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Chapter 6

General Discussion

Social network sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, have become a popular means of communication in the past years (Smith & Anderson, 2018; Statistica.com, 2018). With the use of SNSs, interactions of sojourners with their social networks were no longer limited to face-to-face interactions in the host country. SNSs extended opportunities for communication with significant others in the host- and the home-country, and this could be helpful in maintaining relationships. At a glance, this was a positive development for sojourners considering that stable, meaningful relationships are important for one's overall adjustment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, the relevance of SNSs in sojourners' adjustment was yet an understudied topic. This gap in scientific knowledge was the impetus for this dissertation.

The overall goal of this dissertation was to advance our understanding of the roles of social network sites in sojourners' adjustment. To achieve this goal, I conducted a set of studies using a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on scholarship from various disciplines such as media and communication, cross-cultural/acculturation psychology, clinical psychology, social psychology, and migration studies. The starting point was to integrate the main assumptions of the seminal models on sojourners' adjustment (Berry, 2003, 2006; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), and derive a general conceptual framework that guided the research process. This general framework of sojourners' adjustment was premised on the proposition that communication processes and social interactions impact sojourners' adjustment via subjective outcomes. This served as the backbone of the studies presented in this dissertation.

This concluding chapter provides a summary of the key findings of the studies in this dissertation. It also includes an integration of the key findings across the various studies, reflecting on the theoretical implications. The last parts of this chapter discuss the methodological contributions, practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Addressing the Research Question: A Recapitulation of the Key Findings

This dissertation set out to answer this overarching research question:

How and to what extent do SNS interactions relate to sojourners' adjustment?

There were four empirical chapters presented in this dissertation to address the research question. The studies in these empirical chapters 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).

Part One: Broad Relational Context – Significant Others

In Chapters 2 and 3, the relational context of social interactions was sojourners' significant others, such as family and friends, in the home- and the host-country. Using the general framework of sojourners' adjustment as a baseline (Berry, 2003, 2006; Ward et al., 2001), I proposed and tested *a concurrent communication model* of sojourners' adjustment. 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, & Trepte, 2017; Rui & Wang, 2015). These concurrent social interactions are predicted to influence subjective outcomes, which, in turn, impact adjustment. This dissertation focused on two types of subjective outcomes, a positive subjective outcome (perceived social support in Chapter 2), and a negative subjective outcome (homesickness in Chapter 3), and their respective impact on psychological adjustment (Chapter 2), and sociocultural adjustment (Chapter 3). Moreover, Chapters 2 and 3 addressed questions on temporal lags (i.e., long-term and short-term effects) and reciprocal relations between social interactions and subjective outcomes (Meng, Martinez, Holmstrom, Chung, & Cox, 2017; Trepte & Scharkow, 2016; Slater, 2015; Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016); as well as between subjective outcomes and adjustment (Burns, Deschênes, & Schmitz, 2015; Meng et al.,

2017; Pettit, Roberts, Seeley, & Yaroslavsky, 2011; Stroebe, Schut, & Nauta, 2015a&b; Treppe & Scharrow, 2016).

Chapter 2: Social Interactions, Perceived Social Support, and Psychological Adjustment

Key Finding 1: *In the long-term, SNS interaction with the host-country network was detrimental to sojourners' psychological adjustment because it undermined perceived social support, which, in turn, exacerbated depressive symptoms in the short- and the long-term.*

Key Finding 2: *Regular face-to-face interactions with the host-country network sustained perceived social support, contributing to better psychological adjustment.*

Key Finding 3: *In the short-term, better psychological adjustment increased perceived social support. In turn, perceived social support increased SNS interaction with the host-country network, both in the short- and the long-term.*

Chapter 2 describes a longitudinal panel model study that aimed to investigate the relative impacts of social interactions (face-to-face interaction with the host-country network, and SNS interactions with the host- and home-country networks) on perceived social support (a positive subjective outcome), and, in turn, its impact on psychological adjustment. Based on previous studies, psychological adjustment was conceptualized in terms of depressive symptoms (Ward et al., 2001; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Thus, lower depressive symptoms indicated greater psychological adjustment. The results showed that SNS interaction with the host-country network lowered perceived social support in the long-term. Meanwhile, face-to-face interactions with the host-country network increased perceived social support in the short-term, consistent with previous findings (Adelman, 1988; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The results also revealed that perceived social support increased SNS interaction with the host-country both in the short- and the long-term. Moreover, perceived social support decreased depressive symptoms in the long-term. In the short-term, perceived social support and depressive symptoms negatively reinforced each other. SNS interactions with the home-country network was not associated with perceived social support. These findings imply that regular face-to-face interactions with the host-country

network are important to sustain perceived social support among sojourners. SNS interaction with the host-country network could be detrimental to sojourners' psychological adjustment by lowering perceived social support, which, in turn, heightened depressive symptoms. Notably, perceived social support was not simply an outcome, but also a predictor of SNS social interactions. Those who felt socially supported were more likely to interact with the host-country network via SNS. Taken together, the findings validate the social enhancement hypothesis, which postulates that those with thriving face-to-face social networks, and better adjustment, tend to have more active online social interactions (Lee, 2009; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007b).

Chapter 3: Social Interactions, Homesickness, and Sociocultural Adjustment

***Key Finding 4:** In the long- and the short-term, SNS interaction with the host-country network alleviated homesickness; which, in turn, contributed to better sociocultural adjustment.*

***Key Finding 5:** In the short-term, homesickness increased SNS interaction with the host-country network.*

Chapter 3 zoomed in on the relative impacts of social interactions (face-to-face interaction with the host-country, and SNS interactions with the host- and the home-country networks) on homesickness (a sojourn-related negative subjective outcome), and, in turn, its influence on sociocultural adjustment. The results indicated that SNS interaction with the host-country lowered homesickness, in the long- and the short-term. Paradoxically, homesickness increased SNS interaction with the host-country in the short-term. Face-to-face interaction with the host-country network and SNS interaction with the home-country network were not associated with homesickness. Lastly, homesickness lowered sociocultural adjustment only in the short-term. At a glance, these findings provide an optimistic depiction of the role of SNS in sojourners' adjustment. However, the reciprocal effects between SNS interaction with the host-country network and homesickness imply a positive feedback loop. According to the Reinforcing Spirals Model of Slater (2015), a positive feedback loop, if left unchecked, could

lead to extreme levels. In this case, the alleviating effects of SNS interaction on homesickness could potentially lead to ever increasing SNS use. One possible implication of these results is that users are likely to build reliance on SNS interaction for relief; and such reliance might lead to excessive SNS use or addiction (Sheldon, Abad, & Hinsch, 2011). Thus, SNS use might be helpful for sojourners in dealing with homesickness and adjustment; however, they must be aware of the potential negative implications when SNS is used to solve social difficulties.

