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The Role of Social Networking Systems in the Lives of International Students: Collective Case Studies of Six Saudi Students in an Australian Higher Education Environment

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Cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) has become a pressing issue in a progressively more globalized communication context, particularly for international students who move away from familiar connections in their home country. The adaptation process may result in experiences of pressure, anxiety and depression. Today's communicative patterns have been carried out to another level, especially with the phenomenon of social networking systems (SNS). This paper addresses the experiences Saudi students who study and the role that social networking systems (SNS) plays in helping them to overcome their difficulties during their adaptation process. The paper first provides a discussion of the relevant literature relating to international students' concerns and the affordances of social networking systems (SNS). Second, it describes a qualitative collective case studies that aim to explore in-depth the usage of social networking systems (SNS) on these students' psychological, educational and socio-cultural adjustment. The main result of the study s is use of social networking systems general and Facebook in particular have greater impact on Saudi international students' psychological, educational and socio-cultural adjustment.

Key words: Social networking systems, Saudi international students, Cross-cultural adaptation (CCA), psychological, educational, socio-cultural adjustment, collective case-studies.

Introduction

Saudi Who study abroad are facing personal, academic and social adjustment problems within Australian universities (Alhazmi & Nyland ,2010. Communication is central to the adjustment (Kin, 2008 Y. Y. Kim ,2008) and social networking systems (SNS) are the communication channels of today's students; using them enables international students to adjust to their new life and solve their problems (Magro and Ssharp, 2011; Ismail, 2010). Therefore, conceptualizing the linkage between communication via social networking systems and cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) is worth investigating to give tools for helping international students overall experiences.

The significance of the study

This study tries to understand how the experience of Saudi students who study abroad students is being changed by using social networking systems. The significance of the study is fourfold: 1)there is an increasing number of Saudi students who study abroad worldwide, particularly in Australian universities (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, February 2011), 2) the paucity of literature that addresses the experience of this particular group in comparison with other international students from other countries Alhazmi & Nyland (2010) The educational and cultural adjustments are considered to be a major issue affecting the educational achievements and the lives of international students in general and Saudis in particular Ali & Kohun, (2009);

Furnham, (2004), 4) Social networking systems (SNSs) could contribute to bridging these difficulties (Ismail ,2010). Thus, investigating the linkage between these issues and thinking of new ways to employ such systems educationally could make the experience of being Saudi students who study abroad more successful.

Objective of the study

1- Understanding the experiences of cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) amongst Saudi international students entering Australian universities.

2- Identifying the role of social networking systems (SNS) in overcoming emerging challenges during the experiences of cross-cultural adaptation (CCA)

3- Generating recommendations that could serve in enriching the experience of Saudi international students entering Australian universities.

The generic objectives of the research underlie the following research question:

- What is the impact of using SNS in the cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) process of Saudi international students in Australian university?

Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations, although the oriented aims of it have been reached. First, this study may not be totally representative of the broader population. It involves only Saudi international students within Australian universities, thus, the generalizability of the results to other nationalities or to other Saudi students studying in other countries would not be possible. Second, the method used in this research does not present the actual

picture, as a more experimental method is needed. This limitation provides opportunities for further research that should consider broader empirical studies to bring a more accurate picture of the phenomenon being investigated.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Social Networking Systems

According to (Boyd and Ellison ,2007), social networking systems (SNS) have been defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, 210). A social networking system is defined as a network of people using online services that contains specific activities through a free space and software (Ceccomi, 2008). It is defined also as a subgroup of friends having a social interaction based on a Web site (Crock, 2008). Another description (Richter & Koch ,2008) suggests that SNS is an application that provides users the functional ability to manage their identity and to keep in touch with other users.

Facebook began in February 2004. And it is one of the most popular computer-mediated communication tools. By 2011, Facebook reached more than 500 million active users; half of them access Facebook through their mobile phone social networking services. In these social networking services, people can post their pictures and create images about how they view themselves. Moreover, they are able to view the profiles of other people or those people within their network. People can also update their profile and instantly know about the lives of the people within their network (Kennedy et al, 2007).

Social networking sites have unique features. They grant greater connection among individuals that could not otherwise be obtained. SNSs give users an opportunity to meet and connect with strangers, And enable them to make their social network visible (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The social networking systems' unique features, according (Burden&Atkinson, 2008) are:

- Connectivity and social rapport
- Collaborative information discovery and sharing
- Content creation
- Knowledge and information aggregation

Content modification

Studies of International Students

The study of international education has been made through the experiences of international students in this new environment and the business aspect as a product that has to be marketed and promoted (Alhazmi&Nyland, 2010). International students can experience remarkable problems associated with coping with a new educational system, cultural differences, and language barriers and adapting to their academic life (Alhazmi&Nyland, 2010; Furnham, 2004). International students are "young, well educated, highly motivated, adaptable and better than their peers. But some remain vulnerable to depression, illness and poor academic performance" (Furnham, 2004). In addition, they are a vital and increasing group in the universities. Therefore, the importance of understanding these issues

and providing needed support is a critical and significant consideration (Furnham, 2004).

