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Leveraging Social Media for Social Protection: Addressing the Challenges of International Students Abroad

Daniel Kibet Koech
University of Debrecen, Hungary

Esayas Demissie Degago
University of Debrecen, Hungary

Edina Molnár
University of Debrecen, Hungary

ABSTRACT

Study abroad experiences often present significant challenges that can lead to stress and emotional upheaval among international students. In response, social media networks have emerged as vital tools for accessing social protection services in today's digital landscape. This study explores the role of social media in providing emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support for international students at foreign universities. Anchored in social learning theory, the findings reveal that social media networks have a substantial and positive impact across all four dimensions of social protection. This study highlights that students' activeness and perceived utility of social media are critical factors in seeking emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support. Interestingly, while the reliability of social media is crucial for those seeking instrumental and appraisal support, it is less important for those seeking emotional and informational assistance. Additionally, the degree of challenges faced by students abroad is found to be significant for those seeking emotional and informational support, but this factor plays a lesser role for those relying on social media for instrumental and appraisal support.

Keywords: Internationalization, Social Media Networks, Social Protection,

Personal Counseling, Emotional Support, Information Support, Instrumental Support, Appraisal Support.

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INTRODUCTION

Studying abroad is becoming the norm as countries across the world revamp their efforts toward internationalization and globalization. This opportunity gives students short-term or long-term study experience in a foreign country to acquire knowledge and skills and develop talent in a multicultural environment (Andrade, 2008). The challenges that university students face are diverse and primarily concern dilemmas related to appropriate career paths, planning their careers, issues arising in academics, and stress, which require interventions that can enable them to develop and achieve their career and social dreams. For example, Cetindere & Shin (2025) discovered that Turkish international students at U.S. universities encounter social, emotional, financial, academic, and cultural challenges. Rahman, Hamka & Lin (2020) reported that international students cannot manage their emotions, coupled with the challenges of different cultures and languages. Other challenges that students in universities face revolve around social adjustment in multicultural environments (Hooley et al., 2018; Lázár & Bene, 2018). For Chinese international students, English language proficiency in oral communication, vocabulary, and academic writing negatively impacts their relationship with their lecturers and their productivity in academic engagements (Xue & Singh, 2025).

As a result of challenges in host countries, measures should be taken to help them access services, information, and programs tailored to provide positive experiences so that they can achieve their goals (Carr, 1999; Lee & Wesche, 2000; Beri et al., (2025). According to Kim (2024), perceived health status boosts the subjective well-being of international students in contrast with perceived discrimination, which diminishes their well-being and satisfaction. There is an urgent need for universities to focus on and address adjustment issues facing students in foreign countries because of the impact that challenges have on the success of intercultural education (Andrade, 2006). Because of this, counsellors should select the best strategies for delivering their services and monitor and evaluate their impact on solving challenges faced by students (Tatar, 1998).

SMNs are internet-enabled interacting platforms that allow users to create a public or semipublic profile, reach out and enroll in a list of users to share on a

common platform, and access and explore their friends' lists within the common system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SMNs and blogs consume approximately 25% of users' time, with an estimated 110 billion across the world. SMNs are new technologies that differ from conventional websites and refer to various technological platforms that facilitate socialization among users, including blogs, microblogging (e.g., Twitter), social networking (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook), and video- and file-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube), among others (Davis III et al., 2012). This technology has revolutionized communications, interactions, and socialization for people worldwide (Sriwilai & Charoensukmongkol, 2016).

Users need internet-enabled devices and an active internet connection to communicate seamlessly. This technology currently empowers psychologists to reach out to clients and meet their guidance and counseling needs outside of traditional face-to-face meetings in a physical office environment (Osborn et al., 2014). Studies indicate that the young generation engages in SMNs to pass time, seek information, engage in interpersonal interactions, and access entertainment. Consistently (Barker, 2009). According to Boyd & Ellison (2007), young people can interact with their peers, reinvent their personalities, and showcase their talent and personality via social media.

The use of SMNs is associated with the need for identity, which individuals derive from their knowledge of being a member of a particular social group (Barker, 2009), where they derive emotional and psychological satisfaction. There are different reasons why young people spend their time on social media, and this is determined largely by their gender. SMNs have been packaged into applications for Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype, Instagram, SnapChat, WeChat, LinkedIn, and Google Hangouts, among others, where youth register themselves to engage in greetings and share ideas and information, photos, and videos (Wash & Lampe, 2012). Both males and females appear to utilize the internet equally (Joiner et al., 2005). Boys access social media for entertainment and to follow current events, look for new friends, and build relationships (Peter et al., 2005), whereas girls express their romance, deep feelings, and confidence with their friends on social media and maintain contact with their existing friends (Madden & Rainie, 2003).

