

The Role of Youtube in the Intercultural Adaptation Process of Sojourners

-- The example of Chinese Students Studying for a PhD in Malaysia

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Abstract

The study was conducted to investigate the influence of YouTube on the language, life and cultural adaptation of Chinese international students studying for PhD in Malaysia through in-depth interviews. The study found that YouTube has created a intercultural platform for cross-cultural communication by introducing mass self-communication in the process of cross-cultural adaptation, and its rich and diverse video content has played a positive role in Chinese students' language adaptation, life adaptation, and cultural adaptation, helping Chinese students to better adapt to life in Malaysia.

Keywords

Intercultural adaptation; Malaysia; Chinese students; YouTube.

1. Introduction

In today's globalization context, the research phenomena and research topics involved in transnational and cross-border population movements in China have gone far beyond the traditional scope. In recent years, researchers have gradually shifted their research centers to international students, foreign-based business people, and migrant worker groups[1]. Due to the ease of sample collection and the strong expectations of acculturation[2], the international student population has become a "hot" topic for cross-cultural researchers, and research findings are abundant. However, most of the early studies on international students have focused on the intercultural adjustment of non-Western students in Western countries [3], and fewer studies on the intercultural adjustment of international students in non-Western countries [4,5], and even fewer studies and scholars have focused on the intercultural adjustment of Chinese students in Malaysia[6,7].

Chinese-American sociologist Xiao ZhenPeng[8] was one of the first to use the term "sojourners," defining Chinese laundry workers who worked in the United States in the 1950s as "sojourners" he argued, "who spent many years in another country but could not integrate. Brein and David further define the scope of the study of "sojourners" as international students, trainees, tourists, missionaries, foreign service personnel, and business, military, and academic exchange personnel[9], who stay in the country of residence for a limited period of time with the preconceived purpose of not obtaining permanent residence. According to the official data

released by EMGS (Education Malaysia Global Services) on applications to study in Malaysia in 2021, the number of international students from East Asia has increased by 102% from 2020 to 2021, directly doubling, with the largest number of international students from China, as shown in Figure 1, the number of Chinese applicants in 2021 Malaysia has 10,326 more international students than those applying in 2020, an increase of 116%. There is little change in undergraduate applications and an 83% increase in doctoral applications.^① The purpose of Chinese students staying in Malaysia for doctoral studies is to obtain a PhD degree, and they stay in Malaysia for a definite period of time as well as for a definite purpose.

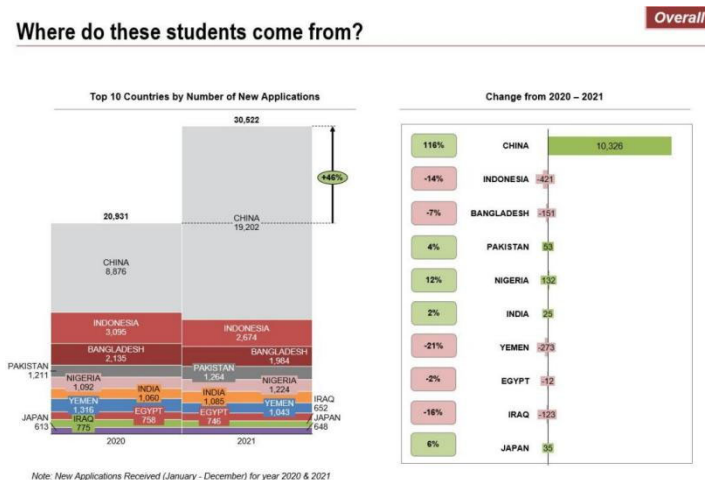


Figure 1. Sources of International Students in Malaysia

2. Literature Review

Media play an important role in the socialization process of individuals. The intercultural adaptation process of sojourners can be understood as a special form of socialization or re-socialization process: sojourners enter an unfamiliar cultural environment and they adjust themselves to the new cultural environment by learning new social rules, cultural traditions, language and customs[1]. This process is influenced by a combination of factors, but most of the existing studies have analyzed the impact of these factors on acculturation from the perspective of various cultural variables, the relationship between immigrant groups as a minority group and the dominant group in the country of migration, or the psychological stress of immigrants[10], while only a few studies have focused on the interaction between the media use status of mobile groups and the acculturation process. In the digital age, media has become so integrated into people's daily lives that their lived experiences are almost parallel to the media experience in the media deluge. "Digital 2022", published by We Are Social, states that there are 4.62 billion social media users around the world in January 2022. This figure is equal to 58.4 percent of the world's total population, global social media users have grown by more than 10 percent over the past 12 months.^② The use of media products by the sojourners community should be considered as an important part of their cultural adaptation index system.

