

## Original Paper

# The Influence of Social Media on the Cognition of Chinese Students in Malaysia

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Received: December 5, 2023      Accepted: December 14, 2023      Online Published: December 21, 2023

doi:10.22158/wjssr.v11n1p1

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjssr.v11n1p1>

### Abstract

*Malaysia is currently one of the most popular study destinations for overseas Chinese students. At the same time, due to global educational status and better media technology facilities, including social media, more Chinese students tend to live or study abroad. However, the different patterns of social media at home and abroad have created a cognitive gap among overseas Chinese students in Malaysia. Qualitative in-depth interviews and Focus group discussions with more than a dozen overseas Chinese students studying in Malaysia showed that social media use has multiple impacts and aids in structuring learning, lifestyle influences, and the relationship between social media use and cognitive formation. The findings suggest that China's local social media has been identified as a widespread use by overseas Chinese students for cross-border daily interpersonal communication. It not only helps to construct the lifestyle of overseas Chinese students, but also helps maintain their social perception as "Chinese" by generating the image of home.*

### Keywords

*social media, cognition, Chinese students, influence, media dependence*

### 1. Introduction

Social media has been identified by many scholars (Zong, 2015) as an effective tool to reconstruct cognition. For example, social media such as WeChat, Sina Weibo, QQ Zone, Renren, and Facebook have had an immeasurable and significant impact on the study, lifestyle, social interaction and consumption of international students to a certain extent. At present, the biggest problem facing Chinese social media is how to guide young people, especially international students, to correctly understand the gap between different cultures and the resulting cognitive biases (Zong, 2018). This

study not only focuses on how social media can shape the social cognition of international students, but also focuses on why social media has such a great impact on the cognitive construction of international students. The underlying reasons behind it are worth analyzing.

The widespread use of social media is the most common feature of the economic society, especially the most typical use of social networking sites. People gradually connect the real world and the virtual world through social media. We retrieved our classmates and friends through WeChat Moments, which was the first benefit we got from social media (Li, 2019). Nowadays, Twitter, Facebook, Blogger, YouTube, LinkedIn and a large number of other social media apps are being used, and a large amount of information is delivered to the audience in the process of mass communication. China has 485 million internet users who spend 41% of their time on social media every day (Kemp, 2019). The most popular social media are People.com, Sina Weibo, WeChat, Qzone, Youku, Tudou, Douban, and so on. These new social media are popular among Internet users, especially among the younger generation of college students.

Among them, Renren is an open SNS that functions in exactly the same way as the internationally popular Facebook and Instagram, but with more popular games and small content software. Sina Weibo is an open microblog, especially in first-tier coastal cities. WeChat is an instant mobile messenger similar to WhatsApp, which is the most common medium of communication in China, especially with the opening of video and voice features, replacing to some extent the functions of phone calls and text messages. Qzone is a closed SNS based on a chat software called QQ Messenger, which has the largest registered user base and relies heavily on QQ Messenger, which is more like MSN Space or Skype. Youku and Tudou are the Chinese brothers of YouTube. Douban means reading companion, and it is now an SNS that attracts people who share the same interest in books, music, movies, radio etc. (Liu, 2021).

The weakening of the Chinese government's regulatory influence should be taken into account when discussing the social media usage habits of Chinese students. Chinese social media users living abroad have undergone some obvious changes: most of the censorship from mainland China has disappeared, a variety of websites and apps have become available, and users have more unfiltered global information at their disposal (Li, 2019). In addition, their habits of using social media have changed dramatically. On the one hand, their friends in China still use controlled and censored local social media platforms, especially WeChat and QQ as the main media communication platforms. Aiqiyi and Tencent Video are the most typical video online media platforms. On the other hand, their classmates and teachers in Malaysia are using international social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube. There seems to be a huge difference between these two types of audiences (Lee, 2018).

Therefore, one of the phenomena that this study will investigate is the changes in the use of social media by Chinese students studying abroad. For Chinese students studying abroad, young people are

more willing to communicate through social media, rather than using communication methods such as telephones to communicate. This fully proves that the communication methods of modern international students have fundamentally changed. Just as McKinsey conducted a study on social media in China in 2019, it came up with the results of how social media has changed communication channels. Social media has indeed reduced the use of landline phones, text messages, emails and even mobile phones. For telecom operators, this change in social media has also fundamentally changed their future business methods and profit models. But for international students, this is a more convenient and economical way for them to keep in touch with relatives and friends through the Internet when they are away from home.

Today, international students have more motivation and free time to use social media. According to Nielsen 2021 survey, students are more inclined to use social networks and express themselves and communicate through social media than regular employees. In addition, students are more motivated to visit SNS, Renren, Douban, LBS and Digu than full-time employees. In this Nielsen 2021 survey graph. We should pay more attention to the high usage of WeChat, Weibo, and RenRen as they are the most popular social media among international students, especially fresh graduates.

On the one hand, the rich information resources improve the cognitive level of international students. At present, social media is developing rapidly, and information transmission is fast and convenient. Relying on the network system with huge capacity, it can meet the increasingly diverse and rich needs of the public for information. In the era of social media, the openness and sharing of information has made social media break the boundaries of time and space, and international students can realize that “scholars can know the world without going out” to meet their own cognitive needs. Social media at all levels are also keeping pace with the times, registering official accounts on Weibo, Douyin and other social platforms to publicize their own policies and other information, and build a platform for equal communication for international students’ cognition. Opinions expressing opinions, participating in interactive discussions, exercising their right to know, participate, and express their rights. In this way, international students can broaden their horizons and gradually form their own values, which is conducive to enhanced cognition and recognition (Ackerman, 2019).

In addition to this, it is also important to recognize that social media plays an important role in shaping the perception of overseas students. The new communication and interaction environment enriches the way of social participation of college students. When social media was not yet popularized, international students mainly participated in lectures, forums, symposiums, or related activities organized on campus. Cognitive recognition mainly depended on official news, and the dissemination subject had absolute right to speak. With the development of network technology, social media has been widely used and has become an important bridge connecting college students with the outside world (Thorndike, 2020). International students are not only recipients of information, but also

publishers and disseminators of information. This relatively loose communication and interaction environment enhances information. The information here is not only the participation and understanding of students' opinions on life, study etc. in the campus environment, but also the participation and suggestions of the outside world, current affairs and politics, and they will seriously integrate into all news and communication activities in the current society.

Young people, especially those with higher education, are more active in their thinking and more forward-looking in their understanding of all aspects of social life. Consequently, this also influences their lifestyle and cognitive style to a great extent (Violet, 2020). Compared to other studies that mostly focus only on the social media use of Chinese international students in Europe and the United States or Chinese domestic university students, the case characteristics of this study are more prominent and obvious, and it will be representative and informative as a study on the cognitive shaping of Chinese international students' social media use in Southeast Asia. This study mainly focuses on the impact of Malaysian Chinese international students' use of social media on their own cognition, behavior, and emotions over the years, filling a gap in related research. Unlike most studies that focus only on the impact of media use by students from developed countries in Europe and the United States and are limited to the impact on their personal behaviors, this study focuses on Malaysian Chinese students and their use of social media, which has no precedent before.

