

Use of Cultural Intelligence to Measure Influence of Online Social Networks on Cultural Adjustment

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Abstract. When people are crossing the borders for studies, business and migration purposes, they have to face the culture shock during the mingling of new cultures. However, as online social networks can be reached anytime, from anywhere in most cases where access to traditional networks is impossible, this makes online social networks, particularly important to the sojourner who will have to constantly resort to social support sources to cope with the difficulties and psychological stress of cross-cultural adjustment. Nevertheless, the use of online social networks in the context of cultural adjustment is an under explored area. This study draws upon social network theory, social capital theory and cultural adjustment perspectives, to develop a new model which can contribute to the sparse literature on the impact of online social networks on cross-cultural adjustment and serves a foundation for future research in this vital area of influence of online social networks.

Keywords: Online social networks · Cultural adjustment · Social network ties · Cultural intelligence · Supportive messages

1 Introduction

There is extensive research currently conducted to understand and explain the notion of cross-cultural adaptation, mostly from psychological and sociological aspects. These research works and theories attempt to explain how an individual moving from one culture to another culture (mostly crossing the borders of the country) align his life to the new culture, rules, customs and perceptions. The number of people crossing the borders yearly for studies, business and migration purposes are increasing gradually [18]. Therefore, an analysis on factors that contributes to the sojourners' [18], people who are temporarily residing in countries other than their home country, cultural adjustment is important.

Previous research work has explained cultural adjustment as a staged model of recovery from the cultural shock [4], a learning process [3], a hybrid of both recovery and learning [17], and equilibrium model as a dynamic and cyclic process for tension reduction [4]. Cross-cultural adjustment is also viewed from a social support perspective, in which most of the interaction, learning and recovery related to cultural adjustment is explained via an interaction framework [2]. These literatures have highlighted

that an immigrant or a sojourner will face resistance and shock during a cultural switch. Individuals use various methods, and tools to accept the new environment and feel habitual in the new culture. Acculturation [11], a process the society and people undergo when two cultures mingle, has been studied in depth in order to determine the most suitable process for a sojourner to be comfortable in the new environment. Online social networks can be considered as a good support structure for acculturation because they provide an opportunity to interact with the new environment and maintain the sojourners' old contact as well. Social networking sites have become an everyday tool in our lives. Social network sites have received a tremendous amount of attention recently by individuals and it is argued in this paper that social networks can influence cultural adjustment. This research will study the social support perspective in multicultural adjustment using the Social Network Theory [7, 22, 31] and attempt to show how a sojourner for acculturation can use online social networks, the indispensable tool used for networking in the present day.

As mentioned earlier, the number of people crossing borders is increasing. They will undergo the cultural shocks discussed in the previous section, which has been studied in psychology in depth. This study contributes to the above literature by understanding how online social networking can be used for acculturation. It combines the psychological theory on the social support perspective of cultural adjustment with existing social networking theories, using today's popular social networking media. Apart from the theoretical contribution, the implications of the study recommends different types social ties for sojourners to find various social supports to overcome depression, obtain affirmation, improve skills and get tangible assistance, in the process of adapting to the new culture. Based on the above theoretical and practical implications of this study, it can be considered that this research makes a significant contribution to the existing cross cultural adjustment literature.

The rest of this report is organized in the following manner. Section 2 discusses the theoretical background and the Sect. 3 discusses the theoretical framework, including the hypotheses. Section 4 explains the data collection, analysis and results. The Sect. 5 discusses the importance and implications of this study.

