



# Influence of social media exposure factors on cultural acculturation: Ethnic identity as a mediator

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## ABSTRACT

This study delves into the impact of social media platforms on our daily lives, exploring their role in shaping communication behaviours. Conducted among working individuals in Kuala Lumpur, the research specifically investigates the relationship between social media exposure and cultural identity with ethnicity in a moderating role. The widespread adoption of the internet and associated platforms has profoundly affected culture, characterised by shared practices, beliefs, and material possessions passed down through generations. Employing a questionnaire survey, researchers employed quantitative methods. Structural Equation Modelling with Smart PLS was used to test the hypotheses. The study found a significant association between cognitive and social use with cultural acculturation. Moreover, a strong relationship was found between ethnic identity and cultural acculturation. The indirect impact of cognitive and hedonic use was also statistically significant. The relationship between cognitive, hedonic, and cultural acculturation is fully mediated by ethnic identity, with small direct impacts and considerable indirect effects. Social usage, both directly and indirectly, was not statistically significant, suggesting that ethnic identity does not serve as a mediator in the association between social use and cultural acculturation. The insights gained could inform policies and practices aimed at preserving cultural identity and fostering cultural diversity.

Keywords: **Social media exposure, cultural acculturation, ethnic identity, social, cognitive, hedonic use**

## INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, profoundly influencing global culture in various ways (Abraham et al., 2019). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok have revolutionised global connectivity by transcending historical, social, political, and geographic barriers, establishing themselves as essential components of modern life (Bhanye et al., 2023). Social media facilitates frequent interactions among users, enabling them to post updates, share photos, and create videos (Felix et al., 2017; Shaharuddin, et al., 2022).

Social media extends beyond personal interactions, allowing users to connect across time and space, fostering like-minded communities, and enabling creative participation in public life. Researchers across disciplines continue to explore the causes and effects of platform use, contributing to a deeper understanding of its impacts (Raza et al., 2020).

While earlier cultural theorists viewed group identification as static and evident, contemporary perspectives recognise it as fluid, contextual, and influenced by temporal and spatial shifts. Social media has emerged as a critical element of culture, reshaping how individuals interact and express themselves (Thomas, 2020).

The platforms improve interpersonal relationships by creating spaces for users to share ideas, opinions, and content. The growing use of social media also expands opportunities for analysing cultural identity, enabling researchers to examine data on topics, trends, and influencers (Ahmed & Lugovic, 2019). Over the past decades, social media exposure has significantly influenced cultural identity by fostering social relationships and enabling users to engage with readily accessible online content (Sawyer & Chen, 2012).

## BACKGROUND

This study investigates the impact of social media exposure (SME) on the cultural identity of multicultural Malaysians, exploring their interaction and the mediating role of ethnic identity in the relationship between SME and cultural identification. Social media enhances influence, learning, and cultural engagement but can also shape identity and cultural perceptions (Abraham et al., 2019).

Culture is structured through shared similarities among its members, and cultural patterns evolve over time, influencing cross-cultural identity development. SME affects cultural identity by shaping beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviours (Allen & Busse, 2016). Through acculturation, individuals adopt and practise codes that help them be recognised within cultural groups. Social media accelerates this process by assimilating individuals into diverse cultural identities, overtly and covertly.

Malaysia, as the focus of this research, is home to a rich diversity of ethnicities, religions, and languages. Its population consists of 67.4% Malays and other Bumiputera groups, 24.6% Chinese, and 7.3% Indians (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). Since the internet's introduction in 1995, Malaysians have increasingly relied on it for everyday tasks such as reading the news, paying bills, and maintaining social connections (Wok & Mohamed, 2017).

While social media is influential, sociocultural factors also play a role in identity development (Luqman et al., 2017). Certain online behaviours, such as trolling and image

sharing, contribute to individual and group identity formation (Chae, 2017). Smith et al. (2021) found that social media strengthens cultural identity, community bonds, and family ties, though societal disadvantages like school dropout rates and criminal records also affect one's sense of cultural identity.

