

The Urge of Share & Fear of Missing Out - Connection between culture shock and social media activities during Erasmus internship

Judit Pasztor, Gerda Bak

University of Pannonia, Doctoral School in Management Sciences and Business Administration

pasztor.judit@gtk.uni-pannon.hu,

bak.gerda@gtk.uni-pannon.hu

Abstract: International student mobility (ISM) is a perfect opportunity for the students who complete a short-term internship in another European country to develop their cultural competences as well. Most of the students have some previous knowledge regarding cultural differences, but they are not well prepared for the arising problems such as culture shock or intercultural communication difficulties. Longer time abroad causes cognitive and behavioral changes in the interns: they have to face anxiety resulting from contacting a new culture, feeling of confusion and loss, and incompetence caused by loss of accustomed cultural clues and social rules. Both ends of the socialization spectrum (from social isolation to overactive social life) trigger oversharing on social media and deepen Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). This study addresses the nature, causes, and stages of culture shock, and aimed to determine if there a relationship between the culture shock and social media use of students who participate in Erasmus internship program, and to explore the students' perceptions of social media activities related to oversharing and FoMO.

Keywords: international student mobility, Erasmus, internship, culture shock, social media, Facebook, Instagram, FoMO

Introduction

Nowadays, students can spend their internships abroad, and due to the Erasmus program, they can work in different European countries after their graduation as well. The aim of these student mobility programs is the possibility to gain work experience, practice foreign languages, and connect with new cultures. Before the era of total connectedness through social media, and internship abroad was a different experience: interns had to have a laptop or computer and to visit a library or find a wifi signal somewhere to upload and share their best photos with the family and friend via email. The process was time-consuming and difficult. Nowadays, every student has smartphones, and due to the lack of roaming fees in

the EU, their connectedness to the social media platforms is continuous. Missing friends does not mean the same as ten years ago, and their everyday life can be checked easily via Facebook or Instagram. This new form of connectedness is a double-edged sword, negative posts are not liked, dark photos are not shared, and sad stories are not commented. Thus positive, well-composed photos and stories have to be made to assure an excellent place in the news feed of our acquaintances on social media. Working abroad is a sophisticated experience with many adversities such as language barriers, inability to navigate effectively during conflicts, inability to decode nonverbal communication properly, feeling of loneliness, homesickness, social isolation. Internship in a different culture is an adventure that has always its dark sides, but the enrichment of personality cannot happen without adversity. Culture shock is not just a shocking feeling of something new and unknown, but a phenomenon: a whole journey from the excitement of the new place, through the stressful phase of adaptation to the period of acceptance of the new cultural rules.

The aim of this study to explore the possible connection between the phenomenon of culture shock and social media use and different emotional adversities such as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), loneliness, social interaction anxiety.

1 Role of social media in generation Y

Millennials or "Generation Me" are the popular name of generation Y, which is represented by individuals who were born between 1980 and 2000 [1][2][3]. Twenge [4] was one of the firsts who connected the generational changes to the development of social media, which became the base of connectedness and a "safe place" for the young generations [5][6]. Twenge [7] named the offsprings of this era iGeneration, Prensky [8] called them digital nomads due to their inborn digital competences, which caused a significant generation gap between the generation Y/Z and the previous ones [9][10][11]. The main characteristics of the Millennials are the quick access to the information, shallow interpersonal relationships, extreme connectedness via social media, but weak attachment in real life, thirst for adventure, challenge, and freedom, need of individualism, self-reflection, and simplicity [12] [13].

The phenomenon of post-adolescence is reflected in the "Peter Pan syndrome" [14] and quarter-life crisis as well [15], which leads to the delay of establishing a family, starting a career, or weakening the attachment to the parents [16]. These psychological effects favor the popularity of student mobility programs such as Erasmus+, and short-term summer works abroad. The more joyful experience one can have during their early twenties, the classic mature duties seem to be less appealing. The students precisely edited photos of an internship abroad at the platforms of Facebook or Instagram give a well-planned impression toward the

others who stayed at home and reflect success [17], thus trigger envy [18]. The circle of friends is a reference group based on shared experiences and similar tastes, which can influence the decision-making process [19]. "Consumption" of summer/Erasmus experiences reflects one's identity [20] and strengthen the link between the individual and their reference group [21]. The Millennials have been bombarded by the reference groups' requirements through social media as well, and they would like to identify with this unreal and highly idealized version of themselves [22]. Facebook and Instagram are the most frequently used social media platforms to present themselves online [23]. Self-presentation is a form of communication that can facilitate the maintenance of relationships [24].

