

The Role of Social Media in Shaping the Sociocultural Adaptation of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong

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Abstract. Social media has become an essential part of the cross-cultural adaptation mechanism in the framework of digital globalization. More and more mainland Chinese students chose to continue their higher education in Hong Kong in the recent past, where they unavoidably come across a number of cultural adjustment-related issues. The complex situation of social-cultural adaptation is formed under the influence of Hong Kong's unique media environment, which connects both Mainland China and international media outlets. A broad body of research has been conducted at home and abroad on issues related to cross-cultural adaptation, which mainly focus on aspects such as language barriers, lack of social support, and feelings of psychological stress among expatriates. There are not many studies that focus on the mediating role of social media, particularly for Hong Kong's special administrative region and its mainland Chinese student group, which is culturally distinct from other places. Through in-depth analysis of the influence on students' adaptation to the new social environment caused by different social media usage behaviours, this study will fill the void in current research and provide theoretical support for the cultivation of students' social-cultural adaptation capabilities. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that better cultural adaptability is significantly related to increased use of social media; Users who favour international social media platforms, such as Facebook; And those who actively acquire cross-cultural knowledge and information through various channels. According to Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, an open information environment helps with adaptation, and social media provides essential resources for students to cross information obstacles and obtain localised content. International platforms also promote social learning and integration better due to the diverse contents they offer and enhanced local connections. This study offers practical implications for educators and policymakers in multicultural academic settings.

Keywords: Social media, Cultural adaption, Hong Kong

1. Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of students from the mainland have chosen to pursue further study in Hong Kong, both to improve their own qualifications and to broaden their horizons through personal experience and exposure to culture. However, this change often poses problems of cultural adaptation [1,2]. Hong Kong has a special media system of multiple media platforms, and students

can use these platforms locally, such as WeChat and Rednote, and also spread information globally through international social media tools like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube [3-5].

In the context of digital globalisation, social media has become an essential channel for individuals to achieve cross-cultural adaptation [2,4]. These platforms can help Mainland students in Hong Kong understand the local lifestyle, communicate with local children as well as their peers on the mainland, vent their feelings, and build a digital community [3]. Online Spaces can also offer some function support in adaptation to new cultural environments and thus enhance intercultural adaptability [1-7]. But they may also strengthen cultural boundaries through selective interaction and group division [4,5]. There are several academic and practical applications of studying the influence of social media on the cultural adaptation of Mainland Chinese college students.

In this particular cross-cultural media environment, social media not only serves as an entertainment and communication platform but also plays a crucial role in students' exposure to, understanding of, and adaptation to local culture, values and daily life [2,6]. It is through these digital channels that students may either stay in familiar online Communities or be exposed to the diverse sociocultural life of Hong Kong [4,5]. In light of this, this paper will examine how different kinds of social media influence the sociocultural adaptation of Hong Kong-based Mainland Chinese students [1-3]. Referring to Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, this study is expected to discover which online learning platforms students like better; how much they are engaged in local culture when participating in related courses online; To what extent it helps students adapt to a new cultural environment [2,6].

Previous research on cross-cultural adaptation has mainly focused on international students studying abroad, which typically involves offline activities like face-to-face communication, academic events, and linguistic obstacles. Although the above factors continue to play a role, there is an increasing sense that digital environment, especially social media, is reshaping people's interaction and understanding of new cultures [1-3]. In terms of intra-national mobility, students moving from mainland China to Hong Kong will need to go through both physical border crossings and social-cultural language differences under the overall Chinese social-political environment [4,5]. Social media, in particular, enables people to gain access to local knowledge, observe cultural practices, and maintain social relationships that are beneficial for psychological well-being [2,8]. However, there is a lack of research on how digital platforms specifically help the adaptation of students who come from the mainland to Hong Kong [7].

The study has some characteristics in terms of perspective, etc. First of all, it increases the body of literature on intercultural adaptation by setting up an independent case study under the same national but different cultural circumstances, that is, between Mainland China and Hong Kong [4,5]. Second, it extends the theoretical application of Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation theory to the digital and media-mediated environment, making clear that social media have changed the form in which cross-cultural experiences are realised [2,6]. The third point is that it provides practical references for universities, policy-makers and personnel in the student Affairs field of Hong Kong and other similar global educational centres to help Design more effective Support Systems that take into account the digital aspects of students' adaptation [7,8]. In conclusion, the problem raised in this paper can serve as a warning for others that after releasing their emotions through new media or online public spaces promptly solves some practical problems, it still cannot avoid social comparison increasing, causing other people's subjective experience deviation) In addition to this problem being worthy of concern more closely related issues will be faced again later under multicultural backgrounds [3,4].

