Cross-Cultural Experiences of South Asian Students in Chinese Universities: Predictors of the Students' Social-Media Engagements

Authors : Nadeem Akhtar, An Ran, Cornelius B. Pratt

Abstract : China's President Xi' vision of Belt and Road Initiative, an infrastructural project of development and connectivity, is attracting international students to Chinese universities, with Pakistan and India among the top-10 countries of origin of those students (Ministry of Education China, 2018). An additional factor in international students' interest in Chinese universities is their improving global rankings of Chinese universities. Against that backdrop, this study addresses two overarching questions: (a) What factors explain South Asian students' study-away experiences, particularly in their multicultural environments? and (b) What role do new media play in their adaptation to that environment? This study is guided by Stephen's (2011) theoretical model, which suggests that social networks influence immigrants' interactions with host and home culture. The present study used a structured questionnaire distributed through both WeChat and other online platforms to international students studying in Chinese universities. Preliminary results are threefold: (a) that the frequency of use of social media is a predictor of the level of adjustment of the students to their multicultural environment; (b) that social engagement with their international-student peers is a moderating factor in their experiential outcomes; and (c) length of stay in Chinese universities, surprisingly, was not a predictor of adaptation. A major implication of these findings is that, even though social media tend to be criticized for contributing to anomie and to diminishing social capital among youths and millennials, they can be poignant tools for cultural adaptation, particularly among international students in China. It remains to be seen if such outcomes occur among international students in other countries or world regions.
Keywords : adaptation, China's Belt and Road Initiative, international students, social media
Conference Title : ICCTNM 2019 : International Conference on Communications Technology and New Media
Conference Location : Toronto, Canada
Conference Dates : July 18-19, 2019