Social media itself, like internet sites, is familiar to everyone. However, its definition means different things to different researchers. Therefore, no single definition exists for it. The difficulty is that social networking sites are more of an online platform that offers a diverse array of services that is evolving at a fast pace to retain, satisfy, and attract new users. According to Danah and colleagues, social media is an Internet-based service where personal profiles can be created and shared with others [25]. In the words of Andreas Kaplan, social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow users to create and transform user-generated content [26]. A series of social media websites and apps designed to help people share content quickly, efficiently, and in real-time [27]. The central role of social media in our daily lives is no better demonstrated by the latest Eurostat data (2019) [28], which shows 65% of the Hungarian population use social media platforms. The EU average is 56%, while Denmark has ranked first (79%) while Hungary has ranked the tenth. GlobalWebIndex Report (2018) [29] showed that the proportion of people who spend more than 10 hours online has doubled between 2012 and 2018 globally (increased from 2.8% to 5.4%). According to another report from GlobalWebIndex (2019) [30] shows that 47% of Europeans use social media sites to check what their friends are doing, and 41% to spend their free time. It is also proven by the fact that 75% of social media users use Facebook for gathering daily information, and 66% use Twitter [31]. The use of smartphones has become an essential part of everyday life and can trigger maladaptive behavior regarding the individuals' relations to technology [32].

Fear of missing out (FoMO) is described as a "pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" [33]. The anxiety resulted from FoMO is characterized by an urge to stay continually connected with what others are doing [34] and can cause maladaptive smartphone use and addiction [35]. The intrinsic motivation of continuous online presence is the basic need for social interactions, especially if one feels lonely. By browsing social media sites, the life of one's friends can be checked continually, and the comparison triggers more loneliness, boredom, and even depression [36]. The FoMO is a trigger for further social media activity: excessive browsing the social media account of others and oversharing [37]. 80% of Millennials check social

media account twice or more a day [38]. The urge to checking and sharing is the strongest in the evenings and at the end of the week [39] and can lead to maladaptive smartphone use. FoMO negatively affects the overall psychological wellbeing of an individual because it causes a significant amount of anxiety and emotional pressure due to the constant comparison with others [40].

2 Challenges of internships abroad

The behavior of Millennials differs from the previous generations in the field of traveling. They decide destination easier, make decisions more self-conscious, and more mobile [41]. Due to their relative financial freedom (which is based on the postponement of the detachment of the parents financially and emotionally), Millennials behave differently. They spend more financial resources on traveling and exploring the world, organize short trips quicker and more accessible due to their digital competences. They continuously dream about adventure and cross-cultural experiences, and they make idealized photo collection of their experiences and best moments on social media platforms [42]. This young generation is braver and more tolerant for the cultural differences [43], but based on the findings of Twenge [44] the youngest (who belong to the generation Z) spend more time online than any generation before and reach a tremendous amount of information regarding any place of the world. However, their desire to travel is significantly decreased, which reflects the same reduction in the number of Erasmus participants as well [45].

The Erasmus program was created to foster intercultural competences and provide a well-regulated framework for internship (and studying) opportunities abroad for 2-12 months. The program has been designed not to cause "brain drain" in the EU [46]. However, several studies proved that student mobility had a significant effect on career mobility within the European labor market. The study of Guellec [47] confirms the significance of soft factors (such as affection for foreign cultures) in participation. Student mobility has been supported by enterprises as well because it broadens the recruitment pool and can cause labor cost reduction [48]. The primary motivation of participation is experience-seeking, and the most significant influence is the stories and travelogues of the former participants (who became role models or even influencers) and their photos on social media. In a Hungarian study, 74% of 242 students confirmed that they want to have the same experiences and would like to reflect the same image on social media as the influencers. 84.4% of the participants agreed that their internship abroad was one of the best experiences in their life, and that period becomes a determining status symbol for them [49].