2. Research design

The research on questionnaires is based on the group of Mainland students who are studying at Hong Kong universities. Set up computation questions in the questionnaires to screen valid ones. This study will use the quantitative research approach based on the 41-item Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) to further examine which type of media-use habits (for example, platform types, localised contents) is more closely related to students' adaptability after entering university; This study intends to explore how different types of media-use habits (platforms for information collection, localised content) are linked with students' general sense of adaptation through a quantitative survey using the Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS). Using a 40-item Likert scale (1=strongly disagree/difficult, 5=strongly agree/easy), assess the degree of cultural adaptation across several aspects: social interaction, life style adjustment, academic adaptation and cross-cultural recognition. A total of 40 points was averaged to obtain the overall cultural adaptation Index. At the same time, the data from the questionnaire will be analysed with SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

2.1. Variable

Based on the research questions and research goals, the research variables were determined. The independent variables are the frequency of using media, the social media platform preference (mainland platforms, overseas platforms, or both equally), and the active browsing of Hong Kong culture. The control variables are sex, age and length of residence. The dependent variable is the sociocultural adaptability level of individuals..

2.2. Research hypotheses

According to Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, this paper will examine whether there is a connection between the results of adaptation and the use of social media. Therefore, based on these situations and changes in people's perception problems that arise from them after considering digital media as one of the means of cross-border cultural adaptation; At the same time, discover new pathways for addressing this issue [1,8].

Young Yun Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, which conceptualizes cultural adaptation as a dynamic, cyclical process involving stress, such as language barriers, value conflicts, and social alienation, adaptation, including active information seeking, communication engagement, and behavioral modifications and growth, which manifest as increased intercultural competence, psychological stability, and a stronger sense of identity. Rather than a linear progression, the model portrays adaptation as a constant interplay between external cultural pressures and the internal capacity of individuals to adjust through behavioral, cognitive, and communicative mechanisms [1,8,9].

Although stressors are an important component of the theory, in the context of this study, it can be considered that the "cultural adaptation stress" faced by Hong Kong mainland students is a widespread situation. As stated by previous research, culture shock in cross-cultural situations is a common problem faced by international students, including language barriers, lifestyle differences, and a sense of social exclusion [1,2]. These "stressors" are also widely present during the process of mainland students studying in Hong Kong. Therefore, this study does not measure the stressors one by one, but focuses on how students adapt through social media.

Furthermore, Kim proposed in his cross-cultural adaptation theory that the adaptation mechanisms mainly include communication behaviors and environmental interactions. Although social media did not exist at the time this theory was put forward, as one of the essential communication channels today, it has broadly realised the functions of interpersonal interaction, cultural comprehension, and self-display. Therefore, the behaviour of using social media can be considered one form of adaptive measures; Thus, according to Kim's theory, it will help explain that such behaviour has a positive impact on cultural adaptability [1,8].

In short, this study has several meanings. First, it adds to the growing body of research on intercultural adaptation by placing the discussion in a specific intra-national but culturally different environment, that is, Mainland China and Hong Kong [4,5]. Second, it extends the theoretical application of Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory in the digital and media-assisted environment to prove that the impact caused by social media on intercultural experience still exists [2,8]. Thirdly, it can serve as a reference for universities, policy-makers and personnel in the student affairs department of other places in Hong Kong and elsewhere globally to help them develop more effective support systems that acknowledge the digital dimension of students' adaptation [6,7]. Last but not least, this study helps to raise awareness that media literacy and cross-platform interaction can either facilitate or impede the adaptation process; at the same time, it also lays the groundwork for subsequent intervention studies in multicultural academic environments [3,4,10]. Based on the analysis above, this paper presents the following predictions.

H1: The increased use of popular social media platforms is positively correlated with the cultural adaptation of Mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong.

H2: Social media platforms that facilitate interaction among local Hong Kong students, mainland students, and other individuals from different regions are more beneficial for cultural adaptation than those where only mainland students can participate.

H3: Students who proactively browse the content related to their life in Hong Kong tend to have better cultural adaptation compared with those who passively receive it..

2.3. Research result

2.3.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Total Score	220	94	163	121.43	11.227
Preferred Social Media Platform	220	1	3	2.01	0.770
Active Browsing of HK - related Culture Info	219	0	1	0.51	0.501
Daily Social Media Usage Duration	220	1	4	2.39	1.034
Age	220	18	25	21.51	2.244
Gender	220	1	2	1.54	.500
Length of Residence in HK	220	1	4	2.13	1.032

As shown in Table.1,these statistics provide a solid foundation for further analysis, illustrating the central tendencies, variability, and distributions across the key variables in the sample.

2.3.2. Hypothesis testing

The first hypothesis, according to which mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong have better cultural adaptation when they use more popular social media platforms, was tested by examining the correlation between social media use and cultural adjusting scores using Pearson correlation analysis.

