

RUNNING HEAD: INTERNET AND ADAPTATION

Internet Use and Socio-Cultural Adaptation:  
A Study of Korean Students In America

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## INTRODUCTION

In the global world, a great number of people are going abroad for business, vacation, and study. Every individual, even a short-term sojourner, who enters a new culture, must cope with the difficulty of adjustment to the system of new people, norms, rules and values. Kim (1988, 1995, 2001, 2002) argued that cross-cultural adaptation occurs in a process through which an individual learns to and engages in communication within a culture. Some individuals are more successful at this adaptation to new cultures than others. For a long time, similar words, such as cross-cultural adaptation, assimilation, acculturation, adjustment, coping/adjustment, and integration, have been used together without sharp distinction from each other or a clear definition. The concept of cross-cultural adaptation is more abstract, and contains a broader meaning than other similar concepts. According to Kim (1995), “*Cross-cultural adaptation* embraces other similar but narrower terms, from *assimilation* (the acceptance of “mainstream” cultural elements of the host society by the individual) and *acculturation* (the process commonly defined as the acquisition of some, but not all, aspects of the host cultural elements), to coping and adjustment (both of which are often used to refer to the psychological responses to cross-cultural challenges), as well as to integration (mainly defined as social participation in the host society)” (p.174). She defined the concept of cross-cultural adaptation as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (2001, p. 31)

Kim (1988, 1995, 2001, 2002) proposed a structure model of cross-cultural adaptation to explain the mechanism of the differential degrees of adaptation among different people. The structure model consists of six dimensions: 1) host communication competence; 2) host interpersonal or mass communication; 3) ethnic interpersonal or mass communication; 4) host environment; 5) predisposition such as preparedness for new environment, difference of

ethnicity, and personality; and 6) intercultural transformation as the outcome of the cross-cultural adaptation process. Each dimension affects, and is affected by, the other dimensions in the process of cultural adaptation. These dimensions can accelerate or impede an individual's cultural adaptation. She proposed more studies to focus on the relationship between only one or two of six dimensions, and on the nature of the interrelationships between and among some or all of relevant constructs identified.

This study will focus on the relationships among three of six dimensions: 1) host communication, 2) ethnic communication, and 3) cultural adaptation. These three dimensions are the most relevant to the focus of my study examining the relationship between Internet use and cultural adaptation. First, in order to gain an insight into ethnic/host communication, the amount of an individual's use of Internet and e-mail in their native or host language was measured in this study. The third dimension, cultural adaptation, was measured by people's self-reported rating of difficulties with everyday social situations in the host cultural context.

The rapid and widespread growth of the Internet in recent years provides opportunities for its users to interact with others over great distance and to gather information all over the world with little or no costs. Auter (2000) stated that, "Used so regularly for so many diverse purposes, it is safe to say that the Internet has truly become a new channel for all forms of human communication" (p.124). Although a number of communication researchers have examined the roles of Internet in the organizational or interpersonal communication context, they have rarely examined its role in the intercultural communication context.

The Internet has potential to influence the cultural adaptation patterns among immigrants and sojourners, especially students and scholars, in the U.S. because it is one of the most popular media for them. For example, in a survey of the subscribers to "China-Net", one of the most popular electronic bulletin boards among Chinese scholars and students in the

U.S., each respondent spent surprisingly an average of 2 hours a day using the Internet (Liu, 1996). He argued that, “When international intellectuals come to the United States, almost all of them are exposed to the Internet because of: (1) its popularity and easy accessibility on university campuses; (2) academic requirements; (3) the general influence of cyber culture” (p. 7). In addition, another key reason for the great popularity of the Internet among foreign students may come from its multilingual content. The content of the Internet is constructed with various language formats, despite the dominant status of English overall.