2.1 Intercultural communication adversities & culture shock

The culture shock [50] is a complex experience caused by numerous internal and external stressors occurring in contact with another culture [51]. Cultural shock occurs not just for immigrants but students, who study or work abroad for more than three weeks are affected as well [52]. It can be defined as anxiety resulting from contact and mixed feelings of incompetence, loss, social isolation, and lack of accustomed to social rules. Homesickness, perceived loneliness and social isolation, difficulties in self-expression due to language barriers, interpersonal conflicts, boredom, and work-life imbalance lead to further adversities. Pedersen [53] defines culture shock as a communication problem and focuses on the lack of understanding of the nonverbal signs in a foreign culture. One loses the well-known daily routines, the reactions from the environment become unpredictable and sometimes threatening. In this situation, the new culture becomes a permanent stressor and hinders the adaptation of the individual [54].

The root of the intercultural communication adversities are the following: (1) assumption of similarities, (2) language barriers, (3) nonverbal misunderstandings, (4) preconceptions and stereotypes, (5) assessment differences, (6) high level of anxiety due to the disorientation in the host culture [55]. Nonverbal communication can be the root of many difficulties at the workplace due to the cultural differences in touch, body movement, and structure of time [56]. Basic emotions such as happiness, surprise, disgust, anger, and sadness can profoundly influence the meaning a message in a high context culture, while expression of emotions in low context cultures has no practical notability [57]. The success of intercultural communication lies in the extent of cultural distance [58]. The more similarities two cultures have, the more effective the communication between two individuals.

2.2 Phases of adaptation

According to the most basic model [59], acculturation has been described by a U-curve [60]. Figure 1 describes that people will initially have (1) honeymoon/tourist phase, and then there will be (2) a negative phase, that is, cultural shock. However, people will start to (3) adapt (the dotted line depicted some people hated by new cultures instead). Furthermore, (4) refers to some people returning to their places and re-adapting to the old culture, which phase can be characterized by reverse culture shock. Further models [61] have been developed as well.

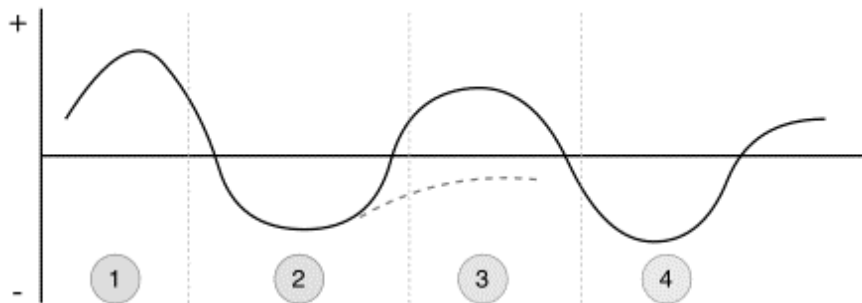


Figure 1
Phases of adaptation

The four phases of cultural adjustment [63] are the following: (1) honeymoon, (2) negotiation, (3) adjustment, (4) adaptation. The culture shock is not preventable [64], and each individual reacts to the new culture differently and uses distinct coping mechanisms [65].

- (1) *Honeymoon period*: everything seems to be fascinating, and the new culture is seen in a romantic light. In this phase, the individual contacts just well-organized and guest-focused establishments such as hotels, airports, restaurants. This period eventually ends [66].
- (2) *Negotiation*: The differences between the old and the new culture creates anxiety. Excitement fades away, and general anxiety level arises due to the difficulties in interpersonal relationships, perceived loneliness, stimuli overwhelming and stress caused by the new cultural values, rules, and conflicts.
- (3) *Adjustment*: One grows accustomed to the new cultural values, and develops routines, understands the nonverbal communication better. Adverse reactions to the new culture are reduced
- (4) *Acceptance*: The new cultural values are accepted, the social rules are adjusted, and the experiences are internalized, the level of stress is decreased.

