

## **The Medium Is the Message: WeChat, YouTube, and Facebook Usage and Acculturation Outcomes**

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Social media usage has been recognized as an integral part of immigrants' acculturation experiences, yet research on social media is just emerging, and more detailed understanding is needed. Drawing on the interactive theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation (ITCCA), the current project used a mixed-method approach to understand how Chinese immigrants' social media use influences their acculturation experiences. Through focus groups and a survey, we examined which social media platforms Chinese immigrants use and for what purposes during their acculturation process, and what influence social media use has on their acculturation process in Canada. Our findings expand the scope of the ITCCA and offer important practical implications for service providers supporting newcomers.

*Keywords: communication, acculturation, Chinese immigrants, social media*

Today, immigrants represent more than 20% of Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2020). Importantly, immigrants have made immeasurable contributions to Canada, and the success of Canada's immigration programs depends on continuing to ensure that immigrants are well-acclimated to Canadian life and society (Hussen, 2018). Over the last decade, an increasing number of Canadian immigrants have come from China (Hussen, 2018). Compared with other immigrant groups (e.g., Europeans), some evidence suggests Chinese immigrants may struggle more with acculturation because of perceived cultural distance and language barriers (Galchenko & Van De Vijver, 2007). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the unique experiences of Chinese immigrants to help improve acculturation outcomes.

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Date submitted: 2021-02-26

<sup>1</sup> This study was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Engage Grant (SSHRC-PEG) No. 892-2019-2005. The authors would like to thank the partner organization, Calgary Chinese Dongbei Association, and two research assistants, Siyin Liang and Lauren Trelford, for their support. They also thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

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Recently, social media has been recognized as an integral part of immigrants' acculturation process (Veronis, Tabler, & Ahmed, 2018), especially as the COVID-19 pandemic pushed immigrant-serving agencies to create virtual programs essentially overnight (Esses et al., 2021). Yet, research on social media is just emerging, and more detailed understanding is needed (Croucher, 2011; Shuter, 2012). In this context, the current project uses a mixed-method approach (focus groups and a survey) to understand how Chinese immigrants' social media use influences their acculturation experiences.

We begin this article by highlighting the interactive theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation (ITCCA), which provides the theoretical basis for our studies. We then discuss social media use in relation to acculturation, drawing on the ITCCA to propose research questions. Finally, we detail the findings offered by this project.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Interactive Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation***

The interactive theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001) provides a holistic framework to understand acculturation by identifying various influences and interactions among the factors that impact cross-cultural adaptation. The ITCCA suggests that predisposing factors (e.g., proximity to receiving country culture), environmental factors (e.g., host receptivity) and communication factors all contribute to the success of individuals' cultural adaptation. Among these factors, social communication plays a key role (Kim, 2001), facilitating sociocultural and psychological adaptation (Yu, Foroudi, & Gupta, 2019) and host culture identification (Li & Tsai, 2015). Social communication includes both host and ethnic communication and is enacted personally or through mass media. Host communication refers to interpersonal and mass communication with members of the receiving country's culture, and ethnic communication refers to interactions with individuals and mass media content from the ethnic culture.

Traditionally, host and ethnic interpersonal communication occur in homes, workplaces, and classrooms, while host and ethnic mass communication occur in mass media such as newspapers, television, and movies (Kim, 2001). More recently, with an evolving landscape of new media, research has found that acculturation can be facilitated through social media (Park, Song, & Lee, 2014). Although research on social media and acculturation is growing, significant gaps exist. For example, most studies focus on international students (e.g., Yang, 2018) and fail to consider broader immigration experiences (Croucher, 2011). Several studies (e.g., Alencar, 2017) explored immigrants' experiences, and the current study joins this endeavor to further investigate this important and timely topic.

### ***Social Media and Acculturation***

Social media has become an integral part of immigrants' adaptation (McKelvy & Chatterjee, 2017). Through social media, immigrants can make connections with the host culture, improve language fluency, and find information about the receiving country (Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016). Social media also allows immigrants to maintain connections with their home culture, strengthen their ethnic identity, and develop ingroup connections (S. Hu, Liu, Zhang, & Wang, 2020). Although it is challenging to develop a clear definition

of social media, scholars agree that social media has the following commonalities: (a) platforms based on Web applications; (b) presenting user-generated content; (c) the ability of individuals and groups to create user-specific profiles; and (d) facilitating the development of social networks (Obar & Wildman, 2015). In the current study, any platform that satisfies these characteristics is considered social media.

Past research has found that different immigrant groups use social media for different purposes. Some studies have found that Facebook is one of the most frequently used platforms among immigrants, including Chinese international students, for host cultural communication (Hofhuis, Hanke, & Rutten, 2019). Other studies have found that immigrants use Facebook mainly to connect with family and friends at home or to express their ethnic cultural identity (Lim & Pham, 2016). Of relevance to the current project, other researchers have suggested that, for Chinese immigrants, WeChat is most prevalent for both host and ethnic communication (Chen, Butler, & Liang, 2018). These findings highlight the importance of focusing on specific immigrant groups to understand how each group uses social media differently, including what platforms they use and how they use those platforms. This is particularly important given the current transition to providing settlement services in virtual formats (Helps, Silvius, & Gibson, 2020). A greater understanding of social media use will help settlement agencies deliver targeted settlement programs.

Another gap in the current literature is that the role of mass communication on social media in the acculturation process is largely unexplored. Instead, most studies have focused on interpersonal communication (e.g., Yang, 2018) because social media provides new ways to interact with people from home and host societies (Komito, 2011). However, social media also provides mass communication opportunities and has outpaced newspapers as the dominant news medium (Shearer, 2018). Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are the major platforms from which people currently obtain information (Smith & Anderson, 2018). For immigrants, learning about culture and language through mass social media communication could play a significant role in their acculturation.

