

Mediating Role of Cultural Identity in the Relationship between Social Media Use Intensity and Social Media Use Purpose among Chinese International Students in Malaysia

Wenwen Zhao¹, Mohd Nizam Osman¹, Siti Zobidah Omar², Hani Salwah Yaakup¹

¹Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, 43400, Malaysia

²Department of Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts (FoSSLA),UCSI University, Jalan Menara Gading, UCSI Heights Cheras, 56000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Correspondence: Mohd Nizam Osman, Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, 43400, Malaysia.

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Abstract

Social media has become essential for international students adjusting to a new environment. Previous research has shown that social media use purposes influence international students' cognition, psychology, and behavior. Limited studies have explored whether social media use purposes could be modified. This study investigated whether and how social media use intensity could influence use purpose by focusing on the mediating role of cultural identity among 213 Chinese international students studying in Malaysia. Data were analyzed using both SPSS and PROCESS macro. The findings revealed that social media use intensity positively predicted social media use purpose. Cultural identity (both Chinese and Malaysian cultural identity) partially mediated the relationship between social media use intensity and social media use purpose. Therefore, part of the impact of social media use intensity on social use purpose is achieved through cultural identity. By comparing the proportion of the mediating effect to the total effect, Malaysian cultural identity had a larger mediating effect than Chinese cultural identity. The results of this study could help improve the cross-cultural experience of Chinese students in Malaysia.

Keywords: social media use intensity, social media use purpose, cultural identity, malaysian cultural identity, chinese cultural identity

1. Introduction

Studying abroad has increasingly become common in recent years. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), over 6 million international students studied abroad in 2019 (UIS, 2021). China, the world's largest source of international students, contributed to 703,500 of these students (The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021). Malaysia, an emerging education center in Asia, has recently become an option for Chinese students seeking to study abroad (Shafaei et al., 2016). According to official data from Education Global Services Malaysia (EMGS), in 2020 over 8,000 students from the Chinese mainland travelled to Malaysia to further their studies. By 2021, this figure had risen to 19,000 (EMGS, 2021).

Social media has become a usual part of daily life, particularly among college students who are known to be heavy social media users (Lau, 2017). International college students who live in a cross-cultural environment have significantly more communication needs than local college students (Hao, 2007). Social media plays a vital role in studying abroad because it allows students to develop new social interactions in the host country while staying in touch with family and friends back home (Park et al., 2014; Rui & Wang, 2015; Shuter, 2012). With an increasing number of international students, several research studies have focused on social media use and its impact on international students, particularly the large population of Chinese international students. However, these studies were conducted mainly in North America and Australia (Yin, 2015). Fewer studies have been conducted in non-Western contexts (Cho & Yu, 2015) and limited focus has been directed to Malaysia (GulRaihan & Sandaran, 2018; Yusoff, 2012).

Different studies have addressed different aspects of social media use such as social media use intensity (Pang, 2018a;

Phua & Jin, 2011; Wang et al., 2019), the time spent on social media (Bano et al., 2020; Jackson & Wang, 2013), and social media use purpose (Guo et al., 2014; Pang, 2018b). Most studies on social media use purpose are based on the use and gratification theory. This theory states that actively social media users utilize it based on specific purposes and needs, such as obtaining information, socializing, and relieving pressure. Thus, motivation to use social media affects specific user behavior. Fewer studies have evaluated how social media usage behavior affects motivation (Wen et al., 2016). This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the impact of social media use intensity on social media use purpose.

International students have specific values and rules that guide their behavior that predates their cross-cultural experience (Gamsakhurdia, 2018). This self-awareness from members of a cultural (or ethnic) group is called cultural identity (Phinney, 2003). Cultural identity, however, is fluid and can evolve during transmission and be influenced by various cultural, geographical, social, and political contexts (Hunsinger, 2006). In the process of cross-cultural contact, individuals participating in local culture may develop a new cultural identification with the host country (host cultural identity) while maintaining their original cultural identity (ethnic cultural identity). This new cultural identification may occur through online and offline communication, such as using social media to learn about the beliefs and norms of the host community, thus allowing them to integrate into the host culture more fully (Liu et al., 2018). According to Park (2016), "culture can be accessed, managed, and practiced through social media" (p. 26). In the age of social media, individuals and populations coexist in virtual space and therefore the previous theory of cultural identity must be re-examined (Shuter, 2012). However, research on the impact of social media on cultural identity in a cross-cultural setting is still limited (Mao & Qian, 2015). Furthermore, most of the aforementioned few studies only focus on the host country's cultural identity while ignoring an individual's ethnic cultural identity (Li, 2014; Yang, 2018; Dalisay, 2012). To fill this void, this study focuses on the impact of social media usage on both host and ethnic cultural identity. Furthermore, the current study investigates whether cultural identity could explain the mechanism underlying the impact of social media use intensity on social media use purpose.