The questions that need to be studied in this paper are the following 4 areas:

**Question 1:** How do Chinese international students in Malaysia use social media to learn about social life in Malaysia?

**Question 2:** What are the characteristics of media dependency of international students in using social media?

**Question 3:** What are the specific effects of social media in shaping and changing the cognitive structure of Chinese international students?

**Question 4:** Does social media change the cognition of international students, which in turn changes their social behaviors and emotional states?

The study of international students has attracted the attention of many researchers. Because this study is conducted in a completely new society by placing young people in an environment different from that of mainland China, the results of cognitive changes studied also be unrelated to previous studies. Including, changes in the social environment, changes in censorship, and changes in attitudes towards the use of social media. The main topics about international students and social media focus on cultural adaptation, social adaptation, social capital and education. Most of the target student groups are located in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia or other Western countries. The significance of this study goes far beyond mass communication research in the general sense.

## 2. Literature Review

Based on relevant research reports and further discussion and analysis, this study provides a general introduction to the use of social media by Chinese students in contemporary Malaysia, especially WeChat, Renren, Sina Weibo and Qzone are the most popular and widely used social media overseas. In addition, it will review and reflect on the cutting-edge research of previous scholars, and try to initially construct the use of social media in the social learning life and cognitive structure of overseas students through social media.

This article attempts to establish social media connections with Chinese students in Malaysia in the context of the unique identities of overseas students. Using the strengths of qualitative research, this study traces the use of social media by Chinese students in Malaysia, and attempts to define and describe the special aspects of social media in influencing the cognition of Chinese students in Malaysia compared with social media in mainland China. More and more studies have shown that social media has a significant impact on the political cognition, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem and stress, social mentality, and even consumption of overseas Chinese students (Li, 2019).

China has the most social media users in the world. Compared with traditional communication channels, social media is becoming more and more popular among netizens. According to a survey by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of December 2020, the number of Internet users in China has reached 989 million, an increase of 85.4 million from March 2020, and the Internet penetration rate has reached 70.4%. Among them, more than 50% of Internet users under the age of 40, student Internet users are the largest, accounting for 21.0%. It is particularly noteworthy that the scale of instant messaging users reached 983 million, the scale of online shopping users reached 802 million, and the scale of short video users reached 873 million... (CNNIC, 2021). Referring to another report released by CNNIC in 2021, the overall coverage rate of social networking site (SNS) users among Chinese netizens is 81.7% (CNNIC, 2021).

In order to better understand the development of social media in China, the Ogilvy 360 Digital Influence team developed a series of social media “bull’s eyes”, placing international platforms in the outer circle and Chinese local platforms in the inner circle. The survey can provide a general understanding of the types and functions of social media in China. The results show that Renren, Douban and Qzone are similar to Facebook and are classified as SNS; Sina Weibo, like Twitter, is a Weibo; Youku and Tudou have the same function as YouTube and are video sharing. However, WeChat is not among them, classified as internet news according to the research. The study, called the classification study of social media, is one of the research projects of Professor Li Yuan of South China Normal University (2018).

Through the above comparison, we can better understand and analyze the similarities and differences of social media at home and abroad. Crampton Thomas (2017) believes that apart from removing some of

the censorship factors, Chinese social media and international social media are quite different in some respects. He pointed out that in China, as in other parts of Asia, language, culture, level of economic development, and potential digital ecosystem drive local differences in Internet use (Crampton, 2021). Below is an overview of common social media in China. Nielsen reported on a changing trend in 2012. Weibo ranks first in China's mainstream social media, and its coverage rate is much higher than that of SNS. Weibo has reached 97% of mainstream social media users, while SNS has only 70% (Neilson, 2020). Only two years later, a survey conducted by Kantar in 2022 showed that WeChat accounted for 91.6% of Chinese social media users, ranking first, while Weibo and Qzone fell sharply (Kantar, 2020). According to the above Nielsen reports and survey results, the use of social media in China is constantly changing, and WeChat has become the most commonly used social media by Chinese netizens. We have reason to believe that WeChat is the social media with the highest usage rate among Chinese students studying in Malaysia. In addition, Sina Weibo, Qzone, and Renren are also listed as common social.

With the development of information network technology, social media has already penetrated into all aspects of people's lives. The catalyst preferences of social media users also show varying degrees of differentiation. According to the 2020 survey of the National Social Science Fund Youth Project "Research on the Construction of Nationally Recognized Public Opinion in Social Media" database, the diversity of domestic mobile netizens' social media exposure is the research focus. According to the analysis of the questioning situation, the length of time the interviewees use their mobile phones to surf the Internet is generally increasing steadily. In terms of specific circumstances, the number of informants who use mobile phones to surf the Internet for "4 hours or more" is the largest, accounting for 47.8%; the number of informants who use mobile phones to surf the Internet for "0-30 minutes" is the least, Accounted for is 3.4%. It can be seen that nearly half of the interviewees reported more than 4 hours of mobile phone surfing time.

In terms of the number of days of use per week, the number of informants who use mobile phones to surf the Internet for "7 days" each week is the largest, accounting for 90% of the total, and the degree of dependence on mobile phones is very significant. On the other hand, according to the survey results of the "China Social Application User Behavior Research Report" released by CNNIC (CNNIC, 2020), the overall utilization rate of key instant messaging applications in 2020 is as high as 92.6% for WeChat and 87% for QQ, while the utilization rate for other applications is 30%. From the following, it can be seen that the two applications of WeChat and QQ dominate the social media application market and are members of the "head" camp doing their part (Fang, 2020).

Despite the above figures, compared with the West or Malaysia, China's Internet landscape is very different. As a research topic of the Internet environment in China, freedom and censorship have always been the focus of attention of researchers (Zong, 2019). According to a report by the American

non-governmental organization Freedom House, during the period covered by the report, China's Internet freedom ranked third in the world in terms of Internet freedom within the scope of "not free" (House, 2021).

The Internet has the characteristics of free, open, and diversified communication. Its rapid development poses a severe challenge to China's party-managed media system. The dilemma of strengthening the control of Internet information dissemination is that, unlike the management methods for mass media that have sufficient people, finances, and affairs, the Chinese government no longer has the means to directly manage the emerging unofficial Internet media. It is a well-known fact that about 3,000 websites, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google, YouTube, the news website BBC, and the *New York Times*, are blocked under the Internet censorship policies of mainland China (excluding Hong Kong and Macau) (Yuan, 2021). In this context, the Chinese government seizes the restrictive relationship between the upstream and downstream of the Internet technology structure, and accordingly establishes a multi-level licensing system.

This system has become the key to the Chinese government's governance of Internet communication. It enables the Chinese government to establish an external management of the huge number of Internet sites and end users through layered control over the operation of the Internet. Furthermore, the Chinese government re-centralized the Internet's communication structure on the basis of the licensing system, and built a content review mechanism in which Internet service providers assume the main responsibilities for in-process supervision, so as to realize effective supervision of Internet information content (Alma, 2020).

