle and Ward (1990) and Ward and Kennedy (1993, 1999) proposed that intercultural adjustment consists of psychological and sociocultural dimensions. Cultural shock was first proposed by Oberg (1960) to illustrate the feeling of anxiety and uncertainty when a person moves to a new environment, which shows the lack of direction, the feeling of being rejected, and the feeling of confusion. A sojourner like an international student normally will experience cultural shock in the process of intercultural adjustment. Psychological adaptation is related to psychological well-being, such as a clear perception of one's own cultural identity, good mental health, and satisfaction with the new host culture. It is a response to cultural shock (Oberg, 1960), and can be predicted by factors such as personality, social support, and stress coping framework. Sociocultural adaptation refers to "the ability to fit in, to acquire culturally appropriate skills" (Ward & Kennedy, 1999, p. 660), which shows if one can effectively interact with host nationals. Sociocultural adjustment is reflected in social skills acquisition or culture learning, which can be predicted by language ability, cultural distance, and the length of stay in the host culture.

Social Media

The last decades have witnessed the rapid development of electronic technology. Information and communications technologies (ICTs), such as new media, which includes social media, Skype, mobile phones, emails, online games, and blogs, have drastically changed the way people communicate, especially in the context of intercultural communication. New media has made human societies more interconnected and interdependent (Chen, 2012). People around the world use new media to communicate without confining to time, space, and religious beliefs. The Internet not only influences social and economic development, but also becomes an integral part of current network communities (Loader & Dutton, 2012). In addition, Chen (2012) noted that new media poses a great challenge to every aspect of intercultural communication in its traditional sense.

Among different kinds of new media, social network sites (SNSs) attract the most Internet users and have greatly impacted human society. Ellison and Boyd (2008) defined social network sites (SNSs) as

web-based services that allow users to create a public or semi-public profile within a system; create a list of other users with whom they are connected via the specific site; and view their list of connections and the connections of others within their network (p. 211)

Although different social network sites have different purposes and functions, Boyd (2007) found that they share a similar feature as online communities that have profiles, friends, and comments.

The growth of social media users has been explosive since 2003 (Pérez-Latre, Portilla, & Blanco, 2011). The *Global Social Media Research Summary 2016* shows

that there are about 2.307 billion active social media users globally. In April 2016, Facebook had 1,590 million users worldwide, which still dominates the SNS world. And the majority of most popular current social network sites was established after 2002 (Pérez-Latre, Portilla, & Blanco, 2011), including Facebook in 2004, Twitter in 2006, YouTube in 2005, and LinkedIn in 2003. The widespread growth of social media users indicates that social media used in every corner of the world has profound communicative implication and influence.

As an integration of a variety of methods of communication, social media provides users a platform to generate and exchange messages, post feelings and photos, and link with friends. Social media are deeply embedded in our daily life, particularly for the young generation. Studies have shown that social media has been considered as a place for getting information or news from family and friends (e.g. Holt, Shehata, Stromback, & Ljungberg, 2013; Pasek, More, & Romer, 2009; Tower, 2013). Previous research also indicated that the majority of social media, outweighing traditional mass communication channels, facilitates information exchange with a relatively cheaper cost (Baym et al., 2012; Beniger, 1996), attracts more people to participate in communication (Huber, 1990; Rainie, 2000), and reduces the time and physical constraints produced by traditional communication (Baym et al., 2012, Eveland & Bikson, 1998). Comparing to traditional communication, social media provides an alternative method of interaction, which allows users to generate and exchange feedback immediately and presents a more realistic image of society. (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 2002; Ju, Jia, & Shoham, 2016).

