ADAPTATION AND THE NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY: A STUDY ON MALAYSIAN STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA AND UNITED KINGDOM

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Abstract
This paper explores Lysgaard (1955) U-Curve model which explains the process of adaptation in a new culture. Lysgaard (1955) stated that those who migrate to other places go through the following stages of adaptation; the honeymoon stage, culture shock, adjustment and recovery. The existence and rise of new media technologies have brought the world closer together and thus raises the question whether one still go through the stages stated by Lysgaard (1955) New media components such as Twitter, Facebook, Skype, Blogs and Online television has created an impact towards the adaptation process. Four focus group discussions were conducted among Malaysians who had been to either Australia or United Kingdom for their tertiary education and has since returned to Malaysia. The discussions centered on the experience of these students adapting into the new culture and how the Internet and the new media has played a role through their adaptation process. Findings from the research show that the new technologies have brought them closer to their own culture and at the same time assist them in adapting into the new culture.

Keywords: *Adaptation, New Media Technology, culture shock, U-Curve, pelajar Malaysia*

ADAPTASI DAN TEKNOLOGI MEDIA BARU: SATU KAJIAN MENGENAI PELAJAR PELAJAR MALAYSIA DI AUSTRALIA DAN UNITED KINGDOM.

Abstrak

Kajian ini cuba meneliti Model U Curve yang dibangunkan oleh Lysgaard (1955) yang menerangkan tentang proses adaptasi dalam budaya baru. Lysgaard (1955) menegaskan bahawa mereka yang berhijrah ke tempat lain melalui tahap tahap adaptasi berikut: bulan madu, kejutan budaya, penyesuaian dan pemulihan. Kewujudan teknologi media baru telah mendekatkan dunia dan ini menimbulkan persoalan samada seseorang melalui peringkat peringkat yang di sebutkan oleh Lysgaard (1955). Komponen media baru seperti Twitter, Facebook, Skype, Blogs dan televisen atas talian telah memberi impak pada proses adaptasi. Empat kumpulan fokus telah dijalankan keatas para pelajar yang pernah belajar di Australia dan United Kingdom dan telah pulang semula ke Malaysia. Perbincangan tertumpu pada pengalaman para pelajar ini dalam mengadaptasi kehidupan dalam budaya baru dan bagaimana Internet dan media baru telah memainkan peranan dalam proses adaptasi yang mereka lalui. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa teknologi baru telah mendekatkan mereka dengan budaya sendiri dan pada masa yang sama membantu mereka mengadaptasi hidup dalam budaya baru.

Kata kunci: *Adaptasi, Teknologi Media Baru, kejutan budaya, U-Curve, pelajar Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1960s until today, the Malaysian government had sent many of their students overseas to obtain a university degree and to experience life in a different culture. The Malaysia Australian Colombo plan was among the earliest program that handled the transfer of students overseas mainly to Australia. This transfer of students has continued to take place all the way until today and involves various other countries such as the United Kingdom, United states of America, Germany, France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Japan, Korea, Indonesia and etc. The sending of students abroad is also no longer just the responsibility of the government alone but various other government linked companies,

multinational corporations and organizations began sending students abroad to further their studies. Among the companies involved are Petronas, Tenaga Nasional, Telekom, Shell, Bank Negara and etc. Aside from this there are those who obtained overseas education through self-financing. In the last official figures released by the Ministry of Higher Education in 2010, there are over 20, 493 Malaysian students in Australia while another 5,265 students are based in the United Kingdom.

The U-Curve Model

This research examines the fundamental issue of intercultural communication and relations. It explores the concept of adaptation, which focuses on how individuals interact and adapt to another culture when they moved to a new place.. This is fundamental in understanding intercultural communication as involving people entering a new culture, meeting new people that may no longer hold the same values, principles or even beliefs with them. Thus, it explores the process as to how the individual adapts to the new scenario.

The U-Curve model was created by Lysgaard (1955) which specifically focused on a person's adaptation to a foreign culture. This model was further extended to observe the re-entry stages of the individuals upon arrival back home. The extended model is known as the W-curve Model which was created by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963).