The more social connection there is between local and international students, the better those international students do in completing academic goals, obtaining English fluency, maintaining higher grades, using university facilities in better ways, having greater identity sense, and having greater satisfaction in the coursework, in university life and in life overall (Sovic, 2009). The required social support is associated with "the sense of community, belonging or identification with the university."

The social isolation amongst students and its impact in reducing their academic achievements Are of serious concern. (Ali & Kohun ,2009) argued that the "students who are more socially open and mix with students from different backgrounds have more of a chance to be socially integrated into the program and a better prospect for completing their doctorate degree" (p. 2). Providing social mechanisms to enhance the connection between students and the faculty will enhance their opportunity to promote their educational and cultural adaptations (Ali&Kohun, 2009; Ryan et al, 2011).

International Students in Australia

Australia has been an attractive destination for international students. This has made a powerful contribution to the Australian economy and has brought more cultural diversity to Australian universities (Hellsten, 2002). Every year, Australia has welcomed thousands of students from all over the world (Yang, 2009). From the international students' perspective, being

in Australia is an excellent opportunity to obtain a higher level of education. The Australian higher education sector is ranked as the first educational sector that recorded a rapid increase in terms of attracting international students with a 16.4% growth from 2008 to 2011(Australian Government Department of Education, 2011).

There are numerous challenges that face the international student in Australian education (Neri & Ville, 2006). The well-known term "culture shock," which is considered a global phenomenon amongst international students, is one serious challenge that can be manifested in other forms such as anxiety, insecurity and other senses of unhappiness. The geographical isolation of Australia from the rest of the world, the significant differences in culture and language, and especially the issues that relate to educational concepts, including the differences in educational philosophies, styles and practices create anxiety for many students. International students have more difficulty adapting themselves to their courses in terms of understanding the course material and participating in class discussion by comparison to domestic students Neri&Ville, 2006). Building social network friendships through SNSs would be a successful method for enhancing these students' academic achievements Neri&Ville, 2006).

International students face cultural constraints within the Australian cultural and academic environment as these surroundings are new and unfamiliar (Hellsten, 2002). The communication methods used between the university staff and these students from different

backgrounds and cultures needs to be changed (Hellsten, 2002). These differences in communication include teaching and learning styles, students' relationships with the lecturer and other students, problem solving, the time concepts and space concepts. Understanding these cultural differences helps Australian universities to provide an appropriate learning environment Christopher (2004).

Background Information Regarding Saudi International Students

In Australia, the existing literature sheds light mainly on international students from East Asia and India (Alhazmi & Nyland,2010). Saudi students are inarguably different from other international students because of two unique features. First, most of them are sponsored by the Saudi government, and they are offered financial and academic support. Thus, they do not suffer from financial concerns such as employment, accommodation and tuition fees. Second, they come from the most gender-segregated environment in the world to a highly mixed gender educational environment. This has made the experience of Saudi students unique (Alhazmi&Nyland, 2010).

The scholarship program of King Abdullah established in 2005 has given the opportunity for all Saudi students to study overseas. There aremore than 80,500 Saudi students studying overseas (ministry of Higher education Deputyship for Planning and Information, 2010). This number is expected to increase to 140,000 students in 2014 as a result of the decision to expand the program for an additional five years

(Mahboob, 2010). As Australia is one of the most attractive education environments, the number of Saudi international students has grown rapidly up to 12,500 students in 2010 (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2010). The majority of them are under the scholarship program of King Abdullah. This program aims to qualify Saudis to carry about a high level of academic and professional standards in the work environment and exchange scientific, educational and cultural experiences with countries worldwide (Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, 2011).

Saudi students in Australian education are facing six main issues regarding their experiences. These are: difficulty in the beginning, cultural identity, adjustment, mixing of gender, social networks and engagements challenges (Alhazmi & Nyland,2010). The first and most serious challenge for Saudi international students within the Australian educational environment is the phenomenon of being apart from their social and friendship networks (Alhazmi & Nyland,2010). These concerns and their impact on their educational and cultural adaptations have not been examined adequately in the literature (Alhazmi & Nyland,2010). Importantly, the majority of existing research concerning the Saudi international students' experiences is out of date (Alhazmi & Nyland ,2010).

Cross-cultural Adaptation and the Use of SNS

Cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) is a socialization process by which newcomers begin and sustain relationships with others

in a new social environment (Burgoon & Hubbard,2005). Therefore, cultural adaptation requires sojourners to directly interact with the host culture and to adjust to all aspects of a new culture (Samovar & Porter,2004). Communication is considered to supply "an essential mechanism that connects people from another culture and the host society" (Kim, 1997, 407). In general, the use of the internet has been acknowledged in its effectiveness on social adjustment and psychological well-being for international students (Ye ,2006) K. H. (Kim, Yun, & Yoon ,2009). The cultural-bridging experience is a process that requires time, the complexity of relationships between environmental circumstances and the behavioral capital of the individuals concerned in changing environments (Y. Y. Kim,1988). In the research on cross-cultural adaptation (CCA), the time factor is a central concern, while the communication is the central of adjustment. In today's communication further enhancement is being driven by new technologies, above all though social networking systems (SNS) that plays the essential role of communication across people around the world.