Although past literature has provided a foundation on which to examine how social media use impacts acculturation, it has not provided sufficient information on how specific groups, such as Chinese immigrants, use social media for various communication activities. This includes key questions concerning how social media is used for mass communication and interpersonal communication during acculturation. Thus, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media influences acculturation, we explored the following research question:

*RQ1: Which social media platforms do Chinese immigrants use, and for what purposes, during acculturation?*

### ***The Impact of Social Media Use on Acculturation***

Immigrants engage in various types of social communication, which can impact acculturation. The ITCCA (Kim, 2001) proposes that host communication facilitates individuals' acculturation, and studies of social media and acculturation have supported this notion. It is commonly observed that host communication activities on social media, especially interpersonal communication, positively contribute to well-being, managing uncertainty, stress reduction (Rui & Wang, 2015), building host social capital (Alencar, 2017),

facilitating host cultural identity (Du & Lin, 2019), and enhancing individuals' sociocultural acculturation (Ju, Jia, & Shoham, 2016).

However, the effects of host mass communication from social media are still unclear. Only a few studies have provided answers, but these have not been consistently aligned with the ITCCA. For example, past studies have found that immigrants had greater concerns about the credibility of social media information, which may detract from their acculturation (S. Hu et al., 2020). It is also common for immigrants to encounter discriminatory information on social media, thereby negatively impacting their acculturation process (Lim & Pham, 2016).

According to the ITCCA, ethnic communication in acculturation generally has a negative long-term impact, although it can ease initial stress (Kim, 2001). Specifically, although ethnic social media communication provides emotional and social support and helps maintain connections with ethnic society (Hofhuis et al., 2019), in the long run, ethnic social media communication distances immigrants from the host culture. This can create alienation from and negative perceptions of the receiving country (Croucher & Rahmani, 2015), contributing to ethnic identity salience (Hofhuis et al., 2019) and thus having a negative impact on acculturation.

However, past findings have not been unequivocal. For instance, Du and Lin (2019) found that ethnic social media communication was irrelevant to Chinese immigrants' ethnic cultural identification, although the authors did not specify whether it was interpersonal or mass communication from social media. In addition, ethnic communication on social media can have differential effects for different immigrant groups. For example, Chinese international students use social media to keep in touch, discuss assignments, and share study tips, bolstering their mental health (Cao & Zhang, 2012). Furthermore, most of the existing studies on ethnic social media communication only examined interpersonal communication; less is known about the impact of ethnic mass social media communication. A wealth of literature (e.g., Moon & Park, 2007) has demonstrated the influence of traditional mass media on acculturation, generally finding that exposure to host country mass media has a positive influence on acculturation, while exposure to ethnic mass media reinforced ethnic identity and a sense of belonging to one's ethnic culture. In the current study, we examine whether these effects hold when mass media are consumed through social media.

In sum, past studies have demonstrated inconsistent findings about the effects of social media on acculturation. One possible explanation is that most studies failed to recognize the intricate nature of social media communication. Social media can transcend the boundaries of interpersonal and mass communication, as well as ethnic and host communication. For example, although Facebook is generally considered a host communication platform, ethnic communication occurs on Facebook as well. Immigrants connect to other individuals through social media; however, they also consume information and news on social media. To understand the impact of such complex communication platforms, we must consider the different types of communication happening on social media. Focusing on Chinese immigrants in Canada, this study asks:

*RQ2: What are the acculturation outcomes associated with Chinese immigrants' social media use?*

To answer these two questions, we conducted two studies using a mixed-method approach. Study 1 used focus groups to seek qualitative information that describes Chinese immigrants' experiences of using

social media in the acculturation process. Built on the results from Study 1, Study 2 used a survey to explore the relations between specific social media use and acculturation outcomes.

### **Study 1: Focus Groups**

#### ***Method***

Three focus groups were conducted in Mandarin in February 2020. Consecutive interpretation (Mandarin and English) was used so that all researchers could follow the conversation and ask follow-up questions. The participants ( $n = 24$ ; 8 each) were recruited via a partner organization that provides services to Chinese immigrants. On average, focus groups lasted 90 minutes. Focus group questions were semi-structured and asked about participants' experiences using social media during their acculturation in Canada, and their perceptions of social media's influences on their acculturation. At the end of the focus group, participants completed a demographic survey and an English proficiency scale (Bernstein, Park, Shin, Cho, & Park, 2011).

#### ***Participants***

Participants (10 women and 14 men) were from mainland China and had lived in Canada for 10 years or less at the time of participation ( $M = 4.39$ ). The average age was 47.54 years ( $SD = 17.00$ ). The majority ( $n = 16$ ) held an undergraduate degree or above, and about half ( $n = 10$ ) were employed. About one-third ( $n = 9$ ) immigrated to Canada through the family class, 10 immigrated through either the provincial nominee program or as skilled workers, four participants were dependents, and one participant entered as an international student. On a 4-point scale (1 = *poor*, 4 = *excellent*), participants self-reported fairly low English proficiency ( $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ).

#### ***Analyses***

The focus groups were digitally recorded, manually transcribed, and translated by two native Mandarin speakers. The transcripts were cross-checked to ensure accuracy. Data were analyzed for themes around acculturation and perceived impacts of social media. Using the descriptive coding method (Saldaña, 2013), two of the authors and two research assistants independently created a list of codes. The team then discussed and compared each list until consensus was reached to establish a comprehensive coding list. Next, this list was used to code the transcripts by all team members independently again. After this round of coding, the team discussed discrepancies until complete consensus was reached. Subsequently, a final code list was established. After two research assistants conducted the final coding of the data, the core investigators developed themes from the data, also resulting in complete agreement (Saldaña, 2013). Representative quotes were selected to demonstrate the findings.

#### ***Results***

We asked participants which social media platforms they used during their resettlement in Canada and for what purposes. Table 1 provides a summary. WeChat was used most frequently and for a variety of purposes, including connecting with family and friends in China and gathering resettlement information.