For the purpose of this study, the focus is only on the U-curve which is the initial adaptation process among Malaysians who are studying overseas. The U-Curve model states that individuals go through four stages of adaptation when entering a new culture. The firstly go through the honeymoon stage, where everything is viewed as a breath of fresh air and individuals enjoy the new turf. This is followed by what Hall (1979) described as the cultural shock stage, where individuals may react negatively by complaining about the new culture or even separates themselves from the new culture. This is followed by the recovery stage where the individual began adapting to the new culture and able to tolerate and understand the cultural differences that exist. Thus, successfully undergoing this stage will allow the individual to adapt and adjust well to the new environment. The W-curve continues on where the U-curve stops, at full adjustment to the new environment.

The U-curve model was constructed in the 1950s where globalization was not of core importance. Travelling in those days were not as an extensive as the exposure that the new generation goes through. Comparatively, today, migration is becoming more common in general. There has been massive migration that took place over the years, especially among Asians to western countries in the promise of a better life. At the same time, there are many Westerners as well who have considered Asia to be their second home by being expatriates to multinational corporations, for example. This had led to the rise of multiculturalism where one may not feel totally alien in a foreign place. For example, most major cities in

the world would have their own China town. Thus a Chinese person stepping into these places would have some familiar cues that they could directly relate to rather than a total detachment between them and their original culture. Chinese food for example, are accessible almost everywhere and for Muslims, most international cities would have halal butchers to accommodate for the growing Muslim communities.

Technology was also different back in that era. Today there has been a rise of new media and other forms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, Skype and various other social media that make contact with others a lot more accessible. Thus a person can be in a totally foreign country, but still maintain constant update with their love ones back home.

The basis of this research is on the issue of intercultural communication, specifically on the issue of intercultural communication. The aim of this research is to look at the relevancy of the model, especially in the changing nature of society today. The earlier research focused their study solely on migrants from individualistic countries travelling and adapting to a collectivist society. This research tends to look the other way around and observed how individuals from collectivistic countries adapt to the new individualistic society and how has technology played a role through this process.

This is an important area of exploration as within this age of globalization, mobility of the individual is becoming more extensive. Over the years, many Malaysians have moved to new places, either for work, permanent migration or to further their studies. This research will focus on Malaysian students who have travelled and studied in either Australia or England, and have since return back to Malaysia to continue on with the next stage of their lives.

Adaptation and the Changing World

Neulip (2006) explained the concept of maladaptive attitudes where immigrants may choose to still hold on to their original culture and not fully embrace the new home culture. It is because they would still like to be identified to their origin, and it is a sense of upholding one's roots. However, adopting this approach may not be favourable to the new home culture as they may feel that the new immigrants are not adapting to the new environment. This itself may create conflict between the groups. Another statement made was with regards to the travelling in groups. When immigrants move from one place to another, they rarely travel alone, but with a group of people who may share their same culture. There is an impact between group movements and individual movements. Though there are Malaysian students travelling alone, most sponsored students are usually sent in groups to their respective countries of study.

Austin (1987) explained the symptoms of culture shock. They are psychological stress, self-evaluation, a sense of loneliness and the feeling of homesick to one's own country and lastly, the change of values. These are explored through their behaviours, emotions and reactions to the adaptation process. Stress can be in

the sense of trying to fit in and the problems of settling down and making new friends. An individual may also question themselves on who they are and why they choose to live in this new culture. Thirdly, the feeling of loss describes how the new environment is just not familiar with the individuals. They miss what home meant to them, and they are no longer having those cues of their culture. Value change describes how a person can actually adapt to a new place that practices something different from what they believe in or have accustomed to.

Kim (2001) discussed her idea of cross-cultural adaptation based on an assumption on how the human being operated as a system. She described that when an individual enter into a new culture, he may enter into a state of disequilibrium before, after a while, that person would find the balance. This disequilibrium stress stage is considered a healthy process as it allows the individual to learn and understand the new culture. This adaptation process is described as the Stress Adaptation Growth model. She felt that as individuals are out of their comfort zone, there are in a better state to learn more to survive. For every two steps forward that an individual take, he takes one step back, until he adapts to the new culture.

