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Summary

Social network sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, hold much promise for international sojourners. International sojourners are individuals who are temporarily away from their home country to attain a particular goal in the host country (Safdar & Berno, 2016). With the use of SNSs, interactions of international sojourners with their social networks are no longer limited to face-to-face interactions in the host country. SNSs enable sojourners to communicate with significant others in the host- and the home-country. These social interactions could be helpful in maintaining meaningful relationships that are important in sojourners' overall adjustment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, scientific knowledge on the relevance of SNSs in international sojourners' adjustment is still limited. Thus, this dissertation aimed to advance our understanding of the roles of social network sites in sojourners' adjustment.

This dissertation presents a set of studies designed to answer the overarching research question: *How and to what extent do SNS interactions relate to sojourners' adjustment?* These studies were guided by a general conceptual framework derived from scholarship in various disciplines such as media and communication, cross-cultural/acclulturation psychology, clinical psychology, social psychology, and migration studies. This general framework of sojourners' adjustment was premised on the proposition that social interactions with the host- and the home-country networks impact sojourners' adjustment via subjective outcomes (such as perceived social support and homesickness) (Berry, 2003, 2006; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). The studies were conducted under two relational contexts: A broad relational context which tackled sojourners' social interactions with significant others, such as family and friends (Chapters 2 and 3); and, a specific relational context which focused on sojourners' romantic relationships (Chapters 4 and 5).

Main Findings

The roles of SNSs in Sojourners' Adjustment via Subjective Outcomes

Chapters 2 and 3 investigated the role of SNSs in sojourners' adjustment (psychological and socio-cultural adjustment) via subjective outcomes (perceived social support and homesickness) using a concurrent communication model. A concurrent communication model extends the general framework of sojourner's adjustment by accounting for the assumption that sojourners use various communication channels (e.g., face-to-face and SNS) concomitantly to interact with significant others in the home- and the host-country (Dienlin, Masur, & Treppe, 2017; Rui & Wang, 2015). These concurrent social interactions are predicted to influence subjective outcomes, which, in turn, impact adjustment. Using a 3-wave longitudinal panel model study design, studies in Chapters 2 and 3 were able to 1) account for the possible reciprocal effects of social interactions and subjective outcome, as well as subjective outcome and adjustment, and; 2) assess long-term and short-term effects among these predicted relations.

The focus of Chapter 2 was to investigate the role of SNSs in sojourners' psychological adjustment via perceived social support. Results showed that in the long-term, SNS interaction with the host-country network was detrimental to sojourners' psychological adjustment (i.e., increased depressive symptoms). SNS interaction with the host-country network undermined perceived social support, which, in turn, exacerbated depressive symptoms in the short- and the long-term. On the other hand, regular face-to-face interactions with the host-country network sustained perceived social support, contributing to better psychological adjustment (i.e., lowered depressive symptoms). Moreover, better psychological adjustment increased perceived social support in the short-term. In turn, perceived social support increased SNS interaction with the host-country network, both in the short- and the long-term.

In Chapter 3, the aim was to specifically examine the role of SNSs in sojourners' socio-cultural adjustment via homesickness. The study showed evidence that in the long- and the short-term, SNS interaction with the host-country network alleviated homesickness; which, in turn, contributed to better sociocultural adjustment. Additionally, in the short-term, homesickness increased SNS interaction with the host-country network.

Together, Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated that SNS interactions, particularly with the host-country network, could be a double-edged sword for sojourners' adjustment. It could be both problematic and beneficial in terms of impact on subjective outcomes: On the one hand, increased SNS interaction with the host-country network lowered perceived social support over time, which, in turn, decreased psychological adjustment. On the other hand, increased SNS interaction with the host-country network decreased sojourners' homesickness both in the short- and the long-term, which, in turn, facilitated sociocultural adjustment.

The role of SNSs in Sojourners' Relational Adjustment

Chapters 4 and 5 aimed to investigate the relevance of SNS in a more intimate relational context, i.e., a romantic relationship. The studies presented in these chapters were based on the assertion that SNSs affordances may be relatively more relevant in long-distance romantic relationships (LDRR). LDRR often require more effort to maintain compared to geographically-close romantic relationships (GCRR) (Aylor, 2003). Communication processes, such as the use of SNSs, might mitigate the impact of distance in LDRR (Dindia, 2003).

Chapter 4 covered a study that investigated the relevance of SNSs in romantic relationship maintenance among international sojourners who are in LDRR. Using a cross-sectional study design, international sojourners in LDRR and individuals (from the general population) who are in GCRR were compared on the relevance of SNS in maintaining their romantic relationship, particularly in: 1) expressing involvement (via relational maintenance behaviors), 2) gauging a partner's involvement (via partner surveillance), and 3) experiencing

jealousy in the relationship. The findings showed that sojourners in **LDRR** were more likely than individuals in **GCRR** to use **SNS** for relationship maintenance; particularly by using **SNS** to express their involvement and to gauge their partner's involvement in the relationship. In other words, those in a **LDRR** were more likely to perform relationship maintenance behaviors through **SNS** than those in a **GCRR**; and were also more likely to use **SNS** for partner surveillance and to experience **SNS**-related jealousy. These findings imply that **SNS** is relatively more important as a medium for relationship maintenance among those in **LDRR** than individuals in **GCRR**.