2 Theoretical Background

Cultural adjustment has been used interchangeably with cultural adjustment in the literature. It has also been variously defined. [17] defined cultural adjustment as a process in which a person familiarizing with and is able to function effectively in a new culture. Adelman [2] considers cultural adjustment as coping with uncertainty in and attaining perceived mastery or control over the new cultural environment. According to Searle and Ward [34], cultural adjustment includes a socio-cultural sense of adjustment and psychological feelings of wellbeing. Ang, Van Dyne et al. [5] concur with Searle and Ward [34] as they consider cultural adjustment as a person's attainment of interactional adjustment and general wellbeing. Earlier research has looked at the phenomenon of cultural adjustment from an individual perspective. One of such key research is Black and Stephens [16] which has contributed greatly to the literature on understanding the acculturation of expatriates. This work was based on the threefold classification: general

adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment by Black [13] and it became the foundation for later research: [6, 14, 27, 33, 35–37]. However, [17] has proposed an enhanced model which helps to measure adjustment in different dimensions while distinguishing between cognitions and emotions [10, 15, 24–26]. This model explores the outcomes of adjustment in a cross-sectional sample of expatriates via the definitions of constructs like novelty, discretion, self-efficacy, and social networks.

In contributing to prior research, Ang, Van Dyne et al. [5] have developed the constructs of cultural intelligence (CQ) [23] based on contemporary theories [20] in the offline settings. They have enhanced the theoretical precision of cultural intelligence [23] by developing a model which posits differential relationships between the four dimensions of CQ (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral) and three intercultural effectiveness outcomes (cultural judgment and decision making, cultural adjustment and task performance in culturally diverse settings). Testing the model through several substantive studies, they have established a consistent pattern of relationships between the four CQ dimensions and the three intercultural effectiveness outcomes where metacognitive CQ and cognitive CQ predict cultural judgment and decision making; motivational CQ and behavioral CQ predict cultural adjustment; and metacognitive CQ and behavioral CQ predict task performance. Therefore, according to Ang et al. [5], a sojourner to be culturally adapted, he or she needs to be achieved cultural adjustment, cultural judgment, decision making and task performance essences. However, the cultural intelligence has only been tested in offline setting and not applied to the online setting at all.

From a social network perspective, a social network involves a set of actors and the relations that connect them [38]. The social network of actors (i.e., individual people, organizations or families) consists of strong ties and weak ties. A tie is the relationship between individuals in the network. Strong ties such as family or close friends [2, 29], are more intimate and involve various forms of resource exchange. Weak ties such as friends of friends, past colleagues, or other acquaintances [21], on the other hand, involve fewer intimate exchanges and less frequent maintenance. They are considered as valuable conduits to diverse perspectives and new information [21]. According to Birnie and Horvath [12], social network theory is able to apply to describe human relationships developed through either face-to-face communication or electronic means. It is particularly relevant to the examination of how the Internet helps maintain old ties and establish new ties [38]. SNSs, aside facilitating the maintenance of pre-existing social ties and the creation of new connections [38], are considered to be an important platform for individuals to manage a wider network of weak ties [21]. Social network theory is therefore applicable to examine online social networks developed through SNSs.

Social capital has been used to describe the latent aggregated resources and benefits entrenched in the relationships with other people [19, 21], such as tangible assistance, emotional support, assurances and skill acquisition [2]. Two kinds of social capital have been discussed by Putnam [32]. Bonding social capital comes from strong ties (i.e., close friends and family) in the form of emotional support [29] and tangible resources [21]. Bridging social capital, conversely, “consists of loose relationships (i.e., weak ties) which serve as bridges connecting a person to a different network, allowing the person access to new perspectives and diffuse information” [29].

3 Theoretical Framework

The research question addressed in this study is how cultural intelligence can be used to measure online social networks of a sojourner influence on cross cultural adjustment. The study has adopted the social support perspective of cultural adjustment from the psychology literature and combines it with the social network theories in the information systems literature to deliver a comprehensive model to analyze the influence of the online social networks on acculturation.