Mobile SMNs include all the traditional social networks and applications offered on mobile devices (Wang et al., 2017). Through this modern socialization technology, users are exposed to SMN influencers (SMIs), who can leverage social interactions to cause impact (Hudders et al., 2021). Efforts to establish career guidance and counseling were triggered by industrialization and growth (Watts, 1999). SMN users are seeking to fulfill their psychological needs, which are associated with the need for belonging and self-identity (Zhang et al., 2022). Researchers across the world attribute the current rise in studies on educational guidance and counseling to the shifting demand for work experience alongside knowledge and skills (Numminen & Kasurinen, 2003) summed up as career guidance. Educational counseling focuses on lifelong learning geared toward addressing social changes and demands (Sweet, 2001). The tech-savvy youth in developed countries have integrated technology into

their education, culture, and daily life, becoming “digital natives” (Teo, 2013).

For adolescents living in developed nations, digital technology has become an integral aspect of their culture, their education, and, more broadly, their lives. As such, these adolescents are often referred to as ‘digital natives’ (Teo, 2013). SMNs have become primary instrumental tools for mobilizations such as boycotts, mass protests, and getting people to attend rallies (Adams, 2011).

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

According to Bandura, people observe behavior either directly through social interactions with others or indirectly by observing behaviors through media. Actions that are rewarded are more likely to be imitated, whereas those that are punished are avoided. This study uses Albert Bandura’s three primary models of observational learning: the live model, where social media users watch and observe each other and adapt to the behaviors of their mentors or those of social media influencers; the verbal instructional model, which involves listening to detailed descriptions of behavior during online interactions and then acts on the basis of instructions and guidelines; and the symbolic model, which is characterized by learning through social media content such as digital books, movies, television, or online media, where behaviors are demonstrated.

Social learning theory highlights the critical importance of observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others, which are instrumental in personal counseling (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Social media network theory formulated the study hypotheses as the link between social media network use and personal counseling.

Social Media Networks and Personal Counseling

SMNs have become a channel through which individuals vent their physical, social, and mental challenges by sharing opinions, concerns, and experiences. Krüger and Johanssen (2016) acknowledge that individuals use social media to share and cope with stress because the platform gives users the freedom to express their opinions, beliefs, and sensitive information. (Kaluzeviciute, 2020). Hungary has an estimated 7.5 million social media users, with a projected increase to over 7.63 million users by the year 2027. (Medve, 2023).

Modern counseling has changed significantly from face-to-face and shifted to the use of technology offered through social media, which is offered through applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, among others (Ahmad et al., 2021). The use of social media networks in counseling offers tremendously desirable results (Creaner, 2020), as online platforms offer great opportunities for counseling professionals to explore and achieve maximum results. According to Jun Fu (2025), active engagement in

online communities among international students underscores the need to establish flexible, conducive, digitally enabled social support groups that can offer international students a sense of identity and belonging.

There is no reason why modern counseling professionals can ignore the use of social media in serving digital-savvy generation (Meyers & Holusha, 2018) because they risk becoming irrelevant and outdated. This is attributed to the rapid technological evolution that is driving the world into a global village. Therefore, there is a strong interconnection between counseling psychologists and the use of social media.

There are different ways through which counsellors can reach out and serve their clients. These include social media branding, delivering counseling services, creating and championing social justice campaigns, and using social media as a collaborative tool with other professionals online (Glasheen et al. 2016). Yerken *et al.* (2022) advise counsellors to consider students' countries of origin, places of residence, and mental health when developing counseling programs. According to Smith and Gillon (2021), counseling professionals can use social media as an influencer to shape the lives of their followers, for personal guidance and counseling through interaction with their clients, and, finally, as a marketing tool for their services to advance their career.

Putri *et al.* (2022) advise school counsellors to seek and adopt social media techniques and strategies that can support guidance and counseling services. Modern innovations in social media can be synchronized with online counseling services for students as an alternative to conventional face-to-face meetings for counseling services (Supriyanto *et al.*, 2020). According to Musdalifah (2021), guidance and counseling via online social media can motivate students to enjoy guidance and counseling services while at home. The use of social media to reach out to and help students has proven strategic and effective during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sholihah & Handayani, 2020).