In Malaysia's multicultural society, people's behaviours are influenced by various intersecting cultures, including national, religious, ethnic, and institutional or corporate cultures (Balakrishnan et al., 2021; Suharnomo & Syahruramdhan, 2018). Social media serves as a powerful tool for mobilisation and has driven cultural shifts, creating conflicts over definitions of gender roles, sexuality, class, and religion while challenging generational norms (Tang & Chan, 2020).

Although social media is often perceived as a primary driver of cultural identity, other sociocultural and contextual factors also significantly influence identity development. Berry (2005) highlighted the role of sociocultural contexts in psychological well-being during acculturation. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1977, 1979) further emphasises that macro (societal) and micro (family) environments shape identity. This study, therefore, seeks to determine whether SME or environmental factors, such as ethnicity, more strongly influence cultural identity development.

### *Problem statement*

Malaysia stands out in Asia for its high number of Facebook users, with most online users having an active account (Wok & Mohamed, 2017). The widespread use of social media, facilitated by high internet penetration rates, has significantly impacted cultural identity in Malaysia. The ease of access to online communication tools has transformed communication habits, frequencies, and patterns, reshaping societal dynamics (Engelin, 2020).

Malaysia's diverse cultural landscape, characterised by a wide range of lifestyles, beliefs, and values, has made it a unique context for studying the effects of social media exposure (SME) on cultural identity. Social media supports indigenous cultural identity (Lubis et al., 2017), while also redefining cultural norms, rituals, and symbols (Sheldon et al., 2020).

Despite these insights, there remains a dearth of published research on SME and cultural identity in developing countries in Asia, particularly in Malaysia. The nation's multicultural fabric for cultural acculturation is fostered by social media (Tang & Chan, 2020).

SME has led to the emergence of cross-cultural identities, altering how Malaysians perceive and express their individual and collective identities. This transformation is particularly significant as it introduces new rituals, symbols, and social practices while influencing individuals' status and sense of identity. Thus, understanding the interplay of SME with cultural identity is vital to grasp how it shapes the lives of individuals in Malaysia's pluralistic society.

The purpose of this study is to bridge the knowledge gap by investigating the impact of SME on cultural identity in Malaysia. More specifically, this research aims to uncover how social media shapes cross-cultural interactions, influences acculturation processes, and redefines traditional identity frameworks in one of Asia's most diverse countries.

### *Research questions*

1. What is the relationship between the social media exposure factor of social use and cultural acculturation?
2. What is the relationship between the social media exposure factor of cognitive use and cultural acculturation?
3. What is the relationship between the social media exposure factor of hedonic use and cultural acculturation?
4. How does ethnic identity mediate the relationship between social media exposure and cultural acculturation?

### *Research objectives*

The following research objectives were formulated based on the research questions:

1. To examine the relationship between the social media exposure factor of social use and cultural acculturation.
2. To examine the relationship between the social media exposure factor of cognitive use and cultural acculturation.
3. To examine the relationship between the social media exposure factor of hedonic use and cultural acculturation.
4. To identify the mediating role of ethnic identity in the relationship between social media exposure and cultural acculturation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Social media exposure*

This study examines the relationship between social media exposure and cultural acculturation, with a focus on ethnic identity. In cultural communication, new media has gained importance in shaping how individuals connect and express cultural identity (Jiaqi et al., 2023). The research outlines three dimensions of social media exposure—social, hedonic, and cognitive use—based on user needs (Luqman et al., 2017). Prior research shows that these needs significantly influence user behaviour in social media, information systems, and mobile applications (Yin, 2020).

Social use of social media refers to forming new social relationships, seeking people of common interests, and maintaining contact with old friends and acquaintances (Sutcliffe et al., 2023) in a two-way interaction. Netizens believe that social media is more socially engaging as it provides greater control over their interactions and have the potential to connect with people from all over the world (Luqman et al., 2017) because sociability is a context-relevant psychological disposition where an individual's psychological objective in utilising social media is related with the establishment and maintenance of social relationships with others.

Hedonic use of social media refers to raising money (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009), passing time (Sagala & Sumiyana, 2020), resting, escaping (Papacharissi & Mendelsohn, 2011), and entertainment (Sagala & Sumiyana, 2020). People feel delighted, happy, and curious during this process. Hedonic social media use fosters social support and relevance (Yingjie, Deng & Pan, 2019). The innately pleasurable aspect of social media encourages

greater engagement and use (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014), demonstrating a strong link between hedonic and social engagements. Users engage in virtual communities through online discussions and word-of-mouth (Lin et al., 2014).