Part Two: Specific Relational Context - Romantic Relationship

The last two empirical chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) aimed to contribute to the literature by investigating 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 romantic relationship maintenance for couples who are geographically separated. Long-distance romantic relationships (LDRR) often require more effort to maintain compared to geographically-close romantic relationships (GCRR) (Aylor, 2003). Distance, and its inevitable consequence of limited physical togetherness, is considered a threat to the survival of romantic relationships (Mok, Wellman, & Basu, 2007). However, communication processes may mitigate the impact of distance (Dindia, 2003). Thus, it was relevant to investigate how new forms of CMC, such as SNS, might impact relational adjustment of sojourners who are geographically separated from their romantic partners. The focus on SNS was important because this communication platform is unique from other forms of CMC. SNSs provide a public and a social context for interaction between partners and their social network, allowing couples to experience and share social processes that are not possible with interpersonal forms of CMC (Tong & Walther, 2011; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011).

Chapter 4: SNS use for Romantic Relationship Maintenance

***Key finding 6:** 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.*

Chapter 4 covers a study that investigated the relevance of SNSs in romantic relationship maintenance among international sojourners who are in LDRR. The roles of other forms of CMC, such as e-mail, texting, instant messaging, and video chat, have been previously investigated (Jiang & Hancock, 2008; Rintel, 2013; Tong & Walther, 2011). However, no studies have looked specifically into the roles of SNSs in LDRR despite this platform's high popularity in the general population and among sojourners. Doing a study in the context of LDRR alone would not clarify how relevant SNS use is in relationship maintenance without comparing it from the GCRR context. Thus, international sojourners in LDRR and individuals (from the general population) who are in GCRR were included in an online cross-sectional survey study. This study compared LDRR and GCRR on how SNS use is related to 1) expressing involvement (via relational maintenance behaviors), 2) gauging a partner's involvement (via partner surveillance), and 3) experiencing jealousy in the relationship. Results showed that those in a LDRR had higher levels of relational maintenance behaviors through SNS than those in a GCRR. Also, compared to those in a GCRR, those in a LDRR used SNS more for partner surveillance and experienced higher levels of SNS-related jealousy. Although partner surveillance and jealousy are, at first glance, negative aspects of a relationship, they could play constructive and maintenance functions as well (Attridge, 2013; Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012;) Thus, the findings imply that SNS is relatively more important as a medium for relationship maintenance among those in LDRR than individuals in GCRR.

Chapter 5: SNS use for Romantic Relationship Support, Satisfaction, and Stability

***Key finding 7:** 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.*

***Key finding 8:** SNS use was more crucial for relationship satisfaction and stability among sojourners in LDRR than among individuals in GCRR.*

Chapter 5 presents a study that 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 SNS facilitates relationship support from SNS social networks, and this, in turn, predicts relational adjustment (i.e., relationship stability and satisfaction) in romantic relationships. In this study, I argued that the value of SNSs use in romantic relationships involves not only the couple members but also members of their social networks. This was based on the premise of the social network perspective on relationship support, which assumes that: social networks are possible sources of relationship-related social support that promote a sense of stability and satisfaction of couple members about their romantic relationships (Felmlee, 2001). 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 an online survey, the results revealed that SNS use predicted higher access to SNS relationship support in LDRR and GCRR which, in turn, predicted perceived relationship stability and satisfaction in LDRR; and only perceived relationship satisfaction in GCRR. However, SNS use had direct negative impacts on relationship satisfaction in GCRR and on perceived relationship stability in LDRR. SNS use and SNS relationship support were not associated with relationship stability in GCRR. The findings validated the relative importance of SNS use in the survival of LDRR.

Integration of the Key Findings and Theoretical Implications

The implications of the key findings in the various studies have been discussed in detail at the end of the corresponding empirical chapters. In this section, I will integrate the various key findings of the empirical chapters, and discuss their theoretical implications. A summary of the theoretical contributions will be provided at the end of this section.

SNS interaction: A Double-edged Sword

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.

SNS social interaction contexts. To clarify the role of SNS in adjustment, one must consider who sojourners interact with, such as the home- or the host-country networks in a broad relational context (Chapters 2 and 3), as well as one's romantic partner or network members in a romantic relationship context (Chapters 4 and 5). Depending on who they interacted with, the roles of SNS could vary, ranging from beneficial, benign, to detrimental.

Host- versus home-country networks. With the advancement of communication technologies, one of the purported implications of CMC and SNS use in sojourners' experiences is greater connection to both the home- and the host-country networks (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Diminescu, 2008). Thus, Chapters 2 and 3 considered three contexts of social interactions: SNS interactions with the home- and the host-country networks, and face-to-face interaction with the host-country network. A key finding in this dissertation is that the host-country network played a more crucial role in sojourners' adjustment compared to the home-country network. SNS interactions with the host-country network were shown to impact sojourners' psychological and sociocultural adjustment, albeit oppositional, via perceived social support (Chapter 2) and homesickness (Chapter 3). SNS interaction with the home-country network was not associated with any of the subjective outcomes.

SNS interaction 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.

In previous studies, the negative impact of Internet and social media use on support and wellbeing was often interpreted as a function of social isolation based on the assumption that online interactions displace "real life" interactions (Muusses, Finkenauer, Kerkhof, & Billedo, 2014; Primack et al., 2017; Shakya & Christakis, 2016). In this dissertation, it was demonstrated that SNS use does not necessarily displace face-to-face interaction (Dienlin et al., 2017). Thus, it is likely that it is not social isolation, but certain characteristics and dynamics of SNS interaction itself, that could make sojourners perceive the host-country network as a less viable source of support in the long-term. It is possible that over time, sojourners realize that SNS interactions do not necessarily translate to offline support (Li, Chen, & Popiel, 2015). Moreover, it could be that SNS interactions elicit social comparison with the members of their host-country contacts who have relatively more intact networks as sources of support and other social resources (Primack et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, despite lowered sense of social support, SNS interactions with the host-country network helped sojourners deal with homesickness, both in the short- and the long-term. In the literature, active and targeted communication on SNS with significant others was shown to attenuate similar negative psychological states (e.g., loneliness, disconnectedness) in the general population (Burke & Kraut, 2016; Verduyn, Ybarra, Résibois, Jonides, & Kross, 2017). It is possible that the use of SNS of international sojourners to interact with significant others in the host country is comparable to the use of general population of SNS. Together, the findings of this dissertation demonstrate how SNS use with the host-country network could have differential impacts on sojourn-related subjective outcomes.