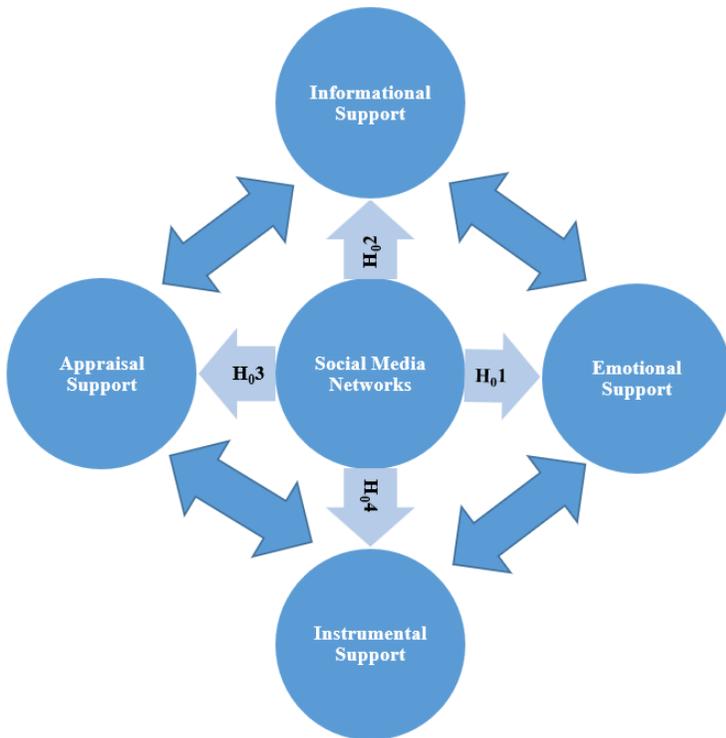
Digital media is an efficient and effective mode of offering guidance and counseling services to students because it helps open communication and provides enthusiasm and motivation to open up and seek solutions to their challenges (Van Rijn *et al.*, 2018).

According to Pérez-Jorge *et al.* (2018), social media offers an innovative approach to personal guidance and counseling with tremendous benefits to students if used by counsellors. This social media platform can effectively integrate guidance and counseling for students, which can be delivered during online learning. Other merits of using WhatsApp for guidance and counseling include convenience, effectiveness, timeliness, instructiveness, and the ability to save space (Nasrullah & Gustini, 2022).

Research recommends both psychoeducational programs and counseling sessions to enable students to cope with challenges (Ulusoy *et al.*, 2014). Career guidance and counseling professionals should align their strategies with social protection to meet the requirements of international students in foreign countries

Figure 1

Conceptual framework



This study investigated personal counseling as a functional aggregate of four supportive human behaviors motivated by earlier studies by House (1983) and Heaney & Israel (2008). The following major perspectives of social support laid the foundation for this study:

1. Emotional support in this study comprises acceptance, love, fulfillment and purpose in life, empathy, trust, and care.
2. Instrumental support components include financial support, access to food, giving or receiving directions in unfamiliar places, advice on medical care, transport assistance, and communication support.
3. Informational support involves the exchange of advice, exchange of suggestions, questions and answers to daily challenges, informative discussion forums, lessons

on how to perform tasks, news updates affecting one's ability to stay in a foreign country, and making appeals for help during times of crisis while studying abroad.

4. Appraisal support comprises positive engagement with peers, appreciation, positive affect, affirmation, and encouragement.

This study examines the role of social media networks in social protection among international students at universities abroad.

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁ Social media networks do not provide emotional support to international students facing challenges related to studying abroad.

H₀₂ There is no contribution of social media networks to international students' information support needs while studying abroad.

H₀₃ Social media networks do not play a role in providing appraisal support to students facing study-abroad challenges in universities abroad.

H₀₄ Social media networks have no instrumental support for international students at universities abroad.

METHOD

This study employed a survey method to explore the role of social media networks in providing various types of social protection support among international students drawn from various Hungarian universities. The survey was designed in alignment with the frameworks proposed by House (1983) and Heaney and Israel (2008), which target emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support. An anonymous online questionnaire created via Google Forms was administered to students aged 18 to 65 years, ensuring confidentiality by not collecting personal identifiers. The questionnaire contained four main sections: demographic information, social media activity, social challenges, and the reliability of social media in offering the specified types of support. Adapted from Williams' (2006) internet Social Capital Scales (ISCS), the questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater social support. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted on each of the dependent variables to assess the effectiveness of social media in providing social protection.