The cognitive use of social media focuses on creating and sharing content as well as accessing content produced by other individuals including sharing opinions, stories, ratings, debates as well as personal photos and videos (Papacharissi & Mendelsohn, 2011). The function of cognitive use allows people to gain and exchange information (Landers & Schimdt, 2016). However, cognitive overload from excessive information may reduce productivity and cause technostress (Bawden & Robinson, 2009; Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Luqman et al., 2017).

### *Cultural acculturation*

Cultural acculturation is a process in which an individual from a culturally or ethnically distinct background adopts values and practices of a culturally dissimilar group while retaining their own culture (Foroudi et al., 2020). Acculturation is multidimensional, involving adjustments and changes in language, socioeconomic factors, and cultural values (Lopez-Class, Castro, & Ramirez, 2011). It is a two-way process where individuals from both minority and majority cultures influence each other (Cole, 2019; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2022).

Acculturation occurs at both individual and group levels, influencing elements like art, fashion, and language to support adaptation (Cole, 2019). Individually, it helps reduce social friction and aids adjustment during extended cultural exposure (Cole, 2019). In multicultural societies like Malaysia, acculturation is shaped by colonisation, globalisation, political shifts, and technological advances. It reflects a balance between embracing new cultural traits and preserving traditional values and beliefs (Berry, 2017).

### *Ethnic identity*

Ethnic minorities are often perceived solely as newcomers undergoing integration into society, which is a limited perspective that overlooks the complexities of their identities and experiences. Second- and third-generation individuals, for instance, are not newcomers but remain subject to these oversimplified frameworks. Consequently, the notion of integration is insufficient to fully capture the articulation and experiences of ethnic minority individuals (Slootman, 2018).

Ethnic identity research spans multiple disciplines, with sociologists focusing on acculturation at the group level and psychologists examining processes at the individual level (Slootman, 2018). The concept of “ethnic options” explores ethnic identification beyond cultural orientation or social cohesion, emphasising the interaction between individuals and external structures rather than solely focusing on ethnic groups (Slootman, 2018).

In Malaysia, a commonly recognised categorical scheme distinguishes between Malays, Chinese, and Indians, though these broad categories mask significant heterogeneity within each group. While studies have explored the distinctions within these categories, they also consider factors such as country of origin, nativity, and generational status. These ethnic classifications are socially constructed and continue to evolve over time (Jensen & Söderberg, 2021).

### ***Social media exposure, ethnic identity and acculturation***

Social media has become a core component of modern social life, influencing identity construction through social interactions (Marwick & Boyd, 2014). Identity construction is an inherently social process, shaped by psychological understandings of interactions with others (Bell, 2019). While the internet has facilitated cultural globalisation and redefined cultural identity, it has also raised concerns about its potentially damaging effects on identity and culture (Cvetkovich, 2018).

In multicultural environments, individuals creatively adopt and adapt cultural dispositions, leveraging social media to present themselves across diverse groups (Kim, 2017). Social media-driven interactions play a significant role in shaping identity, but they can also lack reciprocal dynamics between online self-presentation and offline realities (Dey et al., 2017). Furthermore, the improper use of social media can threaten identity stability and cultural harmony within families (Ismail et al., 2023; Wok et al., 2016).

Malaysia's diverse population comprising Bumiputera (59.3%), non-Malay Bumiputera (8.8%), Chinese (24.9%), and Indians (7.0%) reflects a rich variety of lifestyles, traditions, and cultural practices that persist despite modernisation and globalisation (Balakrishnan et al., 2021; Balakrishnan et al., 2024). This diversity, historically influenced by Malaysia's pre-colonial maritime trading system has been shaped by layers of Hindu, Islamic, and animistic traditions, resulting in a syncretic and evolving cultural identity. This diversity has been influenced by Malaysia's pre-colonial maritime trading system, which connects it to other parts of Asia (Balakrishnan et al., 2020).

