



Expatriate teachers in China: Exploring the utilisation of social media in the adaptation process

Le Roujia

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

*Ireena Nasiha Ibnu

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

ireena@uitm.edu.my

Tengku Elena Tengku Mahamad

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

With the popularity and ubiquity of social media, it seems that adjusting to different cultures is easier than it used to be. Despite social media's pervasive presence in the daily lives of expatriate teachers, there is little research on how it influences their acculturation experience. Hence, this study looks at social media's role in the cross-cultural adaptation process of expatriate teachers in China. Nine expatriate teachers who taught in China were selected from five Chinese colleges as the study's participants. Using semi-structured interviews, the study explored the role of social media in the participants' adaptation experiences in China. The study highlights three important findings that advance the discussion on the development of social networks and cross-cultural communication when working abroad. First, social media is primarily used by expatriate teachers to maintain daily contact with their family and friends from their hometown, and local friends. Second, even though they do join several online expat support groups, expatriate teachers primarily make local friends and fully integrate into the offline culture to achieve cross-cultural adaptation. Thirdly, social media plays a less significant role in expatriate teachers' cross-cultural adaptation compared to personal traits and local support.

Keywords: ***Cross-cultural adaptation, social media, expatriate teacher, Chinese college, intercultural communication***

INTRODUCTION

The growth of expatriate teachers is expected to expand international education, strengthen international communication and introduce quality educational resources in China (Meng, 2017; Wang, 2012). However, the increase of expatriate teachers has raised new issues for China's education system and management model. Some expatriate teachers face physical and mental problems due to the differences in environment and culture, which makes them unable to concentrate on teaching in China (Wang, 2012). To improve expatriate teachers' working experiences and help them achieve their goals of moving abroad, Chinese universities and colleges need to address the issues they face such as emotional, dietary, and health problems. More importantly, expatriate teachers, who are deeply rooted in their own culture, must be able to overcome dilemmas arising from cultural differences.

Cross-cultural adaptation has seen a new research focus in recent years: digital media, namely the use of social networks. One of the more recent developments that has changed the acculturation process is the development and widespread use of online social network sites (SNS) (Hofhuis et al., 2019). International migrants today frequently use social media tools to build social networks, communities, and societies. As a matter of fact, studies show that immigrants commonly use cutting-edge media technology (Dahan & Sheffer, 2001; Karim, 2003). According to Alamri (2018), immigrants utilise social media for a variety of reasons, including social capital acquisition, communication with friends, family, and classmates in both their home and host countries, as well as social adjustment in educational settings. In recent years, social networking has emerged as the most popular and practical method employed by expats.

However, past research also revealed other related issues such as cultural conflict, sociocultural integration, academic adjustment, and mental health problems (Ahmed et al., 2019; Du & Lin, 2019; Lim & Pham, 2016; Park et al., 2014). Unfortunately, very few research attempts have been made to identify and synthesise current evidence on whether and how the use of social media technologies may have a variety of cross-cultural and psychological effects (Pang & Wang, 2020). Moreover, studies on cross-cultural adjustment still tend to concentrate mostly on international students, particularly foreign students in China and Chinese students abroad (Meng, 2017). The few existing studies on teachers' intercultural adaptation are only based on the subjective experiences of the researchers or quantitative evaluations (Yi et al., 2020). Thus, more research is needed to understand the influence of social media usage on expatriate teachers' cross-cultural adaptation experience in China.

To this end, this study adopted a qualitative research method to address the following questions:

1. How does social media influence expatriate teachers' lives in China?
2. What role does social media play in expatriate teachers' cross-cultural adaption process in China?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-cultural adaptation

There are various terms that are used interchangeably with cross-cultural adaptation, including "acculturation," "enculturation," and "cross-cultural adaptation." Kim (1988) defined cross-cultural adaptation as the dynamic process of change that happens to

individuals when they relocate to a new environment. In other words, cross-cultural adaptation refers to the progressive enhancement of an individual's capacity to operate in a foreign environment through an evolutionary or continuous learning process. With time and expertise, the process of adapting never stops; rather, it changes and becomes easier to handle (Kim, 2000). When someone moves from one heterogeneous culture to another that is distinct from their original culture, they may make conscious and inclined behavioural choices and adjustments depending on their cognitive and emotional attachments to both cultures. This process is known as cultural adaptation.