Survey Questionnaires

The survey questionnaire included four parts: demographic information; activeness in social media use; degree of social challenges; and the usefulness and reliability of social media in accessing emotional, informational,

Table 1
Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

| Baseline Characteristic | Full Sample | |
|-------------------------|-------------|------|
| | n | % |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 100 | 43.1 |
| Male | 124 | 53.4 |
| Other | 8 | 3.4 |
| Total | 232 | 100 |
| Marital status | | |
| Single | 112 | 48.3 |
| Married/partnered | 70 | 30.2 |
| Divorced | 16 | 6.9 |
| Widowed | 8 | 3.4 |
| Separated | 26 | 11.2 |
| Total | 232 | 100 |
| Age | | |
| 18-25 | 68 | 29.3 |
| 26-35 | 70 | 30.2 |
| 36-45 | 72 | 31 |
| 46-55 | 22 | 9.5 |
| Total | 232 | 100 |
| Level of Study | | |
| Postgraduate diploma | 2 | 9 |
| Bachelors | 66 | 28.4 |
| Masters | 66 | 28.4 |
| PhD | 86 | 37.1 |
| Certificate | 2 | 0.9 |
| Other | 10 | 4.3 |
| Total | 232 | 100 |
| Employment | | |
| Unemployed | 48 | 20.7 |
| Full time | 50 | 21.6 |
| Part time | 52 | 22.4 |
| On paid study leave | 24 | 10.3 |
| On unpaid study leave | 34 | 14.7 |
| Resigned | 18 | 7.8 |
| Retired | 6 | 2.6 |
| unemployed | 48 | 20.7 |
| Total | | |
| | 232 | 100 |

Note. *n* (232) is the number of respondents.

Table 2
Country of origin of participants

| <i>Country of Origin</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>(%)</i> |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|
| China | 4 | 1.7 |
| Indonesia | 9 | 3.9 |
| Kenya | 79 | 34 |
| Ethiopia | 6 | 2.6 |
| Uganda | 4 | 1.7 |
| Syria | 1 | 0.4 |
| Lebanon | 2 | 0.9 |
| India | 31 | 13.3 |
| Philippines | 7 | 3.0 |
| Latvia | 1 | 0.4 |
| Bangladesh | 12 | 5.1 |
| Pakistan | 19 | 8.2 |
| Tanzania | 3 | 1.3 |
| South Africa | 2 | 0.9 |
| Ghana | 6 | 2.6 |
| Nigeria | 18 | 7.8 |
| Cambodia | 2 | 0.9 |
| Morocco | 1 | 0.4 |
| Rwanda | 2 | 0.9 |
| Russia | 7 | 3.0 |
| Haiti | 3 | 1.3 |
| Senegal | 2 | 0.9 |
| Iraq | 3 | 1.3 |
| Argentina | 2 | 0.9 |
| Spain | 2 | 0.9 |
| Kazakhstan | 4 | 1.7 |
| Total | 232 | 100 |

appraisal, and instrumental support among students while in Hungary. The questions were adapted from Williams' (2006) framework—the internet Social Capital Scales (ISCS). The variables in the questionnaire were developed according to the recommendations of House (1983) and Heaney and Israel (2008). Each item was measured via a 5-point Likert scale as follows for the dependent variables: social media networks and emotional support from 5 (very strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree); social media networks and informational support from 5 (extremely helpful) to 1 (useless); social media

networks and appraisal support from 5 (to a very large extent) to 1 (to no extent); and social media networks and instrumental support from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Higher scores indicate greater social support. Every dependent variable was separately subjected to multiple linear regression analysis to capture the finer details from the respondents and to safeguard against overfitting and opaque generalizations.

The study involved 232 respondents drawn from a target population of 287 international students studying at different Hungarian universities who were active participants in WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook groups. These respondents were selected through random sampling, which focused on their active use of social media while studying abroad, as they were more likely to face challenges associated with adapting to a new environment. The survey was conducted via Google Forms, which were shared and distributed through the identified social media platforms. The collected data were analyzed via SPSS software.