Table 2. Correlation analysis

Analysis Type	Metrics	Values	Interpretations
Correlation Analysis	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (Acculturation Total Score vs. Social Media Usage Time)	0.888	<0.001: Significantly correlated at the 0.01 level (2 - tailed); Sample Size = 220
Regression Analysis	R2	0.788	Social media usage time explains 78.8% of variance in acculturation total score
	Adjusted R2	0.786	High model fit
	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	0.888	Extremely strong positive predictive effect
	p - value (ANOVA)	<0.001	Overall model is significant

The findings of the Pearson correlation study between the two variables—Total Score and the frequency of using social media—are shown in the figure in Table 2.

In summary, average daily social media use is significantly and strongly positively correlated with the total cultural adaptation score at the 0.01 significance level (2-tailed), offering compelling statistical evidence for the link within sociocultural adaptation and social media use.

To test the second hypothesis, which suggests that social media platforms enabling interactions with both local Hong Kong students and mainland peers contribute more significantly to cultural adaptation than those limited to mainland-based interactions, a one-way ANOVA with post hoc tests was conducted to compare cultural adaptation scores across three groups based on platform preferences: mainland-only, overseas-only, and both equally.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of cultural adaptation levels by groups

Group	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	95% Confidence Interval
1 (Mainland - only platforms)	64	109.09	4.767	[107.90, 110.28]
2 (Overseas - only platforms)	90	131.77	8.310	[130.03, 133.51]
3 (Mixed usage)	66	119.29	2.384	[118.70, 119.87]
Total	220	121.43	11.227	[119.94, 122.92]

Table 4. Results of ANOVA and post - hoc tests

Analysis Type	Statistic	Value	Significance	Conclusion
ANOVA F - value	F(2, 217)	268.398	p < 0.001	Extremely significant differences exist among the three groups
Tukey HSD Test	Group 1 vs. Group 2	Difference = - 22.673	p < 0.001	Overseas - platform group is significantly better than mainland - platform group
	Group 1 vs. Group 3	Difference = - 10.194	p < 0.001	Mixed - usage group is significantly better than mainland - platform group
	Group 2 vs. Group 3	Difference = + 12.479	p < 0.001	Overseas - platform group is significantly better than mixed - usage group

Table 5. Results of homogeneity of variance test

Test Method	Levene Statistic	p - value	Conclusion
Based on mean	25.473	$p < 0.001$	Heteroscedasticity (unequal variances)
Based on median	13.442	$p < 0.001$	Heteroscedasticity (unequal variances)

Table 3 illustrates the descriptive statistics of sociocultural adaptation levels among three groups of Hong Kong campus' students who come from mainland China, categorized by their preferred types of social media platforms. The group that exclusively used overseas-oriented platforms (Group 2) reported the highest average adaptation score ($M = 131.77$, $SD = 8.31$), followed by the mixed-platform group (Group 3) with a mean of 119.29 ($SD = 2.38$). In contrast, the group relying solely on mainland Chinese platforms (Group 1) reported the lowest adaptation level ($M = 109.09$, $SD = 4.77$).

A significant between-group effect was found ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the three groups categorized by "the primary type of social media platforms used daily" differ significantly in their total cultural adaptation scores.

According to Post-hoc Tukey HSD Test (Table. 4), Group 1 (mainland platforms only) scored lower than Group 2 (overseas platforms) significantly, with a mean difference of -22.673 , $p < 0.001$. Group 1 received a lower score than Group 3 (both platform types), with a mean difference of -10.194 , $p < 0.001$. While according to Homogeneous Subsets which as shown in Table 5 Group 2 had the highest average score (131.77), followed by Group 3 (119.29), and Group 1 had the lowest (109.09), reinforcing the statistical differences among the groups.

This supports that the use of new media platforms that facilitate cross-regional interaction contributes more positively to sociocultural adaptation.

To examine the third hypothesis, which posits that students who actively browse content related to their life in Hong Kong exhibit higher levels of cultural adaptation than those who passively consume content, the adaptation scores of the two engagement groups have been compared applying an independent samples t-test.

Table 6. Comparison of cultural adaptation levels between groups

Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
75	110.25	5.131	0.592
144	127.34	8.802	0.733

Table 7. Results of independent - samples t - test

Test Type	t - value	Degrees of Freedom	p - value	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval
Unequal Variance Assumed (Corrected)	-18.122	214.237	<0.001	17.087	[15.4, 18.94]

Table 8. Effect size analysis (Cohen's d)

Effect Size Indicator	Value	Interpretation
Cohen's d	2.20	Extremely large effect (>0.8 is a large effect)
95% Confidence Interval	[1.86, 2.55]	Stable and significant effect size

Group Statistics (Table. 6) shows that Students who did not actively browse Hong Kong-related content (coded as 0) had a mean cultural adaptation score of 110.25 ($N = 75$), while those who actively browsed such content (coded as 1) had a significantly higher mean score of 127.34 ($N = 144$).