For Internet control, the Chinese government uses Internet policies and information and communication technology to complete Internet censorship and maintain network security (Yuen, 2021). On February 27, 2014, the Central Network Security and Informatization Leading Group (CAC) was established. The leading group will focus on national security and long-term development, coordinate major cybersecurity and informatization issues related to economic, political, cultural, social, and military fields, and study and formulate cybersecurity and informatization development strategies, macro plans, and major policies. Promote the construction of national network security and the rule of law in information technology, and continuously enhance the security assurance capabilities.

Due to historical reasons, Chinese network management system has created a management pattern of "Jiulong Water Control". General Secretary Xi Jinping (2019) clearly stated in his explanation to the "Decision" of the Third Plenary Session of the Eighteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, "Faced with the rapid development of Internet technology and applications, the current management system has obvious shortcomings. Not high. At the same time, with the increasingly strong nature of Internet media, online media management and industrial management are far from keeping up with the development and changes of the situation". Since 2013, the Chinese government

has taken a series of major measures to increase network security and informatization. The development of inbound strength is increasing. The State Council's Opinions on Promoting Information Consumption and Expanding Domestic Demand emphasizes the need to strengthen the construction of information infrastructure, accelerate the optimization and upgrading of the information industry, enrich the content of information consumption, and improve the ability to guarantee the security of information networks. The Decision of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee clearly puts forward the need to adhere to the policy of active utilization, scientific development, management in accordance with the law and ensuring security, to increase the efforts to govern the Internet in accordance with the law, and to improve the leadership system for Internet management (Xiangxi, 2019).

By 2014, more than 40 countries had promulgated national security strategies in cyberspace, and the United States alone had promulgated more than 40 documents related to cybersecurity. The United States has also established a "network office" in the White House and appointed a chief network officer to report directly to the president. In February 2014, President Obama announced the launch of the US "Cyber Security Framework." German Chancellor Merkel and French President Hollande discussed the establishment of an independent Internet in Europe on February 19, and planned to bypass the United States from a strategic level to strengthen data security. The three leading EU agencies have made it clear that they plan to pass the European data protection reform plan by the end of 2014. As China's Asian neighbors, Japan and India have also been actively acting. Japan issued its "Cyber Security Strategy" in June 2013, clearly proposing to "build a country with cyber security." India issued the "National Cyber Security Strategy" in May 2013 (Marczak, 2019), with the goal of "a safe and trusted computer environment". Therefore, in line with international standards, building a solid and reliable national cyber security system is a strategic choice that China must make.

However, contrary to many Western scholars' concerns about whether the Internet will strengthen China's democratization or consolidate the country's authoritarian control, the majority of Chinese netizens do not seem to worry about censorship. In fact, they support some form of censorship (Wallis, 2020). Considering that sensitive political issues may cause confusion, netizens with academic backgrounds and high degrees have shown strong support for the Internet censorship system (Damm, 2019).

With the continuous progress and development of the Internet age, the use of social media has gradually become an important part of the life of college students. Chinese scholar Zhou Qihua (2020) believes that college students have used WeChat, Weibo and QQ as indispensable tools in their daily social interactions. Not only do they rely on WeChat, but most of their social relationships are based on WeChat. Someone once summarized the needs of American college students to use Facebook as: information sharing, maintaining interpersonal relationships, entertainment, social interaction,



acquiring social knowledge, passing time, entertainment, etc. Whether it is Twitter, Facebook, or Chinese social media such as Weibo, WeChat, QQ etc., (Lister et al., 2018), their development continues to meet the various needs of college students. This study will use the research on the use of commonly used social media platforms by Chinese students in Malaysia, and list the impact of commonly used social media platforms on the social life and personal cognition of college students in order to understand the characteristics of student development.

Here, we focus on introducing the media dependence theory for analysis. Media dependence theory was proposed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin De Fleur in 1974. The definition is that the media meets the needs of a specific audience in a specific society in a specific way; the use of the audience determines the influence of the medium; the audience that depends on the medium will be more affected. Its flaw is that it overemphasizes the function of the medium. In their view, the media is an important part of the modern social structure, with interrelationships with individuals, groups, organizations and other social systems. A media system is seen as an information system, so they look at the consequences of dependencies arising from the media system's control over scarce information resources, including individual and small interpersonal network micro-dependencies, and how these relationships are Influenced by the media's dependence on large social organizations (Costner, 2021).

In terms of the individual's dependence on the medium, Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin De Fleur identified three motives that drive individuals to rely on the medium: understanding, orientation, and entertainment (Amundsen, 2021). Media dependence theory recognizes that media is not the sole source of people's needs, but that people live in social networks that direct them to use certain aspects of the media's function and then "shape their expectations and motivations for using the medium". For example, Loges and Ball-Rokeach (1984) found that cognitive needs were decisive for newspaper reading time, but that this relationship only held for high-income men. In this regard, their explanation is that readers with high social status have relatively high needs for social cognition. Halpem (1987) examines the relationship between social status, particular political identities, and media dependence.

Nowadays, more and more scholars no longer adopt simple cultural determinism or strict technological determinism, but adopt the viewpoint of "social shaping of technology", or are closer to today's viewpoint (Lievrow & Livingstone, 2020), it emphasizes the choice of human beings in terms of materials, focusing on how people adjust or adjust to media technology according to their purpose and environment, and associate technology with human behavior, social relations and culture.

Whether it is technology shaping society or society shaping technology, social media not only refers to new communication technologies or the integration of old and new, but also refers to practices and knowledge, as well as the social arrangements and relationships surrounding them. It should be noted that any seemingly new phenomena in new media cannot be entirely attributed to new technologies, but are actually the result of a complex and continuous process of interaction between technology, human

activities, and systems. Here, the analogy of Moran and Hoawisher in 1998 helps explain this. They compare today's social media to the feeling of a newborn baby, not only because of her genetic inheritance from her parents and even grandparents, but also because of her youth:

*The e-child is still young, and other genes and influences are still waiting for the proper condition for their expressions. The e-child has been, and be, shaped by her cultural contexts and as an agent she shape the culture that she joins* (Moran & Hoawisher, 1998, p. 81).

This metaphor shows that today's social media is a combination, extension and development of the characteristics of the old media. As McLuhan (1978, p. 315) said in "Understanding Media-On the Extension of Man", "Any influence of any medium on individuals and society is due to the new scale; any extension of ours must be in our Introduce a new yardstick in our affairs". Once a medium is produced and widely used, then for the public, a new mode of life and thinking emerge. This change is imperceptible and has nothing to do with the information provided by the media, only related to the media. Therefore, the media itself is a kind of information. At the same time, McLuhan also mentioned how media technology also change our social and personal cognition, how mankind promote the continuous progress of media technology, as a continuous process of mutual influence between the two parties, it takes time to show (Burger, 2020).