These days, academic cross-cultural adaptation challenges are categorised based on the perspectives of Ward and his colleagues (2020). According to these scholars, there are two aspects of cross-cultural adaptation: social adaptation and psychological adaptation. Psychological adaptation, which relates to life pleasures and mental health in cross-cultural interactions, is based on an emotional response. Psychological adaptation can be attained during cross-cultural contact if negative feelings such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and disappointment are absent or negligible. On the other hand, the ability to adjust to the social and cultural context of one's surroundings and to interact and communicate with members of the local community is known as social adaptation (Ward et al., 2020).

Social media usage and cross-cultural adaptation

A collection of web-based tools known as social media enable the production and sharing of user-generated content and expand upon the conceptual and technological underpinnings of Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social networking sites (SNSs) are "web-based" services that let users create a public or semi-public profile within a closed system, list other users they are connected to, and examine both their own and other users' connection lists. Social media gives users a forum to discuss and debate cultural issues with others, regardless of where they are in the world, in addition to communicating and working together.

In order to acquire social capital, communicate with individuals in their hometowns and the countries they are now living in, and to socially integrate into the educational environment, newcomers use social media for a variety of reasons (Alamri, 2018). To investigate the function of social networks in the context of cross-cultural adaptation, Hendrickson and Rosen (2017) conducted interviews with 34 foreign students enrolled in various Argentine universities. The findings demonstrate how social media improved the understanding of regional communication patterns which allowed international students to interact, communicate, adjust and assimilate with their host countries and new culture.

Canhilar et al. (2022) combined the online and offline characteristics of Internet-based expat platforms to study their roles and functions. They investigated the relationship between the different types of social support and the different types of participation in virtual expat platforms using two studies. In order to understand better the various forms of social support, the first study used topic modelling to systematically analyse linguistic data in 45 online English-speaking expat platforms. The second study used an online questionnaire to gather information about the various forms of social support that expatriates receive globally via various channels.

Expats prefer the Internet for information and interaction-based social support from fellow expats and platform contacts, according to both studies. This inclination is probably due to the Internet's ability to link people with similar experiences. Regarding the function and role of hybrid participation in Internet-based platforms, the study suggests that: a) online participants seek out and receive informational and emotional support; b) hybrid participants receive emotional, instrumental support and higher levels of emotional

support compared to those who participate only online; and c) supported recipients show higher levels of long-term participation compared to non-recipients. Among these, hybrid participants who receive support have more frequent conversations with both the community at large and individual platform contacts (Canhilal et al., 2022).

However, continuous communication via social media with one's home country might potentially have unfavourable impacts on expatriates (Hofhuis et al., 2019). International travellers are reminded of life back home when they look at photos, posts, and messages of friends and family who were still living there. This leads to homesickness and a sense of alienation and loneliness among sojourners, which harm their well-being in the host nation (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Moreover, as this study is conducted in China, the unique historical background of censorship of social media should also be taken into account. Given that social media has more clout than traditional media, the Chinese government has implemented a number of new regulations to reduce censorship. Policy changes has resulted in a number of limitations to social media censorship, such as the community specification's numerous confusing statements, its lack of explicit specifics regarding bans, its varied levels of censorship, and its additional unwritten norms (Chen, 2023). Therefore, this study explored the role of social media in expatriate teachers' cross-cultural adaptation in the context of China.