Although SNS was used to interact with the home-country network, it did not play a role in facilitating perceived social support, nor in alleviating homesickness. These findings are consistent with previous results that showed that the home-country network is less relevant during sojourn (Mikal, Rice, Abeyta, & De Vilbiss, 2013; Seo et al., 2016; see also Smith & Khawaja, 2011 review). This is not to say that social interactions with the home-country network are not relevant at all, especially since being a sojourner implies going back home. International sojourners still need to maintain their relationships in the home country (Ye, 2006). Reflecting on these findings, it is possible that SNS interactions with the home- and the host-country networks could be serving different purposes for sojourners. It is necessary to explore differential models of sojourners' adjustment, with separate sets of factors for the home- and for the host-country network contexts. For instance, with the home-country network context, it might be more relevant to investigate social connectedness in relation to family relationship and friendship maintenance. Research on sojourners' reintegration process when they go back home show the importance of maintaining social interactions with the home-country network (Sussman, 2002). More than in dealing with the stress and difficulties that come with being in a new environment, SNS social interactions with the home-country network might be more relevant in facilitating the eventual reintegration process; for example, in maintaining a sense of connectedness and familiarity with their social, cultural, and even physical environment back home (Hofhuis, Hanke, & Rutten, 2019; Sussman, 2002). Future studies should probe deeper into which aspects of sojourners' experiences SNS interaction with the home-country network contributes to.

Another key finding in this dissertation is the validation that face-to-face interaction with the host-country network is important in sojourners' adjustment (Adelman, 1988; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ward et al., 2001). The findings suggest that face-to-face interaction with the host-country network had an immediate impact on sojourners'

perceived social support. This, in turn, increased psychological adjustment. It is important to note that there was no long-term effect. Thus, one of the most important takeaway points from this dissertation is that 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.

This dissertation was able to provide a more nuanced examination as to which communication medium (face-to-face or SNS), as well as with whom (host- or home-country network), SNS interaction could be relevant in sojourners' adjustment. This was made possible with the adoption of a concurrent communication model in the application of the general framework of sojourners' adjustment. This advances the pioneering works of Berry (2003) and Ward et al. (2001) by incorporating current scholarship in media and communication studies (Dienlin et al., 2017; Rui & Wang, 2015). The use of a concurrent communication model explicates the conceptualization of social interactions with the assumption that sojourners use various communication channels (face-to-face and SNS) concomitantly to interact with the host- and the home-country networks. Thus, in contrast to earlier investigations that treated communication channels separately (e.g., Adelman, 1988; Cemalcilar, 2008), this dissertation was able to show the relative importance of the various communication channels, as well as compare the roles of the host- and the home-country networks.

Couple members and social network members. In the context of romantic relationships, SNS could play a role in relationship-relevant maintenance processes in: (a) relationship maintenance behaviors, partner surveillance, and experiences of jealousy with their romantic partner (Chapter 4); as well as in (b) relationship support from a couple's shared social network to facilitate relational adjustment (Chapter 5). The use of SNS for relationship maintenance and relational adjustment (i.e., relationship quality) was significantly higher for those in LDRR. The results of the studies in Chapters 4 and 5 revealed that SNS is used

purposely for relational adjustment in situations where face-to-face social interactions with the romantic partner, and the couples' shared social network, were limited, such as in LDRR.

In Chapter 5, SNS use had opposite impacts on SNS relationship support and relationship quality, both in LDRR and GCRR. SNS use was directly negatively associated with relationship quality (specifically, stability in LDRR and satisfaction in GCRR), but was positively associated with SNS relationship support, which, in turn, was positively associated with relationship quality. The presence of both direct negative effects and the mediated positive effects demonstrated the complex role of SNSs in the maintenance of different types of romantic relationships (LDRR and GCRR). Previous studies have not reached a consensus regarding the association of SNSs use and relationship quality (Clayton, Nagurney, & Smith, 2013; Hand, Buboltz, Deemer, & Buyanjargal, 2013; Kirk, 2013; Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). To understand these oppositional results, it is important to look at the way SNS use and SNS relationship-related processes were conceptualized and measured in the study. Previous studies have shown that it is the active and targeted form of communication with significant others on SNS that facilitates adjustment, while the passive use of SNS undermines it (Burke & Kraut, 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017). This could provide insights as to why SNS use, conceptualized and measured in a general way (e.g., overall use with no specified target nor purpose) in Chapter 5, could have a negative direct effect on relationship quality. On the other hand, looking at the mediated path, SNS use was positively associated with SNS relationship support. This finding is consistent with the results in Chapter 4 which established that SNS is (partly) used for romantic relationship-related communication processes. In turn, SNS relationship support - which could be understood as a targeted (i.e., couple's shared social network) and purposeful (i.e., access relationship support) SNS communication - predicted better relationship quality (Burke & Kraut, 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017).

An alternative way of looking at the oppositional findings is to evaluate the directionality of associations. Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch (2011) offered a model to understand the simultaneous occurrences' of positive and negative conditions or effects in relation to SNS use. According to their two-process view of SNS use, the negative condition (e.g., low perceived relationship quality) drives SNS use, and the positive condition (e.g., relationship support, high perceived relationship quality) rewards it. This implies a modification in theorizing and testing, incorporating reciprocal effects in the model to address the questions on directionality. It is recommended for future research to test this proposition using longitudinal designs.