Why do people use social media? Motive is key factor that influence people's actions. According to uses and gratifications theory (U&G), people consume certain media and media content to satisfy their needs behind such motives of reinforcing relationships and gathering information (Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973). Scholars have identified different media use motives, such as information-seeking, entertainment, arousal, social interaction, escape, companionship, and passing time (Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1981). McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972) argued that there are four major gratifications: diversion, personal relationships, surveillance, and personal identity. Diversion means the willingness to "escape from the constraints of routine and the burdens of problems and emotional release" (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 513). Personal relationships refer to "companionship and social utility" (p. 513). Surveillance is based on the seeking for security, and personal identity indicates "personal reference, reality exploration, and value reinforcement" (p. 513). Schutz (1966) contended that three interpersonal needs, i.e., inclusion, affection, and control, influence all kinds of human communication. Rubin, Perse, and Barbato (1988) further identified six motives for interpersonal communication, including pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, relaxation, and control.

As new technology continues to advance, media use motives research has been extended to the study of Internet use. Although the U&G theory was originally used to investigate traditional media use (e.g., McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972), it offers a basic framework for the research of computer-mediated channels, such as social network sites. After comparing computer-mediated communication (CMC) and interpersonal communication motives, Flaherty, Pearce, and Rubin (1998) discovered

that people used computers to gratify interpersonal needs (i.e., inclusion, control, escape, relaxation, affection, and pleasure), needs traditionally achieved by media (i.e., social interaction, pass time, habit, information, and entertainment), and other needs which can be realized by new media (i.e., meeting people). Other studies uncovered main motives for using social media that satisfy interpersonal communication needs, seek social approval, and receive support (e.g., Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). Moreover, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) measured Internet motives through combining interpersonal, media, and new technology motives. The authors proposed five motives for Internet use, including interpersonal utility (e.g., help others, meet new people, and belong to a group), pass time (e.g., pass time when bored), information seeking (e.g., get information for free and see what is out there), convenience (e.g., it is cheaper and communicate with friends/family), and entertainment (e.g., it is entertaining/enjoyable).

However, it may be more complicated to examine the needs and motives for using social media in the context of intercultural adjustment. Blumler, Gurevitch, and Katz (1985) thus advocated for more cross-cultural studies of media use from the perspective of media gratifications.

Social Media and Intercultural Adjustment

Social media not only provides sojourners with information about the host culture, but also significantly influences sojourners' intercultural adjustment. Scholars have argued that immigrants use a variety of media to help them adjust to the host culture (Hwang & He, 1999; Kramer, 2003; Raman & Harwood, 2008). Ye (2006) found that international students from China ease their adjustment stress through

joining online ethnic support groups, in which they feel a sense of belonging. More studies have found that social media could facilitate sojourners' intercultural adjustment by providing an interaction platform, making connections with the host culture, easing emotional stress, improving language skills, obtaining social support, and learning host information (e.g., Shutters, 2012; Tsai, 2006; Wang, Huang, Huang, & Wang, 2009; Wang, Sun, & Haridakis, 2009; Ye, 2006).

Lueck and Wilson (2010) found that for newcomers who have difficulty in host language or high uncertainty about new cultural values and rules, the direct face-to-face interpersonal communication can be intimidating to them. Social media, unlike traditional interpersonal and mass communication channels, provides newcomers greater anonymity, diminishes the importance of physical appearance, improves users' controllability of the time, and allows them to present their ideas through various forms such as text, image, and video (Baym, 2006; Walther, 1996, 2007). Wang et al. (2009) discovered that Chinese students experiencing negative emotion prefer to rely on online communication and social networking in the process of intercultural adjustment. Ju, Jia, and Shoham (2016) further found that social media communication was positively related to students' intercultural adjustment. Similarly, Tsai (2006) maintained that the Internet usage facilitated intercultural adjustment process. Moreover, Chen and Hanasono (2016) found that Chinese students' adjustment to American culture was positively correlated with Facebook usage. Finally, Sawyer and Chen's (2012) study showed that increasing use of social media led to the decrease of cultural shock in the process of intercultural adjustment.