METHODS

Sample

This study utilised semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data from participants. An in-depth interview can delve deeply into a specific procedure, activity, program, event, or person (Creswell & Creswell, 2003). According to Showkat and Parveen (2017), in-depth interviews are particularly useful when trying to fully comprehend a problem, event, or intriguing incident in its true, authentic context. From June 2023 to July 2023, nine expatriates who are currently teaching or have previously taught in Chinese colleges were selected from Jiangxi Province. They were chosen in part due to the researcher's close proximity with the college and ease of access. The sample inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) maintains a formal teaching position at a college; (2) has no mental or surgical conditions that have been identified; (3) is not a native speaker of Chinese; and (4) has not spent a significant amount of time living in China. Every participant in this study gave their consent to participate. The participants' demographic data is shown in Table 1. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, we refer to the participants as "P1, P2... P10" when quoting interview excerpts.

Table 1. Demographics of participants

No	Gender	Country of origin	Years working in China	Position	Disciplinary areas	Past experience living abroad
P1	Female	The Philippines	More than 3 years	Lecturer	English	No
P2	Female	Spain	More than 3 years	Lecturer	Spanish	No
P3	Female	The Philippines	More than 4 years	Lecturer	English	Thailand
P4	Male	United Kingdom	3 years	Lecturer	English	South Korea, Japan
P5	Male	United States	More than 3 years	Lecturer	Finance	No
P6	Male	United States	5 years	Lecturer	English	South Korea

Table 1. (con't)

No	Gender	Country of origin	Years working in China	Position	Disciplinary areas	Past experience living abroad
P7	Male	United States	4 years	Lecturer	English	Thailand
P8	Male	Cameroon	More than 10 years	Lecturer	English	No
P9	Male	United States	4 years	Lecturer	English	No

The administrative offices of the selected colleges served as the first point of contact for the participants. Then, additional participants were recruited via those first contacted using the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is still the most practical and appropriate sampling method for in-depth interviews and observations, despite being perceived negatively for not yielding samples that satisfy the statistical definition of random samples (Parker et al., 2019). Further, the researcher can include survey respondents they would not have known otherwise in order to identify members of a particular community (Etikan et al., 2016). Expatriate teachers who were interested in participating in the study also got in touch with the researcher through the Chinese social media platform WeChat.

Ten expatriate teachers were initially approached by the researcher; nine of them agreed to participate in the study, and one of them did not reply. After that, prospective participants were given an overview of the study's aim, substance, methodology, and confidentiality principle in accordance with predetermined guidelines. The interview guide informed the participants that the purpose of the interviews was to understand the group's intercultural adaptation process in China and the role of social media in that process. The participants were also informed that the interviews will be audio-recorded and they could stop answering the questions at any time if they had any reservations about taking part in the study. The researchers first had a WeChat conversation with any foreign teachers who wanted to join and fulfilled the inclusion requirements, to reconfirm their willingness to participate. After which, a formal interview appointment was set up by the researchers. Two of the participants underwent online interviews since they were not located in the study region. Before the interviews, all of the participants signed the informed consent form. Ethics approval from the university's research committee was also sought before potential participants were approached.

The interviews were semi-structured, and the participants were asked questions in accordance with a predetermined format. The research topic for this study, the use of social media by foreign teachers in China, guided the construction of the interview guide. To ensure that the interviews proceeded smoothly and to gain in-depth perspectives of the participants, the interviewer asked open-ended questions and when needed, followed up on any ambiguous responses with questions such as "Could you tell me more" or "What do you mean by that?" A few instructions or guiding remarks were also given to maintain the spontaneity and continuity of the interview process.

Each interview lasted about ½ to 1½ hours. To ensure that the participants were comfortable, the interviews were held in a private room with complete confidentiality. The researcher conducted a second, less formal online interview with some of the participants as part of the data collection process to get information on a wide range of perspectives and themes of this study. A laptop was used to record the interview. There were no language difficulties during the interviews because both the interviewer and participants spoke fluent English.

Data analysis

The researchers analysed the data collected using thematic analysis to find emerging themes or concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Continuous comparative analysis was also used to find and create codes. Due to its inductive nature, comparison analysis is frequently utilised in qualitative research. The main purpose of thematic analysis is to detect and explain patterns and themes that emerge from collected qualitative data (Sundler et al., 2019). The NVivo 14 software was used to analyse interview transcripts and identify themes. Descriptive coding was employed to summarise the basic themes (Saldaña, 2021) and strategically assemble the themes into broad categories.