Chapter 5 extended the application of the general framework of sojourners' adjustment in the context of romantic relationships. The study tested the proposition that the use of **SNSs** facilitates relationship support from **SNS** social networks, and this, in turn, predicts relational adjustment (i.e., relationship stability and satisfaction) in romantic relationships. Via **SNSs**, romantic couples are able to build and maintain a shared network (Tong & Walther, 2011). This could prove particularly relevant for those in **LDRR**, considering that they might have geographically separated social networks, or one of them is away from their established support networks (Weiner & Hannum, 2012). Comparing **LDRR** (of sojourners) from **GCRR** using a cross-sectional study design, the results revealed that **SNS** use could be a double-edged sword for sojourners' **LDRR**: On the one hand, **SNS** use had a direct negative impact on relationship stability; on the other hand, **SNS** use increased relationship support, which in turn, increased relationship stability and satisfaction. Moreover, **SNS** use was more crucial for relationship satisfaction and stability among sojourners in **LDRR** than among individuals in **GCRR**.

Main Implications of the Findings

How and to what extent do SNS interactions relate to sojourners' adjustment? This dissertation demonstrated that any answer to the overarching research question must consider the social interaction contexts, the conceptualizations of SNS interaction and subjective outcomes, the directions of associations, and temporal lags. This is important in characterizing the complex, and somewhat paradoxical, roles of SNS in sojourners' adjustment.

The findings of this dissertation showed that despite its promising features and affordances, SNS does not necessarily make sojourners perceive significant others from home as viable sources of support while in the host country. Moreover, the more that sojourners use SNS with the host-country network, the less supported they feel over time. SNS communication with significant others from the home country also does not help in alleviating homesickness. SNS interactions with the host-country network might be helpful when they are homesick. However, this might have long-term detrimental effects, such as developing possible dependency on the medium (Slater, 2015; Sheldon, Abad, & Hinsch, 2011). In the context of romantic relationships, SNS could play a role in LDRR maintenance processes such as: Relationship maintenance behaviors, partner surveillance, and experiences of jealousy with their romantic partner; as well as in accessing relationship support from a couple's shared social network to facilitate relational adjustment.

Besides elucidating the roles of SNSs in sojourners' adjustment, this dissertation validates the importance of face-to-face interactions with the host-country network in sojourners' adjustment (Adelman, 1988; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ward et al., 2001). Regular, face-to-face interactions with the host-country network are important in sojourners' sense of social support. The results underscored the importance of building host-country network during sojourn.

In terms of theoretical contributions, this dissertation expanded the general framework of international sojourners' adjustment based on earlier theorizing in the field of cross-cultural studies (Berry, 2003, 2006; Ward et al., 2001). Moreover, by proposing a concurrent communication view in conceptualizing social interactions, recent developments in communication technology were accounted for. The concurrent communication model predicted that international sojourners use face-to-face and SNS channels concomitantly (Dienlin et al., 2017; English, et al., 2017; Rui & Wang, 2015). This implies that the use of one communication channel does not necessarily displace another, and they might have differential impacts on outcomes despite concurrent use.

Moreover, this dissertation incorporated a transactional view of media effects (Slater, 2015; Valkenburg et al., 2016). The reciprocal effects between social interactions and subjective outcomes (i.e., perceived social support and homesickness); as well as subjective outcomes and adjustment (i.e., psychological and sociocultural) were tested. With the assumption of reciprocal effects, this dissertation was also able to validate the two-process view on SNS use by Sheldon et al. (2011) by demonstrating a possible mechanism for the co-occurrence of two opposing effects in relation to SNS use.

Additionally, this dissertation advances theorizing by showing that the relevance of SNSs in sojourners' adjustment goes beyond the personal level (i.e., perceived social support), and that SNSs also play a facilitative role at the relational level (i.e., relationship support); consistent with a social network perspective on romantic relationships (Felmlee, 2001).

Practical Implications

This dissertation provides a set of results that specifies when, with whom, and which relational contexts SNS interactions might be helpful for sojourners. For instance, SNS use might be relatively less beneficial in a broad relational context compared to a more specific relational context. In the context of romantic relationships, SNS could provide a sense of

stability, continuity, and closeness among sojourners with their partners. These findings could be informative and useful for research on the reintegration process of sojourners.

The findings bear some insights that could be useful for formal support providers (e.g., counselors, school-based or community-based organizations, university offices or corporate departments that deal with international sojourners, scholarship grant providers, government institutions, etc.) in designing concerted programs and services for sojourners. For instance, programs should gear towards organizing activities that encourage enduring and meaningful face-to-face interactions and social activities between sojourners and host-country members. Programs and services should also include discussions about the implications of the use of SNS and other forms of CMC.

Finally, the findings of this dissertation could offer some insights relevant to policies, programs, and campaigns on overseas work and migration. Oftentimes, communication technology is depicted in an optimistic and celebratory manner, reinforcing the notion of a “connected migrant” (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Diminescu, 2008; Hiller & Franz, 2004). This depiction has implications on the positive framing of labor export policies of some countries at the expense of its citizens. In light of the findings of this dissertation, it is important to take a more critical and nuanced messaging regarding the roles of communication technology, such as SNSs, in sojourners’ experiences.