Perceived social support versus homesickness. The findings showed differential relations of SNS social interaction with the host-country network with the two subjective outcomes included in this dissertation, perceived social support and homesickness (Chapters 2 and 3). The implications of these reciprocal associations of media use and the subjective outcomes diverge into two possibilities, negative feedback loop (homeostasis) or positive feedback loop, as theorized by Slater (2015). With the positive subjective outcome (i.e., perceived social support), the predicted implication of the combined long- and short-term reciprocal effects (i.e., the long-term negative effect of SNS use with the host-country network on perceived social support, and the short-term positive effect of perceived social support on SNS use with the host-country network) is a process towards homeostasis. This implies that SNS use could be fairly stable and regular in the context of a positive subjective outcome. On the other hand, with the negative subjective outcome, (i.e., homesickness), the combined long- and short-term reciprocal effects (i.e., long- and short-term negative effects of SNS use with the host-country network on homesickness; and the short-term positive effect of homesickness on SNS use with the host-country network) indicates a positive feedback loop, which implies that SNS use could lead to extreme levels. In other words, SNS use with the host country network could be alleviating homesickness among international students; and in turn, they used SNS

more with the host country network whenever they felt homesick. These reinforcing spirals could potentially lead to excessive SNS use.

The explanation based on the positive feedback loop of media use is consistent with the two-process view of SNS use (Sheldon et al., 2011). This theory illustrates how two opposing conditions/effects can co-occur in relation to SNS use, and how this could lead to a downward spiral and problematic use. According to Sheldon and colleagues (2011), the negative condition/effect drives SNS use, while the positive condition/effect rewards it. The findings in Chapter 3 demonstrated these predictions; that is, increased homesickness (the negative condition) predicted higher SNS interaction, while higher SNS interaction decreased homesickness (the positive condition). This situation could potentially lead to a downward spiral because SNS interaction might function simply as a transient coping response to homesickness, but might not solve underlying social difficulties. Note also that increased SNS interaction with the host-country network could lower perceived social support over time, and, in turn, could lower psychological adjustment (Chapter 2). Thus, according to Sheldon et al. (2011), “the portrait that arises is of a person who is addicted to a coping device that does not approach problem-resolution directly but, rather, approaches a pleasant distraction from problems” (p. 8).

The diverging implications based on Slater’s (2015) theory (i.e., homeostasis and positive feedback loop), as well as Sheldon et al.’s (2011) two-process view reflect theorizing in the areas of positive psychology and (affective) neuroscience in the context of positive and negative emotions (Garland et al., 2010). According to Garland et al. (2010), positive states or emotions are more likely to lead to optimal functioning and resilience. On the other hand, negative states or emotions are more likely to develop into self-perpetuating, self-destructive cycles. Applying this to the findings of this dissertation, it implies that a positive subjective outcome of social interactions (e.g., increased perceived social support) may likely lead to

optimal functioning - as shown by the positive impact of face-to-face interaction on perceived social support, and in turn, its positive impact on psychological adjustment (Muusses et al., 2014). Moreover, perceived social support may also lead to a relatively more stable and coherent system (homeostasis) of an individual's media (SNS) use. On the other hand, a negative subjective outcome (e.g., increased homesickness) demonstrate the possibility of a downward spiral process in media (SNS) use. Further research with a strong interdisciplinary perspective is necessary to validate a possible theoretical integration. Garland et al. (2015) argued that positive emotional experiences may be the source to "perturb a downward spiral and potentially tip the affective balance towards a self-sustaining positivity." (p. 6). Thus, an important research to pursue is to investigate how these dynamic processes work together to tip the affective balance towards better sojourners' adjustment.

Perceived social support versus SNS relationship support. In this dissertation, the findings of the studies (Chapters 2 and 5) on the relation of SNS use and social support appear to be inconsistent. Based on the longitudinal study on the use of SNS in a broad relational context (family and friends) (Chapter 2), SNS use with the host-country network had a significant negative effect on perceived social support in the long-term; and that perceived social support had a positive effect on SNS use in the short-term. In the cross-sectional study (Chapter 5), in both GCRR and LDRR, SNS use positively predicted SNS relationship support. To understand these seemingly contradictory results, it is important to look at the differences between the conceptualizations of social support in the two studies.

The main challenge in conceptualizing social support in this dissertation is to ensure that the concept of social support is equally meaningful and relevant across the various social interactions and relationships being compared in the respective studies. In Chapter 2, social support was conceptualized and measured as *perceived social support* since this is 1) context sensitive and 2) comparable across social interaction contexts (e.g., SNS and face-to-face, with

home and host-country networks) for sojourners (Trepte, Dienlin, & Reinecke, 2015). A general measure of perceived social support meets the two requirements better than other conceptualizations and forms of social support (e.g., enacted or received social support, SNS-based social support). In Chapter 5, social support was conceptualized as SNS-based relationship support. This conceptualization was more in line with the aim of the study (i.e., to investigate the role of SNS in relational adjustment) in relation to the main argument that couples (geographically-disparate or not) are able to establish and maintain a shared network on SNS. SNS-based relationship support was more meaningful when comparing LDRR and GCRR's access to network support. GCRR couples have a relatively more intact (offline) social networks making offline relationship support more accessible for them (Weiner & Hannum, 2012). Thus, SNS use provides comparable opportunities for LDRR and GCRR to access relationship support within the platform.

The discrepancy in the findings between the association of SNS interactions and the two types of support (perceived social support and SNS-based relationship support) is in line with the findings of a study that compared the associations of SNS interactions with (general) perceived social support and SNS-based social support (Li et al., 2015). In a cross-sectional survey study, Li and colleagues (2015) found that SNS interactions are positively associated with SNS-based social support. However, SNS interaction was not associated with perceived social support. Moreover, SNS-based social support was not correlated with perceived social support. The authors explained that SNSs alone do not promote individuals' sense of being more supported, despite actual experiences of support within the platform. According to them, it takes more forms of social interactions, not just SNS, for individuals to feel supported.