METHODOLOGY

- **Research Design**

To answer the research questions accurately, rich and in-depth exploration was needed. Thus, this research was designed based on a qualitative case study methodological approach. Qualitative research is the study of a phenomenon in an open-ended manner within its context (Johnson & Christensen ,2010). Case studies focus on bringing richness and depth to detailed data regarding one or multiple cases by catching the complexity of that case(s) through a selection of data sources (Stake ,1995, Johnson & Christensen ,2010. Yin ,2003) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". (Yin ,2003) asserts that a case study is used (1) to answer the "who" and "why" questions; (2) when the behaviour of participants cannot be manipulated; (3) when it is essential to cover the "contextual conditions" as they are related to the phenomenon being studied; and (4) when there are no clear boundaries between the issue and the context. Therefore, case-study was the most appropriate methodology to effectively carry out this research as it meets the needs and nature of this study especially the collective case studies design. Collective case studies are used when the researcher believes that a certain phenomenon could be better understood through multiple cases (Johnson & Christensen,2010). (Although, Johnson & Christensen,2010) indicates that employed 10 cases in a collective case study is common in educational research, six cases are employed in this study.

The major problem with the case study is that there are many objectives involved. Thus, (Yin ,2003) and Stake (1995) emphasize that it is necessary to ensure that the case study remains reasonably in scope by binding the case, whereby the case study tells a story about a bounded system. Binding the case could be obtained by (1) time and place (Creswell,2002); (2)

time and activity (Stake ,1995); and (3) definition and context (Miles & Huberman ,1994). Such boundaries should not only indicate the inclusion and exclusion criteria, but also the breadth and depth of the study (Baxter & Jack,2008). For this research, the cases are the experiences of the six students Who study abroad during their process of cross-cultural adaptation in Australian context.

- **Methods of data collections**

A triangulation was employed Through using three methods of data collection in this research: (1) Documentary analysis, which generates an initial understanding of participants stories and the role of SNS in their lives and generated the semi-structured interviews; and (2) In-depth interviews To generate and build initial thematic analysis of the students' adjustment experiences; (3) Focus group reviewing the findings and drawing important themes from the participant (see fig 1).

1- Documentary analysis

In order to grasp fundamental phenomenon in a qualitative study, documentary analysis can provide extensive information for researchers (Creswell ,2002). Documentary data are secondary or existing data, which come in different forms and for different purposes, such as "personal documents, official documents, physical data and archived research data" (Johnson & Christensen ,2010). In this research this method is used to get initial picture of the research cases. Greater attention is given to participants' personal documents such as their dairy, CVs and their social networking sites.

2- In-depth Interview

Interview was used to gather information about the research participants' "thoughts, beliefs, reasoning, motivations and feelings about the topic" (Johnson & Christensen, 2007). Open-ended questions Were used, and the general themes of the interview discussion (1) The experience of being an international student, (2) The experience of using SNSs, and (3) How these two experiences are integrated together to provide a better psychological, educational and socio-cultural adjustment and over all positive cross-cultural experiences. These three measurements were at the heart of the discussion on psychological, educational and socio-cultural adjustment

3- Focus group

Focus group with students conducted to address the students' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions. Focus group is a discussion that moderating by a researcher or a moderator using open-ended questions amongst set of individuals regarding a phenomenon within specific conditions. It is named "focus" because the researcher keeps the discussion focusing on the phenomenon being researched (Johnson & Christensen,2010). By doing this, a great amount of information will be obtained to ensure the participants positions

Participants

The non-random purposive sampling technique was used in this research. Johnson and Christensen (2010) assert that the researcher sets up specific characteristics of the population; then, the sample is drawn according to these inclusion and exclusion criteria. In a case study, the researcher selects a small group

of subjects in order to examine a certain pattern of behaviour (Stake,1995); therefore, only six participants were recruited.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis was employed to analyze the research interview data; The importance of organizing the data in a database effectively is highly requested (Yin ,2003). Thus, qualitative research software such as NVivo9 assists the researcher to direct, form and builds a sense of formless and raw information. It doesn't think in place of the researcher; it offers a sophisticated workspace that allows the researcher to work through the information easily.

Fig 1 process of generating data
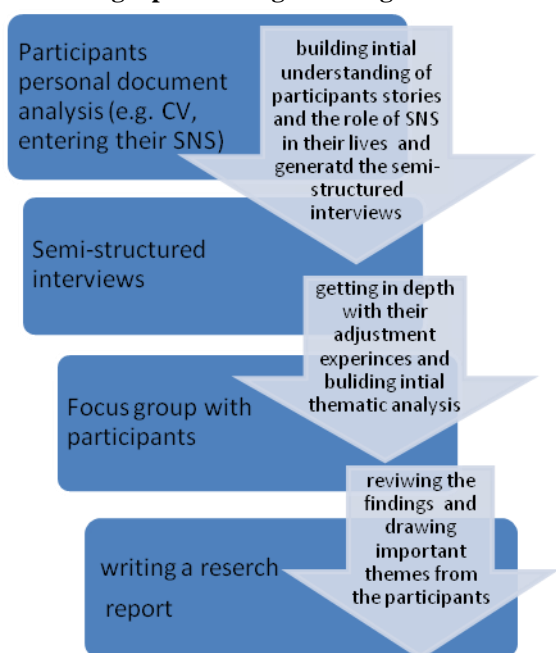
Validity and trustworthiness

A qualitative researcher must consider validity and reliability issues when designing research, analysing findings, and judging the study's quality (Patton ,2001). The essential criteria of quality in qualitative research are credibility (refers to internal validity), confirmability (refers to objectivity), dependability (refers to reliability), and transferability (refers to external validity/generalizability) Guba and Lincoln (1985).