Foreign students in the U.S. can use the Internet not only with English but also with their own native language. One of the most important criteria to distinguish between the ethnic Internet and the host Internet may be language. The Internet is basically a text-based medium in spite of developing its rich graphical environment. Moreover, language reflects a society’s cultural perspective on life that affects human behavior (Asuncion-Lande, 1998). Therefore, which language is chosen when using the Internet may affect and reflect the user’s perspective of the world and behaviors.

Internet users can easily download various language fonts from several Internet sites and install them on their own computers. For example, the Internet site of the Yamada Language Center at the University of Oregon provides 112 fonts for 40 different languages to Internet users for free (Yamada Language Center, 2001). After installing native language kits in their personal computers, people can easily obtain information from their own countries and interact with others with similar interests and cultural backgrounds using their native language. To cite an example, in real time on their computer, people can download or listen to music, watch live broadcasts or read newspapers provided by countless Web pages and portals from their home countries. People can interact simultaneously with others in their own language through electronic mail, chat rooms, Internet voice-phones, or Internet videophones. People can post messages in their languages to their homepages or others’ homepages.

Through the online communities such as mailing lists and newsgroups, people can discuss a particular topic or make friends with others who have similar interests and cultural or ethnic backgrounds. This situation encourages communication scholars to explore how the patterns of Internet use among immigrants and sojourners in the U.S are associated with adaptation to the host culture.

Consequently, the purpose of this study is an attempt to answer the question of how Internet use in the ethnic or host language is related to adaptation to the host culture among Korean students in the U.S.

### **Research Hypotheses**

As explained in the introductory section, the theoretical basis for these predictions lies in Kim's (2001) structure model of cross-cultural adaptation, positing 3 boundary conditions, 3 assumptions, 10 axioms, and 21 theorems to explain the principles and mechanisms of the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

The ethnic or host media use of immigrant/ sojourners is critical in shaping strangers' cultural adaptation to a new culture. Two of the theorems in the structure model stated that "The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the greater the intercultural transformation" (Kim, 2001, p. 91, theorem 5 of the theory), and "The greater the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication, the lesser the intercultural transformation" (Kim, 2001, p.91, theorem 6 of the theory).

A substantial amount of research has examined the impact of traditional mass media, such as radio, TV, newspapers, and magazines, on ethnic and migrant groups' cultural assimilation in the U.S. Many of these studies have shown that ethnic media use is negatively related to the level of acculturation, whereas mainstream media use is positively related to it (see Jeffres; 2000, Subervi-Velez, 1986, for overviews). However, to date, there is a dearth of literature that focuses on the impact of the Internet on the process of acculturation. One recent

study by Melkote and Liu (2000) is the only one that has explored this subject. They conducted an online survey to examine the role of the Chinese ethnic Internet in the acculturation of Chinese students and scholars in the U.S. They discovered that, similar to the use of traditional mass media, Chinese ethnic Internet access provided opportunities to sustain and strengthen Chinese cultural values and traditions, but was negatively related to American value acculturation. However, Melkote and Liu (2000) ignored other factors such as the host-language Internet and psychological characteristics that might affect the subjects' acculturation.

Consistent with Kim's (2001) theorems and previous research, the following three hypotheses explore the relationship between the use of ethnic/host language in the Internet and cultural adaptation. Hypothesis 1 and 2 focus on the relationships between each "amount" of ethnic and host language Internet use and cultural adaptation. Hypothesis 3 focuses on the relationship between the "proportion" of each language Internet use among the total of overall Internet use and cultural adaptation. While hypothesis 1 and 2 examine separately the amounts of ethnic and host language Internet use, hypothesis 3 considers two-language types of the Internet together.

H1: There will be a positive relationship between the amount of *ethnic-language* Internet use and the difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation.

H2: There will be a negative relationship between the amount of *host-language* Internet use and the difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation.

H3: There will be a positive relationship between the proportion of ethnic-language Internet use to host-language Internet use among total Internet use and the difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation.