Social media reshapes communication and infotainment, influencing cultural identity in Malaysia. It has transitioned individuals from passive, appointment-based media consumption to engagement-based interactions, altering how media affects identity and acculturation (Jin et al., 2019; Luqman et al., 2017). Social media platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, enable user-generated content, cross-platform cooperation, and widespread information sharing, making them central to daily life (Balakrishnan et al., 2021; Kent & Li, 2020). Online platforms mediate social identity and cultural perceptions, altering communication patterns (Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Dobbins et al., 2021).

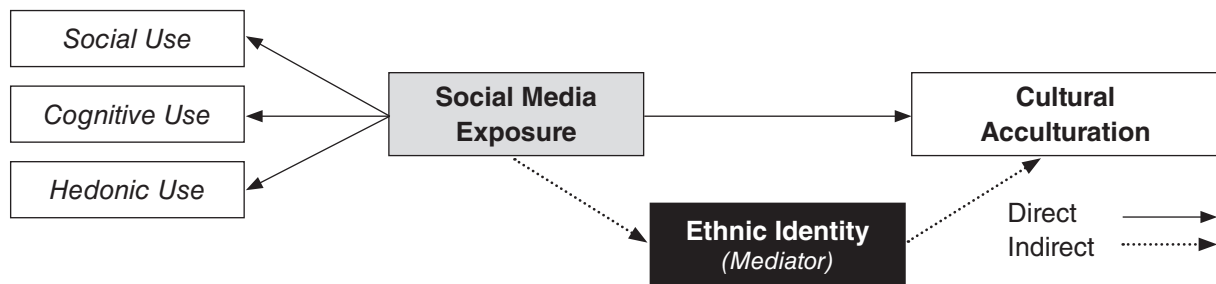
The relationship between social media, identity, and acculturation highlights both positive and negative effects. Although social media fosters interpersonal connectivity and cultural exchange, it also transforms social patterns related to ethnicity, nationality, and other aspects of identity, affecting acculturation processes and cultural comprehension (Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016; Rhodes & Baron, 2019).

### ***Theoretical framework***

The uses and gratification theory, developed in the 1940s, explores why and how people use media, as well as the gratifications they derive from it (Adeagbo, 2022). Unlike theories that emphasise media influence, this theory focuses on user behaviour from the perspective of need satisfaction, providing a foundation for studying user interactions with new media. It has been widely applied to investigate users' needs and their continuance behaviours in various research contexts (Yin, 2020). A key strength of the theory is its ability to uncover motivations behind consuming specific media content, offering valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between media and its users.

The cultural identity theory examines how individuals use communication to construct and negotiate their cultural group identities and relationships in specific contexts. It posits that culture is one of many identities expressed through communication encounters (Noels et al., 2020). Individuals typically navigate three identity dimensions: human, personal, and social identities. Minority groups in majority-based societies face the dilemma of preserving their heritage culture versus adopting the dominant culture (Moftizadeh et al., 2021). Cross-cultural psychology research underscores the pivotal role of culture and intercultural interactions in shaping behaviours, cognitive processes, and emotional experiences, positioning the theory as a subjective or interpretive framework.

This study's conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework

### *Hypotheses construction*

This study explores the relationship between social use and the cultural identity theory. Literature suggests that different forms of social use impact individuals in varying ways. Social use has been shown to positively influence cultural acculturation (Zhao et al., 2022). Media serves multiple roles—as entertainment, information, escape, and even a substitute for reality. New identities formed through media can be both compatible and conflicting, with individuals adapting their self-representation across diverse social media contexts (Jin et al., 2019). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between social use and cultural acculturation.*

Applying the concept of hedonic use, the independent self-construct the pursuit of happiness, independent subjective well-being is generally characterised by an explicit striving for personal happiness that may involve mastering one's environment and achieving goals (Hayat Bhatti et al, 2020). In other words, with an independent approach to pursuing subjective well-being, the goal is personal happiness, even if this pursuit involves other people (Shin et al, 2020). Based on the arguments above, it is hypothesised that:

*H2: There is a positive and significant relationship between hedonic use and cultural acculturation.*

The cognitive use of social media involves creating, sharing, and expressing personal traits like expertise, opinions, and interests. Social linkages are driven by shared activities and interests, particularly through content creation and sharing. This interactive

and collaborative environment enhances the likelihood of forming social ties through media exposure (Ross et al., 2019). Identity is understood as a mental framework used to interpret personal information, solve problems, and make decisions (Notley et al., 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H3: There is a positive and significant relationship between cognitive use and cultural acculturation.*