Descriptive validity is the realistic accuracy of the reported data, which can be obtained by the investigator's triangulation from those collaborating in the data collection and interpretation, for example, the interviewees or observers. This makes the influences of individual subjectivity more balanced and avoids bias (Johnson & Christensen 2010, 265). The investigator triangulation was employed. Once all investigators are in agreement about the study, the research will be more credible Johnson & Christensen (2010)

Interpretive validity measures the degree to which the research participants' thoughts, perceptions, and experiences are aligned truthfully with what is being studied. One significant strategy to obtain this is by asking for the participants' feedback through discussion at the conclusion of the study (Johnson & Christensen ,2010). Two participants were asked to have focus group discussion regarding the research findings of this study. Another strategy is to use "low-inference descriptors", which allows readers to experience the actual language of the participants. This was taken into consideration when writing the research report.

Theoretical validity is the extent to which a theoretical explanation matches the data; this is normally more implicit and less explicit. It is obtained through: (1) extended fieldwork by spending sufficient time understanding the research

Internal validity refers to the degree to which an observed relationship is causal

based on the researcher's justification in the conclusion Johnson & Christensen ,2010). This can be obtained by using triangulation methods, intermixing multiple research methods to overcome weaknesses and strengths of one method and to obtain better evidence (Johnson & Christensen ,2010). Because the researcher uses multiple types of collecting evidence, this validates the narrative account (Creswell & Miller,2000). Three methods were used, each of which served the general aims of this research. Shenton (2004) added the importance of "reflective commentary" as a strategy to obtain internal validity, whereby the researcher reflects on the research steps as they develop. This strategy was applied to this research.

External validity is important in terms of the generalized findings (Johnson & Christensen,2010). To maximize the generalizability of the research, different strategies can be employed. Naturalistic generalization is based on the is based on the similarities between people,

circumstances, and conditions (Stake ,1990). This study could be generalized to similar Suadi students who study because collective-case studies is more interested in making general conclusions, rather than on the context itself. In addition, the methodology section gives the readers an adequate impression that the study cannot only be generalized, but also has the possibility of being replicated (Johnson ,1997). Therefore, the researcher concentrated on providing a well-written methodological section to convince the reader of the research's external validity.

FINDINGS

The Implementation of Using Saudi students study abroad in Saudi International Students' Lives

During the interviews, descriptions were given by the participants regarding their experience as Suadi students who study studying and living within the Australian environment, and their experience as users of SNS. Three major themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews using NVivo9 software as presented in Figure 1

Figure (2) The Implementation of SNS in Saudi International Students Live
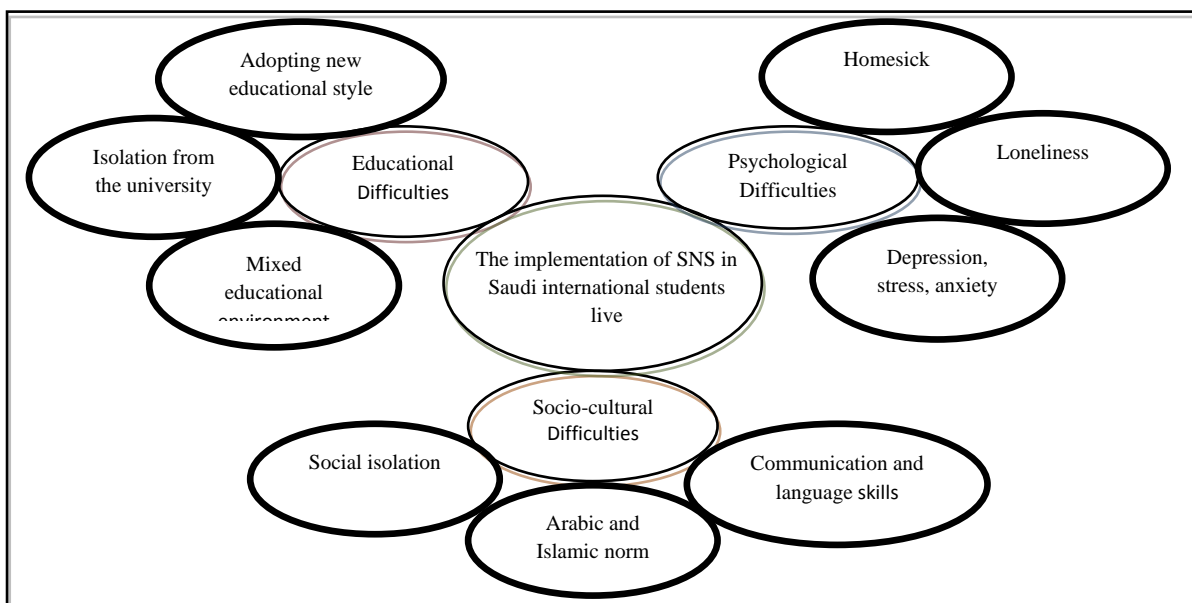
First theme: Psychological Adjustment and Social Networking Systems (SNS)