To ensure the reliability of the coding, the researchers carried out an intratextual analysis, which involved looking at each transcript as a whole and establishing a chronological timeline of each participant's account of acculturation and social media use. The next step was to conduct an intertextual analysis to look for themes that are present throughout the data, such as the usage of social media to support the preservation of home country memories or to establish connections with the host culture. These typical storylines developed into key themes, as evidenced by the data. After completing the coding process, the researcher still had to refine the results many times before finalising the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Three core themes emerged from the analysis: The usage of social media, the effects of social media, and the correlation between social media and cross-cultural adaptation. These themes will be discussed in the following sections.

Theme 1: The usage of social media

In the interviews, the participants mentioned that they use social media to stay in touch with their families and friends from their home country to reduce the stress associated with their acculturation process and increase their satisfaction level. This finding corroborates with Kline and Liu (2005), who found that maintaining contact with friends and family back home can help sojourners feel less stressed and more satisfied during their acculturation process. In addition, expatriate teachers use social media to get information about China, to socialise with people in China, to ask assistance with work, to deal with daily stuff, as well as to enjoy music and videos. To sum up, the usage of social media was mainly for daily communication, information acquisition, as well as to handle daily and work-related matters.

Daily communication

All nine participants used social media as a way of communication. Whether it is to communicate with relatives and friends who are not in China, to communicate with friends who are around, or to communicate with new acquaintances. The following sample excerpts demonstrate this:

Skype. I use that for my mom, because that's all she can understand. But I use WhatsApp as well. And that's for foreign friends. Friends who live abroad. And Line, I use that for people live in Thailand right now. (P4)

I use social media to get in touch with my families and friends. (P9)

Expatriate teachers chose to maintain communication with friends and family through Western social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Skype. Even though China has some regulations against the use of Western social media platforms, expatriate teachers can still access them with some assistance. However, the commonly used social media apps in China differ from those in foreign countries. The participants indicated that they quickly adapted to Chinese social media apps after coming to China, and even introduced them to their families so that they could communicate with them more conveniently.

So my mom downloaded WeChat. It's much easier for me to contact with her because I'm looking at WeChat all the time. But with other family and friends, I use foreign social media apps. (P2)

I have a couple of friends and my parents on WeChat. (P7)

Information acquisition

Participants admitted that they obtained various aspects of information about China through social media. Some participants mentioned that they learned about China through various social media apps before coming to China, and even after arriving in China. Most of the information that they had acquired were regarding the Chinese culture and other information that they felt might be useful for them to easily blend with the local people, and enjoy their stay in the country.

Before I came here, I learned about Chinese through social media. (P1)

I think following official accounts of places that you are interested on WeChat gives you a lot of information such as the opening hours. These official accounts also post some articles. For example, I've followed the account of a theatre and they post a lot of shows, performances and some other stuff. It's amazing because I can know what I can have a look. It's very useful. (P2)

In some ways, the social media can help me understand the culture more deeply and know the local people more deeply. You can watch videos about how people live their local lives, ..., different things help you to understand China. (P8)

Moreover, participants shared that there are some expatriate online groups on the social media apps which provide related information. When the expatriate teachers first arrived in China, they were not familiar with the teaching mode and teaching method that suited the Chinese students. Online social groups provided them a platform to share their problems and seek solutions from other users. This finding is similar to Mai (2017) who indicated that online social groups are a useful platform for expatriates. In addition to providing work related information, online social groups are also convenient and useful to expatriates for other useful information such as which restaurants to go, accommodation, and other related information (Canhilal et al., 2022). Three of the participants shared this:

I learned some information about Nanchang from WeChat group when I first arrived in Nanchang like where to go, which restaurant is, nice stuff like that. (P3)

I will ask them the strategy they use. Every time I have difficulty explaining to the students, I will ask them on the WeChat group, and they will tell me the strategy. (P1)

There are some information exchange groups on WeChat. You can ask any question and they provide with information. (P2)

Handling daily and work-related matters

Social media in China has spawned many applications for various everyday affairs, such as money transactions, buying tickets, hailing taxis, topping up mobile phones and so on. P4 admitted that he had not used a smartphone before coming to China, but found it difficult to survive without one after coming to China.

