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# MECHANISMS OF ACTION BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA CHARACTERISTICS, PERCEIVED VALUE, AND CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION



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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social media characteristics, perceived values, and cross-cultural adaptation among Chinese graduate students in Malaysia. Although previous cross-cultural studies have predominantly examined the effects of social media on cultural adaptation from an application-centred perspective, fewer past studies have examined the specific characteristics of social media and their influence on adaptation processes. With the advent of new communication technologies, cultural identities have been reinforced. They often exacerbate cultural differences and induce "culture shock" within cyberspace. This study employed a mixed-method research approach, integrating Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to develop a model explaining the role of social media characteristics and perceived value in cross-cultural adaptation. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire from 270 Chinese international students pursuing master's or doctoral degrees in Malaysia, and analyzed using Smart-PLS 4.0. The results indicated that social media characteristics had a positive and significant effect on perceived value, and a modest positive effect on cross-cultural adaptation. Moreover, perceived value emerged as a significant predictor of cross-cultural adaptation, mediating the relationship between social media characteristics and adaptation. A single case study was conducted at a Malaysian university, involving interviews with five Chinese graduate students and two university staff members. Data were analyzed using Gioia's method. It revealed that "media distance" and "habits of use" helped explain the relatively weak association between social media characteristics and cross-cultural adaptation. This study contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between social media, perceived value, and cross-cultural adaptation.



## **MEKANISME TINDAKAN ANTARA CIRI-CIRI MEDIA SOSIAL, NILAI YANG DIRASAI, DAN PENYESUAIAN MERENTASBUDAYA**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka mekanisme yang mendasari hubungan antara ciri-ciri media sosial, nilai yang dirasakan, dan penyesuaian silang budaya dalam kalangan pelajar pascasiswazah Cina di Malaysia. Walaupun kajian silang budaya sebelum ini banyak meneliti kesan penggunaan media sosial terhadap penyesuaian budaya dari perspektif aplikasi, kajian terdahulu kurang memberi tumpuan kepada ciri-ciri spesifik media sosial dan pengaruhnya terhadap proses penyesuaian. Dengan kemunculan teknologi komunikasi baharu, identiti budaya semakin kukuh, sering kali memperbesar perbezaan budaya dan menyebabkan "kejutan budaya" dalam dunia siber. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan penyelidikan kaedah campuran, mengintegrasikan Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur Kuasa Dua Terkecil (PLS-SEM) untuk membangunkan model yang menerangkan peranan ciri-ciri media sosial dan nilai yang dirasakan dalam penyesuaian silang budaya. Data dikumpul melalui soal selidik berstruktur daripada 270 pelajar antarabangsa Cina yang mengikuti pengajian sarjana atau doktor falsafah di Malaysia dan dianalisis menggunakan SmartPLS 4.0. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa ciri-ciri media sosial mempunyai kesan positif dan signifikan terhadap nilai yang dirasakan serta kesan positif yang sederhana terhadap penyesuaian silang budaya. Tambahan pula, nilai yang dirasakan didapati menjadi peramal yang signifikan terhadap penyesuaian silang budaya, serta memainkan peranan sebagai pengantara dalam hubungan antara ciri-ciri media sosial dan penyesuaian tersebut. Satu kajian kes di sebuah universiti di Malaysia turut dijalankan, melibatkan temu bual dengan lima pelajar pascasiswazah Cina dan dua kakitangan universiti. Data dianalisis menggunakan kaedah Gioia, yang mendedahkan bahawa "jarak media" dan "tabiat penggunaan" membantu menjelaskan hubungan yang agak lemah antara ciri-ciri media sosial dan penyesuaian silang budaya. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang interaksi kompleks antara media sosial, nilai yang dirasakan, dan penyesuaian silang budaya.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCG	Center for China and Globalization
CCA	Cross-Cultural Adaptation
CV	Cognition value
CA	Cronbach's Alpha
CR	Composite Reliability
CNNIC	China Internet Network Information Center
EMGS	Education Malaysia Global Services
EV	Emotional value
HOC	Higher-Order Component
IQ	Information quality
IS	Information System
ISSM	Information System Success Mode
ITCCA	Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation
IV	Interactive value





LOC	Lower-Order Component
LVs	Latent Variables
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
NBoS	National Bureau of Statistics
NHESP	National Higher Education Strategic Plan
PLS-SEM	Structural Equation Modeling Based on Partial Least Squares
PV	Perceived Value
SCAS-R	Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale
SEQ	Service quality
SMC	Social Media Characteristics
SOR	Stimulus-Organism-Response
SQ	System quality
SWLS	Satisfaction with Life Scale
SV	Social value
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
WOS	Web Of Science





## APPENDIX LIST

- A Approval from Human Research Ethics Committee
- B1 Informed Consent
- B2 Consent to be a Research Subject
- C Questionnaire
- D The Interview Outline
- E Second-Order Model





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction

Each year, over thousands of international students travel abroad in pursuit of an educational opportunity that promised improved life prospects. With reference to UNESCO (2020), global transnational student mobility nearly tripled from 1999 to 2019. For them, the experience of studying abroad was characterized by a blend of curiosity and anticipation regarding unfamiliar cultures, as well as feelings of anxiety





and unease. Upon entering a culturally distinct environment, they encountered a range of challenges. For instance, language barriers, academic pressures, unfamiliarity with local food and climate, and the absence of family support were the challenges identified. Consequently, the cross-cultural adaptation (henceforth, CCA) of international students has emerged as a significant concern in education of various countries.

Next, media use plays a significant role in the process of CCA. Packer (1922) argued that modern communication was a driving force behind social progress, with the press serving as a key means for isolated and marginalized individuals to adapt to modern life. Therefore, it was crucial in addressing social problems in the United States at the time. In contrast to the last century, current communication media and environment have evolved dramatically. Social media, characterized by digitalization, networking, mobility, interactivity, and low entry barriers, is transforming the landscape, structure, and norms of global information exchange. Numerous past studies have demonstrated that social media usage positively influenced international students' CCA (Rui & Wang, 2015; Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016).

In 2020, the number of Chinese students enrolled in overseas higher education institutions reached 1,061,511. It significantly surpassed the second-highest figure in India, with 461,792 students (UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, the intercultural





adaptation of Chinese graduate students in Western countries has garnered considerable attention from both domestic and international researchers. However, relatively few researchers have focused on the adaptation of Chinese international students in Asian countries (Goodwin et al., 2020; Wilczewski & Alon, 2022). Following the introduction of "One Belt, One Road" initiative in China and the strengthening of comprehensive cultural and educational cooperation between China and participating countries, Malaysia has emerged as an increasingly popular choice for tertiary education (Yusoff, 2011a; Mst et al., 2017). By December 2022, Malaysia had attracted a total of 177,000 international students, of whom 52,907 were Chinese, comprising 43% of the international student population (MoHE, 2022). Notably, the number of Chinese applicants for doctoral programmes in Malaysia increased by 83% in 2021 (EMGS, 2022). Therefore, investigating the social media use and CCA of Chinese graduate international students in a multicultural context like Malaysia is particularly significant.

## 1.2 Background of Study

To begin, the talent competition has intensified in the era of globalization. It prompts countries worldwide to actively attract international students as a means of enhancing their global competitiveness. The admission of international students exerted a





significant impact on both the economy and educational system of the host nation. International students often contributed positively to the destination country's economy. Despite the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international enrollments and the global economy during the 2019–2020 academic year, international students still contributed \$11.9 billion to the economy and supported 125,000 jobs in California and New York alone, where they were most concentrated. Beyond paying high tuition fees, international students incurred considerable expenses related to housing, shopping, transportation, and health insurance. In host countries, increased market demand driven by such lifestyle expenditures created numerous jobs, boosts overall income growth, and fostered economic prosperity (Wang et al., 2022).



Moreover, international students are directly associated with enhancing the influence and reputation of universities. For instance, the proportion of international students is a key metric used in global university rankings, such as those by Times Higher Education. This has encouraged universities to optimize their international education centres to attract more international students. Thereby, it could boost their institutional prestige. In addition to universities, governments in various countries have introduced supportive policies aimed at attracting international students, such as streamlining entry visa procedures and offering a range of scholarships.