Based on the social support perspective of cultural adaptation discussed by M.B. Adelman [2] cultural adjustment is an indication of (1) coping with uncertainty and (2) perceived mastery or control. The support of the society is classified into two notions such as (1) supportive messages and (2) supportive sources. As earlier mentioned, the cultural intelligence [23] by Ang, Van Dyne et al. [5], can be defined as a measurement of sojourner's capability to function and manage effectively in a culturally diverse setting through meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, behavioral CQ, and motivational CQ. This measurement has been further enhanced to demonstrate a consistent pattern of relationship where motivational CQ and behavioral CQ predict cultural adjustment. Combining the above two models, we argue that cultural adjustment that is motivational CQ and behavioral CQ of the cultural intelligence is equivalence to coping with uncertainty and perceived mastery or control of Adelman's model. Therefore, the equivalence to coping with uncertainty and perceived mastery or control can be achieved through the relevant supportive messages. Furthermore, the supportive messages received related to the cultural adjustment from the social network could allow a sojourner to be adapted to the multi-cultural environment by adjusting to the new culture and then have a sound cultural judgment and decision-making process. As a fact that, the remaining two intercultural effectiveness outcomes that are specified in the cultural intelligence (cultural judgment and decision making and task performance) can only be achieved after a sojourner becomes adjusted to the new culture. We also argue that different social support groups in the online social network will provide support in the cultural adjustment process at different levels. This suggests that different types of supportive messages will be provided by different groups, which is mainly categorized as weak ties and strong ties based on the tie strength.

Based on the aforementioned arguments and the theoretical background, we provide the following model, which ultimately uses cultural intelligence to answer the several sub-questions in the current research which are, (a) Does cultural intelligence ample to measure cultural adjustment via social network settings? (b) Does a social network allow an individual to have more cultural adjustment in the multi-cultural environment? (c) Does the supportive messages received via social networks relate to an individual's multi-cultural adjustment. (d) How does strong and weak ties related to different kind of supportive messages.

3.1 Proposed Model

Based on the social support perspective on coping with uncertainty of cultural adjustment theory [2], we have identified four message types that can be considered as

the support received by the network/surrounding for a sojourner. We have considered these four messages as the independent variables of our model [4]. These four message types support an individual to

1. Have perspective shifts on cause-effect contingencies: We have defined this variable as Overcome Depression(OD)
2. Enhance control through skill acquisition: We have defined this variable as Skill Improvement(SI)
3. Enhance control through tangible assistance: We have defined this variable Tangible Assistance(TA)
4. Enhance control through acceptance and assurance: We have defined this variable as Acceptance and Assurance(A&A)

The model describes that these messages are received by different types of supportive sources in the sojourners' network/surrounding. We consider these supportive sources as the ties [22] in the network of the sojourner and identify it as a moderator that supports an individual at different levels in cultural adjustment using the aforementioned messages. The dependent variables we measure are, motivational CQ and behavioral CQ, which we define as the cultural adjustment and it is measured by the cultural intelligence of an individual [5]. Figure 1 depicts the complete proposed model.

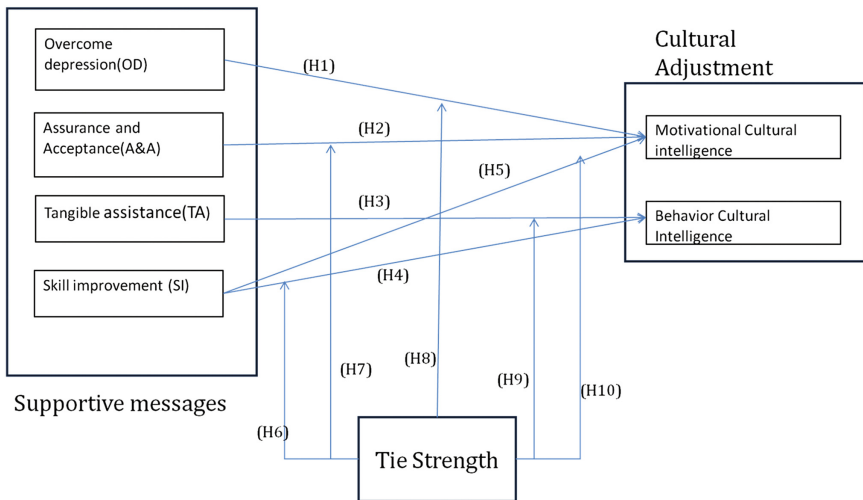


Fig. 1. Proposed theoretical model

3.2 Hypotheses

As per the model above, there are seven constructs, and following are the hypothesis we have derived in order to find answers to the initial research questions.