WeChat is very convenient. You could use it to a train. You could use it to pay for something, to pay for utilities. You can use it to top up your phone. (P3)

In addition, almost all the participants have used social media to deal with working matters, communicating with colleagues about work, managing work documents, and assigning homework to students.

I use WeChat to contact with my boss. (P1)

I used QQ for a time. And the reason for that is WeChat only let you upload videos of 700 megabytes or less. A good number of my assignments were based on group work. So students would need to have made videos and some of these videos were quite large in size. QQ did not have a size limit on videos. So students were able to send me the videos. (P7)

Theme 2: The effects of social media

Despite the multitude of benefits provided by social media, the participants appear to hold different perspectives regarding its effect. Some participants believed that social media is a useful tool and has brought many positive effects into their lives. Others however, felt otherwise. This could be attributed to their lack in interest in using social media as it is perceived to bring negative impact (Akram & Kumar, 2017).

Three participants (P3, P5 and P6) only mentioned the benefits of social media and did not highlight any negative effects. They indicated that in addition to communication, both the online social groups and the functions offered by social media have only brought them positive effects. When asked if social media has negatively impacted the adaptation experience, one participant responded as follows:

Definitely not. It's very useful. Chinese social media, WeChat, has been nothing but positive. (P3)

Nevertheless, in addition to affirming the positive effects of social media, P1, P8 and P9 also mentioned some negative effects. P9 admitted that social media can be addictive. People unconsciously spend a lot of time on social media, scrolling down their phones all the time.

It's kind of like crack, right? It's very addictive. It's just an absolute time killer and I've spent full day doing it. (P9)

P1, on the other hand, shared that social media made her feel homesick. Whenever she made video calls to her family, or saw postings made by her family especially during important holidays, even if she was happy at the particular moment, she would then feel immediately homesick. In contrast, P8 felt that social media forces users to view postings that they do not want to see, which can be frustrating and scary.

You may see a video about something really bad happening. It makes you feel a little fear about going outside. The negative effect is just seeing things that are traumatizing, things that happened to other people can make you feel sad.
(P8)

Additionally, some participants shared some negative comments about social media because they do not like social media themselves. P2, P4 and P7, all described themselves as not being a fan of social media. All three participants admitted that they do not like to share details of their lives on social media, nor do they pay attention to the posts shared by others. P2 used social media to communicate with her friends, colleagues, students and families every day. However, she did not see herself as a social media person because:

I'm not a big fan of social media. I don't actually use Facebook or Instagram. Because I feel that people I want to share my life with, people that care about me know about my life through our conversation but not from the posts on social media.
(P2)

Moreover, P2 believed that social media costs people a lot of time and makes them addicted. This finding is consistent with Akram and Kumar (2017) who found that people might find social media useful in the beginning, but what was originally planned to be a 10-minute scroll can run into two hours or more. Similarly, P4 does not like to post anything on social media or read posts shared by others. P4 did not even use a smartphone before coming to China. The reason P4 started using social media in China was because social media had become very common in daily life here, and P4 would have struggled to live without it. Although he has been in China for three years and is accustomed to the use of social media, he admitted still feeling uncomfortable seeing people post on Instagram or Facebook.

I don't post anything. I think it's actually done more harm to people. I think it's created a generation of narcissist. People posting on social media their fake lives just to get likes, collapse and approval. I'm very uncomfortable with it. I don't like to share my life with people. This is private.
(P4)

P6 felt the same way, but he also believed that the information provided on social media was unreliable. His perception is in contrast to Sukiman et al.'s (2023) finding, whereby content from social media platforms is frequently regarded as more reliable than information from other sources. When P6 needs to search for information, he will ask friends rather than rely on social media.