## **PROCEDURE AND METHOD**

According to Babbie (2001), a survey is a suitable tool for measuring attitudes or characteristics of a large population. Since this study measures Internet behaviors, anxiety, and cultural adaptation of a large student population, a survey research method was used for this study. The research was conducted in the spring of 2002 at the University of Kansas. In this chapter, subjects, procedure, and instrumentation are discussed.

### **Sample and Procedure**

Subjects were limited to Korean students enrolled in regular classes at the University of Kansas at Lawrence. Since cultural differences among participants may influence the variables in this study, participants were limited to only Korean students who have the same native language and cultural background. Respondents were gathered through membership lists of the Korean Student Association at the University of Kansas, and through a few lists from Korean churches in the area. Each participant was given a self-administered questionnaire. The purpose of the inquiry was explained, and then the respondent was left alone to complete the questionnaire, which was picked up later. Participation in the study was absolutely voluntary.

Respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire, which was designed to assess their ethnic and host language Internet use, and socio-cultural adaptation to the host society. The questionnaire included questions of demographic information of participants, which consisted of gender, age, the length of stay in the U.S., marital status, etc. The demographic factors were tested to determine their association with ICA, Internet use, and adaptation to the host culture.

All the international students had passed the English Proficiency Test by the Applied English Center in the University of Kansas. This test is required for every international student who plans to register for regular classes at University of Kansas. Therefore, all

participants were able to understand the research questionnaire. Moreover, the questionnaire was pre-tested to discover potential areas of difficulties by the respondents. All 10 participants in the pre-test answered that it was not difficult for them to understand and complete the English-based questionnaire. Therefore, it was not necessary to translate the questionnaire to Korean.

A total of 103 participants completed the questionnaires. This study focuses on Korean student sojourners who went into American culture after their socialization in their home country (Korea) had been more or less completed. Sojourners are different from other groups in two aspects: 1) they usually stay temporarily in a different environment and intend to return home and 2) they have specific and goal-oriented motives to sojourn in a new environment (Cox, 2001). Therefore, 23 individuals who had stayed in the U.S. for a long time (over 10 years) or who came to America before they were 18 years old were considered as having uncompleted their socialization process in the Korean culture. They were excluded from the analysis after they have completed the questionnaires. In addition, one subject who answered that he/she never had used the Internet was excluded from the data because this respondent did not fulfill the criteria for the focus of this study on subjects' Internet use behaviors. Accordingly, the final number of questionnaires that were actually used in the data analysis was 79. Of the final subjects, 49.4% were females and 50.6% were males. The subjects consisted of 74.7% graduate students and 25.5% undergraduate students, and 49.4% of the married and 50.6% of the singles. Most respondents (91.1%) owned personal computers indicating that PC is a thing of daily necessity for the respondents. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 47 ( $M = 26.56$ ,  $SD = 5.71$ ). The average length of stay in the U.S. was 32.03 months (about 2.7 years,  $SD = 27.25$ ).

## Measurement

### The Amount of Internet Use

Participants were asked to indicate how many minutes on an average day they used each type of Internet function. Flanagin and Metzger (2001) argued that there are four different functions of the Internet such as email, information retrieval, information giving, and conversation. Information retrieval is typically performed via web “search engines”. Information giving is typically performed through such means as personal web sites or by “posting” information to others’ site. Conversation is like “usenet” groups, chat rooms, Internet telephone, and video telephone that enable users to talk with others on topics of mutual interest, asynchronously or in real time, respectively. It was possible to analyze each type of Internet function separately. A total of overall use of the four Internet functions was also calculated.

This scale was divided into two sections, Korean-language Internet use and English-language Internet use. In this study, the sum of Korean-language Internet use and English-language Internet use was regarded as the total amount of overall Internet use. The amount of each language Internet use was calculated separately. However, calculating separately the amounts of each language Internet use could not correctly reflect respondents’ preference, ethnic-language Internet use or host-language Internet use. In order to overcome this limit, the proportion of ethnic-language Internet use to the total of overall Internet use, i.e., [ethnic-language Internet use / (ethnic-language Internet use + host-language Internet use)] X 100, was calculated.