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1.0, 53.4% of the respondents were male, 43.1% were female, and 3.4% were of other genders. A total of 29.3% of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years, whereas 30.2% were aged between 26 and 35 years. Thirty-one percent were in the 36--45 years category, whereas 9.5% were between 46 and 55 years. A total of 28.4% were undergraduates, which was similar to the percentage of master's degree students (28.4%). Among the students pursuing PhD programs, 37.1% were pursuing certificate courses, whereas 9% were pursuing other courses that did not fall into any of the given categories. Under the employment category, 21.6% were in full-time jobs, whereas 22.4% were doing part-time jobs; 10.3% were on paid study leave, and 14.7% were on unpaid study leave. A total of 7.8% resigned from their jobs before traveling to Hungary for their studies, whereas 2.6% had retired. A total of 20.7% had not yet been employed. As indicated in Table 1.1, participants originated from 26 countries spread across the globe.

Regression Analysis

Table 2 indicates that students studying abroad face greater emotional challenges ($M=4.05$, $SD=1.138$), with relatively low variance (1.296), which is closely followed by informational challenges ($M=3.71$, $SD=1.309$), with moderately high variance (1.715). The respondents reported a moderate degree of appraisal challenges ($M=3.67$, $SD=1.161$), with a comparatively lower variance (1.348). Instrumental challenges ranked lowest of the four ($M=3.63$, $SD=1.374$), with the highest variance of all four (1.887).

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Table 3
Personal challenges affecting students while studying abroad

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|----------|
| Degree | N | Range | Min | Max | Sum | Mean | SD | Variance |
| Emotional challenges | 232 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 940 | 4.05 | 1.138 | 1.296 |
| Informational Challenges | 232 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 860 | 3.71 | 1.309 | 1.715 |
| Appraisal challenges | 232 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 851 | 3.67 | 1.161 | 1.348 |
| Instrumental Challenges | 232 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 843 | 3.63 | 1.374 | 1.887 |
| Valid N | 232 | | | | | | | |

Table 4
Pearson correlation of the dependent variables

| | Pearson Correlations | | | | | Instrumental Support Sum |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| | Activeness in SMNs | Emotional Support | Informational Support | Appraisal Support | Instrumental Support | |
| Activeness in SMNs | 1 | .570** | .420** | .381** | .276** | |
| | Pearson Correlation | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 232 | 232 | 232 | 232 | |
| | N | .570** | .559** | .581** | .348** | |
| Emotional Support | 1 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| | Pearson Correlation | 232 | 232 | 232 | 232 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .420** | .559** | .621** | .449** | |
| | N | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| Informational Support | 1 | .381** | .621** | .000 | .000 | |
| | Pearson Correlation | 232 | 232 | 232 | 232 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .581** | .621** | 1 | .498** | |
| | N | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| Appraisal Support | 1 | .348** | .449** | .000 | .000 | |
| | Pearson Correlation | 232 | 232 | 232 | 232 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .276** | .449** | .498** | 1 | |
| | N | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| Instrumental Support | 1 | .232 | .232 | .232 | .232 | |
| | Pearson Correlation | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 232 | 232 | 232 | 232 | |
| | N | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5
Model Summary for Activeness in SMNs in Emotional, Informational, Appraisal, and Instrumental Support

| Model | Model Summary | | | | | | | Durbin-Watson | |
|--|---------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
| | | | | | R Square Change | F | Sig. F Change | | |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Activeness in SMNs, degree of emotional challenges, usefulness of SMNs, reliability of SMNs | .768 | .590 | .583 | 2.93179 | .590 | 81.706 | 4 227 | .000 | 1.853 |
| b. Dependent Variable: Emotional Support | | | | | | | | | |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Activeness in SMNs, degree of informational challenges, usefulness of SMNs, reliability of SMNs | .695 | .483 | .474 | 3.65673 | .483 | 56.036 | 4 227 | .000 | 1.683 |
| b. Dependent Variable: Informational Support | | | | | | | | | |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Activeness in SMNs, degree of appraisal challenges, usefulness of SMNs, reliability of SMNs | .741 | .549 | .541 | 2.90868 | .549 | 68.983 | 4 227 | .000 | 1.687 |
| b. Dependent Variable: Appraisal Support | | | | | | | | | |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Activeness in SMNs, degree of instrumental challenges, usefulness of SMNs, reliability of SMNs | .667 | .444 | .435 | 2.87307 | .444 | 45.376 | 4 227 | .000 | 1.731 |
| b. Dependent Variable: Instrumental Support | | | | | | | | | |