Overcoming Depression. Essentially, these messages aid the individual in modifying negative causal attributions that contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed or

depressed. For example, spouses can be overwhelmed by the enormous task of family relocation, resulting in feelings of personal helplessness in organizing for the move. Pre-departure assistance can function to help prospective sojourners in developing realistic expectations and beliefs about personal capabilities that mediate stress [4]. Using online social networks sojourners can reduce their stress well by playing games, simple conversation of similar experience and do other activities. Therefore the following hypothesis can be derived.

(H1) The extend of supportive messages received from the online social network to overcome depression is positively related with the motivational cultural intelligence

Assurance and Acceptance. Emotional support in the form of validation of self-worth, affirmation of personal relationships, and a sense of belonging is a critical function of these messages. Cross-cultural, adjustment, particularly given the disruption of old ties, is dependent on the acceptance and reassurances of others in the new setting. Membership groups, of people undergoing similar changes, often serve to alleviate the stress of culture-shock and provide an ersatz community [4]. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be derived.

(H2) The extend of supportive messages received from the online social network for assurance and acceptance is positively related with the motivational cultural intelligence

Tangible Assistance. This straightforward assistance of personal resources (e.g., time, money, labor) cannot be underestimated in the initial and long-term adjustment to a new environment. However, what makes such concrete assistance “supportive” are the interpersonal messages which accompany this help. The old adage, “It’s not what you say (give), but how you say (give) it” applies to offering tangible help to another. For example, neighbors who offer to assist in childcare while moving into a new home can promote feelings of social integration based on communal exchange or a contractual arrangement based on monetary exchange [4]. Therefore the following hypothesis can be derived.

(H3) The extend of supportive messages received from the online social network for tangible assistance is positively related with the behavioral cultural intelligence

Skill Improvement. These supportive messages function to increase the skills of a recipient to achieve desirable out-comes. Orientation programs for developing cross-cultural communication skills and problem solving are representative of this type of instructional support. Among informal networks, such as sojourning students’ ties with host nationals, these message types function instrumentally to facilitate the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourner [4]. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be derived.

(H4) The extend of supportive messages received from the online social network for skill improvement is positively related with the motivational cultural intelligence.

(H5) The extend of supportive messages received from the online social network for skill improvement is positively related with the behavioral cultural intelligence.

Strong Ties. The strong ties in the social network will be the community who the sojourner interacts frequently, and who knows themselves in detail. These groups in the

social network will help the sojourner to overcome the shock in the new environment by helping to overcome depression. Furthermore, since they are more close to the sojourner they will understand the sojourners' feelings on the new environment and will provide reassurance and affirmation. Therefore, we derive the following two hypotheses.

(H6) If the tie strength is stronger, then the relationship between the overcome depression and motivational cultural intelligence will be stronger.

(H7) If the tie strength is stronger, then the relationship between the affirmation/assurance and motivational cultural intelligence will be stronger.

(H8) If the tie strength is stronger, then the relationship between tangible assistance and behavioral cultural intelligence will be stronger.

Weak Ties. The weak ties in the social network will be the community who the sojourner does not interact frequently or the people from the new community. There are groups in the social network will main assist the sojourner in acquiring new skills and to get tangible assistance.

(H9) If the tie strength is weaker, then the relationship between the skill improvement and motivational cultural intelligence will be stronger.

(H10) If the tie strength is weaker, then the relationship between skill improvement and behavioral cultural intelligence will be stronger.