2.1. Media and Cross-cultural Adaptation

Park(1922) was one of the first scholars to study the relationship between mass communication and cross-cultural adaptation, and in his book "The Immigrant Press and Control", he discussed in detail the role of the press in the socialization of European immigrants in the United States. He argues that news communication, represented by the press, helped isolated and marginalized individuals and groups adapt to modern life[3]. Kim, another famous Korean scholar who systematically discussed media and cross-cultural adaptation, She defined the concept of "cross-cultural adaptation", saying that "the process of cross-cultural adaptation

is the process of adapting to a new way of life and eventually to the host culture by constantly adjusting oneself to the pressure of an unfamiliar cultural environment"[11]. In her theory of Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation, she considered that communication plays a vital role in the cross-cultural adaptation of international students. The communication factors, together with predisposition and environment, influence the intercultural transformation of international students.

2.1.1. Social Media Use and Cross-Cultural Adaptation

With the explosive development of social media, "individuals are no longer passive recipients of objects but subjects of communication, and social media have thus built new social networks and social patterns"[12]. Turning to the relationship between social media and cross-cultural adaptation, researchers have argued that social networks help sojourners reduce uncertainty and have the ability to provide a complementary channel for offline communication in developing and maintaining local relationships[13]. Social media plays a positive role in acquiring social capital; helping academic adaptation[14]. In the current research on cross-cultural adaptation and social media, Chinese scholars have mostly focused on media such as WeChat and QQ in China and Facebook, Twitter in foreign countries. Jin & Zhang (2017) found that social media was positively related to international students' identity and social relationships by investigating their WeChat use and social integration in five universities in Shanghai[15]. Mao and Qian's (2015) study found that Facebook helped Chinese scholars in the U.S. stay socially connected and helped deal with Chinese scholars' multicultural identities and adapt to the U.S. cultural environment[16]. Chen's (2018) study confirmed that the use of Facebook and Twitter promoted cultural awareness, cross-cultural psychological adaptation, and cross-cultural social adaptation among Chinese students[17].

2.2. Use of YouTube

Founded in 2005 by Jawed Karim, Steven Chen and Chad Hurley, YouTube is the world's largest video-sharing website where users can upload, view and share videos on the YouTube platform[18]. According to Statista^③ statistics, YouTube platform has 1.9 billion monthly active users in 2019, ranking second in the overall global social platform ranking (the first place is Facebook) and is the world's largest video-based social platform. YouTube has a wide range of global users, with local versions in 91 countries and regions, and monthly active users in 24 "Belt and Road" countries account for 30% of YouTube's monthly active users.^④ Malaysia accounts for 0.80% of global YouTube users, that is 1.52 million people using YouTube in Malaysia.^⑤ Current research on YouTube by Chinese scholars has focused on how to use YouTube to enhance the foreign communication of Chinese culture [19,20,21], Few scholars have focused on the role of YouTube in the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

3. Research Question and Methodology

In this study, the researcher focuses on the group of "Chinese students studying in Malaysia" and the research question is "The role of YouTube in the intercultural adaptation process of Chinese students studying for PhD degree in Malaysia". The criteria for the selection of the research subjects were: first, the participants had to have lived in Malaysia for more than one year; second, the participants held a student visa; and third, the participants still held Chinese nationality. This study adopts a qualitative research method to collect primary data and materials on the YouTube usage habits and scenarios and the degree of acculturation of 10 Chinese students pursuing PhD in Malaysia through interviews to rethink the impact of YouTube usage on the acculturation process of Chinese students. The basic personal information of the research subjects is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of Sample

Participant	Age	Gender	Major	Length of stay in Malaysia
Participant 1	27	man	Training For Teachers With Subject Specialisation	3 and a half years
Participant 2	38	man	geography	2 years
Participant 3	36	woman	preschool education	2 years
Participant 4	37	woman	sociology	1 and a half years
Participant 5	31	woman	Mass communication	3 years
Participant 6	34	man	software engineering	3 and a half years
Participant 7	37	man	Sports dance	1 and a half years
Participant 8	35	man	Management psychology	1 and a half years
Participant 9	31	women	Counseling psychology	2 and a half years
Participant 10	34	woman	New media	1 and a half years

Qualitative research methods are appropriate for this study because they are adapted to exploratory research, where primary data collected from participants serve as a basis for understanding the phenomenon [22]. Qualitative research methods are useful for exploring the lived experiences of Chinese students in terms of acculturation and help the researcher gain deeper insight into the problem.

4. Analysis of Results

4.1. Use Youtube to Learn the Language and Ease the Stress of Language Adaptation

In the interviews, Chinese students generally said that although they had met the language requirements of Malaysian schools when they enrolled, their oral communication skills were not high and they had great language barriers when they needed to use English in their daily lives, especially when they first arrived in Malaysia, they encountered great difficulties when going through the admission procedures and shopping. Moreover, there is a common phenomenon of "bunching and cliquism" among Chinese students, and most of them want to live with their native countrymen, so they basically do not have the opportunity to speak English except for writing and assignments in foreign languages[23]. The Chinese students in this study were pursuing their PhD degree in Malaysia, they had fewer courses and spent most of their time doing research compared to their undergraduate counterparts, which reduced their opportunities to interact with local students even more. YouTube becomes a powerful way for Chinese students to improve their English skills. Participant 2 said, "YouTube is an important way for me to learn English, because there are more professional English videos on it, which teach authentic English speech and daily English conversation, especially when preparing for IELTS. I watched a lot of videos of IELTS speaking interviews. It was very helpful to improve my English skills."