Table 6
ANOVA

| ANOVA | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| | Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Support | | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant), Activeness in SMNs, degree of emotional challenges, usefulness of SMNs, reliability SMNs. | Regression | 2809.186 | 4 | 702.296 | 81.706 | .000 |
| | Residual | 1951.159 | 227 | 8.595 | | |
| | Total | 4760.345 | 231 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: Informational Support | | | | | | |
| b. predictors: (Constant), Activeness in SMNs, degree of Informational challenges, usefulness of SMNs, reliability SMNs. | Regression | 2836.725 | 4 | 709.181 | 53.036 | .000 |
| | Residual | 3035.374 | 227 | 13.372 | | |
| | Total | 5872.099 | 231 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: Appraisal Support | | | | | | |
| b. predictors: (Constant), Activeness in SMNs, degree of appraisal challenges, usefulness of SMNs, reliability SMNs. | Regression | 2334.506 | 4 | 583.627 | 68.983 | .000 |
| | Residual | 1920.511 | 227 | 8.460 | | |
| | Total | 4255.017 | 231 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: Instrumental Support | | | | | | |
| b. predictors: (Constant), Activeness in SMNs, degree of Instrumental challenges, usefulness of SMNs, reliability SMNs. | Regression | 1498.210 | 4 | 374.553 | 45.376 | .000 |
| | Residual | 1873.772 | 227 | 8.255 | | |
| | Total | 3371.982 | 231 | | | |

FINDINGS

A multiple linear regression model was created to predict emotional support provided through activeness in SMNs, the degree of emotional challenges, and the usefulness and reliability of SMNs in emotional support. The results show collective significance at ($F(4,227) = 81.706, p < .000, R^2 = .590$). The participants predicted that emotional support is equal to $0.261 + 0.516$ (social media network use) $+ 0.524$ (degree of emotional challenges) $+ 1.951$ (usefulness of social media networks in emotional support) $+ 0.561$ (reliability of SMNs in emotional support). Emotional support was coded as self-acceptance, the ability to build and share love, the ability to achieve fulfillment and purpose in life, the ability to build trust with others and the ability to obtain or express empathy during sad moments. The results of individual predictors were further examined and revealed that the use of SMNs ($t=5.413, p=0.000$), the degree of emotional challenges ($t=2.928, p=0.004$) and the usefulness of social media networks in emotional counseling ($t=6.630, p=0.000$) were significant, whereas the reliability of SMNs was insignificant ($t=1.834, p=0.068$).

For informational counseling, the results indicated that there was collective significance ($F(4,227) = 53.036, p < .000, R^2 = .483$). The participants predicted that informational counseling is equal to $8.639 + 0.41$ (activeness in SMN use), $+ 0.743$ (degree of informational challenges), $+ 2.349$ (usefulness of SMNs in informational counseling), and $+ 0.635$ (reliability of SMNs). Informational support was coded to include the following: the exchange of advice, exchange of suggestions about living abroad, questions and answers to daily challenges abroad, holding informative discussion forums, exchanging lessons on how to perform tasks, exchanging news updates affecting stay in a foreign country, and making appeals for help during moments of crisis abroad. The results of individual predictors were further examined, and it was found that activeness in SMNs ($t=3.763, p=0.000$), the degree of informational challenges ($t=3.848, p=0.000$) and the usefulness of SMNs in informational counseling ($t=5.709, p=0.000$) were significant, whereas the reliability of SMNs was considered insignificant ($t=1.523, p=0.129$).

The analysis of the results of the appraisal support provided through SMNs reveals collective significance at ($F(4,227) = 68.983, p < .000, R^2 = .549$). The respondents predicted that appraisal support equals $3.127 + 0.285$ (activeness in SMNs) $+ 0.046$ (degree of appraisal challenges) $+ 0.945$ (usefulness of SMNs in appraisal support) $+ 2.241$ (reliability of SMNs in appraisal support). During coding, the following perspectives were added: appraisal support, positive engagement with peers, appreciation, positive affect, affirmation and encouragement. The results of individual predictors were further examined and revealed that the use of social media networks ($t=3.231, p=0.001$), reliability of social media networks ($t=6.336, p=0.000$), and usefulness of SMNs in appraisal support ($t=3.081,$

$p=0.002$) were significant. In contrast, the degree of appraisal challenges ($t=0.268$, $p=0.789$) was not significant.