Theme 3: The correlation between social media and cross-cultural adaptation

The analysis generally revealed that social media plays a favourable role in facilitating expatriate teachers' transition into a new culture. However, this role is limited and not

dominant. Throughout the whole process of adaptation, while social media did assist the participants substantially, the main factors that helped them eventually complete their adaptation were their own positive attitude and the help of residents in the host country. Nevertheless, the various convenient functions provided by social media enabled the participants to quickly adapt to life in China. Additionally, social media also helped participants become familiar and learn about Chinese cultural knowledge which helped them navigate cultural differences and adapt successfully into the Chinese society. One participant stated the following:

To me, everything I live in China is actually pretty easy, especially nowadays where everything is on your smartphone. You just scan things and you can find things easily. So, I don't find living in China difficult at all. (P4)

So I learned a little bit about Chinese culture on social media. Mostly just learning about how Chinese people are friendly and kind to foreigners. Nothing deep or specific. (P8)

Interestingly, the role of social media was found not critical to the participants' cross-cultural adaptation as some previous findings had suggested. For them, social media is more of a communication tool than a coping strategy to help them adapt to the Chinese culture. This is consistent with Canhilal et al. (2022) who found that although expatriates can get some information from social media to help them adjust to their life in China or know some local people from the host culture, the strategy that helps them the most is not social media.

I have not got any local friends through internet. Usually introduced by common friends. But when introduced by common friends, we started communicating via WeChat. I knew them not through WeChat, but through common friends. (P2)

From the participants' perspective, the main coping strategies were their own positive attitude, support from locals and localisation. Even though there are some distinct cultural differences, six of the participants mentioned that they were able to blend in because of their adaptability. If people in a multi-ethnic society can learn about and understand each other, then diversity of beliefs, and differences in values cease to be dividing factors in multicultural societies (Pheung & Yun, 2023). This is consistent with earlier research that indicates sojourners are less likely to experience anxiety about constantly being aware of cultural differences when they are confident in their own identity and home culture (Buddington, 2002). The following excerpts reflect this:

I'm a pretty adaptive person. When I live in different countries, I tend to adapt a lot. Though I still behave like an Englishman. I think adapting is my responsibility. I think if you have an idea of how you want to live, then it's quite easy to adapt. (P4)

There wasn't really much adjustment to do. There wasn't really that much of a transition to be done. I haven't had any trouble to live in Nanchang. It wasn't really much adapting to be done. (P7)

There are differences and those differences should be accepted and understood. If not, there is no way you can adapt to any culture. If you are not willing to accept the differences and understand those differences, you can be angry. But these differences is a part of the people living here. You can't change it, you should understand and accept it, and then be happy with it. (P8)

All nine participants emphasised that support from school staff, colleagues, students, local friends, and even strangers they met on the road was vital to their cross-cultural adaptation process. When the participants encountered any problems, their first reaction was to ask these people for help as demonstrated by these excerpts:

I think it helped a lot having colleagues that are actually willing to help. ... if you have someone that you can trust, and when you have an issue, you can ask, and they will get the answer for you. It makes my life here easier. ... I feel amazing in China because I've had so much support from strangers. ... just because they see you are in trouble; they will offer help to you. It makes me feel very warm. (P2)

I was given a lot of help and advice from both my foreign friends I met here as well as the administration staff of Chinese college. (P6)

From my part, I think Chinese people are always ready to help. Even someone who doesn't know English, he will try to help you. (P8)

Additionally, the findings indicate that self-identity influences the association between social media use and acculturation. This is important since some earlier study viewed acculturation as a one-dimensional process that focuses on the sojourner's choice between the main cultural values (Ryder et al., 2000). However, having a strong ethnic identity does not always result in reduced acculturation to the host culture. People who are very attached to their ethnic identity tend to be less eager to engage with people from the host culture or consume the host nation's media (Hirji, 2006). Assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalisation are the four components of Berry's (1980) four-part acculturation modes, which promotes cultural balance and coexistence of two or more cultures. The findings of our study further support this position.