There are further models (ten steps model by Rhinesmith [67] and the W-curve model by Młynarczyk & Sokołowska [68]) represents the psychological adjustment process, which does not finish after the acceptance phase. When the individual move back home, has to face to re-entry of reverse culture shock, which is emotional and psychological distress. It can result in unexpected difficulty in readjusting to the culture and values of the home country and generally made up of two parts: idealization and expectations. Based on the studies on internship [69]

[70] the individual starts to idealize the period spent abroad after moving back home. This reverse romanticizing is reflected by their social media usage as well: perfectly edited photo collection has been shared on Facebook and Instagram. Most of the satisfied participants became an advocate of student mobility and influence the expectations of the Erasmus applicants.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Measure and Method

The data has been collected anonymously by questionnaire, which took approximately 20-25 minutes to fill in. The survey form included general questions collected demographic information such as gender, age, educational level. The rest of the questionnaire contained validated scales and specific questions related to social media use during the internship period based on the previous study of Matook [75]. The total number of questions was 102.

Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMOS) [71], which is a self-report questionnaire that contains ten questions, aims to measure the level of FoMO of an individual. The final score was between 0-40. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) [72] measures the individual's perceived psychological stress level, contains ten questions, and the final score was between 0-40. Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) [73] contains twenty questions, designed to assess the anxiety individuals during social interactions and can measure the tendency of avoidance or successful adjustment. The final score was between 0-80. The strength of Culture Shock was measured by Culture Shock Scale (CSS) [74], which contains twelve questions and results in a total score between 0-48. The perceived loneliness was measured by the Perceived Loneliness Scale (PLS) [75], which was developed by Matook based on the UCLA Loneliness Scale and contained seven questions. The total score was between 0-28.

All the scales contained Likert scales, which indicates the degree to which one feels the statement is characteristic or true for them. The rating of the scale was from 0 to 4 (where 0 = *Not at all characteristic or true of me*; 1 = *Slightly characteristic or true of me*; 2 = *Moderately characteristic or true of me*; 3 = *Very characteristic or true of me*; 4 = *Extremely characteristic or true of me*). All scales showed good reliability ($\alpha_{\text{FOMOS}} = .0.808$, $\alpha_{\text{PSS}} = 0.895$, $\alpha_{\text{SIAS}} = 0.922$, $\alpha_{\text{CSS}} = 0.722$).

The final questionnaire was available online and has been sent to students directly who partook in student mobility programs such as Erasmus+ or Campus Mundi, and they have been asked to forward the link of the questionnaire to other participants as well. Presented data below is not representative regarding the whole Hungarian student population.

3.2 Survey analyses

The total number of responses was (N = 102) shared between 66 female and 36 male participants. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 30 years (m = 22.29, SD = 2.201). According to their educational background, 76.47% of the respondents had studied at Bsc level and 5.88 % at master level, and 17.65 % at another educational level.

Table 1
Correlation coefficients based on Fear of Missing out (FoMO)

	Coefficients	Confidence level
Perceived Loneliness Score (LONS)	0.243	0.172
Perceived Stress Score (PSS)	0.473*	0.005
Social Interaction Anxiety Score (SIAS)	0.420*	0.015
Culture Shock Score (CSS)	0.555**	0.001

As Table 1. describes, there is a modest, positive correlation between the strength of FoMO, perceived stress ($r = 0.473$, $p < 0.01$) It means that the more stressful the work and the everyday duties in the new culture, the more anxiety appears due to the missed opportunities at home. The lack of close friends and feeling of connectedness can strengthen this fear too. The mean of the Perceived Stress score was 16.33 (scale scores between 0-40, SD=7.34), and the Perceived Loneliness score was 14.90 (scale scores between 0-28, SD=2.37). The relatively high level of perceived loneliness was the most outstanding detail. Data shows a modest correlation between FoMO and Social Interaction Anxiety ($r = 0.420$, $p < 0.05$). The avoidance of social interactions created by anxiety deepens the feeling of incompetence, loneliness. It turns the individual to the well-known and safe place of social media where everything seems to stay the same.

A modest, positive correlation between FoMO and Culture Shock ($r = 0.555$, $p < 0.01$) can be explained by the disorientation felt in a new culture. The differences in rules, values and even nonverbal communication trigger the feeling of incompetence, which is coupled with the avoidance of new social interactions that can cause social isolation or loneliness. The need to perform well at the workplace due to the requirements of the sending educational institution pressurizes the intern to stay abroad, even if it causes negative feelings. In this situation (because of the lack of friends), the individual turns to social media to compensate.