Nearly half of the 29 countries that responded to the OECD/UNESCO-UIS/UNICEF/World Bank special survey on the COVID-19 pandemic reported modifying their recruitment procedures for international students during the 2020–2021 academic year. These adjustments were aimed at promoting study abroad through more welcoming and proactive policies. Thereby, it increased the number of accepted international students. Such policies and initiatives have resulted in a significant rise in the number of international students.

**Table 1.1**

*Number and Growth Rate of International Students from Countries of Origin of International Students in Tertiary Education, 2018-2019.*

Ranking	Country	2019	2018	Growth rate
1	China	1061511	997702	6.4
2	India	461792	377849	22.2
3	Vietnam	126059	108301	16.4
4	Germany	122445	122524	-0.1
5	France	103161	99567	3.6
6	USA	102246	86029	18.9
7	Korea	101493	101694	-0.2
8	Nepal	93921	82047	14.5
9	Kazakhstan	89292	88118	1.3
10	Brazil	81882	70055	16.9

*Note, Unit: persons, % Source, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics*

Referring to the China Study Abroad Development Report in 2022, compiled by the Globalization Think Tank and the Bank of China, Asian countries



neighbouring China possess several advantages as study abroad destinations. The advantages are geographic proximity, cultural similarities, and relatively lower costs. These factors have increasingly made Asian nations attractive alternatives for Chinese students who might have previously considered Western Countries. In addition to implementing measures to increase the influx of international students, host countries should actively develop strategies to facilitate students' adaptation to local life, fostering positive relations and harmonious coexistence.

Next, the virtual environment created by social media closely mirrors real life, social media has been playing an increasingly important role in people's lives, Hence, its use has become a significant factor influencing CCA. and there is a great need to examine the mechanisms at play between CCA and social media in Chinese studies in Malaysia.

### **1.2.1 International Education Development**

To begin, globalization has facilitated the flow and competition of goods, services, manpower, capital, knowledge, and technology within the global market. Subsequently, it resulted in increasingly competitive and interdependent relationships among nations. Since the 1980s, economic globalization has advanced rapidly,





accompanied by swift developments in information technology. These changes have shifted interactions from purely domestic to globally interconnected forms, with economic activities transcending national borders to form an integrated global system. A key characteristic of this global economic integration is the free movement and amalgamation of resources such as talent, capital, knowledge, and technology. They contributed to the optimal allocation of resources worldwide (Wen et al., 2023).

On a global scale, the internationalization of economic development has inevitably diversified the demand for talent. The globalization of economic activities required individuals with an international outlook and specialized knowledge.

Moreover, the internationalization of education is crucial in cultivating such talent.

This educational shift not only enhances the pool of globally competent individuals but also supports national economic development. Additionally, the trend towards the industrialization of higher education has significantly influenced its internationalization because more countries have begun to approach international education as a strategic industry (Li, 2019).





### 1.2.1.1 The Chinese Government Promotes Studying in Malaysia for Chinese Students

The sending nation derived substantial economic and social benefits from international education through the repatriation of talent. China, for instance, has realized significant economic gains from international education by encouraging the return of overseas-educated professionals. Based on survey data in "2020 China Returnee Employment and Entrepreneurship Survey Report" there was a 67.3% increase in international students applying for jobs in China in 2020 compared to 2019 (CCG, 2020). This trend reflected the growing pattern of international talent circulation. In other words, Chinese students pursued education abroad and subsequently returned to China for employment.

In 2020, the phenomenon of "going abroad for further studies and returning to China for employment" continued to gain momentum. There was an increasing number of Chinese students returning after completing their studies or short-term work placements. As China further implemented its national "double-cycle" strategy, the number of Chinese students studying and working abroad was expected to grow. It could enhance the role of internationalized talents with overseas experience in both domestic and global contexts. Returnees with international education backgrounds are also more inclined to engage in national governance. They could leverage their knowledge and experience to serve the public, advocate for China on the international





stage, and contribute to the nation's long-term public governance and active participation in global governance.

Conversely, transnational education has fostered the growth and development of industries associated with self-funded study abroad in China. With reference to data published by the Ministry of Education of China, as of 26 June 2019, there were 608 self-funded study abroad intermediary agencies in mainland China that had been accredited by the Ministry's Education-related Foreign Supervision Information Network. They were listed among the intermediary service providers for self-funded study abroad. Another sector that has flourished is the educational institutions in language training. As the number of international students has increased, there has been a corresponding expansion in language training facilities catering to these students. The programmes are TEFL, TOEFL, and IELTS preparation (Zhan, 2017).

Since the reform and opening up, China has witnessed a consistent increase in the number of students pursuing education abroad. It is illustrated in Table 1.2. From 1978 to 2019, the total number of Chinese students studying overseas reached 6.5606 million. It continues to grow. China has now emerged as the world's leading source of international students, surpassing even the United States.



**Table 1.2***The Number of Chinese Students Studying Abroad in the Past Five Years*

Year	Number of Chinese students studying abroad	Growth rate
2015	523,700	13.9%
2016	544,500	3.97%
2017	608,400	11.74%
2018	662,100	8.83%
2019	703,500	6.25%

Source: Official website of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China

The relationship between China and ASEAN has significantly strengthened in recent years. Both parties have established a strategic partnership, alongside a multi-level and multi-faceted framework for cooperation. This collaboration has yielded substantial results across various sectors. The growing trend of regional economic integration between China and ASEAN has enhanced exchanges in economy, politics, society, and culture. It also drives an increased demand for education. In 2010, the Chinese government introduced the "Double 100,000 Plan". It aimed to have 100,000 students enrolled in studies between China and ASEAN by 2020. To date, China has signed educational exchange agreements with Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and the Philippines, along with mutual recognition agreements for academic degrees with Thailand and Malaysia (MoE, China, 2016).



China has expressed its commitment to enhancing comprehensive cultural and educational cooperation with countries along the "One Belt, One Road" initiative and its key nodes. In July 2016, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the *Educational Actions on Promoting "One Belt, One Road" Construction* (MoE, China, 2016). It was a collaborative document aimed at strengthening educational ties. Following the implementation of this policy, China has intensified its educational collaboration with nations along the Belt and Road. Therefore, it led to a significant increase in the number of Chinese students studying in these countries.



Given its close ties with China, the ASEAN region has emerged as an increasingly attractive destination for Chinese students seeking higher education opportunities. Based on a report by *People's Daily*, 80,000 students from ASEAN countries studied in China in 2015, accounting for 60% of the total number of ASEAN-China students. Several ASEAN countries, including Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia, have announced their ambitions to become regional hubs of higher education. The combination of "push" factors from China and "pull" factors from ASEAN nations is prompting a growing number of Chinese students to pursue higher education in Malaysian institutions.



**Table 1.3***List of International Students in Malaysia*

Year	Total amount of students from abroad	Number of Chinese students
2020	30342	8876
2021	40140	19202
2022	51270	24829
total	121752	52,907

Source: Education Malaysia Global Service (EMGS) official website

*Note*, The initiative known as "One Belt, One Road" (henceforth, OBOR) was introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 during addresses at the Indonesian Parliament and Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University. "One Road" refers to the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road. On the other hand, "One Belt" denotes the Silk Road Economic Belt. Since its inception, OBOR has evolved into China's most significant foreign policy and development strategy. Concurrently, it shaped the country's international economic and diplomatic engagements in subsequent years.

As shown in Table 1.3, official data from Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) on applications to study in Malaysia for the academic years 2020–2022 indicated that 51,270 Chinese students applied during this period. It reflected an increase of 20,928 applications from previous years. Among the international students studying in Malaysia, Chinese students represented 43% of the total.



### **1.2.1.2 Chinese International Students Are Drawn to Malaysia by Its Internationalized Higher Education Policy**

In the early 21st century, academic institutions worldwide began exploring strategies to enhance their competitiveness within local and regional economies. To establish centres of educational excellence, several nations and regions developed "education hub strategies" to reorganize and integrate higher education resources from both domestic and international sources. In Malaysia, the globalization of higher education became a pivotal element of the government's strategic planning following the announcement of "Vision 2020" by Mahathir in 1991.