Nevertheless, previous research still does not reach a consensus on the relationship between social media usage and intercultural adjustment. Some studies revealed that individuals mainly use social media to connect and maintain their pre-existing offline friends rather than to make new friends online (e.g., Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Croucher (2011) discovered that many immigrant groups, especially some minority groups, have created group boundary and defended their own group identity through the Internet. As Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2011) found, although the use of social media among French-Muslim immigrants decreased cultural shock, it also led to the decrease of motivation for intercultural adjustment. Based on these findings, scholars generally agreed that the influence of social media usage on intercultural adjustment is greatly dependent on the immigrants' willingness, the immigrant group, and the extent of intercultural interactions (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2011; Shuter, 2012).

Problem Statement

The literature review above indicates that previous studies in this line of research mainly focused on the relationship between the general usage of social media and intercultural adjustment. Few of them have explored how the use motives of social media affect sojourners' intercultural adjustment in a host culture. To extend this line of research, the present study attempts to investigate the relationship between social media use motives and international students' intercultural adjustment. In addition, the impact of gender, grade, age on social media use motives and international students' overall satisfaction towards intercultural adjustment are also analyzed.

In this study, social media use motives refer to the general dispositions that influence people's social media usage to fulfill their needs, which consists of five dimensions: interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. Psychological adjustment is conceptualized as a sojourner's feeling of well-being in a new cultural context, and sociocultural adjustment is defined as a sojourner's ability to acquire skills to adapt to the host culture.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were international students at the University of Rhode Island (URI) in Kingston, Rhode Island, USA. The researcher asked the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) to help disseminate the survey link to international students (N=518) through E-mail. The first mail was sent to all international students at URI on December 5, 2016. By the end of December, the researcher received 97 responses. Follow up reminders were sent four times to the students. A total of 125 students participated in the survey by February 20, 2017, which reflects a 24% response rate. Twenty one incomplete responses were excluded from this study.

Valid responses from 104 participants were analyzed in this study. Among them, 45 were male and 59 were female. The average age was 25.90 years, ranging from 18 to 38 years old. Their average length of stay in the United States is 3.17 years. Participants were from 19 different countries with the top two largest populations from China and India.

In addition, 71.8% of the participants were graduate students (N=103), and 28.2% were undergraduate students.

Procedure

The survey was conducted via Survey Monkey. Before the survey, three graduate and one undergraduate student were asked to take the survey to secure the overall clarity of the instrument. The ISSO emailed the survey to international students at URI upon the approval of the University of Rhode Island's Institutional Review

Board. After reading a brief introduction of the study in the email, participants were asked to click the survey link and then were redirected to the online survey website. Participants were first asked to read the consent form and click the “next” button if they agreed to participate in the study. The participation in this study is completely anonymous and confidential.

Instruments

The questionnaire used in this study consists of 63 questions with five sections. Section one (items 1-27) includes items from Papacharissi and Rubin’s Internet use motives scale, measuring participants’ motives in using social media. The Internet Motives Scale contains five dimensions: interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. The 5-point Likert scale was used for data collection, with 1 representing “never”, and 5 representing “very often”. Section two (items 28-39) contains items of cultural shock developed by Mumford (1997), which was used to test participants’ psychological adjustment in the United States. Five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree) was used for these items.

Section three (items 40-50) measured the degree of difficulty of participants’ sociocultural adjustment in the United States. The items were adopted from Ward and Kennedy’s (1999) scale on sociocultural adaptation. Five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely difficulty) to 5 (no difficulty) was used for these items. Section four (items 55-60) were about participants’ demographic information, including age, college, nationality, gender, the length of stay in the United States, and grade level. The final section (items 61-63) contains open-ended questions about types of social

media participants often used, and their satisfaction of using social media in the process of intercultural adaptation.

Analyses

Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to examine relationships among social media use motives, intercultural adjustment, age, overall satisfaction, and the length of stay in the United States. T-test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and social media use motives as well as the relationship between the students' grade (undergraduate/graduate) and social media use motives. Finally, multiple regression was used to investigate which social media use motive best predicts the intercultural adjustment of international students.

RESULTS

Cronbach's alpha was tested for the reliability of the scales used in this study.

Table 1 shows the reliability coefficients. The results indicate that all the scales used in this study reach the satisfactory level of the reliability.

Table 1. Reliability Check of scales.