4 Data Collection and Analysis

As stated above, the main emphasis of this research is to find out the use of cultural intelligence to measure the influence of online social network: the Facebook, on these students to become culturally adjusted when they first arrived in Singapore. Therefore to conduct the survey on the above mentioned research question, we have used the given questionnaire in the appendix that formulated according to the proposed hypotheses. The questionnaire was created as the measurement instrument in-order to measure the influence of online social networks on cultural adjustment. After an extensive literature review, 29 items were selected to measure the 7 constructs. Since it was required to measure which type social network ties provide each of the supportive messages, there was a need to repeat the tie strength measurement questions for each supportive message type. The validity of the questionnaire was checked using two techniques; they are Face validity and Pretest. As the initial step, to evaluate the Face validity, the developed questionnaire was given to several experts in the field of Information System (including senior PhD students) to review. The main purpose of this step was to ensure the consistency of items and the constructs. After that, the questionnaire was refined based on their comments. As the second step, the questionnaire was distributed within 10 university town residents to complete as a pre-test. This group consisted of graduate students and exchange students in the National University of Singapore. The purpose of this test was to check the understandability of

the questions. Based on their feedback, the questionnaire was finalized as shown in the appendix. As the next step of our study, the questionnaire was designed electronically and distributed among the residents of University Town. 148 residents responded to the survey, but only 130 cases were selected for analysis. To check whether the selected sample is good enough to carry out the analysis, we have conducted the KMO and Bartlett's Test. According to the analysis results the KMO value is 0.799 and it is well above the recommended value of 0.5 [30]. To further understand the underlying relationships of the proposed factors and items, we have conducted Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) [36]. Once AA1, OD4, MOT5, BEH5, BEH4, BEH3, MC5, and MC4 items were removed remaining items are satisfied the both convergent and discriminant validity.

The hypotheses were tested using LISREL. According to the Table 1, we can see that only the hypotheses H3 and H8, is supported. That is the relationship between Tangible assistance and Behavioral CQ. This implies that, the constructs Overcome depression, Acceptance and Skill improvement, which were the antecedent for Motivational CQ, did not surprisingly show any statistically significant relationships. Also, the effect of Skill improvement does not contribute to the Behavioral CQ. Aligned with the H8, we can say that the tie strength is stronger sojourners receive more supportive messages related to the tangible assistance and that leads to better achieve the behavioral CQ.

Table 1. The hypotheses that significant with the direct effect and the moderator effect

Hypothesis	t-value	Coefficient	Outcome
H3	3.36	0.23	Supported
H8	3.526	0.251	Supported

5 Discussion

The study finds that certain types of supportive messages from the online social network assist in improving different aspects in cultural adaptation. As sojourners who have come to a foreign country for studies, they have understood the possible supportive sources in the online social networks and used it to become more culturally aware and adjusted to the new environment. By being engaged in online social networks during the transition period from one culture to another culture across borders the sojourner can expect to receive different types of supportive messages which can help him be better prepared for the new environment. However, they should understand that these supportive messages are capable of assisting in cultural adjustment only if the sojourner is willing to act upon the information and emotional support received.

Intention to use online social networks for acculturation will increase over the time due to high usage of social media amongst the society. As identified via the survey most of the sojourners have received messages for tangible assistance via their social network during the cultural adaptation. The survey only captures the extension of messages received via the online social network for tangible assistance. It does not indicate that the sojourner received the particular tangible assistance. However, as there is a positive correlation between the behavioral CQ and the tangible assistance

messages received via the online social network, it can be inferred that sojourners use the online social network during the transition period to overcome certain cultural difficulties.

The rest of the results as shown above indicates that there is no significant relationship between the supportive messages received for depression, affirmation, skill improvement with the motivational or behavioral CQ. This result contradicts the existing literature and our initial model predictions. Therefore, it is required to explore the reasons for this contradiction.