### Socio-Cultural Adaptation

To measure the levels of socio-cultural adaptation, I used a modified version of Ward and Kennedy’s (1999) Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS), which measures the amount

of behavioral and cognitive difficulties experienced by individuals adjusting to a new culture and society. Ward and Kennedy mentioned, “SCAS is a flexible instrument that can be modified according to the characteristics of the sojourning sample” (1999, p. 662). In accordance with the fact, the 29 items relevant to the student sojourner sample, e.g., “expressing your ideas in class,” were taken from Ward and Kennedy’s (1999) comprehensive list of items that have been used with various sojourner samples.

The scale used in this study is split into two domains, the behavioral domain with twenty-two items and cognitive domain with seven items. Two numbers for the levels of the cognitive and behavioral adaptation could be calculated separately. By averaging these two numbers, overall socio-cultural adaptation level also could be obtained. The SCAS was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = extreme difficulty, 1 = no difficulty). The scale was scored such that a higher value reflected greater difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation. A higher score of difficulty was considered as a lower level of socio-cultural adaptation.

Various versions of SCAS have been used in at least 16 studies of sojourner adaptation, which have proved this scale is one of the most common measures of sojourner cultural adaptation. Those previous studies have proved that the scale is reliable with alpha scores (.75 - .91,  $M = .85$ ) for various versions of the instrument (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

In this study, the reliability of the 29-item measure of adaptation difficulty was found to be excellent (Cronbach alpha = .94). Of the 29-item scale, both the 7-item measure of cognitive-adaptation difficulty (Cronbach alpha = .84) and the 22-item measure of behavioral-adaptation difficulty (Cronbach alpha = .92) were adequately reliable.

## RESULTS

This chapter presents an analysis of data. The first part reports descriptive statistics and an analysis of how the various demographic variables are associated with host/ethnic language Internet use and the difficulty of socio-cultural adaptation to the host culture. The next part presents the result of hypothesis analyses.

### **Descriptive Statistics and Demographic Factors**

Several items from the demographic information were used as points of comparison when considering Internet use (in Korean/English) and the difficulty of socio-cultural adaptation.

Correlation coefficient tests were performed between the interval data scores (age and the length of stay) and Korean/English Internet use and the difficulty of socio-cultural adaptation. Table 1 presents the correlation scores. The results showed that the length of stay was significantly correlated with socio-cultural adaptation,  $r(77) = -.40, p < .001$ . These relationships were negative, so that the longer sojourners experienced lower difficulty to adjust toward American society. However, the length of stay was not significantly correlated with Internet use with the host (English) and native (Korean) language. The results also showed that there was no significant relationship between the age variables and the three main variables.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation between Demographic Variables and Four Main Variables

	KI	EI	DSCA
AGE	-.15	-.15	.09
LENGTH OF STAY	-.12	.02	-.40**

Note. KI = Korean Internet Use; EI = English Internet Use; DSCA = Difficulty of Socio-Cultural Adaptation.

\*\* $p < .001$

T-tests were performed to uncover the difference of the mean score of Korean/English Internet use and socio-cultural adaptation for three demographic factors such as gender, marital status, and educational status (graduate and undergraduate).

### **Internet Use**

Participants were asked how many minutes on an average day they spent using the Internet in Korean or English. The Internet usage was identified as email, information retrieval, information giving, and conversation. Respondents indicated that they spent a substantial amount of time, an average 123.8 minutes (about 2 hours 4 minutes) each day, using the Internet. As presented in Table 2, the most frequently used Internet function was information retrieval, followed by e-mail, information giving, and conversation, respectively.

Of the total Internet use, Korean Internet use (64.08 minutes) was slightly, but not statistically significantly,  $t(78) = .86$ ,  $p = .39$ , more than English Internet use (59.72 minutes).

Table 3 summarizes the daily use of the Internet in both languages.

Table 2.