Subscale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Social Media Use Motives	0.93	27
Psychological Adjustment	0.79	12
Sociocultural Adjustment	0.90	15
Social Media Use Motive- Interpersonal Utility	0.87	12
Social Media Use Motive - Pass Time	0.88	3
Social Media Use Motive- Information Seeking	0.86	5
Social Media Use Motive - Convenience	0.76	4
Social Media Use Motive - Entertainment	0.90	3

Table 2 lists the mean scores of key variables in this study. The mean score for social media use motives is 3.38. The dimension of convenience was the top one motive for using social media (M= 3.84), while interpersonal utility had the lowest score (M=3.06) among international students. The results also show that participants have a relatively positive adjustment to American culture (M=3.61), with mean scores of 3.39 and 3.78 for psychological and sociocultural adjustment respectively. In addition, international students hold a positive attitude towards their social media usage (M=3.88) as well as their overall intercultural adjustment (M=3.81).

Table 2. Mean score of key variables.

Variables	Mean	SD
Social Media Use Motives	3.38	.73
Interpersonal Utility (1 st dimension)	3.06	.75
Pass Time (2 nd dimension)	3.34	1.18
Information Seeking (3 rd dimension)	3.67	.95
Convenience (4 th dimension)	3.84	.88
Entertainment (5 th dimension)	3.63	1.10
Intercultural Adjustment	3.61	.49
Psychological Adjustment	3.39	.55
Sociocultural Adjustment	3.78	.60
Overall Satisfaction with Social Media Usage	3.88	.67
Overall Satisfaction with Intercultural Adjustment Process	3.81	.81
Age	25.90	4.35
Length of Stay in United States (in years)	3.17	2.78

Pearson product-moment correlations were used to investigate the relationship between social media use motives and intercultural adjustment. As Table 3 shows, social media use motives were negatively correlated with one's overall intercultural adjustment level ($r = -.23, p < .05$) and psychological adjustment level ($r = -.36, p < .01$). It means that the less motives in using social media, the better intercultural adjustment level international students will have. Moreover, social media use motives were negatively correlated with one's age ($r = -.41, p < .01$). In other words, the

motives of using social media decrease as international students get older. Social media use motives were also negatively correlated with one's length of stay in United States ($r = -.22, p < .05$) which means the longer they stay in the United States, the less willingness to use social media.

Among the five dimensions of social media use motives, interpersonal utility ($r = -.23, p < .05$) and pass time ($r = -.23, p < .05$) were negatively correlated with one's overall intercultural adjustment. All the five dimensions of social media use motives were negatively correlated with one's psychological adjustment (see Table 3). No significant correlation was found between social media use motives and one's sociocultural adjustment level. Moreover, the motives for convenience and entertainment were found to be negatively correlated with the length of stay in the United States.

Table 3 also shows that the overall satisfaction of using social media was positively correlated with overall intercultural adjustment ($r = .46, p < .01$). Moreover, the results suggest that older participants tend to adjust better interculturally ($r = .27, p < .01$). Finally, the overall satisfaction with social media use was positively correlated with the overall satisfaction with the intercultural adjustment ($r = .35, p < .01$).

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Coefficients for social media use motives, adjustment, age.

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Social Media Use Motives	.87**	.69**	.83**	.79**	.77**	-.23*	-.36**	-.07	.35**	.16	-.41**	-.22*
2 Interpersonal Utility		.43**	.61**	.55**	.53**	-.23*	-.34**	-.07	.33**	.17	-.36**	-.18
3 Pass Time			.49**	.53**	.58**	-.23*	-.32**	-.11	.16	.10	-.32**	-.13
4 Information Seeking				.62**	.59**	-.11	-.26**	.02	.31**	.10	-.30**	-.15
5 Convenience					.62**	-.17	-.21*	-.10	.23*	.06	-.29**	-.20*
6 Entertainment						-.14	-.23*	-.04	.33**	.19	-.36**	-.23*
7 Intercultural Adjustment							.78**	.89**	.14	.46**	.27**	.10
8 Psychological Adjustment								.41**	-.03	.30**	.27**	.03
9 Sociocultural Adjustment									.23*	.44**	.20*	.13
10 Overall Satisfaction with Social Media Usage										.35**	-.16	-.04
11 Overall Satisfaction with Intercultural Adjustment											.12	.00
12 Age												.25**
13 Length of stay												--

** p <.01, *p <.05; N=1

Table 4 shows the results of *t*-test between gender and other variables.