**Table 1. Use of Social Media Platforms.**

Social Media Platform	Purpose	Frequency	Language
WeChat	Connect with friends and family in China; Connect with Chinese immigrants in Canada; Read local news; Access informal resettlement information	Very frequent	Mandarin
YouTube	Learn English; Entertainment; Local news	Moderately frequent	Mandarin; English
Facebook	Connect with Canadian friends	Moderately frequent	English
WhatsApp	Connect with friends from school	Very infrequent	English
Twitter	News	Very infrequent	English

As one participant explained, "WeChat, as a platform for communication, can satisfy 90% of the needs of a person." Many participants indicated that they use YouTube fairly frequently, particularly to learn English, to get local news and information, and for entertainment. Though Facebook was used less frequently, it emerged as a means of connecting with host country individuals. However, no meaningful themes emerged for WhatsApp and Twitter because participants used these platforms infrequently. We next describe the themes that emerged from the three most used platforms: WeChat, YouTube, and Facebook.

#### *A Wealth of Resettlement Information on Social Media*

Participants indicated that social media had a positive impact on their acculturation. Consistent with past research (Alencar, 2017), participants found a host of valuable information about Canada on social media (WeChat in particular). Importantly, this information was considered most valuable early in resettlement:

WeChat groups help us a lot when we first came. For new immigrants, if they don't know anyone here, their life will be very difficult. Very difficult. Since I have a relative who has lived here for about 20 years, he helped me a lot. He recommended many WeChat groups, such as the house group, the vehicle maintenance group, the house or the apartment renting group.

#### *Social Media Can Help With Psychological Adaptation*

Several (younger) participants described how they used Facebook to connect with friends, particularly people they met at school or language classes. One participant described, "After I registered for (Facebook), I made some friends. At that time, I was learning English, so I made some foreign friends." This is also consistent with previous research suggesting that Facebook is used by immigrants, particularly Chinese international students, to develop and maintain host cultural communication (Hofhuis et al., 2019). Other participants described how they "watch the news on YouTube and other things on Facebook." They explained that they enjoy the diversity of opinions on YouTube and how they can learn about almost anything.

*Social Media Is "Good and Bad at the Same Time"*

Despite these benefits, participants were keenly aware of some of the paradoxes inherent in social media use. They saw social media, particularly WeChat, as vital for the acculturation process, yet also as something that hinders long-term integration into Canadian society. One participant expressed this tension:

In my opinion, social media has two sides. The positive side is, particularly, when we first arrived, everything was new for us; WeChat groups helped us to know a lot of people. WeChat groups also let us know a lot of activities. These activities gave us an excellent opportunity to communicate with different people. So, we knew many neighbors. Then, we could often connect with them. Yet, the negative thing is that to some extent, the groups limit my view. I tend to learn about local life from the WeChat groups instead of communicating with Canadians.

Furthermore, for English language acquisition, social media was also viewed as a double-edged sword. On one hand, social media facilitated language acquisition, and almost all participants found YouTube helpful in this regard. For instance, one participant stated, "If I want to learn English, I will use YouTube." On the other hand, however, there was consensus that WeChat hinders English language acquisition.

Now, WeChat has everything. There are all Chinese immigrants. I think this, more or less, hinders our communication with local people. It hinders our acculturation. It is a small circle. If we don't have this circle, we have to step out and communicate with local people. Ideally, my English should be okay because I have been here for such a long time. However, since the groups cater to all my needs, I don't need to speak (English).

While participants appreciated that other Chinese immigrants translated local news and information into Mandarin, the availability of these translations dissuaded them from reading local news in English. One participant explained, "You would just read these news stories in Chinese . . . because people have already translated that news for you."

*Cultural Comfort Zone: WeChat "Makes Us Stay in This Circle"*

When asked how social media negatively impacts their acculturation, participants indicated that, over time, WeChat becomes a cultural bubble that limits connections outside the Chinese immigrant community. For instance, one participant stated, "Talking about hinderance, I do feel WeChat is a big obstacle to communicate with locals. Because I, myself, just like this comfort zone so much, and want to stay in and don't want to come out." This is consistent with findings that ethnic communication on social media helps immigrants maintain connections with their ethnic group and provides social support but does not facilitate connections with the host society (e.g., Hofhuis et al., 2019). Another participant likened this comfort zone to an "invisible wall" preventing Chinese immigrants from connecting with locals:

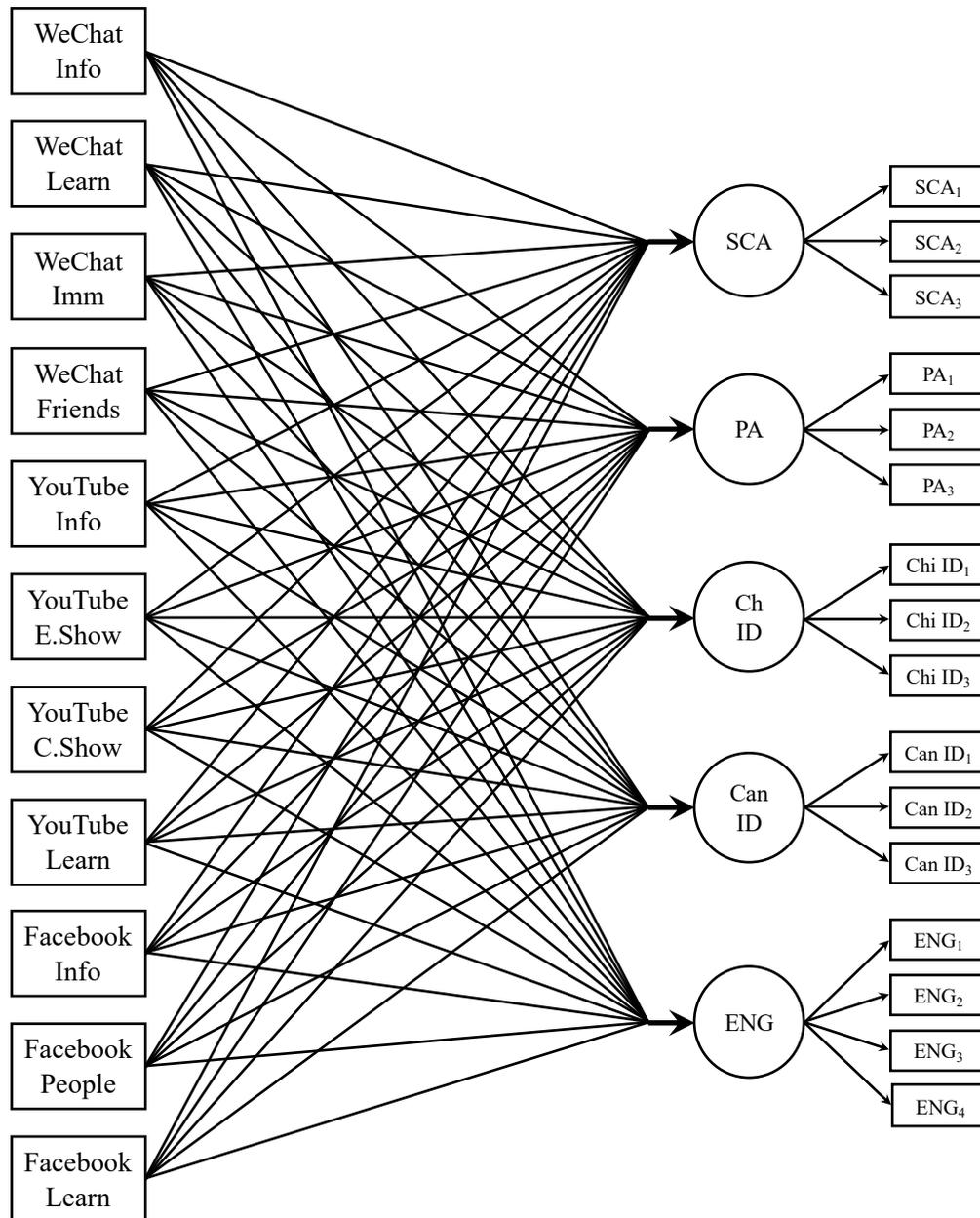
Then, after staying in this comfort zone for a long time, you get used to it. So if you want to challenge a person to step outside of the comfort zone, it is hard for that person. . . .

So there are very few people would like to step outside (of the comfort zone). . . . So this is the invisible wall that social media has built for us, let us stay in the comfort zone, the more comfortable we get, the less we want to go out.

In sum, the results of the focus groups provide preliminary evidence demonstrating that social media plays a substantial role in the acculturation of Chinese immigrants in Canada. Moreover, responses illustrated the complexities and tensions inherent in immigrants' use of social media. Although participants discussed Facebook and YouTube less often than WeChat, the former two platforms were discussed less negatively than WeChat. However, WeChat has a ubiquitous influence, which is perceived as valuable during the early phases of resettlement. But over time, WeChat can lead to the development a cultural bubble, stifling English proficiency and inhibiting connections with the host community. These results informed the development and design of Study 2. In particular, we sought to further understand how specific social media usage is associated with acculturation outcomes.

### **Study 2: Survey**

Study 2 explored the relations among specific social media usage (platform and purposes) and acculturation outcomes through a survey. As noted, we focused on the three platforms identified in Study 1: WeChat, YouTube, and Facebook. Participants used these three platforms mainly to look for information about Canada, connect with local Canadians, and learn English. Additionally, YouTube and WeChat had their own unique usage. WeChat was heavily used for connecting with family and friends back home and connecting with local Chinese immigrants. YouTube was heavily used for watching English and Chinese shows. In terms of acculturation outcomes, we built on Study 1 to specifically focus on sociocultural adaptation, psychological adaptation, ethnic (Chinese) and host (Canadian) identity, and English proficiency, which corresponds with the focal outcomes investigated in previous studies (e.g., Du & Lin, 2019). Figure 1 presents the proposed model central to Study 2.



**Figure 1. Conceptual depiction of focal structural equation model. Info = consuming information about Canada; Learn = learning English; Imm= connecting with Chinese immigrants; Friends = connecting with family and friends in China; E.Show = watching English shows; C.Show = watching Chinese shows; SCA = sociocultural adaptation; PA = psychological adaptation; Ch ID = Chinese identity; Can ID = Canadian identity; ENG = English language skills. The control variables, omitted for clarity, were only regressed on the five acculturation outcomes.**

### **Method**

Study 2 involved collection of data through an online questionnaire sent by the partner organization to its members in July 2020. Two of the research team members also shared the recruitment materials on their social media. The questionnaire was available in Mandarin and English, and participants were able to choose the version they preferred to complete (the vast majority, 93.1%, completed the Mandarin version). A total of 369 questionnaires were completed. After deleting responses from participants who did not identify as Chinese immigrants, who have lived in Canada for > 10 years, who failed the attention check questions, or who finished < 50% of the questionnaire, we retained a total of 145 valid responses for analysis.

#### *Participants*

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 85 years ( $M = 37.78$ ,  $SD = 10.30$ ). The sample was 71.9% female (28.1% male). The average length of time living in Canada was 6.19 years ( $SD = 2.61$ ). The majority (43.8%) of the respondents held a bachelor's degree, 30.1% held a master's degree, and 15.1% held a two-year college degree. More than one third (37.5%) were employed full time, 13% were employed part time, 14.4% were homemakers, and 9.6% were self-employed.