Daily Use of the Internet functions

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation	%
Email	40.39	5	120	40.39	32.6
Information Retrieval	53.25	8	210	53.25	43.0
Information Giving	15.78	0	90	15.78	12.7
Conversation	14.36	0	100	14.36	11.6
Total	123.80	20	330	70.55	100.0

Note. Unit is minutes per day.

Table 3.

Daily Use of the Internet in Korean-Language and English-Language

Internet Function	Mean (minutes)	%	Minimum (minutes)	Maximum (minutes)	Std. Deviation
<u>Korean Internet</u>					
Email	20.18	16.3	0	60	14.12
Information Retrieval	23.42	18.9	0	120	22.89
Information Giving	9.43	7.6	0	60	11.94
Conversation	11.05	8.9	0	90	19.63
Sub-Total	64.08	51.8	0	210	44.68
<u>English Internet</u>					
Email	20.22	16.3	0	75	16.95
Information Retrieval	29.84	24.1	0	120	24.33
Information Giving	6.35	5.1	0	60	9.66
Conversation	3.32	2.7	0	30	6.81
Sub-Total	59.72	48.2	8	180	38.69
Total	123.80	100.0	0	330	70.55

Before testing the relationships between the use of the Korean/English language Internet and socio-cultural adaptation, the relationship between Korean-language Internet use and the English-language Internet use was investigated. A correlation coefficient analysis showed that Korean-language Internet use was significantly positively correlated with English-language Internet use,  $r(77) = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ , two-tailed. The more Korean students use the Korean-language Internet, the more they use English-language Internet. In addition,

as shown in Table 1, the length of stay was not significantly associated with the amount of both Korean Internet use and English Internet use. Also, a correlation analysis showed that the length of stay was not significantly associated with the proportion of Korean Internet use to English Internet use among the total Internet use,  $r(77) = .13$ ,  $p = .26$ . These findings are interesting because they are inconsistent with most previous studies on the patterns of the immigrants' use of traditional mass media (i.e., television, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc.) in the process of their cultural adaptation. For example, as mentioned in the literature review chapter, a series of Kim's studies on immigrants' communication patterns have showed that throughout the years, the immigrants' consumption of host mass media continued to increase, and simultaneously their ethnic mass media consumption continued to decrease year after year.

In addition, differences of gender, and marital status, and educational status in the Korean/English Internet use were investigated. As shown in Table 4, average scores for the amount of Internet use by females, singles, and undergraduates were slightly higher than those by males, married people, and graduate students, respectively. Females and singles spent slightly more time in using both English and Korean language Internet than males and married people, respectively. Undergraduate students spent slightly more time using the Korean-language Internet and slightly less time using the English-language Internet than graduate students. However, the results of independent t-tests showed that the differences in the mean scores of the amount of ethnic/host Internet use in accordance with the distinction of gender, marital status, and educational status were not significantly wide (see Table 5). Therefore, it could be assumed that three factors of gender, marital status, and educational status would not affect subjects' Internet use behaviors.

Table 4.

Demographic Differences in Means of Internet Use

		<u>N</u>	Korean Internet Use	English Internet Use	Total Internet Use
GENDER	Male	39	61.05 (41.86)	53.69 (36.62)	114.74 (62.37)
	Female	40	67.03 (47.60)	65.60 (40.19)	132.63 (77.48)
MARITAL STATUS	Married	39	56.28 (32.32)	51.95 (35.85)	108.23 (54.62)
	Single	40	71.68 (53.42)	67.30 (40.28)	138.98 (81.05)
EDUCATIONAL STATUS	Under- graduate	20	72.65 (45.92)	51.40 (30.19)	124.05 (66.51)
	Graduate	59	61.17 (44.27)	62.54 (41.02)	123.71 (72.42)

Note. Unit is minutes per day. The parenthesized numbers are standard deviations.

Table. 5

Independent sample t-test: Demographic Differences in the Means of Internet Use.