While there are various reasons for the focus on ethnicity, one of the most prominent is the racial bias between ethnic groups in a country like Malaysia (Aminnuddin, 2020). Even though ethnicity is a social construct instead of a biological one, social media exposure has allowed ethnicity to be largely self-defined and negotiated through social relations. The following hypothesis is proposed based on this argument:

*H4: Ethnicity moderates the relationship between social media exposure and cultural identity.*

## METHODOLOGY

The target respondents for this study were working adults aged 25 to 59 years who actively use social media in their daily lives (Victor et al., 2024). Participants were selected from urban areas of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, Malaysia, using purposive sampling to ensure that they met the selection criteria based on social media behaviour and engagement. A total of 390 respondents meeting the demographic criteria completed the online survey questionnaire, which was shared through social media platforms. This sampling approach ensured that the participants were relevant to the study's objectives, providing meaningful insights into the relationship between social media exposure and cultural acculturation.

The study used quantitative analysis to collect and interpret numerical data, allowing for pattern identification, prediction, causal testing, and generalisation (Lim et al., 2017). Despite using purposive sampling, the sample reflected the broader population due to Malaysia's high internet penetration, which rose from 62.78% in 2013 to 97.56% in 2023 (Siddharta, 2024). With 26.8 million social media users, which is 78.5% of the population, social media is central to communication and global connectivity in Malaysia. Given that 99.8% of users are aged 18 and above, the study's sample aligns well with the urban, adult demographic of Malaysian social media users.

The survey was conducted entirely online to protect respondent anonymity, minimising social desirability bias and promoting honest responses. The survey takes an average of 10–12 minutes to complete. All questions were marked as "required" in the Google Form to prevent incomplete submissions, enhancing data reliability. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, a minimum of 384 respondents was needed for a population of 1 million. With 390 valid responses from urban working adults using social media, the sample size was met and surpassed the threshold, ensuring sufficient statistical power.

To address common method bias, procedural remedies were implemented, including the use of multiple response formats and reverse-coded items to reduce response pattern

tendencies (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To assess and mitigate multicollinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) values were calculated. All VIF values were below the acceptable threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017), indicating no significant multicollinearity issues. These methodological precautions ensured the robustness and validity of the study’s findings.

The questionnaire comprised four sections: demographics, social media consumption, ethnic identity, and cultural acculturation. Demographic data covered gender, age, race, education, and employment. Social media consumption was measured using 14 items (Ali-Hassan, Nevo, & Wade, 2015), while ethnic identity and cultural acculturation were assessed using seven- and six-item instrument scales, respectively (Foroudi, Marvin, & Kizgin, 2020). All items used a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”). A pilot test with 42 convenience-sampled respondents confirmed high internal consistency, with all Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.7.

To test the study’s hypotheses, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed. The measurement model and confirmatory factor analysis were estimated using the SEM approach, implemented through the SmartPLS 4.0 software.