At present, various modern technologies have a wide range of applications in various fields, among them, college students are no exception. The use of various social media can not only maximize the daily life of college students, but also meet the needs of teaching and learning. Social media is a new media born in social development. College students can use it to share experiences, opinions etc. Therefore, it is necessary to give full play to the advantages of various social media applications so that college students can use social media to improve their own satisfaction and obtain various Ability improvement. For example, Rutherford (2019) pointed out in her online social media research that there is a positive correlation between students' use of various social media resources and how students perceive their relationship with classmates and teachers and how they perceive them.

Heiberger (2020) provides experimental evidence that Twitter can be used as an educational tool to help attract students and mobilize teachers to play a more active and participatory role (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2020). Mairedera (2018) studied the "unibrennt" ("university is burning") protest movement and concluded that social media (communication technology) connects individuals by providing information and organizing them into a political action community.

### 3. Method

In order to facilitate data collection from informants, the researcher utilized a qualitative research design with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Prior to the commencement of this study, preliminary interviews were conducted to help the researcher focus on social media which is very

popular among Chinese students studying in Malaysia. Conducting qualitative research requires a direct grasp of the main aspects that characterize things based on certain theories and experiences, temporarily ignoring quantitative differences of homogeneity. Prior to each interview and group discussion, the researcher conducted on-screen observations of what informants were doing on their favorite social media including WeChat, Facebook, RenRen and Weibo. Interviews lasted an average of 40 minutes each and included free and open-ended discussions guided by a pre-prepared guide. Most of the interviews were conducted in the interviewee's own room on her/his portable device, and sometimes she/he went online to display her/his social media. The group discussions lasted about 2 hours each and were organized by the participants around the topics presented.

### *3.1 In-depth Interview*

In the beginning of the in-depth interviews, explanation of the research aim, methods and ethics (addressing the answering of sensitive questions, informant anonymity and confidentiality, data storage and publication of findings) was done. Guided by the main protocol, the order and manner of the questions were altered depending on the interviewee's reaction and actual situation. Questions like "anything else you want to add?", "Could you please tell me some details as examples?" were used to elicit the interviewees narratives of the experiences in their own words. The interview was recorded using screen recording software, which can be used only with an Android phone. Transcriptions were done after the interviews. Most interviews were transcribed within 48 hours after the interview. Since all interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the translation was done at the time of transcription. (Do the transcription in Mandarin. After that, transcriptions were translated into English) The translation and transcription of the interviews were as close to the original as possible. The in-depth interview method is one of the data collection methods often used in qualitative research, which mainly uses the oral communication between the interviewer and the interviewee to achieve the exchange of opinions. The steps include: Identifying the purpose of the study, writing a research protocol, recruiting users, writing an interview outline, preparing the study, and conducting the interview. First, determine the purpose of the study. Determine the clear purpose, understand the reason for initiating the demand, and understand what is the purpose of the research? Second, write a research proposal. A complete research program includes the following contents: research content, researchers, research methods, and user recruitment. Thirdly, to recruit users, you need to determine the percentage of users, find recruitment channels and budget for salaries. For example, RM10-20 per person for telephone interviews and RM20-50 per person for face-to-face interviews. It is important to note here that there were two different modes of remuneration because individual respondents were not in Kuala Lumpur during the agreed interview dates, resulting in the interviews being conducted only by telephone.

### *3.2 Focus Group Discussions*

Focus group discussions were conducted after the in-depth interviews. A focus group discussion, also

known as the group discussion method, is a small group discussion in which a trained moderator talks to a representative group of customers of informants in an unstructured, natural form to gain an in-depth understanding of the problem. Focus group discussions were undertaken among 15 Chinese students from Malaysia, with 5 people in each group. Hence, the study used three FGD groups. These students comprised of leaders and student representatives of various departments, including the chairman and vice-chairman of the China International Students Association in two selected universities. Informants in the FGD ranged in age from 21 to 29. Their stay in Malaysia over a period of 1 to 7 years and used social media in their daily life. The FGD group interviews were carried out with the researcher and trained moderators. FGD is a qualitative research methodology, a method of gathering material through communication and dialogue among group members on a specific topic developed by the researcher. Its theoretical basis involves Western hermeneutic theory and the theory of communicative behaviour. Hermeneutics is an illuminating mode of philosophical thinking that stems from an inherent insight in the philosophical tradition that explores, through dialogue and writing, how people achieve meaning or make sense of the world. This view, which embraces hermeneutic thinking, argues that understanding and defining things depends on the assumptions one makes about them. Habermas relates hermeneutic theory to communicative behaviour, proposing a “critical” or “radical” theory of hermeneutics (Habermas, 1981). As a research method, FGD collect materials through exchanges and dialogues between group members on a specific topic formulated by the researcher. In some cases, the use of this method is usually a process of observation, discovery, conversation and analysis of the same and different opinions among participants on a specific topic to reach certain research conclusions. These studies also often use the analysis of interpersonal relationships as an additional reference. And the researcher must study the group as a whole, not the individual, as a unit of analysis. Therefore, “focus group interviews” are conducted through “a series of operational controls, using a combination of variables to cater for the diversity of research purposes” (Xiangang, 2019, p. 365).

#### **4. Findings and Discussions**

First, this section presents the background of the informants who volunteered to be interviewed and the process of using social media, in particular detailing the results of the study. The background information is necessary to further understand why they use certain social media and the characteristics of their usage. The findings were divided in four themes according to the four research questions.

The basic information of the informants in this study will be discussed and the investigators will list the following participants’ background data. As Hall puts it, one’s cognition is a process of representing oneself using history, language, and culture (Hall, 1996; Shi, 2005). The researchers listed the length of time the participants in the study stayed in Malaysia, each person’s different backgrounds and personal

perceptions as well as their preferred use of social media, their choice between staying in Malaysia or returning to China after graduation.

This qualitative study is conducted with Chinese students studying in Malaysia from 2020 to 2023. The first research approach is to interview three groups of Chinese PhD students in Malaysia in the form of FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD), the group discussion will be conducted in the first stage. There are five students in each group, thus a total of 15 students are needed for the three groups. The informants included both males and females. The discussion time for each FGD will be two hours and the content of the group discussion will be recorded. For further discussion, the participants in the FGDs were coded as P1 to P15. Their duration of study in Malaysia ranged from 1 to 8 years, with an average of 3.2 years. P5 was the student who stayed the longest, from his undergraduate foundation to his current second year of PhD. P10 was a PhD student who had just completed his first year of study. Four participants were religious, P1, P4, P7 and P8. It should be mentioned that P8 converted to Islam in his second year while living with a Chinese Muslim classmate. P1, P5 and P8 are Hui, belonging to one of the 56 ethnic groups in China.