The results for the use of SMNs to offer instrumental support show collective significance at ($F(4,227) = 45.376$, $p < .000$, $R^2 = .444$). The participants predicted that emotional support is equal to $9.587+0.197$ (activeness in SMNs) $+0.400$ (degree of instrumental challenges) $+1.216$ (usefulness of SMNs in instrumental support) $+1.632$ reliability of SMNs in instrumental support. The components of instrumental support coded in the study include access to financial assistance from peers abroad, provision or access to food, advice on medical care abroad, giving and receiving directions in unfamiliar places abroad, and transport assistance and communication assistance while abroad. The results of individual predictors were further examined and revealed that the use of social media networks ($t=2.314$, $p=0.022$), reliability of SMNs ($t=4.979$, $p=0.000$) and usefulness of social media networks in instrumental support ($t=3.979$, $p=0.000$) were significant, whereas the degree of instrumental challenges ($t=0.278$, $p=0.781$) was insignificant.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results show collective significance ($F(4,227) = 81.706$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$, $R^2 = .590$), indicating that social media network use in personal counseling among foreign students facilitates successful emotional support by 59.0%, thus rejecting the null hypothesis that social media networks do not provide emotional support to international students facing study abroad challenges. This finding is supported but an earlier discovery by Kietzmann et al. (2011) that the positive instrumental impact of social media on emotional support lies in its ability to seamlessly build both strong and weak social ties surrounding emotional strength. Social media has also been associated with increased social awareness, where users constantly keep themselves updated in their daily engagements. Earlier studies confirmed that social media users engage in social media as an information resource center and seek emotional support. Through social media, users build the trust and credibility of information (Rettberg, 2008). Social media is the source of emotional support, advice and medical advice for diabetic social media users (Greene et al., 2011).

This finding is, however, contrary to the conclusions of Lin et al. (2016), Marino et al. (2018), Primack et al. (2017), Vannucci, Flannery and Ohannessian (2017), Yoon et al. (2019) and Shensa et al. (2016), who acknowledge that although the use of social media has provided a window for connection opportunities and emotional support to adults, social media has been shown to have lower emotional help with increased risk of social isolation, greater anxiety and depression among users. Shensa et al. (2020) reported that face-to-face engagement led to 43% lower odds of depression per 1-unit increase on the 5-point scale (AOR = 0.57, 95% CI = 0.52–0.63) than social media-based emotional

support did, which resulted in 20% greater odds of depression per 1-unit increase on the 5-point scale (AOR = 1.20, 95% CI = 1.09–1.32). This finding is also contrary to the outcome of the study by Shensa et al. (2016), who concluded that heavy social media users may experience relatively less and not more emotional support.

A regression analysis to test H₀₂ revealed that there was no contribution of social media networks to international students' information support needs while studying abroad, indicating that there was collective significance ($F(4,227) = 53.036$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, $R^2 = .483$), where the use of social media for information support significantly impacted the ability of international students to address information challenges while abroad by 48.3%. The results therefore do not support the null hypothesis. Individual predictor findings indicate that social media network use ($t = 3.763$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), the degree of informational challenges ($t = 3.848$, $p = 0.000$) and the usefulness of social media networks in informational counseling ($t = 5.709$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$) were significant, whereas the reliability of social media networks was insignificant ($t = 1.523$, $p = 0.129 > 0.05$). This finding agrees with that of Kim, Sin and Yoo-Lee (2014), whose study findings conclude that students engage in social media to search for peers' background information, obtain opinions from peers, seek solutions on how to perform tasks and exchange a wide range of experiences and expertise available among social media users. Shaw (2008) acknowledges that social media forms the initial source where users can mine background information, which can provide links to other related sources of information. According to Kim et al. (2014), microblogs and SNSs are interesting sources of news and updates for social media users, a finding that studies by Brenner and Smith (2013) and Holcomb et al. (2013) fully support. Kim et al. (2011) further confirmed that social media is a useful information source for diverse contexts, such as Wikipedia, YouTube, and Q&A sites, which provide useful information in academic contexts. Steinfield et al. (2008) postulated that social media provides users with the ability to seek information about offline contacts (social searching) and social browsing to make new friends and links for offline socialization, which, according to Hajli (2018), confirms that the active use of social media has a significant influence on the credibility and usefulness of information. Through social media networks, transgender members exchange a variety of information on opportunities in education and career development, jobs, celebrations, and achievements with their groups (Irudayaraj, 2020). Facebook use is strongly linked to social protection support, including the provision of information and advice, and serves as a hub for seeking partners (Goulet, 2012).