#### *Measures*

Informed by the results from Study 1, a social media usage measure was constructed targeting WeChat, Facebook, and YouTube. The specific communication activities on these platforms were grouped into four types of social communication based on the ITCCA, and items specific to each activity and platform were developed: (1) ethnic interpersonal communication: interacting with other Chinese immigrants (WeChat item) and interacting with family and friends back home (WeChat item); (2) ethnic mass communication: watching Chinese shows (YouTube item); (3) host interpersonal communication: interacting with local Canadians (Facebook item); and (4) host mass communication: reading/watching information about Canada (items for WeChat, Facebook, and YouTube), learning English (items for WeChat, Facebook, and YouTube), and watching English shows (YouTube item). Participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used a given social media platform for the specific purpose listed using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*). Thus, the measure constructed contained 11 items: four on WeChat, four on YouTube, and three on Facebook. A sample item of the scale was: "I use WeChat to read/watch information about Canada."

The Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (Wilson, Ward, Fetvadjev, & Bethel, 2017) was used to measure sociocultural adaptation, the extent to which immigrants have adapted to Canadian culture. The original 11-item scale measures four subdimensions of sociocultural adaptation: interpersonal and social interaction, community engagement, ecological factors, and work- and study-related challenges (the host language skills dimension was dropped because English skills were measured using another scale). Using a 7-point scale, participants indicated how competent they were in different behaviors related to sociocultural adaptation (1 = *not at all competent*, 7 = *extremely competent*). The nine-item scale had a reliability of .93.

To measure psychological adaptation, the extent to which participants felt comfortable living in Canada, Gao and Gudykunst's (1990) measure was used. Their scale has eight items (two English skills items were removed). Participants indicated their comfort with different aspects related to living in Canada using a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). The remaining six-item scale yielded a reliability of .89.

English skills were measured by Marian, Blumenfeld, and Kaushanskaya's (2007) scale. This four-item scale asked participants to report their ability in speaking, listening to, reading, and writing English using an 11-point scale (0 = *none*, 10 = *perfect*), Cronbach's  $\alpha = .96$ .

Participants' identity was measured using Phinney and Ong's (2007) three-item ethnic identity scale. The scale was repeated twice to assess identification with China and Canada, respectively. Each item used a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Reliabilities of these two scales were .84 (Chinese identity) and .83 (Canadian identity).

### **Analytical Procedure**

We used a multistep quantitative analytical procedure. Before focal data analyses, we examined the observed correlations among the set of WeChat, YouTube, and Facebook social media indicators and the five acculturation outcomes (i.e., sociocultural adaptation, psychological adaptation, Chinese identity, Canadian identity, and English skills; see Table 2). Next, we used confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) and structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the multivariate relations between the social media indicators and the acculturation outcomes. More specifically, we explored the construct validity and discriminant validity of the outcomes used in this study to test whether the five-factor model (one factor for each outcome) demonstrated optimal fit as compared with any plausible alternative model with fewer factors. We also used CFA to conduct Harman's single factor test in order to examine the role that common method variance may have had in influencing shared variance in the outcomes (see Conway & Lance, 2010). Having identified the five-factor model for the outcomes as optimal, we next incorporated the 11 social media indicators as predictors of the five acculturation outcomes in a SEM. This allowed us to examine the focal relations after adjusting for unreliability in the outcomes (as latent factors have perfect reliability; Kline, 2016).

In all CFAs and SEMs, the Chinese and Canadian identity factors and the English skills factor used the item-level data as indicators of each respective factor (i.e., the three Chinese identity items were the indicators of the Chinese identity factor). For the sociocultural and psychological adaptation factors, item parcels (which are variables comprising two or more items that are averaged together) were used. Item parcels enable analyzing a more parsimonious model, which is advantageous with a moderate sample size (Williams, Vandenberg, & Edwards, 2009), and have higher reliability (Little, Rhemtulla, Gibson, & Schoemann, 2013). For sociocultural adaptation (nine items), three item parcels were formed by randomly assigning three items to each parcel. For psychological adaptation (six items), we formed three parcels by averaging two randomly chosen items.

Because the items for both the Chinese and Canadian identity factor were highly similar (i.e., they have parallel wording, as only the country referent was changed), we allowed correlated residual

variances between respective items (see Morin, Arens, & Marsh, 2016). Finally, in the SEMs, we included sex (0 = man, 1 = woman), age, number of years in Canada, and education level as control variables.<sup>2</sup> For all CFA and SEM analyses, we used Mplus 8.5 and its robust maximum likelihood estimator (Muthén & Muthén, 2019), which accounts for nonnormality.

### **Results**

Table 2 presents the correlations and descriptive statistics for the focal measures of Study 2.

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<sup>2</sup> We also incorporated the average number of hours spent using social media as an additional control variable. The results with this variable included were broadly similar to the results reported throughout the article, except for the suppression of relations between the psychological adjustment outcome and the WeChat—connect w/ Friends, and YouTube—seek Information social media indicators. Because of the strong, overriding *negative* effect that social media use can have on well-being and given that it may be obfuscating the more direct relations with social media within the acculturation process, we have chosen to omit it from the results we have presented. Further details can be obtained from the first author.

**Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Study Variables.**

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Gender	0.72	0.45	-																		
2. Age	37.78	10.30	-.08	-																	
3. Education	3.26	1.05	-.17	-.05	-																
4. Years in Canada	6.19	2.61	.00	.00	-.13	-															
5. WeChat-Info	4.95	1.67	.03	.11	-.12	-.05	-														
6. WeChat-Learn	2.14	1.52	-.11	.23	-.13	-.28	.26	-													
7. WeChat-Imm.	6.43	1.08	.20	.11	.07	-.11	.30	.01	-												
8. WeChat-Friends	6.78	0.77	.15	.01	.01	-.18	.21	.04	.38	-											
9. YT-Info	3.78	1.59	.04	.02	.02	-.07	-.09	.22	-.14	.09	-										
10. YT-E.Show	4.29	1.83	.05	-.12	-.05	.08	-.01	.10	-.05	.05	.36	-									
11. YT-C.Show	4.39	1.69	.16	-.11	.04	.17	.10	.09	-.03	.11	.30	.28	-								
12. YT-Learn	3.48	1.79	-.04	.14	-.08	-.07	.05	.25	.02	.08	.46	.40	.25	-							
13. FB-Info	2.13	1.43	-.01	-.10	.08	-.09	-.10	-.07	-.11	-.08	.16	.02	-.09	-.07	-						
14. FB-Connect	3.00	1.97	.12	-.20	.07	.06	-.16	-.08	-.09	-.06	.29	.13	.06	.03	.68	-					
15. FB-Learn	1.80	1.29	-.05	.01	.00	.02	-.03	.20	-.21	-.08	.34	.19	.02	.25	.52	.60	-				
16. Sociocultural Ad.	4.43	1.10	-.06	-.24	.26	.03	-.12	-.24	-.10	-.02	.06	-.05	.00	.05	.24	.22	.18	-			
17. Psychological Ad.	5.30	1.05	-.01	-.07	.05	-.16	-.12	.00	-.05	.11	.27	.07	.01	.22	.22	.16	.17	.54	-		
18. Chinese ID	5.21	1.28	.10	.01	-.01	.13	.22	.08	.22	.26	-.01	-.05	.13	-.05	.01	.00	-.04	-.02	-.09	-	
19. Canadian ID	4.40	1.15	-.02	.04	-.07	-.15	.00	.05	-.09	.16	.22	.02	-.09	.19	.15	.14	.21	.45	.59	-.07	-
20. English Skills	6.27	2.16	-.03	-.41	.33	.16	-.17	-.32	-.12	-.11	.00	.10	.01	-.03	.26	.34	.22	.64	.20	-.04	.17

*Note.*  $n = 145$ . Info = consuming information about Canada; Learn = learning English; Imm= connecting with Chinese immigrants; Friends = connecting with family and friends in China; E.Show = watching English shows; C.Show = watching Chinese shows; Connect = interacting with local Canadians; Chinese ID = Chinese identity; Canadian ID = Canadian identity; Ad = adaptation.

$p < .05$  for correlations  $\geq |.17|$ ,  $p < .01$  for correlations  $\geq |.22|$ .

Model fit indices from the CFAs are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Discriminant Validity Confirmatory Factor Analyses for the Acculturation Outcomes.**

	$\chi^2$	$\chi^2/c$	<i>df</i>	<i>#fp</i>	CFI	RMSEA [90% CI]	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta\chi^2 df$
Five-factor	181.34*	1.05	94	58	.95	.08 [.06, .10]	–	–
Four-factor	508.94*	1.05	98	54	.78	.17 [.15, .18]	329.75*	4
One-factor	1,148.94*	1.09	104	48	.43	.26 [.25, .27]	741.19*	10
							424.10*	6

Note.  $\chi^2/c$  = scaling correction factor for  $\chi^2$ ; *df* = degrees of freedom; *#fp* = number of parameters; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; 90% CI = 90% confidence interval for RMSEA estimate;  $\Delta\chi^2$  = Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  difference statistic (Satorra & Bentler, 2001);  $\Delta\chi^2 df$  = degrees of freedom for  $\Delta\chi^2$ . In the row for the four-factor model, the  $\Delta\chi^2$  and  $\Delta\chi^2 df$  columns reflect the nested model comparison against the five-factor model. For the one-factor model, the top  $\Delta\chi^2$  and  $\Delta\chi^2 df$  values present the comparison against the five-factor model and the comparison against the four-factor model (bottom).

\*  $p < .01$ .

Using common guidelines for model fit indices, values for the comparative fit index (CFI)  $\geq .90$  and  $\geq .95$  and values for the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $\leq .08$  and  $\leq .05$  were taken as indicative of adequate and strong fit, respectively (see L. T. Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016). As such, the hypothesized five-factor CFA model was deemed optimal and demonstrated reasonably strong fit,  $\chi^2(94) = 181.34$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .95, and RMSEA = .08 (90% CI [.06, .10]). Moreover, the five-factor model fit significantly better (i.e.,  $p < .001$ ) than any alternative model with fewer factors (i.e., a four-factor model that specified a single factor for all the sociocultural adaptation and English skills indicators, which were the two most highly correlated variables;  $r = .62$ ; see Table 2). Harman's single factor test,  $\chi^2(104) = 1,148.94$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .43, and RMSEA = .26 (90% CI [.25, .27]) suggested that common method variance was marginal (i.e., less than 45% of the total variance). Though this does not rule out common method bias, it does suggest that common method variance unlikely confounds results for our more focal analyses. Taken together, these results support the construct validity of the sociocultural adaptation, psychological adaptation, Chinese identification, Canadian identification, and English skills acculturation outcomes.

The next step in our analyses incorporated the five acculturation factors into a SEM and regressed each factor on the 11 social media indicators (and the control variables). Fit of this model was also reasonably strong,  $\chi^2(256) = 382.67$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .94, and RMSEA = .06 (90% CI [.05, .07]). Table 4 presents the full set of relations estimated by this model, but in the interest of brevity, we only highlight relations for the social media indicators that were statistically significant.