In summary, the primary goal of this study is to investigate the relationship between social media use intensity, cultural identity, and social media use purpose among Chinese international students in Malaysia. Based on previous research, Chinese students in Malaysia hold two cultural identities: Malaysian cultural identity and Chinese cultural identity. This study aims to demonstrate the mediating role of cultural identity, especially Malaysian and Chinese cultural identity, on how social media use intensity affects social media use purpose.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Identity

Cultural identity refers to identification with a particular culture or, as a sense of belonging to specific cultural groups and feelings associated with group membership (Phinney et al., 2001). A clear cultural identity implies that an individual has evident subjective knowledge and understanding of the cultural group's values, norms, and characteristics. Cultural identity that has some historical and cultural context is fluid (Barros & Albert, 2020; Masten, 2014). Larrain (2013) suggests that different cultural environments can make people to reconsider their identities. Upon entering a new cultural environment, international students will broaden their horizons and absorb the two different value systems (Yuki, 2003). In other words, the individual will gain a new understanding of the host's culture during cross-cultural adaptation while maintain his or her original cultural identity (Kim, 2012). Berry (1997) proposed that individuals would face two kinds of cultural identity during the cross-cultural process, an ethnic cultural identity, and a host cultural identity. Ethnic cultural identity refers to the identity of an individual's original culture, while the host cultural identity refers to the identity of the host country culture where an individual has recently migrated to. It is natural to consider cultural identity from the perspective of ethnic and host country (Fang & Huang, 2020; Ngo & Li, 2016). In this study, ethnic cultural identity will be used to refer to Chinese cultural identity whereas host cultural identity will be used to refer to the Malaysian cultural identity.

2.2 Use and Gratification Theory

Use and Gratification (U&G) theory is a very important theory in the field of media research (Liu, 2015). The core assumption of the theory is that individuals consume media content actively, rather than passively, and purposefully choose to satisfy their social and psychological needs or desires (Katz et al, 1973). Although U&G theory was developed in the traditional media era, numerous studies have demonstrated that the theory applies to social media research (Chiu & Huang, 2014; Dunne et al., 2010; Hsu et al., 2015; Lee & Ma, 2012; Lee et al., 2010). Specific environments may generate different incentives for media use to meet the needs (Reece & Palmgreen, 2000). International students entering a new cultural environment will inevitably face many challenges, such as learning a new culture, keeping in touch with families and friends in the motherland, and communicating with the local people. They also have new desire to use social media to rapidly complete their learning tasks and adapt to the host country's environment. In recent years, research on U&G has also begun to pay attention to this special group of international students.

2.3 Social Media Use Intensity and Social Media Use Purpose

U&G theory emphasizes that individuals use social media activity is based on their needs and purposes. However, a limited number of research studies suggest that user initiative can be shaped. For example, Elwick (2014) holds that a student's motivation to learn is influenced by the knowledge taught by his or her teachers. An empirical study on Chinese students found that WeChat use intensity affects their motivation to use WeChat, such as enjoyment and identification (Wen et al., 2016). However, this study was conducted in the users' region and not in a cross-cultural environment. The current research will be conducted in a cross-cultural setting to evaluate the following hypothesis:

H1: Social media usage intensity significantly influences social media use purpose.

2.4 Social Media Use Intensity and Cultural Identity

According to media dependence theory, an individual's degree of media dependence determines how frequently he or she uses the media. The more frequently media is used by an individual, the greater the influence of the medium is on an individual's cognition, emotion, and behavior (Baran & Davis, 2000). In a study based on cultural learning models, the intensity of social media usage, particularly the use of host social media, influences cultural identification (Ellison et al., 2007). Social media usage can create hybrid spaces in which international students are able to simultaneously manage ethnic cultural identity and host cultural identity (Martin & Rizvi, 2014). A comparison study of Facebook (an international social networking site) and RenRen (a Chinese social networking site) discovered that increased Facebook use can improve a migrant's host country's language ability and understanding of mainstream culture, as well as aid in the formation of host cultural identity (Li, 2014); a viewpoint supported by several research studies (e.g., Dalisay, 2012; Yang, 2018).

In contrast, researchers have paid limited attention to the relationship between social media use intensity and ethnic cultural identity even though international students studying in another country can also learn about ethical culture using ethnic social media. By using the terms host cultural identity to refer to Malaysian cultural identity and ethnic cultural identity to refer to Chinese cultural identity, the study proposed the following hypotheses:

H2: Social media usage intensity significantly influences cultural identity.

H2a: Social media usage intensity significantly influences Malaysian cultural identity.

H2b: Social media usage intensity significantly influences Chinese cultural identity.

2.5 Cultural Identity and Social Media Use Purpose

Numerous studies have showed that social media use impacts cultural identity (e.g., Dalisay, 2012; Li, 2014; Yang, 2018). The impact of cultural identity on social media usage has been overlooked but some studies have conducted additional research on this topic. According to Del Vicario et al. (2016), social media provides individuals with channels to establish and form an online identity that is simultaneously tested and reinforced online. Hence social media influences cultural identity and vice versa. According to deOliviera et al. (2016), an individual's identity significantly predicted Facebook usage among Brazilian users. According to Brock (2012), black people use Twitter to express their "Black identity." U&G theory proposes that social and psychological factors will motivate social media use (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Some studies have proven that cultural differences influence social media use purpose (Kim et al., 2011; Lewis & George, 2008; Pan et al., 2017). However, this kind of research mainly focuses on the influence of cultural differences on social media use purposes among users in different countries and not users in a cross-cultural context. There are very few studies on the impact of different cultural identities on social media use purposes among a single group in a cross-cultural context. This study among Chinese students studying in Malaysia assessed whether the Malaysian cultural identity and Chinese cultural identity influence social media use purpose by proposing the following hypotheses:

H3: Cultural identity significantly influences social media usage purpose.