The newness of experiences surrounding being Saudi students study abroad, the newness of being in a novel environment, and the feeling that it is difficult to cope up with such new experience or that this experience is different From what they expected prior to their arrival to Australia, all together present critical psychological issues for Saudis students in Australia. They view the new cross-cultural experience as a challenge that is difficult to navigate through. Obvious problems surrounded by these students are their feelings of social isolation, loneliness, depression, stress and anxiety with the lack of friendship ties, particularly with domestic students. This agrees with (Sakurai, McCall-Wolf, & Kashima ,2010), that international students in Australia psychologically often suffer from these issues. The research participants stated that SNS has played a significant role in connecting them with their social relationship ties, expressing their feelings and maintaining emotional supports. For Maha, being a member of Facebook means a way to vent negative feelings, as she clearly explained that Facebook is a transformer of her bad mood and an encourager of moving positively:

There are many depressed feelings that have swept me during this time; this feeling makes my thinking limited on when I will come back rather than focusing on my studying…. Facebook really changed the atmosphere around me and through such help, I feel like I

am coming back to my point and refreshing my mind

Ali, as well as being influenced psychosocially in a positive way as a result of the emotional support he received online, said that:

Sometimes I feel like I am losing my aims, why I am here and what my ambition is, through the online support from my family and friends I always acquire willingness to go forwards and do my best.

This obviously tells us that SNS, especially Facebook, has a great impact on the students' psychological well-being and adjustment as an essential emotional support for international students (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe ,2007). The usage of Facebook among university students was found to interrelate with factors of psychological well-being, telling that it forced providing greater advantages for students experiencing low self-esteem and low life satisfaction that determine the psychological importance of university students lives, as Abeer said:

I feel shy asking questions in a face-to-face way. I always prefer to go home and use SNS, whether e-mail or Facebook, to ask my classmates about the course matters.

Students also illuminate the accessibility and availability of SNS, which enables them to keep in touch with their home country contacts maintaining old ties through social networking systems especially mobile phone accessibility of such systems. This helps students to overcome their psychological difficulties much more effectively while adapting to a

new environment especially in terms of social psychology as Abdullah linked his social activity via social networking sites to his psychological status:

Technologies have served my emotional needs, access to my Social networking applications via portable handheld devices makes me much more socially active than before…and I believe that I do have more friends than ever before……well…Yes… this as a result makes me psychologically satisfied because I have a lot of support.

Overall, it can be said that certain students reflect a high psychological well-being as a result of using Facebook to communicate with their home country social network. Most importantly, students who expand their online network relationships with people from the host environment express a greater satisfaction with their overall life than those who do not.

Second theme: Socio-cultural Adjustment and Social Networking Systems

Participants provide different reasons for socio-cultural adjustment problems. One of the most common and logical reasons is that their Arabic and Islamic norm is seen to be a challenge for those students to interact socially with the host environment, as Abeer said:

We, as Muslims, always avoid people, I always feel like there is a gap between me and other people around me …. I really feel I am different.

Ali also thinks that he has to protect his cultural identity, especially his religion, while trying to be successful in adopting an Australian environment which is hard for him. This also may explain the tendency of students to build co-national friendships, even online.

It helped me to succeed in many things related to my studies and helped me to positively adapt to my new life while protecting my cultural identity, which is definitely a hard task to do and full of challenges especially for those who are less experienced in life.

This is consistent with (Gresham & Walsh ,2008) study that showed that Muslim students' culture needed to be more understood by Australians in order for Muslims to be successfully adopted into Australian universities. The important issue here is that, as (Ismail ,2010) no need for has suggested, SNS are able to bridge the gap of cultures and make the diversity in the backgrounds of cultures more clear when studying international students' cultural adjustments in Malaysia. When students were asked about using SNS among different cultural backgrounds, they expressed different opinions. Abdullah thinks that SNS is building a great space of freedom to communicate, as he said:

The sharing of multimedia through social networking systems provides me open eyes to the world that helps me build understanding about what other people believe, about their cultures and even personal characteristics.

Maha thinks that this may not be possible, as she has not communicated online with people from different cultures:

I am not sure if communicating with people from different cultures will assist our understanding of each other or if the barrier will still exist.