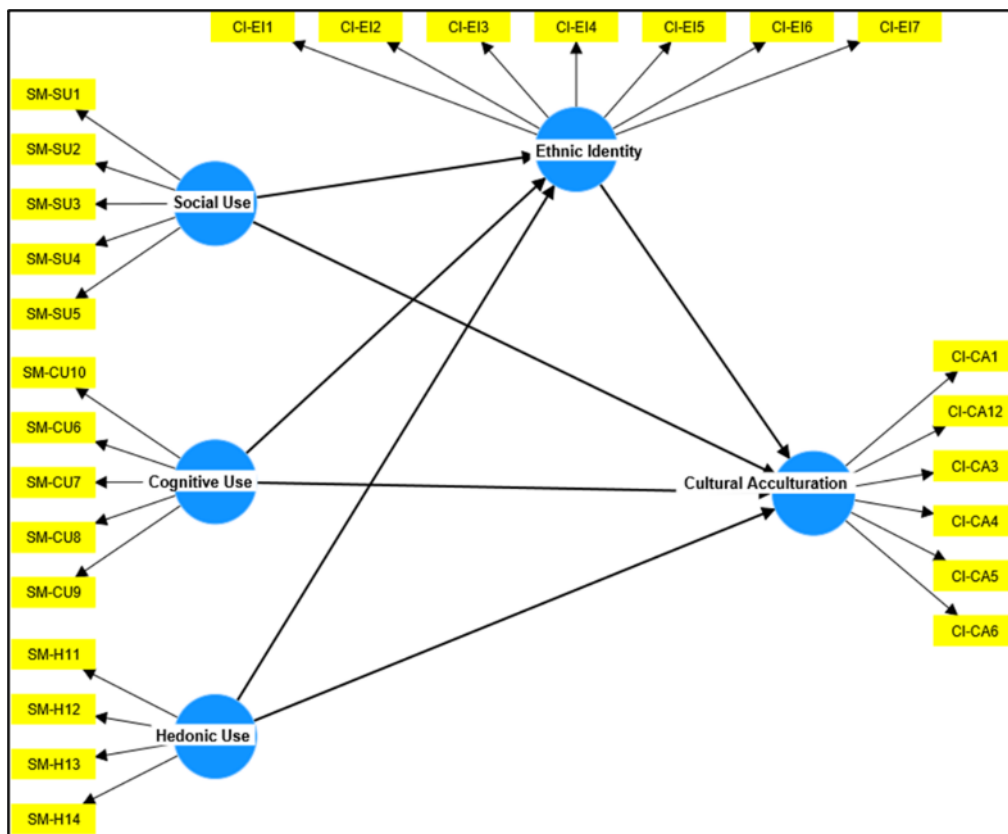


Figure 2. Structural model

## RESULTS

Structural Equation Modelling with Smart PLS was used to test the hypotheses developed. The measurement model was assessed for convergent validity and discriminant validity. The structural model developed was evaluated to significant predictors and the mediation effect.

### Measurement model

Factor loadings, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), were used to test the measurement model's convergent validity. The findings are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Measurement model

Factors	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Social Use	SM-SU1	0.852	0.946	0.77
	SM-SU2	0.825		
	SM-SU3	0.928		
	SM-SU4	0.906		
	SM-SU5	0.898		
Cognitive Use	SM-CU6	0.895	0.94	0.759
	SM-CU7	0.845		
	SM-CU8	0.893		
	SM-CU9	0.893		
	SM-CU10	0.830		
Hedonic Use	SM-HU11	0.900	0.932	0.774
	SM-HU12	0.890		
	SM-HU13	0.883		
	SM-HU14	0.847		
Ethnic Identity	CI-E1	0.775	0.945	0.711
	CI-E2	0.803		
	CI-E3	0.866		
	CI-E4	0.864		
	CI-E5	0.863		
	CI-E6	0.849		
	CI-E7	0.879		
Cultural Acculturation	CA1	.826	0.936	0.709
	CA2	0.866		
	CA3	0.893		
	CA4	0.866		
	CA5	0.747		
	CA6	0.848		

The factor loadings of all the items were greater than 0.7 which satisfies the minimum requirements. The AVE obtained was in the range of 0.709 to 0.779, which is more than the threshold value of 0.5, and the CR values were within the range of 0.932 to 0.946, meeting the minimum requirement of 0.8. As a result, the convergent validity is satisfactory (Hair et al., 2017). Hence, convergent validity at the item levels is supported (Chin, 1998).

Fornell-Larcker's (1981) criterion and Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015) were used to assess discriminant validity. The results (Table 2) show that all the variances extracted by the diagonal values are more than the correlation coefficients between the off-diagonal values, indicating adequate discriminant validity. Furthermore, the results shown in Table 3 are less than 0.9 which fulfils the criterion of HTMT0.9 (Gold et al., 2001) and confirms that the factors are distinct.