H3a: Malaysian cultural identity significantly influences social media usage purpose.

H3b: Chinese cultural identity significantly influences social media usage purpose.

2.6 The Mediating Role of Cultural Identity

Previous research findings suggest that the intensity of social media use can predict cultural identity, which in turn influences the social media use purpose. Therefore, cultural identity can explain the mechanism behind the relationship between social media use intensity and social media use purpose. The following hypotheses were advanced:

H4: Cultural identity mediates the relationship between social media use identity and use purpose.

H4a: Malaysian cultural identity mediates the relationship between social media use identity and use purpose.

H4b: Chinese cultural identity mediates the relationship between social media use identity and use purpose.

In summary, social media use intensity may affect social media use purpose directly or indirectly through cultural identity. Furthermore, personal information such as gender, age, and education level are known to affect social media use purpose (Barker, 2009; Weiser, 2000; Zhang et al., 2018). Therefore, this study hypothesized that the influence of social media use intensity on social media use purpose is mediated by cultural identity after controlling for personal information. Figure 1 shows the proposed research model.

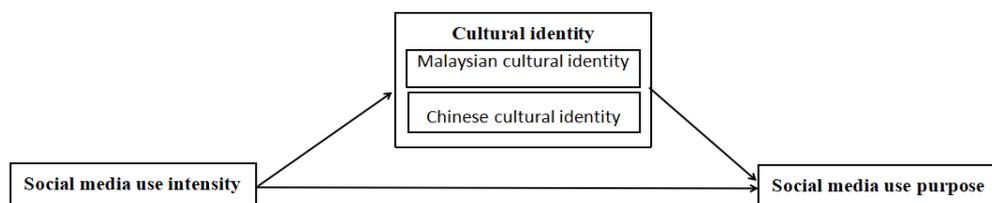


Figure 1. The Proposed Research Model

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

213 study participants were Chinese international students at a large public university in Malaysia. The university is one of Malaysia's leading comprehensive research universities, offering 16 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs, with a large population of international students. Its high-quality education and diverse enrollment of majors make this university one of the most popular universities for Chinese international students (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2020); thus, making it a suitable study site from which to obtain a sufficient sample population. All participants were students from mainland China. Students from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan were ineligible for enrolment since social media management policies differ between the above-mentioned regions and mainland China, resulting in differences in social media preference. Furthermore, significant cultural differences exist between students from the Chinese mainland and those from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan (Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents were recruited through a Chinese online questionnaire platform called Wenjuanxing. Links to the questionnaire were distributed on SNS platforms, especially WeChat, a very popular platform among Chinese students that can be used collect information from many respondents in a short time (Qalati et al., 2021). In this way, respondents are guaranteed to be SNS users. Data were collected from April 2022 to June 2022.

3.2 Measurement of the Variables

The social media use intensity scale used was mainly adapted from Ellison et al. (2007) and Ni et al. (2020). The first five questions were adapted from Ellison et al. (2007), which has been verified in several studies (Jiang & Bruijn, 2014; Phua & Jin, 2011; Wang et al., 2019). In the current study, Facebook was replaced with social media. The other four questions were adapted from Ni et al. (2020). Two elements were deleted due to the low factor loading (less than 0.50). Finally, a 5-point Likert-response scale included 7- items that were adopted, participants were asked to say, "Social media is part of my everyday activity," where "1" meant "Strongly Disagree" and "5" meant "Strongly Agree". In the current research, Cronbach's alpha was 0.885.

Social media use purpose was measured using a 5-point Likert-response scale with ten items, where "1" meant "Strongly Disagree" and "5" meant "Strongly Agree." Because international students use social media for a variety of purposes, the scale was adapted from several scholars. The first three questions, which focused on information usage, were adapted from Hughes et al. (2012) and Wang and Quan (2013). For example, "I use social media to find information" and "I use social media to stay up to date on current events". The 4 items addressing entertainment usage were adapted from Whiting and Williams (2013), such as "I use social media for chatting" and "I use social media to relax". The next 3 items about learning the host country's language and cultural knowledge were adapted from Yang et al. (2004), such as "I use social media to learn about Malaysian culture" and "I use social media to improve my English or Malay language". Cronbach's alpha was 0.840.

Cultural identity was measured by a 5-point Likert-response scale with 8-items, including two parallel scales for Malaysian cultural identity and Chinese cultural identity, respectively. The original scale was adapted from Ryder et al. (2000) and Mezzich et al. (2009). It measured participants' language, preferred foods, holiday celebrations, and social relationships, such as "It is important for me to maintain or develop Malaysian cultural practices" and "I enjoy Malaysian cultural entertainment (e.g., movies, music)". The options range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The Cronbach's alpha of the Malaysian and Chinese cultural identity scales was 0.832 and 0.744, respectively.