Table 2
Correlation coefficients based on Culture Shock

	Coefficients	Confidence level
Fear of Missing Our Score (FOMOS)	0.555**	0.001
Perceived Stress Score (PSS)	0.667**	0.000
Social Interaction Anxiety Score (SIAS)	0.437*	0.011

As Table 2. describes, a significant positive correlation is showed between the strength of Culture Shock and Perceived Stress ($r = 0.667$, $p < 0.01$), which confirms that the feeling of competence to manage the daily life successful connected to the disorientation belongs to culture shock. The connection between Culture Shock and Social Interaction Anxiety is positive and significant ($r = 0.437$, $p < 0.05$). The anxiety which is triggered by foreign language use and the different nonverbal communication strengthens the culture shock. In the adjustment phase of cultural adaptation, social anxiety reduces, and the one start to cope with the daily interactions more effectively, which reduces the degree of culture shock. When the intern is finally adapted to the new culture, the cultural differences can be internalized and enrich the personality.

Concerning social media use during the internship, the study highlighted exciting findings. 88% of the interns used Facebook and 53% used Instagram and 47% used both social media platforms daily. The frequency of posting on social media correlates to the perceived feeling of loneliness ($r = 0.488$, $p < 0.01$) thus the lonelier the intern during the internship, the more posts they make. There is a strong, positive correlation between the need for feedback regarding a new post and the desperation to show an idealized image on social media ($r = 0.777$, $p < 0.01$). The individuals make more preparation (editing, composition) on a photo or a story to get more "likes" - and the Facebook friends react to the well-composed posts better and quicker. There is a weak and positive correlation between the level of stress and the need for social media feedbacks, such as "likes" or comments" ($r = 0.352$, $p < 0.01$) and the stress correlate to the desire of idealized image creation as well ($r = 0.599$, $p < 0.05$). The more stressful is the internship, there higher the need to receive feedback to the posts, and the higher the urge to show the best angle of the experience. This behavior manifests in "experience haunting". The interns try to catch the best moments, find the best location to make a landscape or beach photo, and try to take the best group photos during a gathering. The result is more important than experience. The more social media "material" has been collected, the more frequent the urge was to post ($r = 0.590$, $p < 0.01$), which can lead to oversharing. The urge to share was connected to the feeling of loneliness as well ($r = 0.600$, $p < 0.001$). The most exciting finding lies in the comparison of the Social Interaction Anxiety and social media activity. The higher the SIAS score of the individual, the higher the number of positive posts have been made ($r = 0.439$, $p < 0.05$), which indicates that the students try to mask their problems.

Conclusion and recommendations

The present paper focused on the difficulties of Millennials or younger ones who spend their internships abroad. Research result shows that the interns have to face mild culture shock, which resulted from the close distance of the culture of Hungary and the European host countries. The students experience the feeling of loneliness in the new environment, far from their family and close friends, and their only one communication option is social media. Loneliness comes with the feeling of social isolation and possible avoidance of interactions. As the Culture Shock scale revealed, they have problems with expressing themselves in a foreign language, (especially in conflicted situations), cannot use the social rules of the new culture properly and have to face adversities in the field of nonverbal communication as well (mainly decoding of emotions of others). Fearing of Missing Out (FoMO) resulted from anxiety, which triggered by the feeling of loss and failure and the desire to stay connected with others at home.

The interns use social media applications abroad daily and share their best moments at work in their free time. The study result shows that even if they are feeling depressed and unsatisfied with their internship, they try to mask these feelings on social media and collect exciting moments or places and edit the photos before uploading them to reach the desired outcome and receive more feedback and likes. The more depressed they feel, the more preparation work they do on the photos. The stress, loneliness, and anxiety trigger the need to post more frequently. They might be lonely and disappointed, but their posts show a perfect internship, with great workmates, beautiful landscapes and beaches and diner compositions at restaurants and this idealized. This parallel reality makes the others (who stayed at home) envy and influences and encourages them to apply for an internship program. It is the circle of the connection between the internship programs, social media, and one's need to be connected and seen.

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