**Table 4. Structural Equation Modeling Results.**

	Sociocultural Adaptation			Psychological Adaptation			Chinese ID			Canadian ID			English Skills		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>
Gender	-.03	.19	-.01	.01	.19	.00	.06	.24	.02	.00	.23	.00	-.02	.35	.00
Age	-.02**	.01	-.22	-.01	.01	-.09	-.01	.01	-.07	.00	.01	.04	-.07**	.01	-.34
Education	.21*	.09	.21	.04	.08	.04	.05	.08	.05	-.08	.10	-.07	.58**	.15	.29
Years	.01	.03	.02	-.02	.03	-.06	.11*	.04	.26	-.05	.05	-.10	.09	.06	.12
WeChat-Info	.01	.05	.01	-.04	.06	-.08	.02	.07	.03	.04	.07	.05	-.01	.09	-.01
WeChat-Learn	-.14*	.06	-.21	-.02	.06	-.03	.18*	.08	.25	-.06	.07	-.08	-.25*	.12	-.18
WeChat-Imm.	-.07	.09	-.07	-.05	.08	-.06	.18	.11	.18	-.17	.10	-.16	-.08	.14	-.04
WeChat-Friends	.06	.09	.04	.17*	.08	.14	.37*	.16	.26	.32**	.11	.22	-.13	.10	-.05
YouTube-Info	.02	.06	.03	.11*	.06	.18	-.01	.08	-.02	.13	.07	.18	-.10	.11	-.08
YouTube-E.Show	-.09	.06	-.15	-.04	.05	-.08	-.07	.06	-.12	-.05	.06	-.08	.05	.08	.04
YouTube-C.Show	-.02	.06	-.03	-.05	.05	-.09	.03	.07	.04	-.10	.07	-.14	-.06	.10	-.05
YouTube-Learn	.10	.05	.16	.12*	.05	.22	-.04	.07	-.06	.11	.07	.16	.10	.10	.09
FB-Info	.12	.09	.17	.19**	.07	.27	.10	.10	.13	.06	.09	.07	.05	.15	.04
FB-People	-.01	.06	-.02	-.04	.06	-.08	.00	.07	.00	.02	.08	.03	.16	.12	.16
FB-Learn	.10	.08	.13	-.01	.07	-.01	-.03	.10	-.04	.08	.09	.09	.23	.16	.14
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.24**			.19**			.21**			.20**			.43**		

*Note.* *b* = unstandardized coefficient; *SE* = standard error; *B* = standardized coefficient. Info = consuming information about Canada; Learn = learning English; Imm= connecting with Chinese immigrants; Friends = connecting with family and friends in China; E.Show = watching English shows; C.Show = watching Chinese shows; Connect = interacting with local Canadians; Chinese ID = Chinese identity; Canadian ID = Canadian identity.

\* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01.

For the sociocultural adaptation outcome, using WeChat for the purpose of learning English contributed negatively,  $b = -.14$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ . Although none of the other social media indicators demonstrated significant relations, with all 11 indicators included (and the control variables), 24% of the variance was explained,  $R^2 = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ . For psychological adaptation, using WeChat to communicate with family and friends added to the prediction,  $b = .17$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .05$ . In addition, using YouTube to both seek information about the host nation and learn English contributed significantly,  $b = .11$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p < .05$ , and  $b = .12$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ , respectively. Additionally, using Facebook to seek information related positively to psychological adaptation,  $b = .19$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p < .01$ . In total, 19% of psychological adaptation's variance was explained by the set of predictors,  $R^2 = .19$ ,  $p < .01$ .

In the prediction of Chinese identity, using WeChat to communicate with family and friends contributed positively,  $b = .37$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p < .05$ , although no other focal predictor contributed significantly,  $R^2 = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ . Results were highly similar for the Canadian identification outcome: Using WeChat to communicate with family and friends was positively related,  $b = .32$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p < .01$ , and the overall variance accounted for was  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $p < .01$ . Finally, with English skills as the outcome, using WeChat for learning English contributed negatively,  $b = -.25$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .05$ . Though this may seem counterintuitive, it corresponds with our earlier theorizing, and we consider this negative relation more deeply in the Discussion section. Although only one social media indicator demonstrated a significant relation, the set of predictors, when taken together, accounted for 43% of the variance in English skills,  $R^2 = .43$ ,  $p < .01$ .

In sum, Study 2 revealed several noteworthy relations among the social media indicators identified by the focus groups in Study 1. Furthermore, for each of the acculturation outcomes, at least one of the social media variables contributed significantly to prediction. Although not every social media variable played a substantial role, suggesting a degree of differential importance, significant proportions of variance for each acculturation outcome were accounted for, underscoring the importance of social media use in predicting and explaining acculturation of immigrants.

## Discussion

This project examined Chinese immigrants' use of social media and their acculturation in Canada through a mixed-method project involving focus groups and a survey. The results of both studies—focusing on social media use and acculturation outcomes, respectively—enrich the current literature, which is predominantly based on student samples (e.g., Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016) and mainly examines the general use of social media (e.g., Du & Lin, 2019). Our two-study design contributes unique answers to questions that could not be addressed through a single-method study. Specifically, building on the results of the focus groups, our survey targeted particular platforms and the specific uses of each platform to test relations among social media use and acculturation outcomes.

Together, results of the two studies revealed immigrants' preference for using WeChat, YouTube, and Facebook and how these platforms are used for different communication activities. For instance, WeChat was used for connecting with family and friends back home and connecting with Chinese immigrants in Canada. WeChat was also used to obtain information about both countries. In addition, results showed that different social media communication activities were differentially associated with acculturation outcomes.

For example, using YouTube to obtain information about Canada was positively related to psychological adaptation, but using WeChat for the same purpose was not related to any acculturation outcomes. Together, our results emphasize the importance of differentiating specific uses of social media to better understand its role in the acculturation process.