Significant differences exist between gender and interpersonal utility, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. It was found that females had a stronger motive in using social media than males.

Table 4. *T*-test of gender, use motives, adjustment and satisfaction variables.

Variables	Gender	Mean	Sig.
Satisfaction with	Male	3.84	.61
Social Media Usage	Female	3.91	
Satisfaction with	Male	3.82	.96
Intercultural	Female	3.81	
Adjustment Process			
Social Media Use	Male	3.08	.00**
Motives	Female	3.61	
Interpersonal Utility	Male	2.76	.00**
	Female	3.28	
Pass Time	Male	3.09	.06
	Female	3.52	
Information Seeking	Male	3.35	.01**
	Female	3.90	
Convenience	Male	3.48	.00**
	Female	4.10	
Entertainment	Male	3.31	.01**
	Female	3.87	
Intercultural	Male	3.70	.08
Adjustment	Female	3.53	
Psychological	Male	3.45	.31
Adjustment	Female	3.34	
Sociocultural	Male	3.90	.07
Adjustment	Female	3.68	

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; N=104

Table 5 shows the results of t-test between grade level (undergraduate vs. graduate) and other variables. Significant differences were found in students' grade level and interpersonal utility, information seeking, and entertainment, and psychological adjustment. The results show that undergraduate students use social media more often for the motives of interpersonal utility, and information seeking, and entertainment, while graduate students showed a better intercultural adjustment.

Table 5. T-test of grade level, use motives, adjustment and satisfaction variables.

Variables	Grade	Mean	Sig.
Satisfaction with Social Media Usage	Undergraduate	4.00	.28
	Graduate	3.85	
Satisfaction with Intercultural Adjustment Process	Undergraduate	3.66	.27
	Graduate	3.89	
Social Media Use Motives	Undergraduate	3.71	.00**
	Graduate	3.26	
Interpersonal Utility	Undergraduate	3.37	.01*
	Graduate	2.94	
Pass Time	Undergraduate	3.67	.07
	Graduate	3.24	
Information Seeking	Undergraduate	4.06	.00**
	Graduate	3.51	
Convenience	Undergraduate	4.08	.06
	Graduate	3.77	
Entertainment	Undergraduate	4.02	.01*
	Graduate	3.49	
Intercultural Adjustment	Undergraduate	3.48	.11
	Graduate	3.67	
Psychological Adjustment	Undergraduate	3.19	.03*
	Graduate	3.48	
Sociocultural Adjustment	Undergraduate	3.71	.42
	Graduate	3.82	

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; N=104

Moreover, multiple regression analyses were used to examine which social media use motive best predicts psychological adjustment and sociocultural adjustment.

The results (see Table 6) show that the motives for interpersonal utility and pass time best predicted psychological adjustment ($R^2 = .167$, $p < .05$).

Table 6. Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses.

Psychological Adjustment		
Interpersonal Utility	-0.30	0.02*
Pass Time	-0.24	0.05*
Information Seeking	-0.02	0.86
Convenience	0.08	0.54
Entertainment	0.03	0.81
Sociocultural Adjustment		
Interpersonal Utility	-0.09	0.50
Pass Time	-0.12	0.34
Information Seeking	0.19	0.19
Convenience	-0.14	0.34
Entertainment	0.06	0.69

Finally, participants were asked to identify the social media that they used.

Facebook emerged as the most popular medium followed by YouTube, WeChat, and Instagram. Several other social media were mentioned including LinkedIn, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, Messenger.