A multiple linear regression model created to predict the degree of appraisal support provided through social media networks, the degree of appraisal challenges, and the usefulness and reliability of social media networks in terms of appraisal support shows collective significance ($F(4,227) = 68.983$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, $R^2 = .549$), indicating a significant contribution of social media to appraisal support for international students abroad, thus rejecting the null hypothesis (H₀₃), which states that social media does not play any role in providing appraisal support to students

facing study-abroad challenges in universities abroad. This finding concurs with that of Oh et al. (2014), who posited that supportive socialization facilitated by social media positively correlates with increased satisfaction in life among social media users. Their study of 339 social networking respondents revealed a positive relationship between supportive interaction and positive affect, comprising companionship support, appraisal support, and life satisfaction. Through active positive engagement in social media, users develop a sense of belonging in social groups through membership, where they integrate the development of feelings, affirmation, appreciation, and encouragement (Lin et al., 2014). Activities in social media networks such as posting, instant messaging, and clicking 'likes' enhance social appraisal support, where users exchange positive comments, encouragement, and appreciation from others, which in turn boosts self-esteem and helps users affirm their identities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Chin et al. 2015; Isaranon, 2019; Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012). According to Stefanone et al., (2012), the frequency of Facebook use is the ideal indicator of social support reception compared with emotional closeness.

To test Ho4, which states that social media has no instrumental support for international students in universities abroad, a multiple linear regression model was created to predict instrumental support provided through social media networks, the degree of instrumental challenges, usefulness, and reliability of social media networks in instrumental support. The results show collective significance at ($F(4, 227) = 45.376, p = 0.000 < 0.05, R^2 = .444$), thus rejecting the null hypothesis. The results of individual predictors were further examined, revealing that the use of social media networks ($t = 2.314, p = 0.022$), reliability of social media networks ($t = 4.979, p = 0.000$) and usefulness of social media networks in instrumental support ($t = 3.979, p = 0.000$) were significant, whereas the degree of instrumental challenges ($t = 0.278, p = 0.781$) was insignificant. This finding supports (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2006; Gosling et al., 2011; Joinson, 2008) the conclusion that social media can be used to keep in touch with friends, for social grooming, or for instrumental and informational purposes. According to Naslund et al. (2016), social media users with mental challenges exchange and benefit from peers through social connectedness, are satisfied by being members of a group, and exchange testimonies and strategies for coping with mental illnesses. The rising need for personal counseling services among students can be addressed via social media because it provides a medium for socialization between the students and the counselors, although it may have limitations (Indiani, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Although some previous studies have indicated that internationalization in higher education helps improve academic quality, develop an internationally oriented workforce, and provide opportunities for cross-border citizenship, this study indicates that international students face a wide array of challenges that destabilize

their psychosocial status quo. As a result of opportunities to study abroad, students face emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal challenges. Notably, social media network use for counseling is strongly affected by the activity of the users in social media groups and, to a great extent, the perceived usefulness of social media networks. The reliability of social media is not considered important by users seeking emotional and informational support, while the degree of challenges does not matter for users seeking appraisal and instrumental counseling. It is evident from the findings that social media is the modern appropriate channel through which social protection can reach the most affected groups. As the world embraces technology to make life easier and more comfortable, there is an urgent need for counsellors to adopt the use of social media to reach out and help their clients in guidance and counseling matters. The design and implementation of policies governing the use of social media in counseling should be guided by various types of challenges, whether emotional, informational, instrumental or appraisal, and should be readily available across all social media platforms. Higher education institutions and guidance and counseling organizations should create social protection groups on social network sites that are aimed at addressing social protection challenges facing international students abroad. The outcome of this study is related to the use of social media for personal counseling, which calls for similar research on the use of social media for educational counseling and an investigation of whether social media networks can impact vocational counseling. Further research on the topic of social media and personal counseling using different methodologies for comparative analysis is vital, especially from the perspective of internationalization and globalization.

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Bios

DANIEL KIBET KOECH is a PhD Candidate at the University of Debrecen, Hungary, Faculty of Health Sciences, Psychology Department. His Research interest is Internationalization and Globalization in Hungarian Universities in the post-COVID.

Email: daniel.koech@econ.unideb.hu <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5852-9773>

ESAYAS DEMISSIE DEGAGO is a PhD Candidate at the University of Debrecen, Hungary, Faculty of Health Sciences, Psychology Department, with research interest in Organisational Psychology.

Email: esyas.degago@econ.unideb.hu <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6004-3788>

DR. EDINA MOLNÁR is a College Professor and Head of Psychology Department at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. Her research interests are in Psychology, communication, and economics.

Email: molnar.edina@etk.unideb.hu <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8074-0724>