Similarly, this dissertation showed that SNS interaction positively predicted SNS-based relationship support. Within the platform, sojourners did feel supported by their network, particularly in the context of their romantic relationship. One possible explanation is that in the

context of relationship support, there are very limited number of social contexts where couples could derive support from their shared network. Thus, for sojourners in LDRR, SNS-based relationship support might suffice. In terms of perceived social support, this kind of support was not specific to relationship maintenance needs, but pertained to one's overall or general need. As explained by Li et al. (2015), in the general population, SNS interaction was not sufficient for one to feel generally supported. In the context of sojourn, SNS interaction had a detrimental effect on perceived social support in the long-term. It could be that over time, the more sojourners use SNS to interact with the host-country network, the more that they recognized that support was not available, or perhaps not conducive, via SNS. Indeed, it was regular face-to-face interaction that sustained sojourners' perceived social support. This dissertation contributes to theorizing by illustrating how the level of specificity of support (relationship-specific vs. overall personal need), the context of support (SNS-based vs general perceived social support), and the source of support (specific others such as a couples' shared network or more general significant others in the host-country network) may have conflicting associations with SNS use among sojourners. These findings point to the importance of mapping out when SNS use and with what type of support, in which context, and from whom, could be most beneficial for sojourners' adjustment.

The Other Way Around: Can Adjustment Predict SNS Interactions via Subjective Outcomes?

Perceived social support and psychological adjustment. This dissertation contributes to the body of knowledge by disentangling the direction of associations between social interactions and subjective outcomes, as well as subjective outcomes and adjustment. One of the most prominent theoretical assumptions in this dissertation is that media effects are transactional (Slater, 2015; Valkenburg et al., 2016). With this presupposition, it was necessary to design a study that accounts for the possible reciprocal effects between media use and its outcome(s).

The directionality of effects is a critical gap in SNS communication literature (Meng et al., 2017; Trepte & Scharnow, 2016).

The findings of this dissertation showed that better psychological adjustment in the host country heightened perceived social support, which, in turn, increased SNS interactions with the host-country network. This is in line with the social enhancement hypothesis – the better adjusted sojourners, who perceive greater support, are more likely to use SNS to interact and build their social networks in the host country (Lee, 2009; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007b).

In previous cross-sectional studies among sojourners, the use of CMC and SNS was positively associated with both perceived social support (Cemalcilar, 2008) and online social support (Hofhuis et al., 2018; Mikal & Grace, 2012). The direction of association in these studies was assumed to be unidirectional, in that SNS use predicts social support, consistent with the dominant theorizing in the field of cross-cultural and acculturation psychology (Berry, 2003, 2006; Ward et al., 2001). In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the findings demonstrate that the short-term positive association between SNS interaction and social support was in the direction of perceived social support predicting SNS interaction, and not the other way around. Moreover, if long-term effects are to be considered, then the impact of SNS interaction on perceived social support is negative, inconsistent with the previous findings (Cemalcilar, 2008; Hofhuis et al., 2018; Mikal & Grace, 2012). The inconsistencies in the results of this dissertation and earlier studies merit further investigation. It is important to note though that the findings of this dissertation (Chapters 2 and 3) underscore the importance of incorporating the directionality of association and temporal lags if we are to understand the underlying processes of the association between social interactions, particularly SNS interaction, and adjustment.

Sociocultural adjustment does not predict homesickness. By accounting for the reciprocal associations between homesickness and sociocultural adjustment, we were able to

test the assumptions of the Dual-Process Model of Homesickness (DPM-HS) proposed by Stroebe and colleagues (2015b) which hypothesizes that: 1) homesickness (home factor) is conceptually delineated from new place adjustment experiences (new place factor); and 2) homesickness and sociocultural adjustment have reciprocal effects. Previous theorizing on homesickness have confounded the conceptualization of homesickness as including both home and new place factors (Stroebe 2015a&b). Findings reported in Chapter 3 supported the prediction that homesickness had an effect on sociocultural adjustment in the short-term, but did not provide evidence for the possible impact of sociocultural adjustment on homesickness. Specifically, the results suggest that whenever sojourners feel homesick, they experienced greater difficulty in managing the challenges of daily life in the host country. However, poorer sociocultural adjustment does not necessarily make sojourners feel homesick. This dissertation is one of the first empirical studies that validated DPM-HS. On the one hand, the findings of this dissertation supported the argument that homesickness and adjustment are two separate constructs. However, we did not find support for the reciprocal effects of homesickness and adjustment that DPM-HS predicted. Future studies accounting for these reciprocal relations are needed to test the robustness of the findings in Chapter 3.

A summary of the theoretical contributions

“Our understanding of the uses and effects of media and communication technology develop in a variety of disparate disciplines and subdisciplines that until now have often largely ignored each other, which also hampers integrative theory formation and testing.”

- Valkenburg et al., 2016, p. 3

Responding to the call above, this dissertation was guided by an integrative framework that put together relevant assumptions based on theorizing in several disciplines. 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) by

proposing a concurrent communication view in conceptualizing social interactions. In this model, recent developments in communication technology were accounted for. Based on current scholarship in media and communication studies, a concurrent communication model assumed a reinforcing perspective (as opposed to the displacement perspective) in the use of communication channels (Dienlin, Masur, & Treppe, 2017). It was predicted that international sojourners use face-to-face and SNS channels concomitantly (Dienlin et al., 2017; English, et al., 2017; Rui & Wang, 2015). This dissertation was able to provide an empirical evidence for the reinforcing perspective in the use of communication channels. The results in Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated that face-to-face interaction with the host-country network was positively associated with SNS interaction with the host-country network. This implies that the use of one communication channel does not necessary displace another, and they might have differential impacts on outcomes despite concurrent use. This moves forward theorizing and research in sojourners' adjustment which traditionally looked at the roles of communication channels using separate models.

Moreover, this dissertation incorporated and validated a transactional view of media effects (Slater, 2015; Valkenburg et al., 2016) by testing 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). With the assumption of reciprocal effects, this dissertation was 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 (Chapter 3). Additionally, the application of the general framework of sojourners' adjustment was extended to romantic relationship contexts, LDRR and GCRR. This 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). Moreover, the findings of this dissertation show that the use of SNSs is important in the maintenance of sojourners' LDRR, which could be crucial for their return to their home-country. These findings could inform theorizing in sojourner's adjustment by incorporating the prospects of reintegration and the roles of SNSs in the process (Sussman, 2002).