Subsequently, the Malaysian government prioritized the development of higher education, increased financial investment, and introduced several educational policies, such as the Education Act of 1996. This Act encouraged private universities to collaborate with foreign institutions, fostering partnerships between local private universities and internationally recognised universities (Tham, 2019).

In 2007, Malaysian government introduced the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) for 2020. It aimed to establish Malaysia as a regional hub for quality education. The plan focused on enhancing the quality of education and teaching, accelerating the internationalization of higher education, and prioritising research and innovation. To achieve this goal, the Malaysian government has actively





supported higher education institutions in forming partnerships with renowned universities from the different countries. Additionally, the government has encouraged collaborations between local and international universities. It could leverage the global visibility and quality of overseas institutions to attract foreign students to Malaysia (Ma et al., 2020).

Currently, Malaysia hosts 20 public universities, 33 private universities, 37 public community colleges, 24 polytechnics, 5 foreign university campuses, and approximately 500 private colleges. This is complemented by various institutions from France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. They offered joint degree programmes through partnerships with Malaysian universities and colleges. As a result of this robust development of higher education, Malaysia has become a major destination for international students within Southeast Asia (Grapragasem et al., 2014).

By continuously enhancing its quality control systems to ensure the effective operation and high standards of teaching and learning, the Malaysian government has reinforced its competitive edge in the internationalization of higher education. While the government maintains stringent regulatory control over higher education institutions, it also encourages the private sector to establish relevant organizations to monitor educational standards and protect the interests of stakeholders involved in





collaborative education. The NHESP aimed to elevate the international standing of Malaysian higher education by establishing an accreditation standard that attracts international students and encourages participation in global competitions.

In recognition of these efforts, Malaysia was named one of the "Top 10 Global Destinations for International Students" by UNESCO in 2020 and ranked ninth worldwide for educational excellence. Referring to the QS 2023 World University Rankings, 24 Malaysian universities were listed. Eighteen of them ranked among the top 200 in Asia. Notably, the University of Malaya was ranked 9th in the Asian university rankings. Eventually, Malaysian universities dominated "half of the top 10" positions in the list of Southeast Asian universities (SoHu, 2021).

An important factor for students when choosing an educational institution is the tuition fees (Rolfe, 2002; Yusoff et al., 2015). In Malaysia, the estimated annual tuition fees and living expenses, including accommodation and food, amount to approximately 60,000 RMB for undergraduate studies. It is 70,000 RMB for graduate studies. Compared to similar programmes in Western countries, studying in Malaysia offers significant cost savings of 50% to 70%. Thus, Malaysia is considered a highly "cost-effective" destination for international students.



Overall, Malaysia's international higher education sector holds a leading position in Asia. Its diverse forms of international education, robust quality assurance, favourable study environment, and cost-effective tuition fees have made it an attractive choice for many Chinese students.

### **1.2.2 The Advancement of Contemporary Transportation Networks Enables Cross-Cultural Interactions**

The advancement of information technology in modern transportation and communication networks has been a key driver of globalization (Samovar & Larry, 2004).

First and foremost, lower transportation costs have enhanced people's mobility. Hence, it increases the frequency of cross-border movements. As noted by Held (2001), population migration is common for globalization. Since the late 1970s, the world political map has experienced numerous historical fissions and integrations. It led to economic restructuring and significant shifts in the nature, scale, and internal dynamics of cross-border population flows. Former colonial powers in Europe and America have now become the largest recipients of immigrants (Fan, 2008). As populations move and bring their cultures with them, multinational and cross-continental travel facilitates cross-cultural communication, enabling it to detach



from the current community. Finally, it penetrated into personal daily life (Wang, 2003).

The relatively closed space has been gradually dismantled. It pushed ethnic groups separated by national borders into shared environments. The interactions with diverse cultures and the resulting cultural collisions and conflicts occurred more frequently (Li, 2012). In this sense, transportation not only connects the physical spaces of people's lives but also serves as a crucial bridge for intercultural communication.



In short, Malaysia's proximity to China, absence of a time difference, efficient transportation, and the availability of direct flights from major Chinese cities make it an appealing study destination for Chinese students. Additionally, airfares to Malaysia are significantly lower than those to Western countries. Thus, it further encourages Chinese students to choose Malaysia for their graduate study.

### **1.2.3 Advances in Communication Technologies Offer A Wide Range of Opportunities for Cross-Cultural Communication and Exchange**

In addition to accelerating globalization, the past three decades have witnessed rapid growth in new media. It fundamentally altered human interactions and created a





highly complex networked society. This evolution suggests that the integration of new media and globalization in the twenty-first century is progressively giving rise to a global society (Chen, 2021). Lippmann, the founder of communication studies, argued that the media shapes the "pseudo-environment" in which people live. The media functions as a misleading, virtual, and indirect interface that mediates between the external world and human perception. It offers "second-hand" knowledge through which individuals understand and perceive the world. In this way, people use media to fill in the knowledge gaps left by direct experiences of the outside world, while media simultaneously influences their attitudes, behaviors, and ways of thinking (Lippmann, 2006).



In cross-cultural past studies, researchers had extensively examined the relationship between media and CCA. For instance, Parker's study of immigrant newspapers and Kunst's Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory (henceforth, AUM) explored the impact of media on managing anxiety and uncertainty in cross-cultural communication. Similarly, Kim's "Integration Theory of Communication and Intercultural Adaptation (henceforth, ITCCA)" highlighted the influence of the mimetic environment created by media, particularly mass communication, on immigrants' intercultural adaptation. The ways in which immigrants select, engage with, and use media significantly affect their ability to live and work effectively in foreign contexts.





Compared with the last century, significant transformations have occurred in contemporary media and environmental landscapes. Social media, which merges the attributes of mass and interpersonal communication, has substantially amplified the influence of the "pseudo-environment." New media technologies, characterized by digitization, networking, mobility, interactivity, and minimal barriers to entry, are reshaping the global dynamics, structures, and regulations of information exchange. The advancement of information and communication technologies, alongside the widespread adoption of smart phones, has altered traditional communication modes. It resulted in a diverse range of communicators and a complex, multi-layered information environment.



From the standpoint of media usage, social media not only retains the primary characteristics of traditional media but also integrates the interactivity and immediacy typical of interpersonal communication. Furthermore, due to compatibility and its transcending of temporal and spatial limitations, social media is increasingly supplanting mass media. It becomes the most utilized medium in everyday life, it subtly influences various aspects of people's daily activities, including work, study, communication, and shopping. Thereby, it becomes an essential component of modern existence. Fundamentally, social media is altering the way individuals perceive the world (Turkle, 1995).



### 1.2.4 Studying in Malaysia Mitigate the Supply and Demand Mismatch in China's graduate Training

The ongoing expansion of China's examination and graduate school boom has led to a steady increase in the number of exam applicants since 2018. However, the acceptance rate has been declining annually. Although the enrolment capacity of colleges and universities has been growing, the resources available, such as faculty and teaching facilities have not expanded correspondingly. This disparity has resulted in issues related to resource allocation within higher education institutions and has increased the challenges associated with student admissions. A table is presented below for the data.

**Table 1.4**

*China's graduate Admissions and Enrollment*

	Number of applicants(Thousand)	Growth rate (Compared to previous year)	Number of students enrolled(Thousand)	Enrolment rate
2022	457	21.20%	124.2	27.20%
2021	377	10.60%	117.7	31.20%
2020	341	17.60%	110.7	32.50%
2019	290	21.90%	91.7	31.60%
2018	238	18.40%	85.5	36.10%

Source: data collected from Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China

Furthermore, compared to other industrialized nations, China has a significantly lower ratio of doctoral degrees awarded (1.24) relative to the total



number of degrees conferred (Xu, 2016). The primary responsibility for doctoral enrolment and training lies with the doctoral supervisors. From 2006 to 2016, China's team of doctoral supervisors expanded, with the average teacher-student ratio decreasing from 4.74 in 2006 to 3.81 in 2016 (Wang & Yang, 2019). Despite this growth, the typical Chinese supervisor manages only one PhD student per year, given the average duration of 4.3 years for doctoral studies in China (Yuan, 2014). Due to the oversupply of graduate education domestically, many Chinese students are compelled to pursue their master's and doctoral degrees abroad. Referring to the data from EMGS and MoHE, Chinese students are significantly more likely than undergraduates to apply for graduate studies in Malaysia.