DISCUSSION

In response to scholars' call to examine the impact of social media on intercultural communication (e.g., Croucher, 2011; Phua & Jin, 2011; Sandel, 2014; Wang & Sun, 2009), this study specifically explored the impact of social media use motives on the psychological and sociocultural adjustment of international students in the United States. In addition to enriching the literature in this line of research, this study may also provide practical suggestions for helping international students better adjust to their learning and life in a foreign land.

The results of this study show that social media use motives were negatively correlated with psychological adjustment, and had no significant impact on sociocultural adjustment. Moreover, age was negatively correlated with social media use motives, but it had a positive relationship with intercultural adjustment. The findings are not consistent with previous studies that indicate the increased use of social media tends to improve intercultural adjustment (e.g., Chen & Hanasono, 2016; Sawyer & Chen, 2012; Tsai, 2006). Age may be a plausible explanation for this inconsistency. Previous research has demonstrated that social media use motives decrease as one becomes older (e.g., Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). In this study, more than 70% of the participants were graduate students, and the average age is as high as 25.90. Moreover, as previous studies indicated that international students prefer to use social media to gain social support and gain information (e.g., Ye, 2006; Shutters, 2012), it is more likely that international students who have psychological adjustment problems tend to have strong motives in using social media which supports the results of this study.

In addition, the results also indicate a linkage between age and intercultural adjustment. Older participants in this study showed better intercultural adjustment, but relied less on social media to gain social support, gain information, and maintain relationships. Graduate students on college campus tend to undertake a higher workload comparing to undergraduate students. This might be the reason for graduate students to reduce the motives of using social media. Life experiences and maturity attached to older age may explain why graduate students showed higher scores on intercultural adjustment.

The negative relationship between social media use motives and intercultural adjustment may be caused by technology that may help sojourners alleviate adjustment stress in a host culture, but may also lead to social isolation (Parr, 1992). Furthermore, due to the lack of language proficiency and awareness of the host culture, international students, especially the newcomers, tend to use technology rather than face-to-face interaction on campus to avoid the embarrassment. This may cause barriers for international students to competently live in the real environment, and in turn affect their intercultural adjustment (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005).

The negative relationship between social media use motives and the length of stay in the United States supports Zhao, Kuh, and Carini's (2005) finding that technology use decreases over time for international students because face-to-face interaction with others increased, and more often technology is used for more specific purposes.

The significantly negative relationships between convenience and entertainment of media use motives and the length of study in the United States

suggests that international students may also use other tools to meet their entertainment and convenience needs in the host culture. The significant relationship between satisfaction of social media usage and intercultural adjustment found in this study is consistent with the previous research from Ju, Jia, and Shoham (2016).

It is interesting to see that all the five dimensions of social media use motives were significantly and negatively correlated with psychological adjustment, but not with sociocultural adjustment. Although a number of previous studies have found that the use of social media has a positive impact on intercultural adjustment (e.g., Croucher, 2011; Phua & Jin, 2011; Sandel, 2014; Wang & Sun, 2009), the different results found in this study are puzzling. It demands further exploration and research.

It is worth mentioning that significant differences between social media use motives and gender were found in this study. Consistent with previous studies (e.g. Perrin, 2015), the results show that female participants showed a stronger motive in using social media than males. Female participants in this study scored significantly higher than males in all social media use motives except for the dimension of passing time. The results also indicate that undergraduate students had a stronger motive in using social media than graduate students for interpersonal utility, seeking information, and entertainment. The results are consistent with previous research that found the social media use motives decrease as one gets older (e.g., Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Finally, the results show a significant difference between social media use motives and psychological adjustment, but not with sociocultural adjustment. The results may reflect the dynamic nature of intercultural adjustment. Future research

needs to further investigate this dynamic relationship between social media use motives and intercultural adjustment.

Results from multiple regression analyses reveal the association between social media use motives and psychological adjustment. Interpersonal utility and pass time were found to best predict psychological adjustment in a negative way. The results are puzzling, because both interpersonal utility and pass time should be directly related to psychological aspect of intercultural adjustment. More research is needed in the future to challenge this unexpected finding.