This reality is demonstrated by P4's experience. Until his arrival in China, he had never used a smartphone. Although he is not a big social media user, he nonetheless uses social media apps from both the host country and his own country to stay in touch with others. He maintains his British mannerisms despite having lived in China for three years. P4 provides an example of using the subway to demonstrate how, despite the cultural differences between China and the UK, he still retains the habits he learned in the UK:

I would say one of the big differences that I notice a lot is the way strangers interact. I grew up in London, I always felt there was a lot more consideration for strangers getting on and off the subway. In England, you always wait for people to get off and then you get on. But I always feel it's a battle here in China, nobody waits. I think it's because politeness is the very strong thing about British culture. And I know in China, if you know somebody then they are incredibly polite, generous, and kind. But if you are a stranger, then it's kind of the opposite. Though I adapt a lot when I live in different countries. I

still behave like an Englishman. I still wait others to get on the subway first. Also, I still hold doors for people. (P4)

P7's experience, as related in the interview, also sheds light on how self-identity affects the link between cross-cultural adaptation and social media use. P7 uses Chinese social media every day even if he is not a great admirer of it. Although he deeply values the Chinese culture, he also exhibits many traits of American society:

..., and in many respects, though I do imagine that I have a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and appreciation for it. I'm still at heart someone who was born and raised in a small town of America. So there are some things that I can't quite let go of regardless of how much I try. (P7)

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of social media in expatriate teachers' cross-cultural adaptation process. The researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect data from nine expatriates working in China. Findings reveal that the main usage of social media amongst expatriate teachers in China are for daily communication, information acquisition and handling daily and work-related matters. From the expatriate teachers' perspective, besides benefits, social media also has some negative effects such as negative emotional state, waste of time, and unreliable information. Furthermore, the role of social media in cross-cultural adaptation is not as vital as other factors like personal traits and support from locals.

The current study makes a significant theoretical contribution as it fills in a research gap by qualitatively evaluating the impact of social media in cross-cultural adaptation in the context of expatriate teachers working in China. For the duration of their employment, these teachers may continue to be migrant workers who are not rooted in the local community. Their lack of connections, reluctance to learn the language, and preference for short-term financial incentives over cultural immersion may all contribute to their outsider status. The justification for their migration may be both positive (professional experience and the joy of travel) and unfavourable (weak job markets in home countries or financial burdens) (Jenkins, 2022).

A number of important limitations need to be considered. First, the relatively small sample size and the utilisation of convenience snowball sampling in this study may limit the representativeness and generalisability to the larger expatriate teacher's population. Second, the participants of the research are recruited from the same city in China, which may not represent the situation of China as a whole, resulting in one-dimensional results. Future research can select more samples from different Chinese cities and expand the sample size to get a more comprehensive representation of China.

Third, the results from this study were self-reported by the participants, who may not objectively indicate their social media-related behaviour, which would directly or indirectly lead to content bias. Further research is required to explain the underlying factors that can help determine whether social media has a positive or negative impact on the adaptation process of expatriate teachers; despite the fact, that the relationship between social media and cross-cultural adaptation variables is complex and only a small number of studies have looked at the mediating factors that may contribute to this association.

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Le Roujia

is a PhD student (Media and Communication) who started her doctoral studies in cross-cultural adaptation at Universiti Teknologi MARA in 2021. Her PhD research topic is “Cross-cultural Adaptation Experience and Social Networking Sites Usage Among Expatriate Teachers in China”

Ireana Nasiha Ibnu

is a senior lecturer (Liberal Communication) at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam. In 2019, she completed her PhD in Migration Studies at the University of Sussex, UK. Her PhD research topic was “Female Malaysian Muslim students’ experiences in the United Kingdom: Piety and everyday life in Manchester and Cardiff”. Her research interests include intercultural communication, digital culture and gender studies.

Tengku Elena Tengku Mahamad

is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. She did her PhD in Business and Management at the University of Manchester, UK and her Masters in Communication, majoring in Organisational Communication, at the University of Queensland, Australia. Her research interests include emotion management, organisational communication, and leadership communication.