Demographic information such as gender, sex, age, English language ability, and length of residence in Malaysia was collected from each participant. English language ability in writing, speaking, reading, listening, understanding, and

conversation was measured by self-report on a 5-point scale (1=very poor, 5=very good). Cronbach's alpha for the 6-item scale was 0.886. In addition, participants' social media usage patterns such as time spent daily, frequency of use, and duration of social media use were also obtained from participants.

3.3 Analytical Strategy

SPSS 26 was the primary data analysis tool. Initially, data screening and transformation, by identifying outliers and missing values, was done. Subsequently, the questionnaire's validity and reliability were assessed.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics. Then, the correlation between variables was assessed while controlling for personal information. Regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. As for mediating effects, the PROCESS macro proposed by Haye (2013) was used.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 indicates that there were 146 women (68.5%) and 67 men in the study sample (31.5%). Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 38 years, and the average age was 25 years. Of the marital status, 158 were unmarried, 46 were married and only 9 were widowed. Most participants were unmarried (74.6%). Due to the low number of widows in the study, they were merged with the married group. As a result, marital status was classified as married (N=55) and unmarried (N=158). The participants had resided in Malaysia for a duration ranging from 6 to 64 months with an average residence in Malaysia of 18 months. Most of the participants were undergraduate students (50.7%; N=107), with doctoral students and master's students accounting for 27.2 percent (N=58) and 22.1 percent (N=47), respectively. In Malaysia, most Chinese students frequently used WeChat (48.8%), followed by WhatsApp (39.4%). Most respondents had used social media for more than eight years (40.8%). Among the participants, 27.2% spent 2-4 hours per day on social media, 22.1% spent 4-6 hours daily, and 13.6% of participants spent more than 8 hours per day. As regards the frequency of using social media, 31.5% of the participants checked social media on every notification beep, and 25.8% checked their social media more than eight times in a single day.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Participants (N = 213)

Variables	Categories	N	Percentage	
Gender	Female	67	68.5	
	Female	146	31.5	
Marital status	Married	46	21.1	
	Not married	158	74.6	
	Widowed	9	3.76	
Education level	Bachelor degree	107	50.2	
	Doctoral degree	58	27.2	
	Master degree	47	22.1	
	Post-doctoral degree	1	0.5	
The most frequently used social media	Facebook	10	4.7	
	Facebook Messenger	1	0.5	
	Instagram	4	1.9	
	LinkedIn	1	0.5	
	QQ	2	0.9	
	Sina Weibo	2	0.9	
	Twitter	2	0.9	
	WeChat	104	48.8	
	WhatsApp	84	39.4	
	YouTube	2	0.9	
The frequency of using social media per day	not everyday	8	3.76	
	1-2times	22	10.3	
	2-4times	15	7.04	
	4-6times	30	13.9	
	6-8times	16	14.1	
	More than 8 times	55	25.8	
	On every notification beep	67	31.5	
	Less than 30 minutes	9	4.23	
Time spent on social media per day	30 minutes-1 hour	17	7.9	
	1-2 hours	28	13.1	
	2-4 hours	58	27.2	
	4-6 hours	47	22.1	
	6-8 hours	25	11.7	
	More than 8 hours	29	13.6	
Duration of social media usage	Less than 1 year	11	5.16	
	1-2 years	20	9.39	
	2-4 years	34	15.9	
	4-6 years	34	15.9	
	6-8 years	27	12.7	
	More than 8 years	87	40.8	
	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Age	19	38	25.21	4.95
The length of residence in Malaysian	6	64	18.23	13.63

4.2 Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

In the current study, Cronbach's α , composite reliability (CR), average variance extraction (AVE), and square roots of AVE demonstrated consistent reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The results showed all the factor loadings above 0.5; the AVE (average variance extracted) of all variables ranged between 0.520 and 0.632, which were all greater than the threshold value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2006), and CR (composite reliability) was greater than the cut-off criterions of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006). Cronbach's α ranged between 0.744 and 0.885 exceeding the threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006). The square root of AVE was greater than the correlation coefficient between variables, indicating that the discriminate validity met the requirement. The results illustrated good reliability and validity of all measures.