In exploring the concept and implications of migration to the immigrant youth, Berry et al (2006) conducted a survey on 7,997 adolescents, which included 5,336 immigrant youth and 2,631 local youth. The immigrant youth came from 26 different cultural backgrounds and lived in 13 countries. The questions were focused on language, family values, perceived discrimination and both psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. Among the key findings were, the immigrant youth is adapting well, even as well, as the local youth. In exploring how the youth acculturate, one way is through integrating the heritage and national culture. The second was through the ethnic profile, where they limit interaction with the national society, but decide to be closer to their ethnic communities.

Greenland and Brown (2005) discussed the adaptation and acculturation issues of Japanese students living in the United Kingdom. The research conducted was a longitudinal study where 35 Japanese nationals living in the United Kingdom were analysed over a 12 month period. The key finding was that stress related to acculturation were due to high intergroup anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

A total of four focus group sessions was conducted. The respondents in each group consisted of male and female respondents who have studied in either Australia or United Kingdom and returned home to Malaysia in the last five years. In total there were eight male respondents and nine female respondents. The discussions were focused on their experience as students entering into a new culture and how the new media or social media has played a role throughout their adaptation process.

Table 1 below details the breakdown of the five groups:

Table 1: Focus Group Composition

Group One	1 male	Australia	3 females	3 Australia
Group Two	4 males	3 Australia, 1 UK		
Group Three	2 Males	1 Australia, 1 UK	3 females	2 UK, 1 Australia
Group Four	1 Male	Australia	3 females	3 Australia

Results

Based on the discussion with the respondents, below are some of the highlights of the findings in the aspect of adaptation, internet and the new media technologies.

The Preparation Stage

In terms of preparation many of the respondents admitted that they had prepared themselves prior to going abroad. Most of them did research via the internet and also by contacting fellow Malaysians who were studying there already through e-mail. Those who did not try to establish contact with those abroad found themselves to be homesick as they feel lonely being abroad since they did not get to know many people. However, those who did make prior contacts felt the first few weeks as a learning orientation period about life through a mentoring process from the senior. Technology has played a role in terms of establishing prior contact to allow the first week experience more bearable.

"So it was the first time I was overseas and suddenly you are alone in the house. I felt that the two weeks were rather bleak. I am saying that because I was so homesick with no one around me…" Salina, G3

"Like before going to Adelaide or in Brisbane, the Internet has been powerful to find about, to look at accommodations and things like that, it's a lot of help in that sense.." Nadia, G1

"Allah was testing. The Malaysian Student Society was not well developed. I tried to find but it was not on the Internet. So I had to tawakkal." Juliana, G4

The Early Adaptation stage

Within the early arrival stage Lysgaard (1955) that most newcomers will go through a honeymoon stage. Generally, from this early research the anxiety, excitement and stress begins even prior to that, pre-departure with the preparations. Only one respondent stated that she was excited and happy enjoying the more positive feel of arriving in a new country. However, many respondents felt otherwise. They were more anxious and more particular about adapting to the social life in the new place and also preparing about their studies. They were more focused in settling down rather than enjoying that early arrival moment.

There were respondents who used social media technology to learn about the new place. Some admitted to using technology to find new people and also find way at the new place. Respondents were also adapting the new technology to the new academic life. The existence of online virtual libraries is surprising while one respondent discussed about getting lecture notes via Facebook which was different from his academic experience in Malaysia. The speed of technology also surprises some of the individuals there. It was really helping them to adapt better.