In-depth interview techniques were used in the second stage. Ten students were selected based on specific characteristics. Participants were interviewed individually for 1.5 to 2 hours. Combining in-depth interview content coding and interview data processing, this study analyzed in depth the negative impacts of college students' over-reliance on social media such as WeChat, Jittery, Renren, Weibo, Douban etc., and proposed strategies to deal with them from four perspectives: college students' own perspectives, colleges and universities, the government, and media platforms. In each interview with the informants, these interviewees spontaneously answered one question: whether they would stay in Malaysia or return to China after graduation (which was not directly addressed in the interview questions). The struggle with this question coincides with the research of Shi Yuzhu, the godfather of Chinese entrepreneurship, regarding overseas Chinese - a strong sense of nervousness about returning to their home country (Shi, 2018). In this study, the researchers listed their choices to "stay" or "go back to China" after graduation as a reference argument.

According to participants in the focus group discussions and informants in the in-depth interviews, they check social media apps on their smartphones and laptops on a daily basis. I1, I5, I9, and I10, I12, and I14 check social media on their tablets (iPad) in their dormitories (I5 mentions "the place where I live" and "the house where I live"). (whereas I1 and I9 mentioned "home"). In summary, participants preferred to use their smartphones rather than their laptops or tablets for social media, mainly because "my phone is always around". The habits of these informants in using social media largely also reflect their convenience and frequency of use when choosing media to use; after all, for most young international students, cell phones and tablet laptops, etc. are the media devices they use most often, and most of them have good family backgrounds that provide good financial support. A small number

of international students rely on their own part-time jobs to achieve the freedom of media use. These are important aspects to consider and refer to in their media use background.

To roughly describe the status of users here, for the question of how often and when they use social media, all informants claimed that they use social media every day, especially WeChat every day and even every moment—"I am always checking my WeChat" (I7). For students, using social media every day seems to be a natural thing to do. Taking a closer look at the amount of time they spend on social media each day, informants gave an average of about 2-3 hours per day. However, for personal reasons, I1, I8 and I9 and I12 spend more time on social media (meaning WeChat and QQ groups). Among them, I1 and I8 are in long-distance relationships, which makes them focus more on online chatting with their partners for about 4-5 hours a day. I9 sells skin care products on WeChat and Weibo, which keeps her busy with sales and training on social media every moment. I9 insists that she must use WeChat and Weibo for more than 8 hours a day when she is doing other things (I9). I12 needs to telecommute and teleconference and so has a fixed amount of time to use video software each day.

#### *4.1 Findings for RQ1*

##### **How can Chinese students in Malaysia use social media to understand their social life in Malaysia?**

In the first research method, the focus group discussion, PhD students divided into three groups eagerly discussed their tendency to use social media when using it to learn about social life in Malaysia. This includes the frequency of use and the time period of use. Overall, most of the PhD students relied on WeChat for communication, both with their families in China and with their local Malaysian classmates and friends. Secondly, they use some Chinese portals to learn about current affairs and politics at home and abroad. For example, NetEase News, Sohu News etc. Therefore, the publicize and reporting to Malaysia by Chinese media have to be considered here because the choice of media by international students makes them receive information to some extent from Chinese media. On the contrary, the influence of Malaysian media and even Chinese media is relatively small. From here, it is easy to see that international students rely on Chinese media to a far greater extent than Malaysian media, and the influence of native language media cannot be ignored. Special attention is paid to the exchange of messages from international students on relevant Chinese websites, which makes these portals have more social media functions, and they exchange their opinions with each other and express their respective views. Again, international media such as Facebook and YouTube, which are popular among international students, are representatives of social media. International students are keen on spreading photos, positioning and other related information on the Internet and reproducing information from official media, and these social media are important channels for them to share their self-life with international students. It is clear from the focus group discussions that it is the use of these social media that makes the international students' view of Malaysia and the world is influenced by the role of the

official Chinese media, and that only a small portion of their view comes from the dissemination of international social media platforms, even though this is negligible in terms of their understanding of social life in Malaysia.

The second research method, is the in-depth interview. Nine students have been selected based on specific characteristics. Informants has interviewed individually for 1.5 to 2 hours. Here, the researcher lists the following questions.

- 1). Do you use social media? Which social media do you mainly use?
- 2). which social media do you like the most? Why?
- 3). with whom do you interact the most on social media?
- 4). what do you view most on social media?
- 5). what tools are most useful for you to learn about Malaysian social life?

Before answering the above questions specifically, the researcher would like to highlight one fact. When discussing common social media in this study, WeChat was most often mentioned and identified as the most common social media for overseas Chinese students in Malaysia. As a researcher and observer, we found that every respondent was prone to immediately name WeChat as the most common social media.

*You can find me anytime on WeChat, it's already instead SMS and phone call. (I1)*

*(I use) WhatsApp, WeChat, Facebook, Weibo, Instagram. But I think for now, WeChat already took place of any other social media I used keen to. (I9)*

*I use WeChat and Weibo. WeChat is like my daily communication tool, just as WhatsApp for people here (in Malaysia). (I4)*

Thus, it is easy to see that all nine students interviewed are keen on using WeChat and use it as the most important communication tool rather than WhatsApp, so family and friends within China are undoubtedly the people they interact with the most. It is undeniable that WeChat is an important source for them to get to know Malaysia, including text language communication and sharing of articles and videos. As overseas Chinese students, their understanding of Malaysia is still undoubtedly from domestic information media and personal views and perceptions, so it is said that the home country undoubtedly has a profound influence on an international student's mind. China's greatest leader, Mao Zedong once said, that the Chinese revolution should not copy the experience of the West or the Soviet Union, but should combine with its own reality and follow a path that is in line with China's own national conditions (Aabbye, 2020). Later on, China's reform and development also started from its own reality and explored a new path. These great leaders, who were well versed in Western political and economic masterpieces, understood Western revolutionary reforms, and still combined them with China's own culture. The informants were ordinary Chinese students whose worldviews were also heavily influenced by Chinese culture, and therefore, their choice of social media reflects their

identification and sense of belonging to their own culture.

By summarizing the two research methods mentioned above, the sources and specific media use choices of Chinese students' perceptions of Malaysia are described. To summarize the characteristics of popular social media among overseas Chinese students, this study next identifies the reasons why the informants cited WeChat as the most common social media and summarizes them as follows.

First, WeChat is a social media focused on mobile devices, and most of its users use Android or IOS systems (CNNIC, 2014). The informants use mobile devices, including iPhone, Samsung, Nokia, Oppo, and Huawei. The operating systems are mainly IOS or Android. It is common among all informants to install WeChat on portable devices, especially cell phones.

*I think WeChat is very convenient for me to use, install the apps on my phone, and I can use it whenever and wherever as long as I have Internet accesses. (I8)*

Second, regarding the most commonly used contact the recommended contacts in WeChat are based on a person's contact list on their phone or other linked social media accounts.

*WeChat...is the simplest and the most convenient to use. Firstly, application's network signal is stable. Secondly, it connects with contacts in the phone. Thus, people could easily find contacts to keep in touch without calling. (I6)*

As a mobile social media, WeChat has the advantage of meeting the needs of overseas Chinese students to keep in touch with their families at home and their friends in Malaysia easily. From these information sources live a certain level of understanding of Malaysian social life.