Table 2. Items Loadings, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted, and Cronbach's α (N = 213)

Variables	Factors	Loadings	Mean	SD	AVE	CR	Cronbach's α
Social media use intensity	Social media is part of my everyday activity.	.817	3.97	.963	.596	.911	.885
	I am proud to tell people that I am on social media.	.806	3.50	.966			
	I feel out of touch when I have not logged onto social media for a while.	.806	3.63	1.001			
	I will be upset if a social media platform shuts down	.794	3.46	1.009			
	I feel like I'm a part of a social media community.	.737	3.60	.867			
	I browse social media whenever I have the time.	.735	3.73	.958			
	Even if it is late, I will take a look at social media before I sleep.	.700	3.83	.970			
	I use social media to find information.	.813	3.89	.822			
Social media use purpose	I use social media to keep abreast of current events.	.551	3.97	.915	.632	.944	.840
	I use social media to find information related to class assignments.	.841	3.88	.936			
	I use social media because I want to communicate with families and friends in China.	.708	4.00	.961			
	I use social media for chatting.	.845	3.91	1.040			
	I use social media to relax	.765	3.76	1.054			
	I use social media as a source of entertainment.	.783	3.78	1.032			
	I use social media to learn about Malaysian culture.	.866	3.48	.966			
	I use social media to improve my English or my Malay language.	.864	3.55	1.022			
	I use social media to help me adjust to Malaysian society.	.857	3.82	1.010			
	Cultural identity	I like to celebrate holidays in the Malaysian way.	.822	3.86			
It is important for me to maintain or develop Malaysian cultural practices.		.808	3.68	.943			
I enjoy engaging in social activities with Malaysian people in Malaysia.		.788	3.87	.933			
I enjoy Malaysian cultural entertainment (e.g., movies, music).		.755	3.85	.915			
I like to celebrate holidays in the Chinese way in Malaysia.		.805	3.83	.957			
I enjoy engaging in social activities with Chinese people in Malaysia.		.788	3.92	.867			
Chinese cultural identity	I enjoy Chinese cultural entertainment (e.g., movies, music) in Malaysia.	.782	3.47	1.068	.520	.811	.744
	It is important for me to maintain or develop Chinese cultural practices in Malaysia.	.652	3.95	.867			

4.3 Bivariate Correlation among Variables

Table 3 shows that social media use intensity was significantly associated with Malaysian cultural identity ($r = .513, p < .001$), Chinese cultural identity ($r = .268, p < .001$), and social media use purpose ($r = .682, p < .001$). Social media use purpose was also significantly associated with Malaysian cultural identity and Chinese cultural identity ($r = .578, p < .001$;

$r=.342$; $p<.001$; $r=.450$, $p<.001$ respectively). Interestingly, Malaysian cultural identity was positively associated with Chinese cultural identity ($r=.615$, $p<.001$), implying that the strengthening of Malaysian cultural identity would also promote Chinese cultural identity.

The multicollinearity test is mainly based on the predictive variables' variance inflation factor (VIF). The VIFs for social media use intensity, Malaysian cultural identity, and Chinese cultural identity were 1.36, 1.21, and 1.52, respectively, all lower than 5.0, thus there was no collinearity between variables (Hair et al., 2017). The skewness of the variables in this study ranged from -0.314 to 0.285, and the kurtosis ranged from -0.382 to 0.149, with absolute values of less than 1 indicating that the data conformed to a normal distribution (Huck, 2012).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics, Square Root of AVE, and Correlation Matrix (N = 213)

	Mean	SD	Social media use intensity	Malaysian cultural identity	Chinese cultural identity	Social media use purpose	Kurtosis	Skewness
Social media use intensity	3.67	.744	.772	.			-.314	-.323
Malaysian cultural identity	3.82	.760	.499***	.793			.285	-.382
Chinese cultural identity	3.79	.688	.244***	.615**	.721		-.138	-.149
Social media use purpose	3.76	.626	.682***	.559***	.419***	.777	-.220	-.181

Note: (1) *** $p < .001$; (2) Square roots of AVE for every construct are bold in the table. (3) Off-diagonal numbers are the correlations among variables.

4.4 Hierarchical Regression Analyses

4.4.1 Social Media Use Intensity and Cultural Identity

The predictive effects of social media use intensity on cultural identity, Malaysian cultural identity, and Chinese cultural identity were investigated using three regression models with social media use intensity as the independent variable, cultural identity, Malaysian cultural identity, and Chinese cultural identity as the dependent variables, respectively. Social media use intensity significantly predicted all the independent variables thus supporting H2, H2a, and H2b.

Table 4. The Regression Model of Social Media Use Intensity Predictive Cultural Identity (N=213)

Predictors	Cultural identity			Malaysian cultural identity			Chinese cultural identity		
	β	t	P	β	t	P	β	t	P
Social media use intensity	.390	7.474	.000***	.496	8.369	.000***	.283	3.662	.000***

Note: *** $p < .001$

4.4.2 Social Media Use Intensity, Cultural Identity, and Social Media Use Purpose

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was applied to demonstrate the predicting values of individual characteristic (demographic variables), social media use intensity, and cultural identity on social media use purpose. Three blocks of the regression model were developed. The first block contained demographic variables, the second block social media use intensity, and the third block cultural identity. Table 5 indicates that all the demographic variables explained a 9.5% variance in social media use purpose ($R^2=.095$, $F(6, 212)=3.611$, $p<.001$). The second block of the regression model that included social media use intensity enhanced the model by explaining a 55.9% variance in social media use purpose ($R^2=.559$, $F(7,211)=36.769$, $p<.001$). Thus, H1 was supported. Cultural identity explained an additional 6.5 percent of variance (R-square change=.065, F change (1, 210) =35.166, $p<.001$) in social media use purpose when controlling the effect of personal information variables and social media use intensity in support of H3.