The focal reason for the low significance of the model could be due to the relationships build in the theoretical framework with the supportive messages and the cultural adaptation. Even though previous studies have clearly indicated and justified that cultural adjustment can be measured by the cultural intelligence measurements, since many of the hypotheses are not supported in this framework, we suggest to explore other measurements of cultural adjustment. Different measurements to measure the uncertainty level and the perceived mastery the new environment could improve these results [5]. Furthermore, there are other social network theories, which captures the social capital of the sojourner [9] which could be considered as level of cultural adjustment. We argue that these results could be made more significant if a better measurement of cultural adjustment can be devised based on certainty level and perceived mastery in the new environment.

Therefore, for the future studies, it needs to be explored if a different measurement for cultural adjustment can be obtained if the significance of the model can be improved. These two future actions are mandatory for this study in order to validate the framework with high significance levels. Also, from the theoretical perspective, the framework is capable of capturing only the supportive messages received from the online social networks. There could be a negative effect based on the messages received via the online social network. Therefore, it is required to explore the negative messages that can be given from an online social network to a sojourner, which could tamper the effect from the positive supportive messages received from the social network.

The objective of this study is to develop a comparative, theoretical model to determine the use of cultural intelligence to measure the influence of the online social network for acculturation in a sojourner's life. The theoretical model was mainly built upon the theory of social supportive perspective of cultural adjustment and social network theories. Our results show that online social networks provide supportive messages for tangible assistance, which leads to the behavioral CQ of a sojourner. In conclusion, we attempt to explain the insignificance of relationships by highlighting that the cultural intelligence score might not be the most suitable cultural adjustment measurement in this context since the supportive messages received via the online social network could have less influence on the cultural intelligence on the sojourner. Therefore, we propose a revision to the measurement of cultural adjustment that should be captured by the uncertainty level and perceive mastery of the sojourner in the online settings.

Appendix

Construct	Item	Description
Motivational cultural intelligence [5]	MOT1	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures
	MOT2	I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me
	MOT3	I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me
	MOT4	I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me
	MOT5	I am confident that I can get accustomed to the shopping conditions in a different culture
Behavioral cultural intelligence [5]	BEH1	I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it
	BEH2	I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations
	BEH3	I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it
	BEH4	I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it
	BEH5	I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it
Tie strength derived from [28]	TS1	On average how close was your relationship with the people who sent messages indicated in Section X, prior to receiving the messages
	TS2	On average how often did you communicate with the people who sent messages in Section X, prior to receiving the messages
	TS3	On average to what extent did you typically interact with the people who sent messages in Section X, prior to receiving the messages
OD derived from [9]	OD1	Did some activity together to help me get my mind off of things and made me feel less bored
	OD2	Conducted discussions to make me feel less disappointed about myself when I had difficulties in the new environment
	OD3	Talked with me about some interest of mine and made me feel interested in the new environment
	OD4	Joked and kidded and tried to cheer me up
A&A derived from [1]	AA1	Expressed esteem and respect for a competency or personal quality of yours, and what you are doing
	AA2	Listened to you talk about your private feelings, and listened when you wanted to confide about things that were important to you
	AA3	Let you know that he/she will always be around if you need assistance and cared about you as a person

(Continued)

(Continued)

Construct	Item	Description
	AA4	Agreed that what you wanted to do was right and appreciated it
SI derived from [1, 39]	SI1	Directed you to useful information on how to do something in the new environment
	SI2	Suggested some action you should take to improve your skills
	SI3	Gave you feedback on how you were doing without saying it was good or bad
	SI4	If I wanted to learn a new word in the Singapore culture my social network helped me to find that information
TA derived from [8]	TA1	Agreed to loan you something that you needed
	TA2	Pitched in to help you do something that needed to get done
	TA3	Agreed to come with you to someone who could take action on a particular situation
	TA4	Agreed to provide you with a place to stay or lend some money

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