Lastly, it is understandable that Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram were the most popular social media participants used. They are the most accessible and common social media nowadays in the United States. It is interesting to note that, as a significant percentage of participants were Chinese students, common Chinese social media such as WeChat and QQ were also on the top list of the survey.

In sum, the findings of this study generally confirm the impact of social media use motives on international students' intercultural adjustment in the United States. The study sheds light on understanding the process of intercultural adjustment for the new media generation. It extends current intercultural adjustment study to a new context, enhances intercultural adjustment research by focusing on social media use motives among international students in the United States, and contributes to understanding challenges and changes of intercultural adjustment in the age of new media.

Limitations and implications

Although the present study has yielded some significant findings, several limitations and implications deserve mentioning.

First, the sample size is relatively small in this study. Increasing the sample size in future studies may help to reach a more reliable and persuasive outcome. Participants in this study could also be more balanced in terms of countries and grade levels. This is especially needed for the survey conducted online, because unlike a traditional survey, it is more difficult to get the permission of potential students to participate in the study.

Second, the number of the survey items in this study is relatively large (N=63). Too many survey items may lead to respondent fatigue, loss of interest, and thus less reliable data, as demonstrated by the invalid data in this study (N=21).

Third, the survey was distributed online through email, which might cause difficulty for data collection. Today more and more young people prefer to check emails through a mobile phone, which does not provide a reader-friendly environment for answering online survey questions. It may take participants more time to access and complete the survey, and may result in incomplete responses. Future studies should take students' social media usage habits into consideration when conducting this kind of research.

Finally, future research can employ a longitudinal design to examine if changes on use motives and behavioral outcomes on social media occur before and after a person becomes a sojourner in a new culture. Studies may explore different aspects of intercultural adjustment, such as investigating a particular period of intercultural adjustment and changes of social media motives over time. As Ward and

Kennedy (1999) claimed, intercultural adjustment is a complicated process, which always displays a variety of fluctuations over time.

APPENDIX A. Social Media Use Motives and Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustment Questionnaire

Below is a series of statements concerning **the use of social media** when you are in the United States. There is no right or wrong answers. Please work quickly and record your first impression by indicating the degree to which you use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc.) with the statement. Thank you for your cooperation.

5 = very often

4 = often

3 = uncertain

2 = occasionally

1 = never

Please put the number corresponding to your answer in the blank before the statement

I use social media...

- ___ 1. To help others.
- ___ 2. To participate in discussions.
- ___ 3. To show others encouragement.
- ___ 4. To belong to a group.
- ___ 5. Because I enjoy answering questions.
- ___ 6. To express myself freely.
- ___ 7. To give my input.
- ___ 8. To get more points of view.
- ___ 9. To tell others what to do.
- ___ 10. Because I wonder what other people said.
- ___ 11. To meet new people.
- ___ 12. Because I want someone to do something for me.
- ___ 13. Because it passes time when bored.
- ___ 14. When I have nothing better to do.
- ___ 15. To occupy my time.
- ___ 16. Because it is a new way to do research.
- ___ 17. Because it is easier.
- ___ 18. To get information for free.
- ___ 19. To look for information.
- ___ 20. To see what is out there.
- ___ 21. To communicate with friends, family.
- ___ 22. Because it is cheaper.
- ___ 23. Because it is easier to e-mail (to use social media) than tell people.
- ___ 24. Because people don't have to be there to received e-mail.
- ___ 25. Because it is entertaining.
- ___ 26. Because I just like to use it.
- ___ 27. Because it is enjoyable.

The following questions are about your **intercultural adaptation** in the United States. Please indicate the degree of your agreement with the statement.