**Table 2.** Discriminant validity using Fornell-Lacker criterion

	Cognitive Use	Cultural Acculturation	Ethnic Identity	Hedonic Use	Social Use
Cognitive Use	<b>0.871</b>				
Cultural Acculturation	0.267	<b>0.842</b>			
Ethnic Identity	0.361	0.793	<b>0.843</b>		
Hedonic Use	0.402	0.171	0.269	<b>0.880</b>	
Social Use	0.480	0.124	0.123	0.195	<b>0.883</b>

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity using HTMT criterion

	Cognitive Use	Cultural Acculturation	Ethnic Identity	Hedonic Use
Cognitive Use				
Cultural Acculturation	0.287			
Ethnic Identity	0.389	0.855		
Hedonic Use	0.443	0.185	0.292	
Social Use	0.518	0.131	0.122	0.214

### *Structural model*

The structural model was developed using Smart PLS as shown in Figure 1. The bootstrapping procedure with a resample of 5,000, as suggested by Hair et al. (2017), was used to test the hypotheses.

**Table 4.** Hypothesis testing—direct effect

Relationship	Beta	t-value	p-value	Decision	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>	VIF
Cognitive Use → Cultural Acculturation	0.032	0.710	0.000	Supported			0.023	1.622
Hedonic Use → Cultural Acculturation	0.044	1.075	0.283	Not supported	0.633	0.06	0.004	1.219
Social Use → Cultural Acculturation	0.048	1.285	0.019	Not supported			0.025	1.305
Cognitive Use → Ethnic Identity	0.334	6.064	0.000	Supported			0.081	1.491
Hedonic Use → Ethnic Identity	0.148	2.964	0.003	Supported	0.152	0.136	0.022	1.193
Social Use → Ethnic Identity	-0.066	1.613	0.107	Not supported			0.004	1.299
Ethnic Identity → Cultural Acculturation	0.811	24.089	0.000	Supported	0.633	0.06	1.519	1.18

The direct effects in Table 4 show that Cognitive Use and Social Use have significant relationships with Cultural Acculturation, with a p-value below 0.05 and effect size exceeding 0.020. However, Hedonic Use does not significantly relate to Cultural Acculturation, as its p-value is above 0.05 and effect size is below 0.02. Ethnic Identity is

significantly related to Cultural Acculturation, with a p-value below 0.05 and an  $f^2$  value of 1.519.

An R-squared value of 0.152 indicates that 15.2% of the variation in Ethnic Identity is explained by variations in Cognitive Use, Hedonic Use, and Social Use. Cognitive Use and Hedonic Use significantly relate to Ethnic Identity, as their p-values are below 0.05 and effect sizes exceed 0.02. Social Use, however, is not significantly related to Ethnic Identity.

The cross-validated redundancy  $Q^2$  value assesses the predictive relevance of the model. The blindfolding procedure yielded  $Q^2$  values of 0.06 and 0.136, both greater than 0, confirming the model's predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017).

**Table 5.** Hypothesis testing—indirect effect

Relationship	Beta	t-value	p-value	Decision
Hedonic Use → Ethnic Identity → Cultural Acculturation	0.120	2.912	0.004	Supported
Social Use → Ethnic Identity → Cultural Acculturation	-0.054	1.612	0.107	Not supported
Cognitive Use → Ethnic Identity → Cultural Acculturation	0.270	5.765	0.000	Supported

The results of the indirect effects are presented in Table 5. The results reveal that the indirect effect of Cognitive Use and Hedonic Use are significant while Social Use is insignificant. Since the direct effects of Cognitive Use and Hedonic use are insignificant and indirect effects of Cognitive Use and Hedonic Use are significant, it can be concluded the Ethnic Identity completely mediates the relationship between Cognitive Use, Hedonic Use and Cultural Acculturation. Furthermore, since both the direct and indirect effects of Social Use are insignificant, it can be concluded that Ethnic Identity does not mediate the relationship between Social Use and Cultural Acculturation.

## DISCUSSION

This study's findings provide insights into the complex correlation between exposure to social media, ethnic identity, and cultural acculturation among employed individuals in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The analysis of direct effects indicates considerable correlations between the cognitive use and social use of social media platforms, as well as cultural acculturation. These findings are consistent with prior research that highlights the impact of social media use on cultural identification (Singh, 2020). The study reveals that cognitive use, which refers to activities such as creating and sharing content, and social use, used to interact and maintain relationships, have a major influence on cultural acculturation. Nevertheless, how one makes use of social media for hedonic purposes, such as leisure and pleasure, did not demonstrate a significant correlation with cultural acculturation. This implies that one's ethnic identity impact their use of social media and, consequently, their ability to deal with shifts in cultural identity in a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia. Our understanding of how ethnicity influences cultural identification processes in relation to social media exposure is enhanced by these findings (Luqman et al., 2017; Yin, 2020).