		Korean Internet Use	English Internet Use	Total Internet Use
Gender (male/female)	<u>t</u>	-.59	-1.38	-1.13
	<u>p</u>	.56	.17	.26
Marital Status (married/single)	<u>t</u>	-1.55	-1.79	-1.99
	<u>p</u>	.13	.08	.05
Educational Status (under-/graduate)	<u>t</u>	-.99	-1.12	-.02
	<u>p</u>	.32	.27	.99

**Socio-Cultural Adaptation.** To measure the level of socio-cultural adaptation, respondents were asked how much difficulty they feel in various social situations that they might face while staying in America. The 29-item scale (SCAS) for measuring the overall adaptation difficulty yielded an average score ( $\underline{M} = 2.23$ ,  $\underline{SD} = .58$ ) with the range from 1.00 to 3.93.

The levels of behavioral adaptation difficulty and cognitive adaptation difficulty were calculated separately. A mean score of behavioral-adaptation difficulty was 2.16 ( $\underline{SD} = .60$ ). A mean score of cognitive-adaptation difficulty was 2.30 ( $\underline{SD} = .62$ ). A correlation coefficient test revealed that the difficulty level of cognitive adaptation was significantly positively related to that of behavioral adaptation,  $r(77) = .80$ ,  $p = .001$ . Those who had more problems in terms of cognitive adaptation (e.g., understanding the American value system and seeing things from an American point of view) tended to report more problems in terms of behavioral adaptation (e.g., making friends, getting used to American food, and using the transport system).

In addition, mean scores of the adaptation difficulties by gender, marital status, and educational status were calculated. As shown in Table 7, the average levels of the difficulties felt by *male, single, and undergraduate students* in the situation of social and cultural adaptation to the U.S. were slightly higher, but not statistically significant, than difficulties felt by *female, married, and graduate students* respectively. Therefore, it was assumed that the three demographic factors did not affect the levels of adaptation difficulties.

Table 7.

Independent t-test: Differences of the Difficulty of Socio-Cultural Adaptation by

Demographic Factors

	GENDER		MARITAL STATUS		ACADEMIC STATUS	
	Male	Female	Single	Married	Undergraduate	Graduate
DSCA						
<u>M</u>	2.26	2.22	2.27	2.20	2.38	2.18
<u>SD</u>	.65	.50	.54	.62	.69	.54
<u>t</u>		.48		.51		1.34
<u>p</u>		.63		.61		.18

Note. The higher the mean scores, the higher the difficulty of socio-cultural adaptation.

### Examining the Research Hypotheses

Correlation analyses were run to examine the relationships among variables described in the research hypothesis chapter. A minimum significance level of alpha less than .05 was set as a standard for supporting the hypotheses.

**H1:** There will be a positive relationship between the amount of *ethnic-language* Internet use and the difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation.

Hypothesis one sought to uncover the relationship between the degree of the use of Korean-language Internet and the difficulty level of cultural adaptation. Generally, this hypothesis was not supported. That is, any strong correlation between the amount of Korean-language Internet use and the difficulty of socio-cultural adaptation was not found (see Table 8). However, the information-retrieval function on the Korean-language Internet was significantly positively correlated with cognitive adaptation difficulty,  $r(77) = .229, p < .05$ . More use of the information-retrieval function on the Korean-language Internet was associated with higher levels of difficulty in cognitive adaptation.

Table 8.

Pearson Correlation between the Amount of Korean Internet Use and Difficulty of Socio-Cultural Adaptation

	Email	Information Retrieval	Information Giving	Conversation	Total Korean Internet Use
Cognitive Adaptation Difficulty	.061	.229*	-.004	.014	.143
Behavioral Adaptation Difficulty	.054	.167	-.004	.099	.145
Overall Adaptation Difficulty	.061	.209	.000	.058	.152

Note. \* $p < .05$

**H2:** There will be a negative relationship between the amount of *host-language* Internet use and the difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation.