> *"Firstly, their Internet connection… very, very impressive. … Over there its really fast and that brings us closer to our family in Malaysia… in the case of Skype. "Anjas, G2*

> *" The first two weeks, I was homesick. Okay, I'm sorry, but I had to cry at that time because it was so difficult to find food."- Fendi, G2*

> *'I was excited because the first time to go abroad. Because before this I'm always at home. Never been to boarding school. So, suddenly having the opportunity to go far.. I was excited lah… Only after a month, then it sunk in. I miss my family. In the beginning I was happy going to Gold Coast, going to concerts. Very happy… "Nia, G4*

> *"That one is more connecting to home, but not much of getting new friends…" Nadia G1*

> *"By using skype…by using…emm…whats that…facebook, they post something facebook. Lecture notes and they post everything on Facebook, on twitter.." Rais, G4*

> *"I learned how to use google map" Mus, G2*

The Disintegration Stage (cultural shock)

Cultural shock was a common phase faced by the respondents. This can take the form of adjustments to lifestyle, food, religious practice, language, weather and even how things run in other countries such as the transport system and etc. It is a common stage that was able to be dealt with after months of staying in the new country. Among some of the issues raised were about how shopping malls closed early, missing local mamak food, questioning why foreigners drink so much and also the strange accents of the local. One respondent even questioned her own intelligence and felt inferior compared to the foreigners.

> *"I think as Malaysian, I tend to look up at white people as smart, very smart. So in my first year studies, I took a backseat in doing assignments. I let them be the leaders and I'll participate. …" Sarah, G1*

> *"But as soon as they want to go drinking, night pubs, and then it*

loses the connections there.” – Luqzan, G1

“Their English language. It took me a month to understand their accent. “ – Ibrahim, G4

“I had to deal with this emotional problem until the end of the year. I was sick. Can see the bones in my body. My husband, lost ten kilos. Really thin. Depression. Depression. Seriously.” Julie, G2, on having to leave her baby girl in Malaysia.

The Adjustment and Recovery Stage

Many respondents admitted that social media and new media technology have been integral towards maintaining relationships back home. Part of adapting to the new culture was also ensuring that they are able to still maintain relationships with those in the old culture. It was important to maintain relationships with family members left behind. Those who had to leave their partners or children felt that social media were their only way of getting updates. There was minimal use of the new technology towards making new local or International friends, but more on expanding the Malaysian network.

Mostly definitely Facebook…for me to look at my daughters picture….” Juliana, G4

“Facebook for me is a medium to communicate with my wife. I was alone there. It is a medium for me to see my children's photo.” Helme, G2

“Skype helps me to communicate better with my family.” Rahim, G3

“My children used Facebook, I did not. I call them reporters who help update news…. updating grandma, they help me out.’ Arina G3

“So in terms of Facebook, I think I was among the first in terms of my groups of friends to join and I’m influencing other people to join me as well..” Luqzan, G1

“From Facebook I got to know Malaysian people in Melbourne” Nana G1

Aside from family members at home, a few respondents stated the importance of connecting to media in Malaysia. Thus Media Prima Malaysian online television channel became an important portal for Malaysian students to keep themselves posted with the latest television shows. They even follow drama serials from Malaysia that was running in Malaysia at the same time. Aside from that, one respondent even admitted to entering Malay novel online sites to read Malay literature. However, not many respondents admitted to using the Internet to read Malaysian newspapers.

"At times friends will update on Facebook. There's this drama that is best kan. Then we will check tonton (the Malaysian online television channel)" Dilla , G4

Online for Juara Lagu (a Malaysian singing competition)… yes. Fendi, G2

…tonton.com…. Mus. G2 (when asked whether he watched anything online)

"…and then I read novels, Malay Novels online because obviously you cannot get it in Australia." Nia, G4

Technology has played a role in the adaptation process. In this context, adaptation is perceived with the ability to maintain contact with both cultures at almost a similar rate. Though physically these people are apart, technology is a key element to maintain that virtual relation that allows them to be posted on what is happening back home.