#### **1.2.4 Chinese international Students Under Large Pressure**

Initially, Ding et al. (2022) conducted an analysis of literature on the mental health of Chinese international students from 2018 to 2022. They drew data from the China Knowledge Network (CNKI) and the Web of Science (henceforth, WOS). A total of 329 relevant publications were identified. They revealed that psychological adjustment among these students remained inadequate. On the contrary, some past studies focused on dimensions such as psychological well-being, depression, anxiety, life satisfaction, self-esteem, loneliness, and happiness. All of these indicated





persistent challenges in the mental health of Chinese international students.

Recent distressing incidents further highlighted these concerns. For example, in August 2019, Jenny Lu, an Asian student at the University of Pennsylvania, dropped out after just three weeks due to psychological issues. In March 2021, Zhang Yide, a student at Emory University, passed away, with his father suggesting suicide in his letter titled "To Dave's Classmates at Emory University." In October 2021, Tone Yao Lee, a student at Santa Clara University, took his life by lying on railroad tracks due to depressive disorder. In February 2022, a 26-year-old Chinese doctoral student at Stanford hanged himself in his lab, reportedly due to academic pressure. It was a data from Westlake Voice Public Account. More recently, in August 2023, Qi Tailei, a Chinese student at the University of North Carolina, made headlines for fatally shooting his supervisor. Xinmin Weekly reported it. These cases underscored the critical and ongoing issues surrounding the mental health of Chinese international students.

A past study conducted by UC Berkeley found that 37% of master's degree students and 47% of doctoral students reported experiencing symptoms of depression. The "Psychological Self-Help Handbook for Chinese International Students," published by Know Yourself (2020), investigated the psychological well-being of Chinese students abroad. Based on the data from 10,707 valid questionnaires, 83.95%



of respondents reported experiencing at least one psychological breakdown, 72% were severely affected by academic pressure, and 44.58% had considered quitting their studies.

The Chinese and Malaysian governments have introduced various policies to promote Sino-Malaysian higher education cooperation and exchanges between the two countries. The development of transportation and media technology has further facilitated international education. The imbalance between the supply and demand of graduate education in China, along with the high cost-effectiveness of studying in Malaysia, are key factors driving Chinese students to pursue education in Malaysia.

As the world's largest source of international students, Chinese students often encounter significant cross-cultural stress when navigating environments vastly different from their own. These stresses can severely affect their academic performance, daily life, and overall health and well-being in a foreign country.

With the growing number of Chinese students in Malaysia each year, there is a pressing need to focus on their CCA within Malaysia's multicultural environment. Moreover, the rapid rise of social media and its impact on the intercultural adaptation process of Chinese students warrants further attention and research. It aims to address gaps in the existing literature on how social media facilitates CCA for Chinese graduate students in Malaysia.



### 1.3 Problem Statement

Since the emergence of social media in the late 1990s, its technologies and applications have evolved rapidly. Therefore, it increasingly influences people's lifestyles. As of 2023, there were 4.76 billion social media users globally. It represented 59.4% of the world's total population, with users spending an average of 2.5 hours per day on social media platforms (We Are Social, 2023). Given the growing significance of social media in daily life, academic interest in this area has intensified. Past studies on social media were primarily focused on four domains: social media technology (including network structure and topology, statistical correlations, information flow, and diffusion), social media information services (such as data handling, information fusion and integration, and visualization), social media user information behaviour, and the application of social media (Camacho et al., 2020; Gu & Rundle, 2019).

Furthermore, past studies on social media applications within information systems (henceforth, IS) have demonstrated that social media characteristics (henceforth, SMC) and perceived value (henceforth, PV) significantly influence users' choice, continued use, and satisfaction, marking it as a critical research direction in the field (DeLone & McLean, 2003; Wang, 2016; Zeithaml, 1998; Sharma & Klein, 2020). Additionally, some researchers have explored the





impact of cultural differences on social media selection and usage from a marketing perspective to enhance social media design and attract more users (Alsaleh et al., 2019). Cross-cultural communication researchers primarily examined the interaction between social media use (including duration, type, frequency, and interaction) and CCA (Rui & Wang, 2015; Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016; Pang, 2020). However, there remains a lack of research investigating the relationship between SMC, PV, and CCA, as well as the mechanisms underlying these interactions.

In addition, past researchers have shown considerable interest in the CCA of Chinese international students in English-speaking countries. However, less attention has been given to the cross-cultural experiences of Chinese students in Asian countries (Goodwin et al., 2020; Wilczewski & Alon, 2022). In Malaysia, Chinese students represented the largest group of international students, numbering 1.345 million (Hirschmann, 2020). Despite this substantial presence, only four articles published between 2010 and 2020 examined acculturation among Chinese students in Malaysia. Besides, these studies merely identified the factors influencing their acculturation without exploring their use of social media.

When international students arrive in an unfamiliar country for study, they encounter not only a new cultural environment but also an unfamiliar social media landscape. This is true for Chinese international students, who have typically been





immersed in a Chinese-centric social media environment. Upon going abroad, if they find that the characteristics of foreign social media platforms do not align with their needs, they often revert to their pre-existing social media consumption habits. This reliance on familiar platforms can hinder their ability to integrate into the host country's society. Potentially, it might lead to cultural alienation (Zhang & Hu, 2019). Furthermore, new communication technologies can reinforce the cultural identities of different ethnic groups, exacerbate cultural differences, and ultimately result in “culture shock” within cyberspace (Fu, 2018).

Therefore, examining the relationship between SMC, PV, and CCA, as well as the underlying mechanisms in this current study offers valuable insights for social media developers to enhance their platforms. This current study also contributes to promoting the CCA of Chinese international students within the context of social media, ultimately facilitating their integration into the host country’s culture.

The main objective of this current study was to explore the mechanisms underlying the role of SMC, PV, and CCA among Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia. A mixed-method research approach was employed. Firstly, a quantitative approach was used to assess whether SMC such as information quality (henceforth, IQ), service quality(henceforth, SEQ), system quality(henceforth, SQ), and the PV of social media, including social value (henceforth, SV), cognitive value





(henceforth, CV), emotional value (henceforth, EV), and interactive values (henceforth, EV), were key predictors of CCA (psychological and socio-cultural) among Chinese graduate international students. This phase also tested the relationships between SMC, PV, and CCA.

Secondly, a case study approach was utilized to further elucidate and demonstrate the mechanisms of CCA and social media use among Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia. This qualitative phase aimed to validate the quantitative findings from various perspectives and provide deeper insights,

particularly in areas where the quantitative results did not align with the initial hypotheses.



## 1.4 Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

(1) Determine the impact of SMC on PV of social media among Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia.





(2) Determine the effect of PV on CCA of Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia.

(3) Determine the impact of SMC on CCA of Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia

(4) Develop a mechanism for the role of SMC, PV and CCA of Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia.



### 1.5 Research Questions

This study needed to address the following research questions:

Firstly, this current study examined SMC through the lens of IS acceptance. It empirically investigated the role of these characteristics in CCA. It was grounded in the information system success model(henceforth, ISSM), focusing on three key dimensions: SQ, SEQ, and IQ.





Secondly, this current study explored the value dimension from the perspective of PV. It considered Chinese graduate international students as social media users and highlighted that their PV of social media platforms during the CCA process is essential for the continued use of these platforms. It identified the specific value dimensions of social media that influence the CCA of Chinese graduate international students.

Thirdly, this current study investigated the satisfaction of Chinese graduate international students with social media platforms, drawing on CCA theory. It focused on the impact of SMC and PV on the level of CCA among Chinese graduate international students. It also explored the mechanisms and pathways through which these factors influence their adaptation process. Therefore, the main questions of this current study were:

Research Question 1: How do SMC affect the perceived social media value of Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia?