Based on T-test Results(Table. 7), unequal variances ($F = 11.490$, $p < 0.001$) were revealed by Levene's test, so the unequal variance t-test result was used. The t-value was -18.122 with $df = 214.237$, $p < 0.001$, and the mean difference was 17.087 —favoring the active browsing group.

Table 8 presents the effect size analysis using Cohen's d to examine the extent of cultural adaptability among different student groups according to their social media use. The calculated Cohen's d value is 2.20 , which falls into the category of a large effect size (values greater than or equal to 0.8 are generally considered large). The effect seems to be relatively stable and statistically significant according to the 95% CI (1.86 - 2.55).

This considerable Effect size shows that the type of social media platform used - mainlander only, overseas only, or mixed - has a strong impact on students' sociocultural adaptation. It supports the core view of this study, that is, digital media behavior is not an accidental factor but has a considerable influence on the cultural adaptation of Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. According to the above analysis, it is suggested that social networking services should introduce diverse elements at the platform level and internationally to better promote cross-cultural interaction and exchange results; At the same time, improving one's own cultural awareness through varied approaches will help enhance tolerance of other cultures in interpersonal communication.

In summary, students who proactively seek out information about Hong Kong culture tend to have stronger sociocultural adaptability, which strongly supports Hypothesis H3..

2.3.3. Multivariate analysis

In order to examine the comprehensive impact of numerous factors on cultural adaptability in different scenarios, a multi-linear regression analysis was conducted; Specifically, it is divided into two parts: one part includes cultural adaptability as its target variable, while another group consists of social networking behaviour habits, types of social media, frequency of use and interaction experiences among users when receiving information from different platforms.

Table 9. Overall model fit

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
R2	0.790	Independent variables explain 79% of the variance in cultural adaptation
Adjusted R2	0.784	High model fit, no obvious overfitting
F - value	133.045	The overall model is extremely significant ($p < 0.001$)
Standard Error of Estimate	5.210	Relatively small prediction error

Table 10. Variable coefficients and significance

Variable	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t - value	P - value	VIF
Average daily social media usage time	0.878	15.345	<0.001	3.305
Other variables (gender, age, etc.)	Not significant	-	>0.05	<5

With an R^2 value of 0.790 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.784 , the model demonstrated strong explanatory power, as seen in Tables 9. and 10. which means that the predictors accounted for about 78.4 percent of the variance in cultural adaptation scores. The ANOVA result was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming the overall validity of the model.

Among the independent variables, the average amount frequency of social media use each day turned out to be an immensely significant predictor ($p < 0.001$), with an unstandardized coefficient of $B = 11.280$ and a standardized beta of $\beta = 0.878$, indicating a strong positive relationship with cultural adaptation.

Active browsing of Hong Kong-related content was not statistically significant ($p=0.685$) after controlling for other variables; therefore, it is unable to independently predict cultural adaptation in a multivariate scenario. Age, gender, length of stay in Hong Kong, and mainstream social media platforms used were among the other control variables that did not show any significant effect.

Since all variance inflation factors (VIF) were well below the threshold of 10, with a maximum VIF of only 1.944, collinearity checks did not need to be considered. It can be seen that this set of regression coefficient values all exhibit good stability and lack randomness to some extent.

To sum up, among all the variables in the entire model, only the average amount of time spent on social media remained statistically significant. Although active content browsing was found to be associated with cultural adaptation in earlier bivariate analysis, this effect did not persist after other variables were introduced into the model, and thus it is speculated that there may be overlaps or interactions among various factors in the model.

3. Conclusion

According to Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory, this paper explores the impact of social media use on the socio-cultural adaptation of Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong for their studies. All of the above results show that all three hypotheses are supported. Firstly, there is a positive correlation between high cultural adaptability and a large consumption of popular social media platforms; that is to say, the former can promote cultural learning and adaptation through digital means. Second, Students who used platforms for interaction between students from different regions showed better adaptability to new environments than those using regionally segregated platforms; thus, it is essential to encourage cross-regional communication. Third, although active content browsing seemed to support adaptation in the initial presentation, it lost its prediction ability after multivariate analysis and stated that the length of time people use social media is more significant. Therefore, together they highlight that not only is it necessary for students to be engaged in multiple social media activities but also how essential it is to enhance their cultural identity through interaction with different cultures; thus providing new forms of connection among different cultural groups under the digital environment.

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