Our research also provides insights into the discrepancies in previous researchers' findings. WeChat is the major platform that Chinese immigrants used to connect with friends and family back home, and such use was positively related to psychological adaptation, Chinese identity, and Canadian identity. Although it is not surprising to see that this communication activity is positively related to ethnic identity (Hofhuis et al., 2019), it is interesting to see that it also contributes to psychological adaptation and receiving-country identity. Previous studies (e.g., Allison & Emmers-Sommer, 2011) found that ethnic communication on social media distances immigrants from the host culture, but our results suggest otherwise. One possible explanation is that when talking to family and friends back home, immigrants intentionally emphasize the positive aspects of their immigration/acculturation experiences. Thus, it reinforces immigrants' appreciation of the receiving country, which in turn contributes to psychological adaptation and receiving-country identity. Another important finding was that learning English on WeChat was negatively related to sociocultural adaptation and English skills. It might be that, despite trying to acquire language skills on WeChat, immigrants can only access lower-quality content, which adversely influences language skills and gives false impressions of the receiving country.

YouTube is mainly used for mass communication, and two types of activities contribute to psychological adaptation: using YouTube to learn English and to obtain information about Canada. These results expand the current literature by examining the influences of mass social media communication, given that previous studies predominantly focused on interpersonal communication (e.g., Hofhuis et al., 2019). The results support the previous conclusions that social media usage is positively related to psychological adaptation (Yu et al., 2019) and bolsters the need to distinguish specific social media communication activities that may uniquely contribute to psychological adaptation. One surprising result is that watching English-language shows on YouTube did not relate to any acculturation outcomes, whereas past studies (e.g., Moon & Park, 2007) found that receiving country mass media communication contributes to acculturation. One possible reason is that although the shows are in English, YouTube content is less structured than traditional TV shows. Thus, this host mass communication activity may not contribute to acculturation.

Facebook is used for both mass and interpersonal communication, and largely for host communication. Looking for information about Canada on Facebook was positively related to psychological adaptation, which supports previous findings on the positive role of Facebook (e.g., Park et al., 2014). However, it was surprising that connecting with local Canadians on Facebook was not associated with any acculturation outcomes; previous studies have suggested that host interpersonal communication on social media contributes to key acculturation variables (e.g., Ju et al., 2016). Studies of international students indicated that Facebook is mainly used to connect with friends made at school (e.g., Hofhuis et al., 2019). Nonstudent immigrants may not have the opportunity to make friends on social media, and thus, host interpersonal communication on Facebook was limited. This result highlights the importance of differentiating the acculturation experiences of immigrants and international students.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

This project has several theoretical implications. It expanded the scope of the ITCCA by exploring the ethnic, host, mass, and interpersonal communication across different social media platforms, and their associated outcomes. While all types of communication happen on social media, they play different roles in acculturation, resulting in a complex process. Our findings suggest that mass media communication on different platforms had different influences on acculturation, and thus we update the literature on mass media and acculturation in the social media context. Host mass communication activities on YouTube were positively related to psychological adaptation. However, same activities on WeChat had no or a negative relation to acculturation outcomes. Such results also emphasize the importance of recognizing the intricate nature of communication on social media because the same activity on different platforms demonstrated differential relations with acculturation outcomes. Based on these findings, we advocate for ongoing research to incorporate a more nuanced approach when studying social media and acculturation, and we argue that the ITCCA could be further broadened in the context of social media by differentiating specific communication activities on different platforms.

This project also produced findings that did not align with the ITCCA or previous studies (e.g., S. Hu et al., 2020). The ITCCA suggests that ethnic communication distances immigrants from the host culture, creates alienation from and negative perceptions of the receiving country, and discourages motivation to acculturate (e.g., Croucher & Rahmani, 2015). However, ethnic interpersonal social media communication (connecting with friends and family back home on WeChat) contributed to psychological adaptation and receiving country identity. This might be due to the glorifying function of social media, which suggests that people tend to make themselves look better on social media. This interesting finding indicates that social media may bring new dynamics to the types of communication suggested by the ITCCA during the acculturation process.

### ***Practical Implications***

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced settlement agencies to quickly pivot their programs online (Esses et al., 2021). In this context, findings from this project can inform future settlement programming. Because using WeChat to learn English was negatively associated with English skills, immigrant-serving agencies can encourage newcomers to avoid this platform for language acquisition. Moreover, given that newcomers turn to social media to acquire receiving-country language skills, agencies can leverage this trend to create their own virtual language platforms or virtual language channels on YouTube.

Results from the current study suggest that finding resettlement information using social media platforms is positively associated with psychological adaptation. This builds on previous studies demonstrating that newcomers rely heavily on social media for resettlement information (Ahmed, Veronis, & Alghazali, 2020). Prearrival information programs and postarrival resettlement programs are encouraged to harness the power of social media for providing newcomers with valuable information. It is important to ensure that such information is accurate and helps to foster realistic expectations about life in the receiving country.

### ***Limitations and Future Research Directions***

Although we believe that our results will generalize to other newcomer groups, our sample only comprised Chinese adults living in Canada for less than 10 years. It will be important to replicate this research with different groups of newcomers living in different countries. Additionally, because acculturation is a dynamic phenomenon, intensive longitudinal designs (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013) will be needed to examine changes over time. The current research controlled for key demographic variables but did not include any other individual difference variables. Future researchers are encouraged to include measures of immigrants' acculturation attitudes (Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher, 2019), which are known to be important predictors of acculturation outcomes. Importantly, the cross-sectional nature of the current studies does not facilitate causal inferences. Thus, research that uses experimental designs may be needed.

### **Conclusion**

Our study emphasizes the importance of differentiating specific uses of social media to better understand its role in the acculturation process, recognizing that the same communication activity on different platforms impacted acculturation outcomes differently. Thus, the medium is, at least in part, the message. Social media has become ubiquitous in newcomers' resettlement experiences (Veronis et al., 2018). This is particularly the case now that policy decisions and the COVID-19 pandemic have pushed immigrant-serving agencies to create virtual programs (Helps et al., 2020). By shedding light on how Chinese immigrants use ethnic, host, mass, and interpersonal communication across different platforms throughout the acculturation process, findings from the current study expand the scope of the ITCCA and offer important practical implications for service providers.

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