Research Question 2: How does the PV of social media affect the CCA of Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia?

Research Question 3: How do SMC affect the CCA of Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia?





Research Question 4: What are the mechanisms by which SMC, PV, and CCA of Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia work?

## 1.6 Theoretical Framework

This current study employed four main theoretical frameworks to understand the social media use and CCA process of graduate Chinese international students in Malaysia: the Stimulus-Organism-Response (henceforth, SOR) theory, ISSM, PV theory, and CCA theory. These frameworks provided a comprehensive basis for

examining how SMC and PV influenced the CCA of Chinese graduate international students.

### 1.6.1 The SOR Theory

The SOR paradigm, first proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), explained how environmental stimuli impact users' internal states, subsequently influencing their actions and intentions. The model consists of three components: stimulus, organism, and response. Stimuli are external factors, such as environmental cues, that influence an individual. According to Bagozzi (1986, p. 46), organisms represent the internal



states of users, encompassing their "perceptual, physiological, feeling, and thinking activities." These internal states mediate the impact of stimuli and determine the individual's response. Responses are behavioral outcomes influenced by the organism's internal state and are often considered the final endogenous variable in the model (Kim, 2021).

Following that, stimuli affect the organism's response by triggering changes in its internal state, such as affective, cognitive, and experiential shifts. The organism's perception thus mediates the relationship between stimulus and response, reflecting how the organism reacts to the environmental cues (Baker et al., 1994; Eroglu et al., 2001; Fiore & Kim, 2007). The SOR theory emphasizes analyzing and explaining the mental processes of the organism. In addition, it identifies the psychological factors responsible for individual behavioral, and thereby elucidating the intermediate mechanisms linking stimuli to responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

In this current study, the SOR model was applied. First of all, social media characteristics were conceptualized as stimuli. Then, the PV of social media by Chinese graduate students represented the organism's perception. Next, the degree of CCA reflected the organism's response. This framework elucidated the influence mechanism between social media stimuli and the behavioral intentions related to CCA.



To start, the S-O-R model was utilized in this current study for two primary reasons. Firstly, the model has been widely employed by researchers to investigate online consumer behaviour. For instance, Xue et al. (2020) found that virtual interactive experiences (O) can mitigate the effects of online interactions (S) on user participation in social networks (R). Shan et al. (2019), using eye-tracking technology and questionnaires, examined the relationship between patients' choices of doctors and the information provided by the doctors, using the S-O-R model. Their findings revealed that emotional trust (O), elicited by the information provided by doctors (S), significantly influenced patients' choice behaviour (R). Similarly, Kim (2021) demonstrated that users' perceptions of Instagram advertisements are influenced by varying levels of engagement (S), which in turn affects their communication behaviour (R). Molinillo et al. (2020) argued that a user's utilitarian and hedonic perceived value(O) is shaped by a company website's mobility, visual appeal, and interpersonal influence (S), subsequently impacting the user's purchase intentions (R).

Secondly, the S-O-R framework provides a systematic approach to exploring how SMC stimuli influence the PV of social media among Chinese graduate international students. it could affect their process of CCA while studying abroad. This structured approach makes a compelling case for adopting the S-O-R theory as the theoretical foundation for analysing the social media use behaviours of Chinese international graduate students.





### 1.6.2 ISSM

The ISSM was introduced in 1992 by renowned American scholars DeLone and McLean (1992) after a comprehensive analysis of approximately 190 studies on the use of IS conducted between 1981 and 1987. The model also incorporated insights from Mason's (1978) research on information impact and Shannon and Weaver's (1949) work on communication relationships. The ISSM offers a practical framework for evaluating the success of IS by outlining the causal relationships among key components, including information quality, SQ, system use, user satisfaction, personal impact, and organizational impact, as depicted in Figure 1.1. The model further examines how these interrelationships influence overall IS success (Gui, 2019).

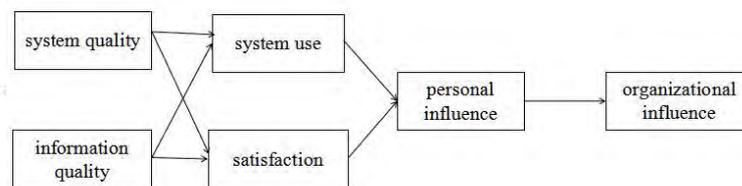
Although the ISSM has been widely acknowledged since its inception, it has also faced significant criticism. Seddon (1997), in his critique of the ISSM, questioned the relationships among the four variables: SQ, IQ, intention to use, and user satisfaction. He argued that intention to use should be replaced with system validity, that system importance should be included. Also, the bidirectional relationship between satisfaction and intention to use should be revised to a one-way effect of system validity on satisfaction.



Similarly, Pitt et al. (1995) criticized the ISSM for being overly focused on information production, emphasizing factors such as accuracy, timeliness, and reliability of information. At the same time, it neglected the service quality aspect of the IS. They argued that the model does not sufficiently address how the quality of service influences the success of IS.

**Figure 1.1**

*Initial ISSM Mode*



Source: DeLone & McLean (1992)

As research in user-system interactions advanced, DeLone and McLean (2003) revised and refined the original ISSM, as depicted in Figure 1.2. The revised model introduced service quality as an additional dimension, replaced “System Use” with “Intention to Use,” and simplified the concept of “Net Benefit” by merging personal and organizational impact into a single construct. By including factors such as team, industry, and user perspectives in the assessment, the concept of “Net Benefit”

enhances the model's accuracy and comprehensiveness. The revised model elevates the role of users in the IS, taking into account their recognition of service quality and their overall experience. The modified model includes the following variables:

i. SQ: It evaluates the IS itself, typically through metrics such as ease of use, functionality, reliability, flexibility, and integration. These attributes assess how well the system performs and meets user needs in terms of operability and efficiency.

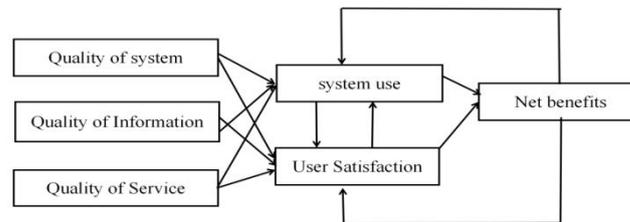
ii. IQ: It is the quality of data processed and generated by the IS. Key elements include accuracy, precision, currency, timeliness, adequacy, understandability, and conciseness. High IQ ensures that the data is reliable, relevant, and useful for decision-making.

iii. SEQ: It measures the quality of support provided by the IS department and IT support staff. Key attributes include the accuracy, reliability, and empathy of support personnel. It reflects how well users are assisted in their interactions with the system.

iv. **System Use:** It measures how comprehensively users engage with the system's functionality to achieve desired outcomes. Important variables include the quantity, frequency, appropriateness, and purpose of use. It is often studied as a dependent variable to indicate the extent of system engagement.

v. **User Satisfaction:** It assesses how content users are during their interaction with the IS. Satisfaction is influenced by the ease of use; the simpler the system is to operate, the more satisfied the users will be. DeLone and McLean (2003) consider user satisfaction to reflect user attitudes and experiences during the system's development and operational phases.

vi. **Net Benefit:** It measures the overall impact of system use on individuals, organizations, or industries. This dimension is assessed by variables such as increased productivity, improved social and psychological well-being of users, and cost savings at the organizational level. It captures the ultimate value delivered by the system in contributing to success across multiple dimensions (Oshegbo, 2022).

**Figure 1.2***Modified ISSM Mode*

Source: DeLone & McLean (2003)

The new ISSM model identifies three primary metrics—SQ, IQ, and SEQ.

They can influence user satisfaction and system use, thereby directly impacting the net benefit (net income) of the consumer. The feedback loop within the model pertains to the user's evaluation of both user satisfaction and system utilization.

The ISSM model is the most widely adopted theory in user behaviour. It was frequently employed by researchers to examine factors influencing user satisfaction, continuous usage intention or behaviour, and adoption intention (Cheng & Jin, 2018; Zhou et al., 2019). In this current study, the researcher applied the ISSM model to offer an analytical perspective on how SMC, namely IQ, SQ, and SEQ, as environmental stimuli affect the perceived social media value (O) among Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia.