Ward et al.'s (2001) conceptual differentiation of the two types of adjustments (i.e., psychological and sociocultural adjustment domains) was helpful in providing the theoretical foundations of and directions for the studies in this dissertation. In the original conceptualization of Ward and colleagues (2001), the two adjustment domains are conceptually distinct but interrelated, and predicted by different types of variables. Psychological adjustment is predicted by factors such as personality, life changes, and social support whereas sociocultural adjustment is affected by factors such as the amount of interactions with host nationals, acculturation strategies, and length of residence in the host culture (Ward et al., 2001). However, findings from previous studies offered mixed-evidence, demonstrating that a number of factors predicted both adjustment domains. In this dissertation, the selection of the predictors for each of the two domains (e.g., social interactions, positive versus negative subjective outcomes) was not as clear-cut as the conceptualization of Ward et al. (2001). The empirical investigations of these two domains in this dissertation were based on Ward et al.'s (2001) conceptualization in relation to other relevant models. For example, for psychological adjustment, the prediction that social interactions predict psychological adjustment via perceived social support was guided by the models proposed by Adelman (1998) and Berry (2003, 2006). On the other hand, for sociocultural adjustment, the prediction that social interactions predict sociocultural adjustment via homesickness was informed by the models of Stroebe et al., (2015b) and Van Vliet (2001). Our findings are consistent with the growing empirical evidence of the possible overlaps and shared elements underlying these adjustment

processes (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). It is indeed important to re-think the conceptualization of the two types of adjustment and explore possible frameworks that “would better reflect empirical evidence and open doors to re-integration of theories in explaining sojourner adjustment” (Zhang & Goodson, 2011, p. 625).

Methodological Contributions

By using a longitudinal panel design (Chapters 2 and 3) and comparative designs (Chapter 4 and 5), I was able to provide a scheme in teasing out the complex interplay of face-to-face and SNS interactions in international sojourners’ adjustment. In Chapters 2 and 3, I addressed the challenges and recommendations for future research articulated in extant literature that similarly called for the investigation of reciprocal causal associations between social interactions and subjective outcomes, and subjective outcomes and adjustment (Treppe & Scharnow, 2016; Meng et al., 2017; Verduyn et al., 2017; Stroebe et al., 2015a; Stroebe et al., 2015b; Thurber & Walton, 2005). Specifically, I tested a concurrent communication model by using cross-lagged and non-lagged reciprocal causality path analyses to account for the long-term and short-term reciprocal associations, respectively. The cross-lagged analysis assumes causal associations that happen over time; while the non-lagged analysis assumes causal effects that occur within a short span of time (Finkel, 1995; Kline, 2016). In essence, the non-lagged analysis disentangles the bidirectional causal association in correlations found in cross-sectional studies (Mathisen, et al., 2007). The use of a longitudinal panel design contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the reciprocal relations of social interactions, subjective outcomes, and adjustment. Although panel designs do not conclusively prove causality, they are useful in estimating reciprocal effects and assessing whether a set of results is consistent with a causal model (Finkel, 1995).

In Chapter 5, I conducted a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis, which included latent variable modelling and measurement invariance testing. Measurement invariance testing

is an issue related to the current debate on methodological shortcomings in conducting research in the social sciences (Kühne, 2013). In comparative studies, testing for measurement invariance can be regarded as an additional step to ensure the integrity of measurement instruments and the comparability of the models. Despite its relevance, this methodological issue has been rarely addressed (Kühne, 2013). Since the study in Chapter 5 involved two groups belonging to different populations, and with data for each group collected at different time points, I deemed it necessary to perform a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (particularly, testing for measurement invariance between the two groups) to be able to make meaningful comparisons (Kühne, 2013). For the measurement invariance testing, I made use of latent variable modelling. This accounted for the error variance, allowing for real variance interpretation, which was particularly important for the self-constructed scale of SNS-based relationship support. Since measurement invariance was established, I was confident that the factor loadings of indicator variables on their respective latent factors do not differ between the two groups (Kühne, 2013; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). In other words, the constructs in the study were measured and understood in the same way in both LDRR and GCRR.

Practical Implications

In terms of practical implications, this dissertation informs international sojourners themselves, as well as their significant others (family, friends, and in some cases, their romantic partners), of the social factors that may contribute to adjustment. 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. The findings of this dissertation could be informative and useful

for research on the reintegration process of sojourners. Restarting life in the home country could be less distressing if one looks forward to reuniting with a romantic partner.

Moreover, this dissertation highlights the value of regular face-to-face interactions with significant others in the host country. Thus, sojourners are encouraged to keep a good balance of SNS and face-to-face interactions during their sojourn. This sounds intuitive but this dissertation provides empirical evidence for this advice. This practical information considers both positive and negative consequences on one's sense of support, feelings of homesickness and romantic relationship maintenance.

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. To facilitate this, training programs should be available for both sojourners and host-country members that promote greater communication and understanding (e.g., language learning, intercultural competence training, etc.). In relation to this, discussions about the implications of the use of SNS and other forms of CMC should be included in the programs and services for sojourners. Support providers must clarify when SNS could be beneficial for or detrimental to sojourners.

The models that were tested in this dissertation have predictive values that could be useful in anticipating possible extreme negative consequences of using SNS in dealing with sojourn-related social difficulties, such as homesickness. With these information, support providers and sojourners themselves are aware of the risks (e.g., online addiction) of relying on SNS to deal with homesickness. There should be counseling services, therapies or

rehabilitation programs available for sojourners in relation to problematic SNS (or social media use). Hopefully, these results could also provide insights on the practical consequences of the use of other forms of computer-mediated communication among sojourners.

Finally, the findings of this dissertation could offer some insights relevant to governments and advocacy groups in advancing policies, programs, and campaigns on overseas work. Oftentimes, the impact of communication technology on sojourn experience is portrayed in a very optimistic and celebratory manner (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Diminescu, 2008; Hiller & Franz, 2004). In light of the findings of this dissertation, there is a need to step back and present a sober and more nuanced depiction of this medium. It is important to take a critical stance on the discursive narrative of a “connected migrant” (Diminescu, 2008; Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018), and problematize how governments could capitalize on this portrayal to promote labor migration. Going abroad to pursue one’s personal goals could be an enriching experience. However, it becomes an issue when the government itself regards its citizens as export products (O’Neal, 2004). In some developing countries like the Philippines, remittances from overseas workers have become a crucial source of revenue (Rowley, 2017). It is therefore not surprising that many programs and policies are substantially geared towards sponsoring labor migration (Asis, 2008; O’Neal, 2004). For instance, the Philippine government promotes the use of communication technology as a marketable skill that could increase the chance of being hired abroad, and as a means of communication with distant loved ones (Medenilla, 2017). Communication technology could benefit sojourners and their families (Bernal, 2015; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Paragas, 2009). However, the liberating or empowering affordances of these technologies (e.g., in fostering and democratizing social connections) are ‘potentials’, and not guaranteed outcomes, that are subject to certain conditions and contexts (Aguirre, 2014; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). The notion of a connected migrant has implications on the positive framing of labor export policies of the Philippine government – which belies the

struggles and social costs of geographically fragmented relationships, as well as masks the government's lack of clear resolve in pushing for genuine economic and social reforms that would make staying in the home country a viable choice (Asis, 2017; Pertierra, 2012).