*WeChat is a combined functional social media I can chat with them (parents) in text, voice or voice call them and video call them. (I2)*

*My parents can't type words as fast as young people do, but use WeChat they don't need to type much, just talk and send me voice message. (I9)*

*My parents and sister, even my nephew, we chat everyday on WeChat. They don't need to type, just press the bottom, speak then release and send whatever they want say to me. (I6)*

#### 4.2 Findings for RQ2

**According to the media dependence theory, what are the characteristics of media dependence of individuals in the process of using social media?**

First, the results of the focus group discussion were as follows.

Nowadays, laptops and smartphones are the two main terminals for international students to access the Internet. Among the interviewees, most of the international students use computers every day and almost all of them use cell phones every day. In terms of the time spent on the Internet, half of the students use computers for 1-4 hours a day, half of them spend more than 12 hours a day on the Internet, while the proportion of those who use cell phones for 1-4 hours a day drops to less than half, and the proportion of those who use cell phones for more than 12 hours also rises. It can be seen that the



frequency and time of cell phone use in the daily life of international students exceeds that of computers, and cell phones have become the first terminal for contemporary college students to go online. This conclusion is different from the conclusion that “computer is the first medium for Chinese college students to use the Internet” reached by our researchers in 2013.

Meanwhile, in the research on “Purposes of International Students Going Online”, there is no obvious bias in the main purposes of international students using computers, and the proportion of each option is relatively balanced. Among them, watching videos accounted for the largest proportion, followed by “using search engines” and “listening to music”, both close to half of the students. In fourth place was “chatting, browsing microblogs etc.”, with the smallest number of people. In contrast, the bias of international students’ cell phone Internet purposes is more obvious, with the “chatting, browsing microblogs etc.”, option having the largest number of students, much higher than the other options. From this, it can be inferred that the main purpose of international students’ Internet access is leisure and entertainment, with the use of social media being the most important Internet purpose.

Secondly, in the in-depth interview, four questions were asked for the nine interviewees interviewed, which are elaborated and analyzed here.

- 1). Why did you choose Malaysia?
- 2). When you first arrived in Malaysia, what was the biggest problem you encountered when using social media?
- 3). What is the social media you use most often? In what situations do you use it? How do you use it and how often do you use it?
- 4). In what ways do you think using social media helps you in your daily life in Malaysia?

Here are a few examples from the informants as an illustration.

*I love following trends. Like why do we all use Gmail because everyone is using it? Why do we use iPhone, because everyone is using it. I use Facebook and WeChat because my friends, classmates and professors are using it. The overall trend of people using these social media makes me fit in. It is the use of these social media that has allowed me to better integrate into Malaysian society and daily life, but without detaching myself from my culture in China. (I10)*

*I have formed the habit of checking my WeChat, Weibo, facebook, twitter, Qzone, etc. from time to time in my life, chatting with my friends or browsing “moments” from their photos or posts, and the interesting things they share, comment and like about their travel process and learning process are always affecting me, which is socialization in the media. (I9)*

*The two most important reasons why I chose to study in Malaysia were that it was close to China so I could easily go home to visit my parents and friends, and that the tuition fees for studying in Malaysia were low and my family could afford to pay for it. At first, I was not very used to the pace and way of life in Malaysia, but gradually I got used to the life here. The most*

*common social media I use is WeChat. This is because my parents can also use WeChat whenever they want, so I share my photos in my WeChat circle of friends so they can see what I am doing, who I am with, and what my life is like in Malaysia. Social media, especially WeChat, has made my life fun and simple and happy. (I2)*

*As you know, comments and likes on social media are set up so that only your friends and regular friends can see them, and it protects the privacy of the owner. WeChat, facebook, ins, and Weibo are all a close circle of friends, which makes me feel safer. It is these settings that make me feel safe even when I am living far away from home. (I4)*

Through in-depth interviews with the informants, the researcher believes that with the gradual improvement of the Internet and the prevalence of smartphones, social media, such as Facebook and Twitter internationally and WeChat, Qzone, Renren, and Weibo domestically, have rapidly become software or applications that people use on a daily basis. After social media entered people's lives, it gradually became an essential tool and a way of leisure and entertainment, and people's entertainment and communication gradually shifted from "offline" to "online". While these social media have brought convenience to people's communication, they have also caused some problems, such as procrastination, inefficiency, and compulsive behavior when relying on online social media to a high degree. In order to investigate whether there is a scientific basis for this statement, whether using social media is contradictory to understanding reality, and whether social media facilitates people's life or hinders their happiness, this study redefines social media dependence among international students as the psychology of inseparability from social media that is common among international students, and compiles a social media dependence questionnaire for international students to investigate the basic situation of social media dependence among international students.

#### *4.3 Findings for RQ3*

##### **Under the influence of media dependence theory, how does social media specifically affect the shaping and changing of Chinese students' cognitive structure?**

Through focus group discussions, the informants gave their own views on how social media has changed their cognitive structures.

*Social media for me is a source of news and information about life. I read some articles shared by friends or public accounts to which I subscribe. (I4)*

*There are also some informative news from social media, some public accounts of media, I subscribe to them and receive daily tweets of news. (I6)*

*I really like to train my body at home. There are some public accounts on WeChat that are doing body training and muscle building instruction. I get the guidance pushed from these public accounts. (I7)*

The study found that the majority of informants believe that the current direction of perception shaping

is correct, and less than half believe that the direction is wrong. Similarly, a large majority of informants believe that Chinese social media are performing “well”, “very well”, or at least “well” in disseminating information to the public. Half of participants believe the media are performing “fair” or “poor” in this area. Overall, the majority of participants rated the performance of social media, especially WeChat, positively. Participants’ trust in the media industry as a whole also reflects their favorable impression of the media. In terms of “accuracy and fairness of news reporting,” about half of participants said they had “a lot of trust” or “a lot of trust” in domestic news media. While most people had a favorable view of the media and a high level of trust, a significant number also pointed to problems with the media when asked about specific issues.

Half of the participants believe that the Chinese media are somewhat biased in their coverage of major events. Other problems include the media being easily influenced by powerful people or organizations. Other problems include the media being easily influenced by powerful people or organizations, and the media focusing too much on positive and soft news. International student representatives were generally positive about the media but critical of specific media representations, an ambivalence that has been found in previous studies.

The research results also show that many international students are concerned about the negative impact of social media on traditional journalism. Half of the respondents believe that social media is undermining traditional journalistic values and threatening the quality of journalism. Similarly, the majority of respondents believe that online news seeks speed at the expense of accuracy. Despite concerns about negative impacts, more than half of respondents said social media could make journalism more accountable to the public. Participants’ thought toward fake news are noteworthy. The majority of respondents said they see fake news online “often” or at least “sometimes”. However, only a small proportion of the public agreed that not reporting news that cannot be verified is one of the most important responsibilities of journalists. However, only a little of the public agreed that not reporting news that cannot be verified is one of the most important responsibilities of journalists.