This hypothesis was partially supported. As reported in Table 9, a significant negative correlation was found between the amount of English-language Internet use and the level of the difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation,  $r(77) = -.250$ ,  $p < .05$ . The more time a respondent spent on the English-language Internet, the lower difficulty of socio-cultural adaptation to America he/she felt. Specifically, the amount of English-language Internet use was significantly negatively correlated with the level of the difficulty in behavioral adaptation,  $r(77) = -.282$ ,  $p < .05$ . Greater English-language Internet use was associated with lower levels of the difficulty in behavioral adaptation. On the other hand, English Internet use was not strongly associated with the level of the difficulty in cognitive adaptation.

Table 9.

Pearson Correlation between the Amount of English Internet Use and Difficulty of Socio-Cultural Adaptation

	Email	Information Retrieval	Information Giving	Conversation	Total English Internet Use
Cognitive Adaptation Difficulty	-.196	-.075	-.119	-.182	-.195
Behavioral Adaptation Difficulty	-.183	-.205	-.176	-.164	-.282*
Overall Adaptation Difficulty	-.200	-.146	-.155	-.182	-.250*

Note. \* $p < .05$

**H3:** There will be a positive relationship between the proportion of ethnic-language Internet use to host-language Internet use among total Internet use and the difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation.

This study performed another correlation coefficient to see the relationship between the proportion of each language Internet use among total Internet use and the levels of the difficulty of socio-cultural adaptation. Table 3 showed the average percentage of Korean-language Internet use (51.8%) and English-language Internet use (48.2%) among the total of overall Internet use. The results of a correlation analysis indicated the proportion of Korean-language Internet use was significantly positively correlated with the level of the difficulty of cultural adaptation,  $r(77) = .450$ ,  $p < .001$ . The larger the proportion of Korean-language Internet use to English-language Internet use among the total of overall Internet use, the more the problems in the socio-cultural adaptation process of Korean students in the U.S.

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents discussions and conclusions along with limitations of this study and recommendations for future researches.

### Discussions

Hypothesis one predicted that the higher use by Korean students of the Korean-language Internet, the more they experienced socio-cultural difficulties while living in America. The results showed that there was no strong correlation between the amount of Korean-language Internet use of Korean students in the U.S. and their levels of the difficulty in cognitive and behavioral adaptation to America, so the hypothesis was rejected. This result is consistent with Liu (1996) suggesting that the amount of Chinese scholars and students' exposure to the Chinese Internet was not correlated with their degrees of acculturation to American behavioral manners (in dressing, eating, and drinking) and American value systems (in sex, religion, health and physical appearance, and relationship between parents and children).

Hypothesis two predicted that a positive relationship between the amount of host-language (English) Internet use and cultural adaptation would exist. The results revealed a significant correlation between these two variables. A significant correlation indicated that the higher use of English-language Internet by Korean students in the U.S., the lower their socio-cultural adaptation problems. This finding is consistent with previous studies on adaptive functions of host mass media use. For example, Hwang and He (1999) found that the use of English-language broadcast media satisfied Chinese immigrants' acculturation needs for language skills, information about the host society, and knowledge of American culture and customs. In addition, individuals who used more English-language mass media, including the Internet were better acculturated than those who exclusively used Chinese-

language mass media. Also, Walker (1999) found similar results in a study on the role of host/ethnic media use in Haitian immigrants' adaptation to the U.S.

In addition, it is interesting that host-language Internet use was significantly associated with student sojourners' behavioral adaptation (e.g., making friends, getting used to American food, using the transport system, etc.) and not associated within their cognitive adaptation (e.g., understanding the American value system, seeing things from an American point of view, etc). Increased usage of the English-language Internet by Korean students in the U.S. is related to their decreased behavioral adaptation problems to American socio-cultural standards. For cultural strangers, the use of the host-language Internet provides potentially helpful information about behavior in the host society rather than about what the value systems of the host society are.