Another issue is that students were disappointed about having friendship with local students and some describe it as being an impossible issue. This is in correspondence with Andrade (2006) research, which shows that many international students in English speaking countries were disappointed by the lack of relationship with local students. Students need to build a sense of belonging to a wider community as Sakurai, et al (2010) asserts: "The rarity of contacts and personal ties between locals and international students is a non-trivial issue as it implies a lack of opportunities for 'enrichment through internationalization' as assumed by the contemporary educational institutions and the globalizing communities. Moreover, local ties are potentially rich resources for international students' psychological, social-cultural, and academic adjustment." Students attribute that to the lack of time they spend at the university, as Ahmad said:

I go to the university only two hours a day and I have family responsibilities. For me, there is no time to build friendships with the university members, so… well; building friendships online is the best way for me

Communication skills and language ability is considered by the research participants to be a major concern for building community and friendship. According to the functional model of friendship network (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin,1977), international students characteristically form three categories of social networks, co-national, multinational and local. Local friends are friends from the host country. Multinational friends are the remaining international students from countries other than their own. Co-national friends are those from the same country of origin. Saudi students who study abroad tend to build co-national friendship ties especially online through Facebook. At the same time, students think that the language obstacle can hinder international students' efforts to build friendship and communicate with locals (Mori ,2000). International students' English capability improved their self-esteem and definitely related to more interpersonal relationships with the host environment, which is an interpretation of their adjustment and is consistent with (Duru & Poyrazli ,2007) studies that initiate that lower levels of English proficiency was a forecaster of both psychological and socio-cultural adjustment and are a predictor of acculturative stress and depression.

Students stated that they prefer to engage in a personalized network through online activities such as e-mail, mobile phone and SNS rather than to join international student associations that they do not care about. This tendency to search for offline relationships has improved their feelings of belonging to a desired community.

As Abdullah stated:

I feel like I am getting actual social network support via Facebook, my questions are answered quickly, I've getting advice faster and from experienced people.

Maha has also been supported socially via Facebook:

The majority of my social activity is carried out online, once I arrived to Australia, I've become an active user of Facebook. It really helped me to

connect with people in a way that could not be possible otherwise. I feel like I have 24 hours of support from my family, my friends and those whom I know here in Australia.

When they asked about their opinion on whether they will be able to use SNS such as Facebook with their classmates and lectures, they showed greater reactions. For example, Maha said:

It will be absolutely great. I can say that for certain, I will be much better in courses, at least I will communicate freely and with great confidence, and most importantly this communication runs around the clock.

Students who get the chance to communicate with other nationalities, in particular local students, have shown a deeper comfort and satisfaction with the host environment. Fatimah clearly stated that:

Yes, I've friends [followers] in my twitter from different nationalities and some of them are becoming my close friends; this enriches my experience... I think twitter for me has been an eye opener to the world around me.

This can be explained by saying that as they develop friendships, they explore the communicative pattern of the host culture and gain the essential information about people from that culture, their familiarity with the host society's communicative behavior is enhanced, which creates great satisfaction. This is consistent with (Burgoon & Hubbard ,2005) study that suggests the understanding of communicative behavior to be the individual pathway to adaptation. The share of multimedia and the posting of videos,

photos, and more through Facebook can create a bridge of understanding of such communicative behavior.

The major theme at this stage is that the student's adaptation of SNS on a daily basis, especially Facebook, has a vital influence on their socio-cultural adjustment. They are building social capital online and creating their own communities that reflect their own subjective norms which, as a result, significantly facilitates the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

Third theme: Educational Adjustment and Social Networking Systems

The research participants indicate that there are some educational difficulties they have encountered while studying in Australian universities. One difficulty is the difference in educational typology between Saudis and Australian educational styles. For instance, as Ali explains, Saudi's educational style has been inherited and the Australian educational style is one that they have adopted themselves in to. The styles are completely different, which stands to be a challenge in and of itself.

Our educational system is really the main problem that we come here with. It was based on a teacher-centered way, whereas here, it is much more learner-centered, so we came here without the sufficient skills required to deal with this new educational style, which is creating some problems.

Students view the change of their role in their educational system as being difficult. Fatimah said that this experience is much harder during the first *semester:*

Adjusting to the Australian university culture was difficult because it was completely different from how undergraduate programs back in Saudi used to be. So, the first thing I had to adjust to was the way in which classes were carried out…For new students, I would say that they will feel overwhelmed and worried at times, but the first semester is the most difficult.

The other educational problem stems from the fact that these students are coming from the most gender-segregated educational environment in the world to a highly mixed gender educational environment. One female student asserts that being in a mixed gender environment was a hard experience for her; hence, she had chosen to isolate herself instead of engaging with her classmates, particularly the male ones.

It was so hard being in the classroom with males that I have not experienced before as I come from an environment that is closed. I feel more confident socializing with them online rather than face-face communication.

When asking students about their experiences with using Blackboard, they express lower preferences of dealing with it, as Abeer said:

I really do not like Blackboard; it is such a boring system… I always feel it does not belong to me. I do not know why, I just hate the system, especially when it comes to communicating with other students.

Students demonstrate their wishes to see more use of digital applications in their courses, for example students display dissatisfaction in the communication methods between them and the faculty.

This corresponds with (Yang, 2009) who suggested that international students from "generation Y" in Australian universities need to use more digital tools in university life. Abeer points out that:

For me, Blackboard is ok for academic matters but not for building friendship or communicating with other students.

Another issue that the participants expressed is that the university culture is creating a social isolation as the transformation to more of an e-learning environment has caused a weak relationship between universities and individuals to develop. This weak relationship stems from the fact that e-learning does not require students to physically attend class, which creates a gap of social isolation for Saudi students who study abroad.