In the next in-depth interview, the researcher asked four more questions accordingly:

- 1). If you define yourself, what is “home”?
- 2). Do you feel any change in “who you are” when you study in Malaysia?
- 3). How do you compare yourself living in Malaysia and living in China? (Is there any change in your performance in Malaysia compared to China?)
- 4). Do you think using social media affects your personal perceptions?

The researcher asks these questions based on the cultural identity and belonging that the perceptions ultimately form. It is not easy for the informants to answer these questions, but it clearly shows the cognitive changes they have formed through their study life in Malaysia and the changes in their life attitudes and mindset through the subtle process. This would also involve the formation of their

emotional empathy and cultural common circle.

*Living in Malaysia has made me more dependent on social media to connect with my family and friends back home through social media, and my homesickness has grown stronger. The biggest change in my perception is that I feel I have become more international, my communication horizon is more open, I am no longer limited to China, and I have a more international perspective on things. (I6)*

*"I like to read the articles on WeChat public accounts. They are all in Chinese, which is easier for me. If I am not studying, usually, I am more happy to communicate with Chinese people in Malaysia in Chinese. Malaysia is an open country with different languages and cultures, which makes me feel fashionable and life feels convenient. (I7)*

*To be honest, my English is not good and Facebook is a little difficult for me to read. I'm not used to reading English or expressing myself in English. But WeChat is completely in Chinese. It's hard for you guys to gauge the impact of the Chinese way of speaking and thinking on me. Rather than social media having an impact on me, it's the Chinese cultural circle that has changed my perception. Although, the Malaysian culture has also had an impact on my thinking, the influence of the Chinese cultural climate seems to be greater. I almost only communicate with Chinese speaking friends even on Facebook. (I8)*

Through the answers of these informants, it is easy to see that the influence of language seems to be much greater than the influence of social media. In other words, in the case of WeChat, for example, WeChat has a natural appeal to Chinese students with its native language, far more than whatsapp, and students choose WeChat more often. Like the other common social media mentioned by informants, Weibo, Zhihu, and Youku all have this common advantage, and these are all mainstream media in China. Even Facebook offers the system language in Chinese, but its context is mostly in English, so not many student scholars do. Informants' choice of social media indicates the importance of language for social media. Coming back to the question, international students as a whole still identify with the Chinese cultural circle, even in Malaysia, and emphasize that Malaysian Chinese and Chinese language gives them a sense of closeness and belonging. What they identify with is that they are Chinese, even Chinese. This has not changed whether they are in China or Malaysia. Based on this common cultural circle, it is clear that their perceptions are guided and shaped more by the values of Chinese social media.

In contrast to the most frequently used social media answers, informants in the in-depth interviews each cited various social media as their favorites. However, nearly half of the informants chose WeChat as their favorite social media. A closer look at WeChat will help us understand what types of social media overseas Chinese students prefer. In addition, Sina Weibo, Facebook, YouTube, Youku, Renren, Qzone, Instagram, Douban and Jitterbug were also nominated as common social media for daily consumption.

#### 4.4 Findings for RQ4

##### **Will social media change the cognition of international students and thus their social behavior?**

In this one question, the researcher will also use two research methods. Firstly, in the focus group discussions, the grouped discussants will look at whether social media has changed informants' social perceptions macroscopically and will even go further to consider whether informants' social behaviour also changes after the perception change.

An analysis of social media audience activity shows that the most common use of social media by overseas Chinese students is to keep in touch with friends and family back home and to learn about what is going on back home through them. By asking the question "What tools are most useful for you to communicate with China?" question, 2 out of 10 informants (I5 and I8) found WeChat to be the most useful tool for connecting with friends and family in China. According to the informants' answers (I5 and I8), WeChat is more time and quality saving.

*Obviously, when I use WeChat to talk to my friends (in China) (whether by text or voice or video), it seems more sincere and formal. (I5).*

However, in this day and age, social networking across borders is not limited to via WeChat, with the remaining eight informants insisting that social media, particularly webcam software, is the most useful tool. Instant messaging or voice messaging, voice calls and video calls on social media are common ways to keep in touch with family and friends in China. In addition, in order to stay "not too close" to friends and family (I3), informants prefer to communicate and socialise with their friends or other relatives on social media. Considering the geographical distance, informants mentioned the concern that:

*I don't think we really have something to make a long conversation when we (me and my friends) stay in different places and haven't met for too long time. (I6)*

At the same time, informants opted for a gentle approach to collecting cross-national connections, "interacting with them by commenting under their posts or 'liking' them". (I6), rather than communicating directly with individuals. Informants felt better.

*I can keep contact with them without disturb them or engage their busying hours. (I10).*

By developing a transitional social network, students are able to maintain distant but close and lively relationships with family and friends in China. Social media has, in a way, made overseas students feel close to home. As one interviewee, a first year PhD student in Malaysia, put it, she had endured intense homesickness.

*(My family and I,) we always video chat, I use video chat with my nephew and help him to do his mathematic homework, because my sister is busying for prepare dinner. And when he has new pet hamster, he immediately video chat with me to show-off. It is really a great feeling, sometime I feel I am still stay with them every day at home, even the tiny things in*

*their daily life I know clearly through the chat. And they feel the same. (I6)*

Social media plays a positive role for overseas Chinese students by acting as a mediator of transnational social networks between China and Malaysia. Moreover, this transnational connection gives most overseas students a sense of security when they are faced with the fact that they will have to return to China sooner or later. As the interviewees put it:

*Social media keeps the tie of my connection with my hometown and China. (I12)*

*It (social media) helps me to keep the tie and relation between me and my previous social cycle, then I don't feel worry about one day go back China I would lose my best friends or connections with others. (I9)*

From another perspective, transnational social networks are also loaded with news and information from China through social media. The focus shows that all informants access news about China and their home country through social media to a greater or lesser extent. Informants get news and information from both official news sources (official news accounts on Weibo, WeChat and Facebook) and unofficial sources (including WeChat accounts on Weibo and WeChat, friend circles on WeChat and online chats).

*Every day I read news from the public news account in WeChat and other news APPs as Sohu News. I know what happening in my hometown and China. It makes the geographical distance seems not important. Social media makes me keeping up- to-date information about home by every news I read and every posts and photos my friends and family shared. (I2)*

*Social media helps me to keep the trends, such as TV shows and TV dramas, and some kuso videos, I watch those on YouTube and Weibo...then I have things to talk with my friends, the trending topic. (any example?) For example, the one I watched most is Ben Pao Ba! Xiong Di. There is an official channel on YouTube, but usually one-day delay from its first shown time on Hunan Satellite. (I7)*

*I watch Chinese TV series and variety shows, like Ba Ba Qu Na, Ben Pao Ba! Xiong Di online on YouTube. (I9)*

Secondly, the researcher continues to use in-depth interviews to question the informants. This questioning approach aims to further discuss the details of how social media has changed informants' perceptions from a micro perspective, and the changes in social behaviour that have been induced by the change in perceptions.