### 1.6.3 PV

PV is vital in marketing. It is emphasized by both academics and businesses. PV forms the cornerstone of all relational exchange activities (Wu et al., 2014). However, Zeithaml (1998) defined PV as the subjective evaluation of a product or service, arising from a comparison between perceived benefits and the costs associated with acquiring the product or service. As the PV theory evolved, researchers have refined and expanded upon this concept. Woodruff (1997), a notable contributor, described PV as the expected value of a product or service relative to the actual value experienced by the user. It resulted in a comprehensive evaluation of overall value. Similarly, Grönroos (1997) characterized PV as the assessment process of a product, service, or other informational elements encountered during usage. It could assist in achieving the product's intended goals. Song et al. (2019) further argued that PV represents the trade-off between gains and losses that consumers make, weighing the costs and benefits after perceiving the effectiveness of a product or service.



**Table 1.5***The Concept of Perceived Value*

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Content</b>
Zeithaml. (1988)	The subjective evaluation of a product or service that results from a comparison of the perceived benefits of acquiring the product or service with the cost of acquiring it.
Dodds et al. (1991)	The evaluation of a good made by a customer after weighing the quality, price and cost paid for the good
Woodruff. (1997)	The comprehensive value evaluation of a product or service by comparing the expected value of the product or service with the actual value generated by the user.
Grönroos. (1997)	The process by which a customer assesses and evaluates a product, service, or other information element in the course of using a product or experiencing a service in order to facilitate the product's fulfillment of its objectives
Han. (2019)	Consumers have a comprehensive subjective perception of the value of a product or service, which is closely related to the quality of the product, the policy environment, and its own attributes
Xiao. (2018)	.Before using the mobile social network service, the user's cognition and preference perception of the product/service, as well as in the process of the mobile social network service, the user's response to the functional value perception and emotion brought about by the extrinsic functional utility of the product, as well as the psychological value perception and emotion gained by the fulfillment of intrinsic pleasure, socialization, and other psychological needs, and so on.
Yang.(2021)	A comprehensive assessment of the utility of a social software program based on the perceived gains and losses that an individual experiences from the specific features of the social software program.

With the growing popularity of social media and the Internet, researchers have utilized the concept of PV to explore how consumers engaged with these platforms. Sheth et al. (1991) defined PV as “the functional value derived from the specific functions of the product itself, the EV gained from its use, and the enhancement in self-perception facilitated by the application of social software in relevant scenarios,”



within the framework of consumer value theory. Later, Yang (2021), examining the attachment mechanisms of social software users, described PV as “the user’s subjective perception of the social network and their overall evaluation based on perceived preferences.” Consequently, researchers have not reached a consensus on the definition of PV due to the diversity of study objects and contexts. Currently, most of them refer to the definitions proposed by Zeithaml or Woodruff when discussing PV. Table 1.5 provides an overview of the concept of PV.

The explanation of PV and its descriptions highlights that customer’s/users’

PV comprises three primary features:



### 1. Subjectivity

Before the 1990s, researchers examined value primarily from the perspective of the product, service, or enterprise. They often viewed the customer as a passive recipient of value. However, Zeithaml (1988) argued that an enterprise's success hinges on the customer’s perception of value. The existence and realisation of value are intrinsically linked to the customer’s experience, and even when interacting with the same product or service, different customers may perceive value differently (Xiao, 2018). Consequently, subjectivity is a key characteristic of customer’s/users’ PV . This view aligns with Woodruff’s (1997) perspective and Schiffman’s (1997)





argument that PV varies among individuals, influenced by users' preferences and personal traits. Moreover, the user's cognitive evaluation of a particular product or service can differ across varying contexts.

## 2. Dynamics

Vatrappen (1992) identified that, beyond individual differences, temporal variations also significantly influence the PV of users. He posited that both the formation and sustainment of users' PV must account for the time factor, as individuals tend to assess the same product or service differently at various points in time. This dynamic nature of users' PV was corroborated by Gardial et al. (1994). They concluded that users' PV is not static but evolves over time. Consequently, it is imperative for companies to maintain continuous engagement with users and to monitor their evaluations dynamically. In addition, it allows for timely improvements in the quality of products or services.

## 3. Hierarchy

Woodruff (1997) examined the hierarchy of users' PV through the lens of information processing logic and the sequence of information flow. It resulted in the development of a hierarchical information processing model. Specifically, when users





begin selecting products or services, they initiate a process of considering and evaluating the various benefits that these products or services offer. In order to identify their needs, users establish a set of criteria to satisfy these needs. Thereby, they could select the product or service that they perceive as most satisfactory. Following the purchase, users evaluate the product or service based on their own usage experience. If the product or service meets or exceeds their expectations, users perceive a higher value. Consequently, PV is influenced by factors such as the user's educational background, upbringing, income level, and other personal characteristics.

In social media, an increasing number of users and consumers are accessing information and services via the Internet, with platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp providing a wide array of information and services. Users' PV is inherently dynamic and constantly evolving. It necessitates that social media service providers maintain ongoing attention to users' needs and develop engaging product features. These features should effectively support cross-functional, extensible, compatible, and innovative content to stimulate user satisfaction and encourage sustained use.

Following that, user PV is subjective, multi-level, and multi-dimensional. It is influenced by individual differences among users. Therefore, even when using the same social software and services, different users may experience varying levels of





satisfaction. Moreover, changes in the user's context and time of use can further alter their needs and perceptions. Users are more likely to adopt positive attitudes and behaviours towards social media when they perceive that it contributes positively to their lives or learning, and when the PV is high. Therefore, this current study posited that PV reflects a comprehensive, subjective evaluation of the utility of social software, shaped by the perceived benefits and drawbacks experienced by individuals during their use of the software's specific functions and services.

Then, PV originates from the user's perspective, offering a theoretical foundation and evaluative criteria for examining user experience. It also provides a theoretical basis and a novel perspective for exploring the role of social media in CCA.

Finally, this current study employed the theoretical perspective of PV to analyse the overall evaluation and perception of Chinese international students' use of social media, addressing the psychological or cognitive state of the organism (O) within S-O-R theoretical framework.





### 1.6.4 ITCCA

ITCCA comprises three core concepts: CCA, communication, and the notion of the stranger. Kim (2001, p. 31) defined CCA from an open-systems perspective as "a dynamic process in which an individual establishes (or re-establishes) and maintains relatively stable, mutually beneficial, and functioning relationships with a new and unfamiliar cultural environment through reorientation to that environment". The ITCCA model conceptualizes CCA as a communicative process, situating it at the intersection of the individual and the environment. In this current study, communication refers to "all the information-shifting activities between an individual and his or her environment" (Kim, 2001, p. 32). Within Kim's theory, strangers are defined as "individuals who have crossed cultural boundaries and settled in a different culture". The adaptation journey of any stranger is a gradual transition from being an "outsider" to becoming an "insider," following the stress of engaging with a new environment. As illustrated in Figure 1.3, the ITCCA model identifies six key dimensions that can either facilitate or hinder the process of intercultural adaptation.

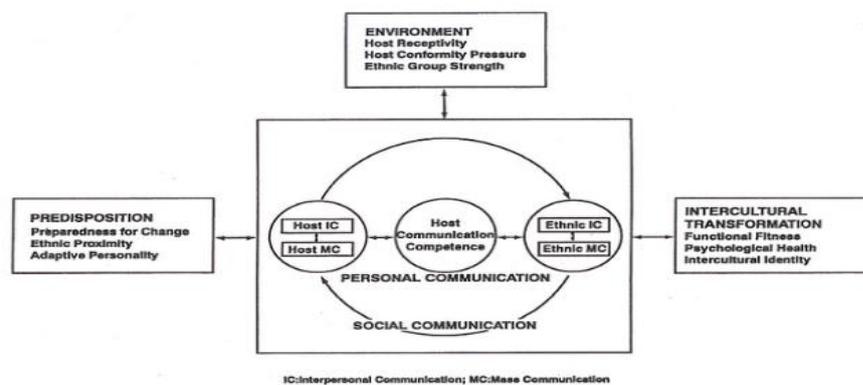
According to Kim (2001, p. 122, 123, 134, 138), the development of communication abilities in the host country is positively associated with active engagement in communication activities with its citizens. Through interactions with host country members, "strangers observe and learn standards for language and



nonverbal communication practices in host countries". They gain an understanding of not only what the natives do, but also how they do it. Conversely, interactions with ethnic or co-nationals offer sojourners "a certain sense of 'safety' and 'belonging' in a foreign land". However, there is a perspective that excessive reliance on networks with ethnic or co-nationals may hinder sojourners' communication with locals and participation in local activities, potentially "impeding adaptation by reducing the pressure on strangers to accept new situations".