5 = strongly agree

4 = agree

3 = uncertain

2 = disagree

1 = strongly disagree

Please put the number corresponding to your answer in the blank before the statement

- ___ 28. I feel strain from the effort to adapt to the new culture.
- ___ 29. I miss my family and friends back home.
- ___ 30. I feel generally accepted by the local people in the new culture.
- ___ 31. I wish to escape from my new environment altogether.
- ___ 32. I feel confused about my role or identity in the new culture.
- ___ 33. I found things in the new environment shocking or disgusting.
- ___ 34. I feel helpless or powerless when trying to cope with the new culture.
- ___ 35. I feel anxious or awkward when meeting local people.
- ___ 36. When talking to people, I make sense of their gestures or facial expressions.
- ___ 37. I feel uncomfortable if people stare at me when I go out.
- ___ 38. When I go out shopping, I feel as though people may be trying to cheat me.
- ___ 39. I found it an effort to be polite to my hosts.

Please indicate the degree of difficulty with the statement.

5 = no difficulty

4 = slight difficulty

3 = moderate difficulty

2 = great difficulty

1 = extremely difficulty

Please put the number corresponding to your answer in the blank before the statement

- ___ 40. Understanding the local value system.
- ___ 41. Understanding the locals' world view.
- ___ 42. Seeing things from the locals' point of view.
- ___ 43. Understanding cultural differences.
- ___ 44. Taking a local perspective on the culture.
- ___ 45. Making friends.
- ___ 46. Being able to see two sides of an intercultural issue.
- ___ 47. Family relationships.
- ___ 48. Making yourself understood.
- ___ 49. Communicating with people of a different ethnic group.

- ___50. Dealing with people in authority.
- ___51. Dealing with people staring at you.
- ___52. Dealing with someone who is unpleasant.
- ___53. Dealing with people unsatisfactory service.
- ___54. Dealing with bureaucracy.

Finally, please answer the following questions as accurate as you can:

- 55. Age: _____
- 56. College: _____
- 57. Nationality: _____
- 58. Gender: Male _____ Female _____
- 59. Length stays in the US: Year _____ Months _____
- 60. Grade: Freshman _____ Sophomore _____ Junior _____ Senior _____
Postgraduate _____
- 61. Please list two social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blog, iPhone, LinkedIn or others) you use most often in the process of your intercultural adaptation: (1) _____ (2) _____
- 62. Please indicate your overall satisfaction regarding the use of social media in the process of intercultural adaptation: Very Satisfied _____ Satisfied _____
Uncertain _____ Unsatisfied _____ Very Unsatisfied _____
- 63. Please indicate your overall satisfaction regarding the process of your intercultural adaptation: Very Satisfied _____ Satisfied _____ Uncertain _____ Unsatisfied _____
Very Unsatisfied _____

Thank You Very Much for Your Cooperation!

APPENDIX B. Anonymous Consent Form for Participants

You have been asked to take part in a research project described below. The online instruction on Survey Monkey will provide you with the project details. You should feel free to ask questions. If you have more questions later, please call Yiping Ma (401-339-1889), the person mainly responsible for this study, and she will discuss them with you. You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

Description of the project:

You have been asked to take part in a study that is intended to study the impact of social network sites on international student adjustment at the University of Rhode Island.

What will occur:

You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire that contains 63 questions. It will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Risks or discomfort:

The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal. If you do not feel comfortable during answering the questions, you can stop at any time.

Benefits of this study:

Although there will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, it may help you increase the knowledge regarding social network sites and intercultural adjustment.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in this study is anonymous. All answers will be confidential. All the answers of questionnaire and consent forms will be also kept by Yiping Ma for 3 years before they are removed.

Decision to quit at any time:

The participation in this study is on the voluntary basis. You do not have to participate and you can stop answering the questions whenever you feel uncomfortable. If you have any questions regard the study, please contact Yiping Ma (401-339-1889) or Professor Guo-Ming Chen (401-874-4731).

Rights and Complaints:

If you have any complaints regarding the study, please feel free to anonymously contact Yiping Ma (401-339-1889) or Professor Guo-Ming Chen (401-874-4731). In addition, you may also contact the office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies, Research and Outreach, 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island (phone: 401-874-4328).

You Must be at Least 18 Years old to be in this research project. You have read the consent form and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. Your filling out the survey implies your consent to participate in this study.

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