Hypothesis three predicted that the higher use of ethnic-language Internet in comparison with the use of host-language Internet use, the more difficulty in adapting to the host society. It was measured how much percentage of each language Internet use occupied an individual's total Internet use (combined ethnic-language Internet use and host-language Internet use), and then tested how the percentage of each language Internet was related to the levels of socio-cultural adaptation difficulty experienced in the host society. The results revealed that the larger the proportion of ethnic-language Internet use to the total Internet use, the higher number of adaptation difficulties in the host society and culture. Of course, the proportion of host-language Internet use was negatively correlated with the levels of adaptation difficulties. In other words, within a limited time to use the Internet each day, respondents who spent more time using the Korean-language Internet as compared to using the English-language Internet felt more difficulties while living in America than those who spent less time using the Korean-language Internet. Even if the simple amount of Korean-language Internet use is not related to Korean students' adaptation level as shown in the test

results of hypothesis one, the relative amount of Korean-language Internet use as compared to the amount of English-language Internet use has a strong, positive correlation with the level of adaptation difficulty. This finding is consistent with a series of Kim's (1976, 1977, 1978) studies of the host/ethnic mass communication patterns of Korean immigrants in the U.S. She found that a simultaneous increase was observed in the immigrants' host mass media use, the positive attitude toward the host society, and the cognitive complexity in perceiving the host society and culture.

### **Conclusions**

This study offers one of the few examinations of the structure model of cross-cultural adaptation. As explained in the introductory chapter, the structure model of cross-cultural adaptation provides an explanation of the multidimensional mechanisms individuals adjust themselves to a new and unfamiliar cultural environment. This model combined six dimensions (host communication competence, host social communication, ethnic social communication, host environment, an individual's predisposition, and intercultural transformation) that work together interactively to facilitate or delay each cultural stranger's adaptation process. The present study focused on three dimensions (host social communication, ethnic social communication, and intercultural transformation) by looking into the relationships of one aspect of each dimension: host-language Internet use, ethnic-language Internet use, and socio-cultural adaptation difficulty, respectively. Overall, support was found for the structure model of cross-cultural adaptation.

This study is one of the initial attempts to uncover how Internet use is related to cultural adaptation. The results of the present study indicated that ethnic-/host-language Internet use could play a great role in the process of socio-cultural adaptation of an individual staying in a foreign country. The structure model of cross-cultural adaptation identified host social communication and ethnic social communication as critical components that can

facilitate or impede individual's successful adaptation to the host culture. However, it has not been known how host and ethnic communication via the Internet would be related to or affects an individual's adaptation process in a new environment. This study bridges the gap between Internet use and cultural adaptation. The findings of this study suggest that the more the proportion of Korean-language Internet use compared to English-language Internet use in the total amount of Internet use of a Korean student in the U.S., the more he/she feels socio-cultural adaptation difficulty.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Just like any other study, there are some limitations to be resolved by future research. First, this study did not include some other factors that may influence an individual's cultural adaptation, such as the role of the host communication competence (e.g., host language fluency, knowledge of host society and culture, etc.), ethnic/host interpersonal communication, and the use of traditional media (e.g., radio, television, magazines, etc.) and personality. It is suggested that other factors be incorporated into research design in future research.

Second, it seems unreasonable that the results can be generalized in all situations because this research was conducted under particular conditions; that is, the subjects were selected from only one small group of Korean students in a particular area (University of Kansas in Lawrence) at one point in time. Therefore, replicating this study for different populations (e.g., immigrants with various socio-economic status rather than students, different ethnic groups, etc.) over extended periods of time is recommended, which can further verify the findings of this study.

Third, this study was conducted on a particular developmental stage of communication technologies. Currently, computer communication technologies are quickly developing and influencing human society. This study assumed that the Internet provides its

users with four functions such as e-mail, information retrieval, information giving, and conversation. However, in the future, the Internet may offer more diverse types of functions, or the distinction between diverse functions may become obscure. Therefore, there will be a need to reexamine the role of the Internet in cultural adaptation on a higher developmental stage of communication technologies other than the current stage.

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