Most of the students prefer seeking information support from their friends rather than relying on the university support, as shown in this quote from Ali:

I have been receiving many benefits regarding my study, for example, through Saudi PhD students in Australia's Facebook page, students exchange their knowledge in a professional way. It is just a great tool to be educators, to know about different PhD students discipline, achievement and getting their advice, which will reflect on my study.

English proficiency presents again as a problematic issue that concerns Saudi students in the academic area. Their understanding of the lectures, writing the assignments, the written and oral examinations, and the capability to ask questions in class are stress factors,

especially with students who have low self-confidence, as Maha expressed:

Although I have a higher IELTS score and I can speak English fluently, during the class time I always feel like I have no English ability. I feel shy communicating with other students in the class, especially Australian students… sometimes I prefer to not understand rather than to ask questions.

Students believe that their main problem with English is the lack of practice, even though they are in an English speaking country. Ali also thinks that English proficiency presents as his challenge at the university in communicating with others.

During the first year of the university, the language barriers made my understanding of the course information (especially, for example, understanding unknown terms) really limited. I felt too shy to interact with the teachers' questions, especially when the teachers talked too quickly, which reduced my academic achievement.

This result is consistent with other research viewing an association between English proficiency and academic performance. (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh,2006) found that international students studying in the U.S. with low academic accomplishments reported a lower level of English proficiency and superior overall adjustment tension.

DISSCUSSION & CONCLUSION

It has been believed that the adaptation of social networking systems (SNSs) in the lives of international students could enhance their psychological, educational and socio-cultural adjustment, which, in turn, facilitates their process of cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) to the new environment. While this study sought to shed a light on whether Saudi students who study were influencing by being users of SNS and systems during their process of cross-cultural adaptation (CCA), rich information has been discovered from the findings regarding the role of such systems on the lives of international students and the dimensions of these students' cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) process are being affected by their using of SNS while studying in Australia. The main results are: (1) the adjustment challenges of these students can be viewed from three main perspectives: educational, psychological and socio-cultural aspects; (2) Saudi students who study have an obvious attitude of using SNS, in particular Facebook, which has played a significant role in the process of cross-cultural adaptation especially on their psychological well-being; and (3) students who build social networks online with different backgrounds and groups tend to be more adaptive and well-adjusted than those who do not do so; and (4) SNS are the best communicative channels for Saudi students who study to build an understanding of the host culture communicative pattern and hence enhance their overall satisfaction which will certainly affect their academic achievements.

Understanding the factors that influenced Saudi students to adopt SNS in their daily lives leads to an understanding of their motivational reasons for using such systems. The results have shown that Facebook plays a major personal and social role that Is reflected positively on these students' everyday lives.

The interview data analysis identified three main issues regarding the student's usage of SNS. One remarkable point that Was or has been generated from the results is that social networking systems (SNS) generally have a significant role in these students' lives. The result also demonstrates a significant point that Saudi students who study abroad who actively integrate social networking systems in their lives and communicate with a diversity of cultures backgrounds reflect much more satisfaction in their English proficiency, social capital, psychological well-being, and overall life satisfaction. This is consistent with past research of Cao, Pauleen, & Bathurst (2012). Social networking systems (SNS) have a great impact on Chinese students' adaptation to a New Zealand environment. Moreover, students who have experienced communicating and socializing with their classmates show more confidence in their academic context. This is accordingly true with the study (Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Chi-Wai Kwok ,2010) that looks at the impact of social networking from an educational view, which found two socialization processes (social acceptance and acculturation) that can change the experience of networking into a learning progression through their negotiation result. Moreover, this is consistent with what Ryan, et al (2011) found; SNS groups of classmates can provide valuable outcomes that potentially aid in student educational and cultural adjustment. In addition, students demonstrate their wishes to see more use of digital applications in their courses.

Implications of the Study

There are five implications generated from the study's findings in the area of cross-cultural issues in social networking sites. One dominant implication is that the gap between students' expectations prior to their arrival in Australia and the reality of sojourn is demonstrated to be a strong reason for adjustment failure as this has deepened their feelings of loneliness and homesickness, which as a result, creates much anxiety. Therefore, as long as they build prior accurate information about what their life would look like in Australia, they would be more satisfied with the upcoming experience. The students who do so reflect greater satisfaction than those who did not; this emphasizes the importance of creating connections between those who are already in Australia with the perspective students to build accurate expectations.

Although social networking systems have positively impacted the student's adaptation, it could to some extent hinder their adjustment. The frequency of use of such systems to communicate with the home country networks could limit the possibility of building new online networks with the host culture, which could not only affect their understanding of the new culture but also increase their feelings of homesickness and loneliness. This is considered to be a main problem for Saudis use of Facebook as the majority of them seeking co-national friendship. Therefore, it can be said that to some extent social networking systems could be both valuable and destructive at the same time.