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There were several limitations in this dissertation that need to be considered when interpreting the findings. Cognizant of these limitations, I would present in this section some possible theoretical and methodological considerations for future research.

Theoretical and conceptual limitations

In previous theories on sojourners' adjustment, culture was a prominent concept (Berry, 2003, 2006; Kim, 2017; Ward et. al., 2001). Social interactions were often characterized as intercultural contacts, or interactions between people having different cultures (Berry, 2003, 2006). In previous studies, culture was often equated to one's national identity (Ward et al., 2001). In this current dissertation, the concept of culture was not directly tackled. For instance, the definition of social interactions in Chapters 2 and 3, did not distinguish co-national, host-country national, and other nationalities. It is not clear in this dissertation as to which group of significant others in the host country (co-national, host-national, other nationalities) make a difference in adjustment. It has been shown that in the long-term, international students could benefit more from their friendships with host-country nationals than co-nationals (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Sleeman, Lang, & Lemon, 2016). Such information could be useful in planning strategies on how to help international students adjust better in the host country. Moreover, culture could be relevant in explaining why international students do not seek social support from their home country. According to Smith and Khawaja (2011), among Asian cultures, emotional control (or the ability to handle emotional distress on your own) is highly valued (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). For this reason, Asian international students might choose to keep their concerns from the home-country network to avoid being perceived as a failure in managing their emotions. Additionally, beyond national identities, cultural orientations such as interdependent versus independent self-construal, or collectivist versus individualist orientations, could also make a difference in perceived social support.

Shelton, Wang, and Zhu (2017) argued that social support could prove to be more beneficial for students with interdependent self-construal. Their findings provide further support to the growing literature showing stronger associations between social support and well-being among individuals from collectivist countries compared to those from individualist countries (Shelton et al., 2017). Thus, it might be relevant for future studies to scrutinize the conceptualizations of culture and cultural factors (such as national identity, cultural orientations, cultural distance, etc.), and investigate how they play a role in SNS communication and adjustment.

The conceptualization of social interactions also lacked nuance in terms of the valence of interactions. The studies in this dissertation did not differentiate between positive and negative types of interactions. Future studies could look into how certain types of interactions might differ in terms of impact on subjective outcomes. I also limited my investigation to two possible subjective outcomes (i.e., perceived social support and homesickness) as intervening variables. Future studies should look at other possible intervening variables (e.g., social connectedness, social and cultural identities, skills acquisition, bridging social capital, etc.) that mediate the relation between social interactions and adjustment. It is also important to link SNS social interactions and subjective outcomes to the attainment of the specific goals of sojourn. For instance, academic adjustment for student sojourners, as well as work adjustment and job satisfaction for international employees/expatriates (Bierwiazzonek & Waldzus, 2016).

Additionally, the conceptualization of psychological adjustment was limited to depressive symptoms in this dissertation. Although this was consistent with previous conceptualizations in several studies on sojourners' adjustment (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), the dissertation did not capture the positive components of psychological wellbeing. Wang, Wei, and Chen (2015) highlighted the importance of going "beyond the pathological lens" to understand international students' adjustment better (p. 275). Thus, I recommend that future studies include positive indicators of psychological adjustment such as

happiness and life satisfaction. Indeed, it is not just the absence of negative indicators, but also the presence of positive indicators, which may serve as markers of optimal wellbeing (Fredrickson, 2001).

Another important consideration is to investigate actual enacted/received social support and explore the mechanisms of how it is linked with social interactions and adjustment. Findings based on studies on perceived social support cannot be generalized to enacted received social support (Barrera, 1986). Moreover, specific information on how enacted social support can benefit international sojourners can be helpful for support providers, particularly in designing institution-based support programs.

Methodological limitations

This dissertation made use of self-selection and convenience sampling. In the recruitment of participants, two important selection criteria were that they identified as sojourners (e.g., international students, expatriates, or overseas workers), and that they were Facebook users. The operationalization of sojourner in this dissertation was consistent with the dominant theorizing and operationalization in the literature (Bierwiazzonek & Waldzus, 2016; Hofhuis et al., 2019; McNulty & Brewster, 2017). However, one limitation of this dissertation is that there was no measure provided to clarify the intention of sojourners to return home. Moreover, international sojourners who do not use Facebook were automatically excluded. This limited the generalizability of the results to other international sojourners who could be using other SNSs other than Facebook. The results of this study cannot be also generalized to other relevant communication platforms such as video-calling and instant messaging. Furthermore, the invitation for participation in the studies and all the surveys used were in English. Thus, only participants who understand English were included in the study. Future studies should look into the possibility of translating the various measures to include non-English speaking sojourners.

This dissertation is one of the few studies on sojourners' adjustment that included a longitudinal design (Bierwiazzonek & Waldzus; 2016; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Given that this dissertation targeted a special population defined based on a transient, temporary and finite circumstance (i.e., short-term migration), there was much difficulty in getting a large sample of respondents and retaining the respondents over time for the longitudinal study. It was also a challenge to find sojourners engaged in long-distance romantic relationships. Note though that based on a systematic review of Zhang and Goodson (2011), the sample sizes of the 64 articles they reviewed ranged from 21 to 631, and these were mostly cross-sectional studies. The studies in this dissertation can be considered having a good sample size relative to the previous studies on sojourners, and sufficient for the statistical analyses to answer the research questions. Moreover, the participants in the studies came from different countries, and were based in different countries as well. Although not representative, the samples provide a relatively higher external validity since the participants were not only coming from a certain national group, nor studying in the same university/working in the same company in a single country. As with the attrition of participants in the longitudinal study, panel attrition analyses showed that there were no serious selection problems due to the loss of participants in the succeeding measurement occasions. Also, the assumption of constancy in structural effects across the three time points in the panel design was maintained despite attrition. Nonetheless, the number of participants limited statistical power and prevented more complex model testing. Moreover, the sample size limited latent variable modeling in the longitudinal panel study. Such analysis could clarify true effects by isolating measurement-related variance. Also, larger sample sizes are needed to perform multilevel analytical procedures that differentiate aggregate or group level effects from within-person variations (e.g., random intercept cross-lagged panel model). Lastly, the sample size limited the inclusion of potential moderators (e.g., public vs. private communication via SNS, co-national vs. host-national host-country network). Thus, future studies should ensure

larger sample sizes to have greater flexibility in performing complex model testing, as well as attain greater statistical power.