**Figure 1.3**

*Structure Model of CCA*



*Note*, From *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation*. by Kim, Y. Y. (2001). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

In the process model (as depicted in Figure 1.4), Kim illustrated that when sojourners leave their familiar environment and enter a new cultural setting, their habitual patterns of thought and behaviour are challenged. Following that, their cultural identities are often suspended or relinquished. It necessitates the acquisition



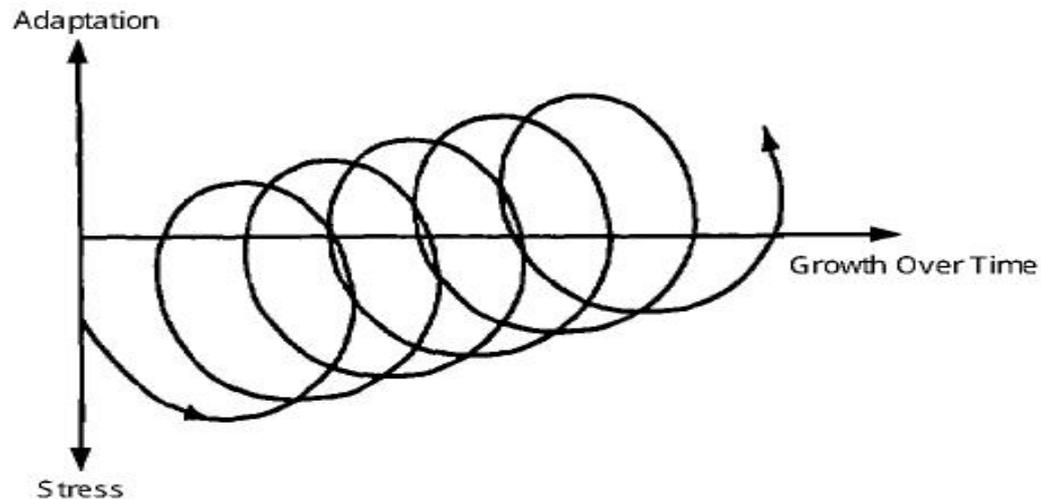
of a new cultural system. This dynamic makes CCA inherently stressful for strangers. Under such pressure, strangers frequently experience an imbalance, manifesting as low mood, tension, anxiety, confusion, and other negative emotions. In Kim's process model, this stress activates an adaptive mechanism. When a stranger enters a new cultural environment, recognizing the presence of stress is crucial for the deconstruction of their original cultural framework (Zhang & Zhou, 2019). The initial imbalance and stress thus become opportunities for new learning, reinforcement, and personal growth (Kim, 2001, p. 56).

Moreover, stress and self-growth are interconnected and persist throughout the adaptation process. Each stage of CCA presents distinct pressures. Once the stress of one stage is managed, new pressures emerge. It might drive the continuous development of strangers. This "stress-adaptation-growth" cycle encapsulates the process of overcoming stress and adjusting to challenges. Furthermore, it might evolve as a result. This phenomenon is often referred to as intercultural personality development or intercultural transformation (Kim, 2001; Taylor, 1994).



**Figure 1.4**

*The Process of "Stress-Adaptation-Growth"*



Sources: *Becoming Intercultural: An ITCCA*. Kim, Y. Y. (2001).  
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The ITCCA, considered the most comprehensive framework for understanding CCA, conceptualizes this process as a normal aspect of environmental adjustment. The theory identifies the primary factors influencing adaptation and elucidates their interrelationships. Basically, it approaches CCA from the perspective of the universality of human adjustment. Additionally, Kim (2001) emphasized the crucial role of communicative activities such as mass media consumption and usage, in driving individuals' gradual adaptive changes. Due to its focus on communication, Kim's theory provided a robust theoretical foundation for this current study on interpersonal communication and media use in intercultural adaptation (McKay-Semmler & Kim, 2013).



### 1.6.5 Theoretical Model Construction

In this current study, the researcher employed the SOR model to provide a concise and structured framework for examining the relationships and mechanisms between social media characteristics (S), Chinese graduate international students' perceived social media value (O), and their cross-cultural outcomes (R). The researcher utilized ISSM to illustrate the stimuli influencing Chinese graduate international students' perceptions of social media value. Subsequently, the PV theory was applied to explain the affective and cognitive responses generated by these stimuli, specifically the overall evaluations and perceptions of social media use among Chinese international students. Finally, the ITCCA was used to elucidate how the PV of social media influenced the CCA of Chinese graduate international students. It represented the organism's response. The theoretical framework of this study is depicted in Figure 1.5.

### 1.7 Importance of Research

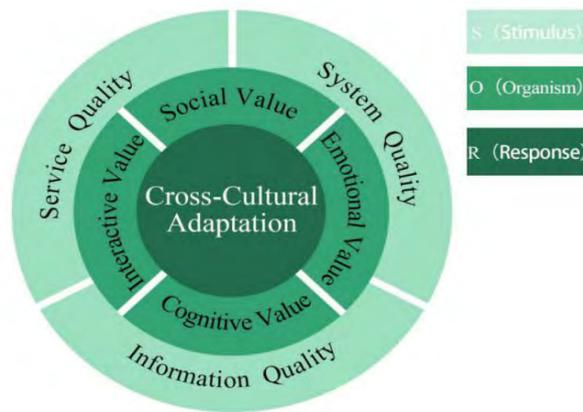
The purpose of this study was to optimize social media design and provided high-quality social media services for Chinese graduate international students by identifying the factors that stimulate social media use among Chinese international graduate students. In addition, the researcher analyzed their impact on PV, and



examining the outcomes of their CCA. The study offered several theoretical implications, including:

### Figure 1.5

#### *The Theoretical Framework of This Current Thesis*



ISSM and the SOR theory were utilized to investigate the stimuli that influenced the PV of social media from an information use perspective. For communicators, information providers, and audiences, social media transcends time and space barriers. Furthermore, it broadens information sources, communication channels, and methods, while audience needs become increasingly diverse and multidimensional. Consequently, the characteristics of social media can significantly impact users' psychological states and behavioral responses.

Therefore, this current study examined the stimuli affecting the social media value perception of Chinese graduate international students by focusing on IQ, SEQ, and SQ. It extended the application of ISSM to cross-cultural contexts. Besides, it offered novel insights into the social media usage of sojourners and addressed gaps in past studies.

To continue, examining social media's contribution to CCA from PV revealed its significant role as a facilitator of this process for international students adapting to new cultural environments (Ma & Liu, 2018). By referring to the concept of PV from the marketing field, this current study emphasized the user's experience with social media as a product. Also, the researcher investigated the mechanisms through which social media influences CCA. This approach not only deepened the understanding of the adaptation process but also enriched research perspectives on the intersection of social media use and CCA.

The theoretical framework of social media and CCA was constructed in this current study. It integrated the SOR model, ISSM, PV, and the ITCCA. This current study specifically focused on analyzing the characteristic of social media and the CCA processes of Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia. As a result, a research framework was developed, comprising three key components: "SMC, PV of social media, and CCA."



Next, this current study expanded the research population by focusing on the social media usage and CCA of Chinese graduate international students in Malaysia. Following that, it contributed to the limited literature on this demographic. The socio-cultural practices and social media experiences of these representative students have often been overlooked. It led to an outdated and one-dimensional understanding of Chinese international students and their experiences abroad. Consequently, this current study aimed to update and enrich the existing literature on social media and CCA among Chinese international students within the evolving contexts of modernization and globalization.