Another apparent issue is that the role of SNS in general and Facebook in particular

have to be considered by instructional designers in Australian universities to help the overall educational adaptation of the students as its success outside the educational settings would be a significant gain in achieving the educational means. Students who shared union cultural backgrounds have a tendency to gather jointly. Therefore, encouraging international students' cultural assimilation with other students through utilizing SNS in their course context enables them to build friendships, sharing their cultural thoughts and, hence, motivating their sense of belonging, which helps them to overcome their social isolation (Ali & Kohun,2009). The role of the university's face book webpage, for example, should be played differently, instead of creating content that targets them as a consumer to advertise education. There has to be a shift of its content to be more social, communicative and connective with direct interaction with the university' members. Using SNS in the course content not only improves the learning environment but also builds a cohesive relationship between international and local students and between students and the university staff (Ismail ,2010). This is not valuable only for international students, but also the locals will benefit from this experience. To obtain this, the educators' awareness towards the importance of integrating SNS into their educational context must be raised, instructors are required to establish a SNS account with the current learning method, for example, Facebook account with giving a privacy issues adequate awareness. Supplies "seed" to stimulate the exchange of knowledge and promote the

students' participation. This understanding of the nature of learners' psychological dynamics, desires, requirements and sensitivity might establish effectiveness in exploring pedagogical issues in the online learning processes and outcomes (Barak & Williams,2007). By doing this, international students can facilitate their intercultural friendship ties, thereby contributing to the enrichment of the experiences of international students and to the internalization of the university communities more generally.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes that the adjustment into a new culture, especially one that is deeply different from their own culture, is an overwhelming experience for the international student. Therefore, the more social connection between local and international students, the more positive position among international students in academic goals, English fluency, less possibility of dropping grads, better use of university facilities, greater identity sense, greater satisfaction of the course, the university life and life overall which is consistently with the study of (Sovic ,2009). Thangiah (2010) suggests that having social networks that include locals and other international students can positively contribute to the process of student adjustment in their new environment

Importantly, according to the present findings that social networking systems provide stronger and desirable communication tools to keep in touch with past, recent and possible future friends, SNSs have a high level of importance to the international students' cross-cultural

adaptation, which is in line with (Cain ,2008).

Finally, it must be argued that encouraging students from the stage of ELICOS (English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students) to adopting and communicating with each other through SNS could bring several advantages for international students to improve their English proficiency in Australian universities. Moreover, it will give a tool to enhance the students' cross-cultural adaptation more effectively as this stage is the beginning of the new live for these students in Australia while all of their teething problems are starting from this stage.

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الدور الذي تلعبه أنظمة شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي في حياة الطلاب المبتعثين: دراسة حالة عن ستة طلاب سعوديين ضمن نطاق بيئة التعليم العالي في أستراليا

سحر سالم الغانمي

تهتم هذه الدراسة بالدور الذي تلعبه مواقع الشبكات الاجتماعية في حياة الطلاب الدوليين السعوديين. تحاول هذه الدراسة الكشف عن العلاقة بين الجوانب الثقافية والاجتماعية و النفسية في محاولة التكيف الثقافي للطلاب الدوليين السعوديين والدعم الذي يتلقونه من المجموعة الاجتماعية على الانترنت من خلال أنظمة الشبكات الاجتماعية خلال فترة التحاقهم بالدراسة بالجامعات الأسترالية. من جهة، التكيّف والتأقلم مع الحياة الأكاديمية والثقافية الجديدة وغيرها من القضايا المحيطة بتجربة الطلاب الدوليين هي من الأمور التي يدخل فيها عامل التحدي، و التي قد تؤدي إلى نتائج غير مرغوب فيها من ناحية التحصيل العلمي لهؤلاء الطلاب. ومن جهة أخرى، مواقع الشبكات الاجتماعية ظاهرة تتمتع بمميزات تتعلّق بنظرية الاتصالية ومذهب الفعالية بين الأفراد ومبدأ التعاونية بواسطة الربط الشبكي مما اجتذب الطلاب في عصرنا الحالي ليكونوا المستخدمين الرئيسيين لهذه المواقع. هذه المسائل خلقت التساؤل التالي هل مثل هذه الانظمة تستطيع ان تمكّنهم التغلب على التحديات التي تواجههم بصفتهم طلاب دوليين، تستحق إذاً هذه العلاقة أن نجري دراسة حولها.اولا نوقشت الادبيات التي تعود لموضوع البحث. ثانيا صمم هذا البحث بطريقة نوعية اعتمدت على دراسة حالة لستة من الطلاب السعوديين في أستراليا لمعرفة تأثير أنظمة الشبكات الاجتماعية على تكيفهم النفسي و الاجتماعي و الثقافي بشكل اكثر عمقا.اظهرت هذه الدراسة الدور الفعال لمثل هذه الانظمة في مساعدة الطلاب على تكيفهم النفسي و الاجتماعي و تحصيلهم العلمي كما اظهرت اهمية الاهتمام بتفعيل هذا الدور من قبل الجهات المعنية بنجاح تجربة الابتعاث من خلال بناء جسر للتواصل مع الطلاب. بالإضافة الى اهمية تفعيل هذا الدور من قبل الجامعات الاسترالية خاصة في مرحلة دراسة اللغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي، الطلاب المبتعثين السعوديين ، التعليم العالي في أستراليا