The results reveal a significant correlation between ethnic identity and cultural acculturation, affirming prior studies on ethnicity's role in shaping cultural identity (Ward & Szabó, 2023). Ethnic identification mediates the relationship between cognitive and hedonic social media use and cultural acculturation, demonstrating its influence on social media usage and cultural adaptation in Malaysia's multicultural context. The indirect effects analysis shows ethnic identification as a full mediator between cognitive, hedonic usage, and cultural acculturation, emphasising its importance in understanding social media's impact on cultural identity. However, the indirect effects of social media on cultural acculturation are insignificant, suggesting a limited role for ethnic identification in this relationship and highlighting the need for further research.

The analysis of indirect effects shows that ethnic identification fully mediates the relationship between cognitive and hedonic social media use and cultural acculturation. Thus, recognising ethnic identity is essential in understanding how social media use influences cultural identity. However, the indirect effects of social media use on cultural acculturation were found to be insignificant, suggesting a limited role of ethnic identification in this relationship and emphasising the need for further research.

This research contributes to literature by empirically exploring the relationship between social media exposure, ethnic identification, and cultural acculturation in Malaysia's ethnically diverse context. It examines the impact of social media on cultural identity among working adults in Kuala Lumpur, offering insights into preserving cultural heritage and fostering diversity amid technological and global shifts. However, the study's focus on a specific demographic and location may limit its broader applicability. Future research should investigate these relationships across wider populations and varied settings to enhance the understanding of social media's role in shaping cultural identity.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results of this study offer insights into the multifaceted relationship between ethnic identification, cultural acculturation, and social media use among employed Malaysians in Kuala Lumpur. The results indicate that hedonic use of social media platforms does not show significant correlation with cultural acculturation, but cognitive and social use do. It is important to include individuals' ethnic identity when trying to understand how social media affects cultural identity processes. Ethnic identity was additionally found to mediate the relationship between cognitive use, hedonic use, and cultural acculturation.

This study has important theoretical implications, especially for the cultural identity theory as well as the uses and gratifications theory. This study extends previous research on the impact of media by adding to the understanding of why people use social media by applying the uses and gratification theory. We learn more about people's motivations and behaviours when we apply this theoretical framework to the study of user behaviour and needs within the framework of new media platforms, such as social media.

In addition, the cultural identity theory offers a perspective to analyse how people navigate and build their cultural identities when exposed to social media. This study contributes to our understanding of cultural identification processes, especially in heterogeneous cultures like Malaysia, by examining the ways in which ethnic identity and social media use interact with one another. Promoting cultural diversity as well as

preserving traditions and cultures require an understanding of how individuals navigate cultural identity dynamics in the digital era.

Both individuals and workplaces can benefit from applying the study's practical conclusions. To better promote cultural diversity and inclusion in the workplace, organisations would do well to study how social media exposure affects cultural identity. An inclusive workplace can be created when companies use social media to help employees communicate and work together across cultural boundaries. People can also get insights into how their social media use affects their cultural identity, which can help them make better choices regarding their online personas and relationships.

It should be noted, nevertheless, that this study does have certain limitations. The results may not be applicable to a broader population because they were based on a single survey in one place. Additionally, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causality between social media exposure, ethnic identity, and cultural acculturation. To better understand the intricate interaction among social media use, ethnic identification, and cultural assimilation, future studies could investigate these connections across more diverse population and settings, including rural communities and different ethnic groups.

Furthermore, the long-term impacts of social media usage on cultural identification processes should be better understood by longitudinal investigations which could provide deeper insights into how social media engagement shapes identity over time. Future research could also incorporate qualitative methods to complement quantitative findings, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of personal experiences and social media's role in shaping cultural identity.

Despite these limitations, the study's theoretical and practical contributions enhance our understanding of how social media affects cultural identity dynamics. By exploring social media's influence on ethnic identity and acculturation, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and organisations seeking to foster cultural inclusivity in an increasingly digitalised world.

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