Future studies should also consider the time and number of assessments in the longitudinal study. As of yet, there are no established theoretical or empirical bases for the choice of the time lag between measurements. In this dissertation project, I based the time interval on a previous longitudinal study on international and domestic student sojourners' adjustment (Hechanova, et al., 2002). However, it is possible that a 3-month interval between assessments is not sufficient or even too long to detect changes. Thus, future research should look into both more fine-grained and longer time-intervals in assessing developmental trajectories. The number of waves for the types of analyses performed in this current dissertation were sufficient. It is suggested, however, to consider increasing the number of assessments for greater flexibility in multilevel analytical procedures (Hamaker, 2018).

Across the various studies in this dissertation, I made use of self-report measures. There are several limitations to the validity of self-reports of media use and adjustment (see e.g., Araujo, Wonneberger, Neijens, & de Vreese, 2017; Boyle, 1985; Junco, 2012; Rosen, Whaling, Carrier, Cheever, & Rökkum, 2013; Stroebe et al., 2015a). Although it has been shown that self-reports highly correlate with actual time spent on SNS (as measured by Facebook use computer monitoring software) (Junco, 2012), it is important to consider a more comprehensive measure of SNS use in future studies (e.g., include actual time spent on SNS; comparable across studies) (Rosen et al., 2013). Along the same lines, I suggest more precise, as well as more comprehensive measures of depressive symptoms that can be used to validate (e.g., neurophysiological measures) and characterize (e.g., state-trait interactions) self-reports (see e.g., Boyle, 1985). This way, professional support providers are much more informed in the design of intervention programs for sojourners.

There were a few single-item measures used in this dissertation (e.g., frequency of social interactions, homesickness, perceived relationship stability, perceived relationship satisfaction). In the empirical chapters (Chapters 3 and 4), I argued that the use of these single-item measures was theoretically and methodologically justified; for example, the appropriateness of single item face-valid measures, the necessity of using shorter versions of the scales to keep the survey short, as well as to avoid overlaps of items in the validated scales used in the survey (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Konrath, Meier, & Bushman, 2014). However, future studies should investigate their comparability with the multi-item scale measurements of the same constructs (Konrath et al., 2014; Van der Linden & Rosenthal, 2016). The use of single-item measures limits the exploration of the possible multidimensionality of the constructs (Van der Linden & Rosenthal, 2016). Another limitation is that single-item measures do not allow for the investigation of methods variance. It is important to note, though, that these limitations were not deleterious in the current dissertation since the focus is on the causal relations of the variables based on the structural model (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002).

The conceptualization and operationalization of the “new place” factor as proposed by the DPM-HS (Stroebe et al., 2015b) was limited to Ward et al.’s (2001) definition and operationalization of sociocultural adjustment. Although this measure of (sociocultural) adjustment is in the context of host-country experiences and covers several dimensions (e.g., cognition and communication, social and cultural relatedness, practical and environmental challenges) (Ward & Kennedy, 1999), future studies should explore other conceptualizations and measures of new-place related stressors to provide a holistic investigation of the model.

In most cases, I used previously validated scales in the various studies in this dissertation. However, due to the lack of existing measure, I constructed the Facebook relationship support scale (Chapter 5). Although I was able to establish that this measure has good reliability, and does not vary in terms of meaning between those in LDRR and GCRR

using multigroup invariance analysis, it is still important to establish the scale's psychometric properties in future studies.

This current dissertation focused on the individual level experience and between groups. Future studies should look at multiple levels of influence by employing within-person, dyadic level (e.g., looking at the interplay between romantic partners or friends), and social network level of analyses. We recommend for future research to validate our results using similar longitudinal designs with a much larger sample. We also suggest other methodologies such as daily diary studies, content analysis of SNS interactions, social network analysis, and qualitative studies to test the robustness of the results in this current dissertation, as well as provide a more comprehensive and in-depth account of international sojourners' experiences.

Although the results of the current dissertation might be informative for different groups of migrants, it is important to acknowledge the variations in experiences that might limit generalization of the findings to all individuals who are away from home. We recommend testing our models on other populations who might be temporarily or permanently living away from their home country (e.g., domestic sojourners, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers). This might prove to be useful to some populations who are at a higher risk, and receive less institutional support (e.g., undocumented immigrants and refugees) compared to international students and expatriates. I hope that this dissertation can stimulate further questions and investigations to better capture the complexities of the roles of communication in sojourners' adjustment. Ultimately, it is my hope that the findings in this dissertation are helpful to the numerous individuals who might be voluntarily or involuntarily displaced and far away from home.

Concluding Remarks

With SNS, is home never too far away? The findings of this dissertation show that despite its promising features and affordances, SNS does not necessarily provide the feeling

that one is close to home. SNS might make it easier to communicate, exchange information, maintain social contacts, but it does not necessarily make sojourners perceive family and friends from home as viable sources of support while in the host country. Moreover, SNS communication with significant others from the home country does not alleviate the longing for them. SNS interactions with friends in the host country might be helpful for those days that one feels homesick. However, this might not be beneficial in the long-run. On the contrary, the more that sojourners use SNS with the host-country network, the less supported they feel over time. This is not to say that SNS does not serve an important function. The use of SNS could be helpful in maintaining a sense of relational continuity that could ease their reintegration process in the home country. However, the findings of this dissertation underscore the importance of building and strengthening ties with the host-country network via (good old) face-to-face social interactions. Despite constant connectivity and other affordances that SNS offers, home is still miles away. Sojourners must deal with the situation of being far away from home for some time. This entails engaging in face-to-face social interactions, building meaningful relationships, and savoring social experiences in the host country- until it is time to go back home.

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