Among the demographic variables, only gender and marital status influenced social media use purpose. Of the marital status, 158 were unmarried, 46 were married and only 9 were widowed. Due to the low number of widows in the study,

they were merged with the married group. As a result, marital status was classified as married (N=55) and unmarried (N=158). Independent sample T-test analysis was used to investigate whether there are differences in social media use purposes among different gender and marital status groups. The data were checked before analysis to ensure that the prerequisite conditions were met. The results revealed that the groups were independent, the variance was homogeneous, the data were normally distributed, and there were no outliers. The t-test result (Table 6) shows that there was no statistically significant difference between males and females ($t=-1.788$, $p>.05$), but there were statistically significant differences between married and unmarried people ($t=3.234$, $p<.05$). The mean value of social media use purpose for unmarried students and married students was 3.84 ± 0.66 and 3.53 ± 0.60 , respectively. Thus, unmarried Chinese students use social media more purposefully than married Chinese students in Malaysia.

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Predictors of Social Media Use Purpose (N=213)

Predictors	B	S.E	Beta	Model			
				R ²	Adjusted R ²	ΔR^2	ΔF
Block 1				.095	.069		3.585*
Gender	.179	.092	.133*				
Marital status	.196	.099	.155*				
Age	.003	.016	.025				
Education level	-.144	.091	-.196				
Length of residence in Malaysia	-.002	.003	-.039				
English ability	.071	.070	.073				
Block 2				.559	.544	.464	213.469***
Gender	.134	.065	.099*				
Marital status	.007	.070	.005				
Age	.001	.011	.006				
Education level	-.101	.064	-.138				
Length of residence in Malaysia	-.003	.002	-.061				
English ability	.168	.049	.173**				
Social media use intensity	.597	.041	.707***				
Block 3				.624	.610	.065	35.166***
Gender	.076	.061	.053				
Marital status	.048	.066	.038				
Age	-.003	.011	-.023				
Education level	-.071	.060	-.097				
Length of residence in Malaysia	-.004	.002	-.085				
English ability	.092	.047	.095				
Social media use intensity	.471	.043	.555***				
Cultural identity	.328	.005	.310***				

Note: (1) Personal information variables were coded as dummy variables. (2) * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 6. The Result of the T-Test in Gender and Marital Status (N=213)

Variable		N	Mean	SD	t	P value
Gender	Male	67	3.646	.5076	-1.788	.075
	Female	146	3.811	.6072		
Marital status	Not married	158	3.839	.6551	3.234	.001
	Married	55	3.526	.5986		

4.4.3 The Mediating Effect of Cultural Identity on Social Media Use Intensity and Use Purpose

The presence of a mediating effect must satisfy the following conditions. First, the independent variable must predict both the dependent and mediating variables. The mediating variable must then predict the dependent variable. Finally, when the mediating variable is removed from the model, the independent variable's direct effect on the dependent variable is significant but reduced (partial mediation) or eliminated (full mediation) (Gebregergis et al., 2020). Hayes (2013)'s regression PROCESS macro was used to demonstrate the mediating effect. To analyze the statistical significance of indirect effects, bootstrap estimates of 5000 samples were used, with 95% confidence intervals excluding zero indicated significance. For the current research, cultural identity was entered into the model first to explore the mediating effect, then Malaysian cultural identity and Chinese cultural identity were placed in the model to build a parallel mediating effect analysis. Based on the results of regression analysis, gender and marital status were controlled in the analysis.

For the first mediating analysis, the independent variable of social media use intensity predicted both the mediating variable of cultural identity ($\beta=.390, p<.001$) and the dependent variable of social media use purpose ($\beta=.597, p<.001$). Cultural identity also significantly predicted social media use purpose ($\beta=.328, p<.001$). The 95% bootstrap confidence interval of the indirect effect did not include zero ($b=.128, 95\% CI=.071$ to $.191$), indicating that cultural identity mediated the relationship between social media use intensity and social media use purpose. Moreover, the direct effect was reduced but still significant ($\beta=.469, p<.001$). The total effect was 0.610, the indirect effect was 0.139, and the indirect effect accounted for 51.8 percent of the total effect. Thus, cultural identity played a partial mediating role and supported H4.

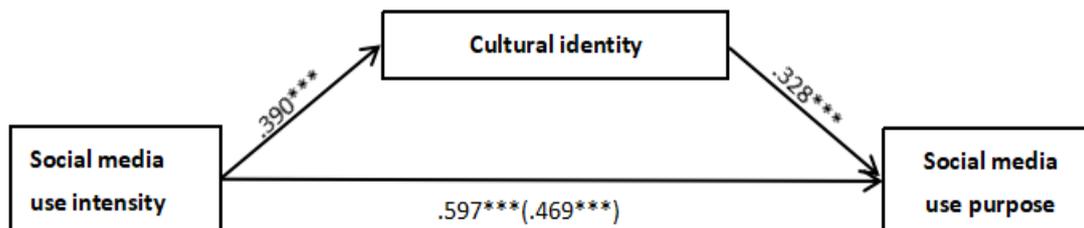


Figure 2. Mediating Effect Model of the Impact of Social Media Use Intensity on Social Media Use Purpose

Note: (1) Unstandardized coefficients were presented. (2) The number in brackets was the direct effect. (3) *** $p < .001$.