DISCUSSION

Today, in the era of globalization and progress in technology, the existence of social media has brought changes to how individuals interact with one another. It has also brought people who live in different countries together. This can be seen in one of the responses received by Anas, G2. He said "Facebook is like your breakfast. Everytime you go to the office you will spend at least forty minutes to open Facebook only to see what's happening with Friends in Malaysia and also friends around Australia". This show how pivotal it was to maintain that relationship with family back home for the Malaysian students.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, the cost of making a telephone call to a foreign country was really expensive and communication between countries was sent via traditional postal mail. However, today, the existence of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Blogs and etc. have actually made communication with people in other countries a lot easier. This brought to the important question on whether one really leaves their country when they are abroad. These technologies have made communication a lot easier and faster. With efficient Wi-Fi connection, face to face communication can now take place in a virtual form.

The globalization era is also one of a rich media environment. The existence of foreign media channels through collaboration with satellite or cable television channels has allowed the adaptation process to be easier as again individuals are able to identify with the familiar cues from their culture. This could be helpful if the individuals still attempt at incorporating with their new culture. However, there are people who may take this opportunity and decide to marginalize themselves from their new society, thus not requiring them to go through a process of adaptation. For example, with the use of social media, individuals may still keep in touch with family members back home in an instant and be able to communicate with them using the chat service. Photos can be uploaded

and transferred within seconds while the conversation is in real time. The Skype services offers families to communicate without the excessive line costs. Thus an individual may no longer leave their culture when they leave their original culture. In fact, it travels with them and within this rich media environment, it may not even allow them to participate in the new culture and these individuals prefer to be tied up with their laptops or mobile machineries instead of really meeting people on the outside.

In the era of technological globalization, many of the Malaysians abroad admitted to have used social media and other forms of technology to assist them with their adaptation process. Among the most favourite medium was Facebook and Tonton, which is an Internet based television station owned by Media Prima. They used Facebook mainly to maintain contact with families at home while Tonton was used to keep up to date with the local drama serials. Aside from those, a few participants admitted purchasing things online and that includes buying groceries which is something they will not do here in Malaysia. Many admitted the Internet helped them during pre-departure, to learn about the new environment and at the same time establishing contacts with Malaysian students there. Internet also helped during the first few days of arrival especially in looking for Halal meat and at the same time understanding the transportation services. The use of Google maps has also increased, assisting students to help find the way in the new community. Other than this, some respondents do blog and feel that they do belong to some virtual communities.

Mikal (2011) stated that the Internet provides a new form of social support to students abroad. He studied how the new social media act as a venue of interaction. The difference in culture and language ability may reduce or limit face to face communication between foreign students and the local students. With the Internet, the physical barrier has been reduced, creating a more conducive environment to interact. Aside from that, Mikal (2011) stated that the new social media is important as a way to maintain the relationship between the foreign students to the family and friends that they have left in their home country. The new social media have reduced the distance barrier and individuals could not what happens in their home county almost instantaneously. This was evident in the case of Malaysian students. In fact, they also felt the need to know the happenings back home and also follow local Malaysian drama serials.

Sawyer (2011) conducted a research on the impact of new media on intercultural adaptation. She conducted interviews with international students in the University of Rhode Island using the diffusion innovation framework. Most of the respondents stated that the reason they used the social media is to maintain contact and relationship with the family members. Aside from that it is the best way to keep them posted on the news at home. Her respondents also agreed that Facebook was used to assist in the process of adaptation as it is a great way to learn about the new culture that they are at. Having a social media assists them to adapt to the new culture and allows them to have a sense of belonging to the new

community. There is a proper assignment of groups they belong to and these social media reminds them that they do have friends within the new community.

Both these studies have supported the findings of this research in terms of understanding the role of technology and social media in the adaptation process of Malaysian students abroad.

SUMMARY

All in all, the Malaysians student admitted the importance of the social media as a form of support in the adaptation process. However, most of the respondents stated that it is mainly used to maintain contact with families at home. Though it is a good way of making new friends, they admit that they are still attached to the happenings at home. In a way, this may have affected the U-Curve model to a certain degree. For example, when the U-curve model was constructed, it never took account of the current networked society we have today. When an individual leaves the country, they leave the country completely. News from home was not instantaneous and contacting home was rather costly. However, social media has brought a lot of changes and allows people to adapt at their own pace as they are never completely detached from home. In fact, is there even a need to adapt if 'home' is still very much accessible?

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