In addition, this current study held significant practical value in several key areas. Firstly, it aimed to enhance the operational quality of social media platforms. By conducting an analysis of the SMC and PV stimulus factors among Chinese graduate international students. Furthermore, the current study offered valuable insights and practical guidance for designing "user-centred" social media platforms. The findings provided crucial reference points for social media designers, highlighting directions for improved platform design. This guidance assists designers and engineers in developing social media functions and services that align with user needs. Thus, it enhanced internal functionalities and boosted the operational capacity and overall quality of social media platforms.





Finally, the findings of this current study could provide empirical evidence supporting the role of social media in facilitating the cultural adjustment of Chinese graduate international students. To better support these students, practitioners, including international educators, administrators, advisors, and teachers, must develop an awareness of the social media usage patterns of Chinese international students in Malaysia. Such insights were crucial for recognizing the significance of social media as a tool in the CCA process. They enabled practitioners to offer more targeted and effective support.



### **1.8 Study Limitations**

The quantitative component of this current study was grounded in an established theoretical framework. Several independent variables were selected and measured using various scales. It was important to note that the chosen variables and scales may slightly influence the socio-cultural and psychological adjustment outcomes of Chinese graduate international students due to the specific focus of this study. The qualitative aspect of this current study was constrained by time and resources. It limited data collection to a single Malaysian university. The primary participants included Chinese graduate international students, the president of the Chinese Students' Union, and staff from the International Mobility Centre (IMC) and the





Institute of Graduate Studies (IGS). Future research should aim to include a broader range of participants from diverse universities across different regions of Malaysia to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

## 1.9 Operational Definition

This subsection introduced the key concepts central to this study. There were CCA, Chinese international students, social media, and PV.



### 1.9.1 CCA

The term "CCA" was defined as "the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments" (Kim, 2001, p. 31). Kim emphasized that cultural adaptation involves more than merely integrating new cultural elements into an individual's existing cultural environment. It requires individuals to continuously adjust their internal cultural cognitive structures. This adjustment process enables





them to assimilate new cultural values while maintaining the continuity of their previous cultural identity. CCA also encompasses the acquisition or rejection of new cultural norms and the preservation, transformation, or subversion of original cultural values. It results from the complex interplay of mutual interactions, negotiations, and internal decision-making processes (Kim, 2001).

On the other hand, researchers (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1993a, 1993b, 1994) proposed that CCA comprises two subtypes to serve as distinct outcomes of acculturation. They are psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. First and foremost, psychological adaptation pertains to an individual's psychological well-being or satisfaction within a new cultural environment. However, psychological well-being has been defined as "the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively" (Huppert, 2009, p. 137). In contrast, sociocultural adaptation refers to an individual's ability to "fit in" with a new society or interact effectively with local people (O'Reilly et al., 2010).

### **1.9.2 Chinese Graduate International Students**

Besides, Brein and David (1971) defined "sojourners" as a broad category encompassing students, trainees, technical assistants, tourists, missionaries, foreign





service personnel, and business, military, and academic exchange personnel. To elaborate, Huntington (2005), in his examination of identity issues arising from the mass migration of individuals from less developed countries to the United States in the late 20th century, argued that sojourners have increasingly supplanted immigrants as the primary drivers of global cross-cultural mobility. In recent years, past studies on the acculturation of sojourners have increasingly focused on international students, foreign-based business professionals, and migrant workers, with the CCA of international students receiving the research attention (Wang, 2014).

The concept of international students is defined differently across countries, with China emphasizing the students' purpose and behaviour in going abroad, while other countries define them primarily based on visa status and nationality (Yang, 2023). Differently, the *Dictionary of Education* defines international students as those studying in educational or research institutions abroad, exchanged between countries, including university students, graduates, advanced trainees, and visiting scholars (Gu, 1986). On the contrary, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines an international student as “a foreign student who does not have the nationality or citizenship of the country in which he or she is studying” (OECD, 2023). Generally, the concept of an international student encompasses two main aspects, namely studying in a foreign country at the tertiary level and not possessing the nationality of the host country. In this current study, “Chinese graduate





international students” specifically referred to Chinese students who completed their basic education in China and are pursuing master’s or doctoral degree in higher education in Malaysia.

### 1.9.3 Social Media

The most highly cited definition of "social media" on Google Scholar between 1994 and 2019 was attributed to Kaplan and Haenlein, with 19,656 citations (Aichner et al., 2020). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build upon the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0.

It enabled the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Moreover, social media can be understood as a virtual network and community constructed on Internet technology, facilitating the sharing of ideas and information. Users employ devices such as desktop computers, smartphones, and other tools, using Web 2.0 application software to transmit text, images, audio, video, and other types of information (Dollarhide, 2019). Kietzmann et al. (2011) further conceptualized social media as a honeycomb comprising seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. Eventually, key elements in defining social media include user-generated content, sharing, and the ability to connect with other users.





Globally, social media platforms have flourished with distinct characteristics. To initiate, circle social platforms include Facebook, WhatsApp, and WeChat, while public social platforms are represented by Twitter and Weibo. Vertical social platforms, such as LinkedIn and Zhihu, cater to niche interests, whereas multimedia sharing platforms include YouTube, TikTok, and DouYin. Collaborative projects are exemplified by Wikipedia and Baidu Baike, and review sites include Yelp and Dianping. Additionally, virtual worlds like Second Life and World of Warcraft provide immersive digital experiences (Lai, 2017).

In this current study, social media referred to four types of platforms: circle social platforms, public socialization platforms, vertical socialization platforms, and multimedia sharing platforms. These platforms facilitated environments where users produced content, share information, and connect with other users.

#### **1.9.4 PV**

Initially, Zeithaml (1988) elaborated on the concept of PV from the perspective of "benefits and costs." He defined it as the overall utility of a product or service assessed by comparing the perceived benefits against the costs incurred.





In this current study, PV referred to the comprehensive evaluation of the utility of social media platforms, based on the perceived benefits and losses experienced by individuals during their use. They were influenced by the specific features of the platforms themselves. The current study identified PV dimensions that aligned with the characteristics of social media. they were SV, EV, IV, and CV. To begin, SV reflects the social attributes of social media, such as the social status and self-image that users gain from using these platforms. Next, CV examines how users' perceptions and PV are shaped by their cognitive level and demands within the social media environment. Then, IV pertains to the realisation and validation of users' PV through their interactions with others. Following that, EV, analyzed from the perspectives of social and behavioral psychology, addresses users' sense of belonging, security, value recognition, and personalized expression on social media.

### 1.10 Summary

Overall, the significant economic and political benefits of international education have led the Chinese and Malaysian governments to actively introduce policies promoting bilateral cooperation and exchanges in this sector. The imbalance between the supply and demand of graduate students in China, combined with Malaysia's favourable study environment, has made Malaysia an attractive destination for





Chinese students. Advancements in transportation technology have facilitated the movement of people and the exchange of cultures. Additionally, evolving communication technologies have opened new avenues for cultural interaction among sojourners. Following that, social media has transcended the traditional constraints of time and space, altering conventional communication patterns and significantly enhancing the CCA of international students.

Despite a substantial body of past studies on social media and CCA, there remains a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms by which social media characteristics influence CCA. Additionally, limited past studies has focused on the CCA of Chinese international students in Malaysia. Therefore, examining the CCA of Chinese graduate students in Malaysia within the context of social media is both timely and crucial.

Next, The primary objective of this current study was to analyse the mechanisms linking SMC, PV, and CCA. The researcher innovatively integrated the SOR theory, ISSM, PV, and ITCCA to construct a theoretical framework that examined the relationship between social media characteristics and CCA among Chinese international students in Malaysia. This current study provided valuable knowledge for educational and cross-cultural scholars to better understand the cultural adaptation of Chinese graduate students in Malaysia. Also, it aided these students in





adjusting more quickly to local life and academic environments. Furthermore, the study offered practical implications for software developers, guiding them in upgrading and enhancing product design to better meet the needs of international users.