As regards the mediating effect of Malaysian cultural identity and Chinese cultural identity, a parallel mediating effect analysis was conducted. Social media use intensity positively predicted Malaysian cultural identity ($\beta=.496, p<.001$) and social media use purpose ($\beta=.597, p<.001$); Malaysian cultural identity also positively predicted social media use purpose ($\beta=.120, p<.01$). The 95% bootstrap confidence interval of the indirect effect did not include zero ($b=.060, 95\% CI=.027$ to $.118$), the direct effect was reduced but still significant ($\beta=.479, p<.001$), indicating that Malaysian cultural identity partially mediated the relationship between social media use intensity and use purpose. Similarly, social media use intensity positively predicted Chinese cultural identity ($\beta=.283, p<.001$); likewise, Chinese cultural identity positively predicted social media use purpose ($\beta=.206, p<.001$), the 95% bootstrap confidence interval of the indirect effect of Chinese cultural identity did not include zero ($b=.059, 95\% CI=.025$ to $.108$), indicating that Chinese cultural identity also partially mediated the relationship between social media use intensity and social media use purpose supporting both H4a and H4b.

According to these results, the total mediating effect of 0.597, Malaysian cultural identity and Chinese cultural identity accounted for 10.1% ($.060/0.597$) and 9.9% ($.059/0.597$) of the total effect, respectively. By comparing the proportion of the mediating effect to the total effect, it was discovered that Malaysian cultural identity had a larger mediating effect than Chinese cultural identity.

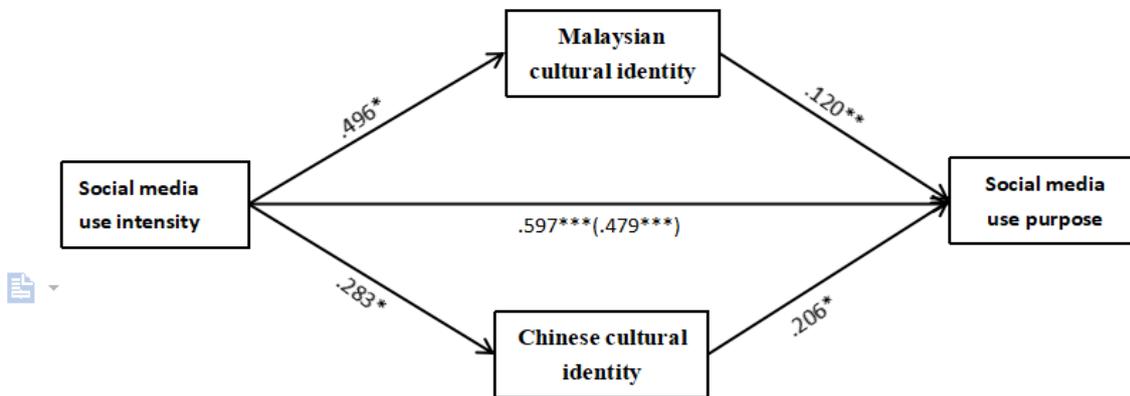


Figure 3. Parallel Mediating Effect Model of the Impact of Social Media Use Intensity on the Social Media Use Purpose
 Note: (1) Unstandardized coefficients were presented (2) The number in brackets was the direct effect. (3) *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 8. Summary of the Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Results
H1: Social media use intensity → social media use purpose	Supported
H2: Social media use intensity → cultural identity	Supported
H2a: Social media use intensity → Chinese cultural identity	Supported
H2b: Social media use intensity → Malaysian cultural identity	Supported
H3: Cultural identity → social media use purpose	Supported
H3a: Chinese Cultural identity → social media use purpose	Supported
H3b: Malaysian Cultural identity → social media use purpose	Supported
H4: Social media use intensity → cultural identity → social media use purpose	Supported
H4a: Social media use intensity → Chinese cultural identity → social media use purpose	Supported
H4b: Social media use intensity → Malaysian cultural identity → social media use purpose	Supported

5. Discussions of Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between social media use intensity and social media use purpose among Chinese students in Malaysia. All the study hypotheses were supported by the study findings.

Firstly, social media use intensity significantly influences social media use purpose consistent with a previous study conducted by Wen et al. (2016). Furthermore, Malaysian and Chinese cultural identities both positively predicted social media use. These results imply that the user’s purpose or motivations can be molded. Instead of being conducted in the user’s region, the current study focuses on international students and verifies this conclusion in a cross-cultural context.