4.2. YouTube Is An Effective Supplement to Classroom Learning and Relieves Academic Stress

For international students, completing their studies is one of their most important tasks in the host country. Chinese education methods are different from those abroad in many ways, Li (2016) argues that developing foreign language skills to understand the content of teaching, gain a more profound understanding of the contents of learning are the most important

academic pressure that Chinese students encounter in the initial stage of study abroad[5]. In the interviews, all participants mentioned that the biggest pressure they faced was academic pressure. As participant 6 said, "Malaysia is a Commonwealth country after all, and their academic approach is Western, which is completely different from China, so I don't know how to do research when I first arrived in Malaysia".

YouTube provides a platform for Chinese students to learn and relieve their academic stress. Participant 5 said, "I think YouTube is a good platform for learning, for example, I learn how to use the data software of SPSS by learning from YouTube, and some academic lectures in our school are also broadcasted through YouTube." YouTube is an open platform where users can freely choose the videos they want to watch, and for international students who are not so good at English, they can even find Chinese versions of teaching videos on YouTube, which play an important role in improving their academic level and relieving academic pressure.

4.3. Learning Knowledge Help International Students to Adjust to Host Cultural

International students encounter many discomforts when they first arrive in the host country, including not adapting to the local food, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and language in all aspects of their lives[24]. In the interview, 8 out of 10 participants mentioned that they encountered different degrees of stress in their lives in Malaysia, and that they were not accustomed to the local food, not familiar with the religious beliefs and cultural customs of Muslims, which caused them a lot of pressure. For example, Participant 7 said, "In order to avoid cultural friction, I usually don't talk about politics and religion with the locals, and I don't dare to invite my supervisor to have dinner with me because I am afraid of accidentally violating their food taboos".

YouTube is an open self-publishing platform that provides a platform for Chinese students to learn and understand Malaysian culture, through which they can search and exchange knowledge about Malaysian culture. For example, participant 8 said "Whenever there is a festival, I will use YouTube to search what festival it is, what is its origin and what are the customs."

5. Conclusion

5.1. YouTube Has Created A New Form of Communication: Mass Self-communication

YouTube is an open platform that breaks through personal and mass communication. Depending on the purpose of the communication, both the communicator and the audience can set the information to be open or private, when the video is disseminated to the masses, it is mass communication; when the video is set to private it is interpersonal communication, and sometimes it can even be something in between. When international students watch YouTube videos to learn Malaysian culture or learn English, it is one-to-many, it is mass communication; when international students chat privately with UP owners, it is interpersonal communication. this kind of communication in YouTube is in line with what Caster calls mass self-communication. the information is generated by individual users themselves, the information is self-selected among the page contents of the Internet, and the information can be received by more users simultaneously received and exchanged among each other.

5.2. Youtube Provides A Intercultural Platform for Cross-Cultural Communication for Sojourners.

YouTube is an open and free platform, most of the content on the platform is spontaneously created by users, it has users all over the world, which creates a cross-cultural platform for users, the communication of sojourners is no longer limited to host country communication and

ethnic country communication, the communicators on this platform could be from ethnic country, host country, or anyone in the world, and Its content and audience are also international, as participate 2 says,"

"Some videos on YouTube have subtitles in Chinese and the language is English." So we cannot simply define whether this communication is ethnic or host communication because of the emergence of YouTube as a cross-cultural platform.

Although this study has been completed, the differences in country, experience, personality, and language of the international student population make the findings applicable only to the scope of this study, and subsequent studies can consider studying international students from other countries and regions. This study only examines YouTube as a social media, and subsequent studies can consider examining the role of other social media in the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

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Notes

- ① EMGS is Education Malaysia Global Services, an educational administrative department under the Malaysian government that serves international students from different countries who come to study in Malaysia worldwide.
- ② We Are Social is a global social media oriented creative agency with 10 offices across 5 continents.
- ③ Statista is a global comprehensive data repository of data covering the world's major countries and economies, with primary sources being commercial organizations and government agencies.
- ④ The study relies on data from the China Belt and Road Network of the National Information Center as of December 2019 to determine whether countries are part of the "Belt and Road" countries.
- ⑤ Alexa's website provides data on the top 40 countries and regions that account for 84.4% of YouTube visits, with the remaining 15.6% of visits coming from other countries and regions, according to the data provided by Alexa for this study.