The researcher list the following questions in this session.

- 1). What is your personal opinion on social media? What do you think it means to your life learning?
- 2). How does social media affect their cognitive construction?

### 3). Why can social media change people's perceptions and even their behaviour?

By mapping the use of social media by overseas Chinese students, the researchers summarized some of the common social media activities of informants. It is not difficult to see that overseas Chinese students actively use social media as a tool for transnational social networking behavior in order to maintain social relations in China.

The active performance in transnational social media gives social media the power to strengthen social relations based on the past lives of overseas Chinese students. At the same time, it provides emotional support for overseas Chinese students.

*Social media makes it possible for me to keep contact with my friends and family far away from me, then I can live my life here, otherwise I can't stand the loneliness or helpless time when studying in a foreign country. So I think social media gives me a mental support. (I4)*

*I feel closer to my family and friends thanks to social media, which makes me feel comfortable and safe while studying here (Malaysia). Social media has greatly enhanced my social understanding of China and Malaysia, and I have developed a deep affection for both places. (I9)*

Through such a platform of transnational social media, China's image is constantly refreshed not only in the life experience of international students, but also in every message transmitted from the motherland through social media. Through social media, these international students have reshaped their deep perception of society, especially their home countries. Social behaviors such as their future employment, personal life and learning also have an immeasurable impact.

## 5. Conclusions

Through the analysis in the above, the informants who participated in this study produced different levels of perceptions of outcomes through social media use, with both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, they showed little potential to become new immigrants but were very eager to return to China and would eventually return to their country of origin. They study and live in Malaysia, but their social ties are closely tied to China. This "seam" (Shi, 2017) situation is somewhat thrown out of balance by the high prevalence of social media. Informants have constant access to a wide range of experiences from their home country. In the "contact zone", their psychological state is not affected by changes in the cultural environment (Sun, 2017). Their common identity is based on being "Chinese", neither overseas Chinese nor Chinese under the concept of pan-China, which is the credit of social media, which binds overseas Chinese, especially Chinese students, tightly into a cultural community and shapes the national perception of Chinese civilization. On the other hand, students' dependency on social media does contribute to their heteronormative perceptions, and different types of dependency have different degrees of influence on heteronormative perceptions. In particular, comprehension

dependence does not have a significant effect on either of the two different types of anomalous cognitions, probably because it is generated by tool-directed motives, and there are more tool-based media with the purpose of obtaining effective information, especially for social comprehension purposes, and people tend to choose specialized information media, such as Today's Headlines, for news and current events or The news and events around us. Interaction dependence and entertainment dependence both have significant positive effects on perceptual irreplaceability and cognitive preemption, with entertainment dependence having the greatest effect on cognitive preemption and directional dependence having the greatest effect on perceptual irreplaceability. That is, the more people rely on social media for social interaction and leisure, the more they perceive social media as irreplaceable, and the more they want to open it to check it out.

Informants' social media is highly transnational. In addition, social media serves as a source of news, information, and entertainment, reinforcing the impressions of people's homeland. With the help of this transnational network, the dominant culture from China is growing in the minds of the informants. The imagery of China is not only a virtual image stuck in the memory, but also the latest experience of every day abroad. According to Suryadinata's findings, Chinese organizations, Chinese language education, and Chinese language media are a three-way complementary relationship in strengthening and maintaining Chinese culture in diaspora Chinese communities (Suryadinata, 2017). In this study, Chinese social media, Chinese language, and overseas Chinese communities maintain culture of origin and ethnic perceptions among overseas Chinese students in the same way.

The culture and lifestyle of the host country have little influence on the change of perceptions of Chinese students abroad. Informants follow the general etiquette of the host country out of respect and social necessity. However, their knowledge of the Malaysian language, culture and society is limited in their daily lives. This phenomenon is prevalent among overseas Chinese students, at least when it comes to social media usage. Further research could provide a cultural adaptation analysis of this phenomenon.

Firstly, the usage patterns of social media among overseas Chinese students in Malaysia shows in this research could be divided into 3 aspects:

- 1). Social media is the extensive application among overseas Chinese students. They visit social media regularly every day most on their smart phone for keeping connection with friends and family.
- 2). WeChat is the most common social media in overseas Chinese students' daily life, which combined the instant message, voice & video chat, news, entertainment and photo& video sharing functions in one APP.
- 3). Overseas Chinese students are more active on Chinese social media than international social media. Facebook and Instagram are the only nominators from international social media.



Secondly, social media has changed the perceptions and thus influenced the behavioral patterns of overseas Chinese students, not so much by changing as by maintaining the status quo ante. On the one hand, social media provides the ground for transnational networks and overseas Chinese communities to be the force that protects overseas Chinese students from their lifestyles of origin. On the other hand, social media itself provides the latest lifestyle-related news and information as a resource for finding a way of life in the host country of origin. But social media has really changed the way overseas Chinese students communicate with each other while living abroad. Free and efficient instant messaging via WeChat has replaced texting and direct phone calls in most daily lives, as well as face-to-face communication with family and friends in China.

Thirdly, the media dependence of social media has led to a subtle change in the behavior of overseas Chinese students. It is through the daily communication on social media and overseas life that they become active. Perceptual irreplaceability and cognitive predominance have significant positive effects on the dependent use of social media, which indicates that the abnormal cognitive evaluation of social media and the abnormality of their thinking patterns are the main sources of their dependent use behaviors. That is, there are two main reasons why a person uses WeChat when he or she should not: first, he or she wants to open WeChat to see what is new, and this compulsive mindset drives him or her to make impulsive or unreasonable decisions, i.e., to play with WeChat in inappropriate situations; second, he or she believes that WeChat provides him or her with values that are irreplaceable by other media, and this categorical cognitive evaluation. This categorical perception may also motivate the person to use WeChat in situations where it is not appropriate to do so. This is a typical media-dependent behavior, and it has even become a daily behavior of the students, indicating that this behavior has become a habit in their perception.

In addition to the findings of the three studies mentioned above, overseas Chinese students are apathetic to political messages and discussions on social media, even though they embrace strong nationalism. Mainstream ideology is national rather than political. Mainstream culture spills over from everyday communication and entertainment content across borders. The ties that connect them to their homeland are more emotional and personal. Through this study, the researcher further analyzes and answers in detail the shaping and influence of social media in the cognitive behavior of international students, especially the positive and negative effects shown under the creation of media dependency, which will have implications for all such studies in the future.

### **Acknowledgement**

This thesis started and ended with a passion to gain extra knowledge and to fulfill my ambition to do research. Indeed, it has been a long journey but a worthwhile one. First of all, I must thank Professor Dr

Faridah Ibrahim, my supervisor who has been guiding me in the research with much patience and encouraging words. All your advice, support, and help are appreciated. Thank you! Also, sincere appreciation to other professors in the faculty, for their great support. I am thankful to the Infrastructure University of Kuala Lumpur, especially the Faculty of Business, Information & Human Sciences (FBIHS), for all the technical support and facilities provided throughout my time with the Department.

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