Secondly, the study’s results concur with the existing literature that reports that social media use intensity influences cultural identity. Notably, many previous studies have centered on the positive influence of social media usage on host cultural identity (Dalisay, 2012; Ellison et al., 2007; Yang, 2018), because social media provides a channel for international students to learn the local language, customs, values, and aids in identifying with host’s cultural identity (Li, 2014). This study found that Chinese students’ social media usage in Malaysia potentially promoted Malaysian cultural identity and positively impacted on their Chinese cultural identity. The more Chinese students depended on social media, the more they were likely to enhance their Chinese cultural identity. This could be attributed to the fact that social media has no apparent geographical boundaries and can be accessed by users originating from different countries. For example, Facebook is a popular social media platform in many countries worldwide. In this study, WeChat and WhatsApp were the

most frequently used social media platform by participants illustrating that Chinese international students simultaneously used host social and ethnic social media in a foreign country. In the literature, ethnic social media usage has been proven to promote ethnic cultural identity (Li & Liu, 2017; Li & Tsai, 2015). Although extreme use of social media may have some negative effects (Giunchiglia et al., 2018; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; McNicol & Thorsteinsson, 2017), it can also improve cultural identity and social media use purpose.

Interestingly, Malaysian cultural identity was positively related to Chinese cultural identity. A study of Hispanics living in the United States proved that even when migrants identified with the host country's culture, they (migrants) would not necessarily lose their ethnic cultural identity (Li & Tsai, 2015). Sojourners can maintain a sense of belonging to both cultural groups while adhering to their own norms and values (Tartakovsky, 2013) a trait referred to biculturalism (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). Berry (2004) stated that contact with different cultures makes individuals appreciate that they belong to an ethnic group and such individuals will then produce their own country's cultural identity. While the preceding studies have primarily focused on the immigrant group, this study validates the rationality of bicultural identity among international students. A study of Chinese students in New Zealand discovered that the frequency with which they used Chinese social media (Weibo) predicted their identification with New Zealand culture (Du & Lin, 2019). Multicultural communication is increasingly becoming common in the age of social media. Therefore, attention ought to be paid to the many and diverse resources used to form cultural identity in an era of rapid media and cultural globalization (Ibold, 2010). The existence of a partial mediating effect of cultural identity indicates that part of the influence of social media use intensity on use purpose is explained by cultural identity. Moreover, both Malaysian and Chinese cultural identities play an intermediary role, which implies that cultural influences should be taken into consideration when exploring the influence of social media use behavior on social media use purpose.

6. Limitations and Implications

This study had several major limitations. Firstly, the U&G theory propose that media use purpose affects user behavior but this study investigates the impact of social media use intensity on social media use purpose. Despite a previous study confirming this point of view (Wen et al., 2016), users and use behaviors of social media are complex, and the impact of social media use intensity on social media use purpose ought to be studied in various groups of people. Secondly, study participants were Chinese international students from a large public university therefore the study results may not apply to all Chinese students in Malaysia. Furthermore, the study was limited to Malaysia and may not be representative of Chinese international students in other Asian countries. Thirdly, the current study employed a cross-sectional research design that surveyed the research subjects at only one time point thus making it difficult to determine causality between variables (Setia, 2016). Fourth, the current study did not categorize social media use purposes into different types and thus it is unknown whether different use purposes can be shaped, future research could explore whether different use purposes can be shaped.

In addition to the limitations mentioned above, there are three main implications that could be drawn from this study. First, part of the influence of social media use intensity on social media use purpose is explained by cultural identity. Since both Malaysian and Chinese cultural identities play an intermediary role, cultural influencing mechanisms should be considered when exploring the influence of social media use behavior on social media use purpose. Besides, different cultures are not antagonistic to one another. From this study, Malaysian cultural identity positively influenced Chinese cultural identity and therefore researchers should keep an open mind when studying cultural identity. As Shuter (2012) suggested, more research into cultural identity theory is needed in the digital age. Second, social media use intensity can help participants enhance their identification with Malaysian (host) culture. Host cultural identity is helpful in assimilating in a foreign country. This study also demonstrated that social media use intensity could help Chinese international students improve their Chinese (ethnic) cultural identity which is beneficial for adapting to a cross-cultural setting (Smith & Silva, 2011; Yoon et al., 2012). Therefore, social media use can help Chinese international students to improve their host and ethnic cultural identity and thus gain a better cross-cultural experience. Third, international students are the primary driver of new market participants in higher education internationalization and they bring to the host country many financial, cultural, and economic benefits (Terry, 2011; Yu et al., 2019). Given the large number of Chinese students studying in Malaysia, results from this study could help them have a positive experience and contribute to Malaysia's economic, cultural, and educational development.

7. Conclusion

This study aims to explore the relationship between social media use intensity and social media use purpose, which once again verifies that social media use purpose can be shaped. The subjects were Chinese students studying in Malaysia. Due to the large numbers, Chinese students have long been a focus group for cross-cultural scholars, but the group has received little attention in Asian backgrounds, especially in Malaysia, an increasingly popular study destination for Chinese students. By using social media, Chinese students in Malaysia can enhance Malaysian cultural identity and Chinese

cultural identity, which once again answers the question that multicultural identity is not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, cultural identity predicts social media use purpose, demonstrating that social media use purpose can be influenced by other factors. The discovery of the mediating effects also implies that Malaysian and Chinese cultural identities can explain how social media use intensity influences use purpose. These findings can help Chinese students improve their cross-cultural experience in Malaysia.

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