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A Structural Equation Model of Reverse Culture Shock, Digital Coping, and Sustainable Reintegration Among Returning Migrant Content Creators

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ABSTRACT

As digital migration increases globally, the challenge of sustainable reintegration upon return becomes more pressing, particularly for individuals navigating reverse culture shock (RCS). This study investigates the structural relationships between reverse culture friction (PCF), digital coping strategies, reintegration self-efficacy (RSE), and sustainable re-adaptation outcomes (SRO) among returning migrant content creators. Using a quantitative approach based on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the research models latent constructs mathematically and empirically test direct, indirect, and moderating effects through survey data from 100 returnees active on digital platforms. The findings reveal that while PCF significantly predicts engagement in digital coping behaviors, such coping alone does not directly lead to sustainable re-adaptation. Instead, RSE emerges as a critical mediator, channeling the psychological impact of cultural dissonance into resilience and reintegration success. Interestingly, perceived community support (PCS) often presumed to aid returnees was not a significant factor in digital contexts. This study contributes to sustainability and development discourse by proposing a quantified reintegration model that highlights internal psychological resources over external supports. Practical implications suggest that policy and reintegration programs should focus on empowering self-efficacy and digital fluency rather than solely building community structures. The integrated model offers a foundation for developing targeted interventions to support human development in post-migration transitions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, the scale and visibility of return migration have expanded significantly, driven by increasing global mobility and the integration of digital platforms into everyday life. According to recent global estimates, over 280 million people live outside their country of origin, and a growing proportion of these migrants eventually return home either voluntarily or due to external pressures. However, return is not always accompanied by ease or familiarity. Studies have shown that up to 60% of returnees experience some form of reverse culture shock (RCS), manifesting in psychological stress, identity conflict, and social disconnection [1, 2]. In parallel, digital behavior has become deeply embedded in the lives of modern migrants. For instance, more than 3.5 billion people actively use social media platforms, with YouTube alone accounting for over 2.7 billion monthly users globally [3]. This intersection of mass return migration and high digital engagement creates a unique socio-psychological context: returnees not only navigate cultural readjustment offline but also perform and negotiate their reintegration experiences online, in real time [4]. These patterns signal a shift in how reintegration should be understood not merely as a demographic event, but as a complex, digitally mediated process that requires new frameworks for sustainable human development (SHD) [5].

This misalignment can have serious implications for sustainable development, particularly in emotional, social, and psychological dimensions. Returnees may experience alienation, reduced productivity, or a desire to re-migrate, thereby disrupting efforts toward stable reintegration and personal well-being [6]. For individuals whose livelihoods are shaped by digital presence, such as YouTube content creators, the process of re-adaptation is both public and performative. Their digital content often reflects their struggles and strategies, serving as a coping mechanism that bridges personal experiences with online community engagement. In this context, digital platforms play a dual role: they are spaces for emotional expression and tools for identity negotiation. Platforms like YouTube allow returnees to articulate their discomfort, seek validation, and reconstruct their cultural narratives through storytelling. Given these dynamics, understanding the intersection of reverse culture shock, digital coping strategies, and reintegration outcomes is essential not only for academic inquiry but also for informing policy and development planning. Governments, educational institutions, and reintegration agencies must consider the digital lives of returnees when designing support

programs. This study responds to this gap by developing a conceptual model that captures the relationships between PCF, digital coping, self-efficacy, and sustainable reintegration, offering both theoretical insights and practical implications for planning sustainable human reintegration in the digital age.

In recent years, growing attention has been directed toward the complexities of post-return experiences among international migrants, particularly in the context of RCS and re-adaptation dynamics. Reverse culture shock refers to the psychological dissonance and socio-cultural conflicts encountered by returnees who re-enter once familiar environments, but now feel foreign after prolonged exposure to other cultures [5, 7, 8]. This condition has been widely observed across diverse populations, including international students, repatriated scholars [5], and returnee professionals [3], who often face identity tensions, loss of social capital, and challenges reintegrating into their origin societies. However, few studies have explored how digital platforms mediate these re-entry processes. With the increasing integration of digital technologies into everyday life, social media has become a powerful arena for emotional expression, identity negotiation, and social reintegration [9, 10]. In particular, YouTube, as both a content creation platform and a community, offers returnees a space to narrate their experiences, gain peer support, and publicly process their transition [11, 12]. This is especially relevant in countries like Indonesia, where digital connectivity is high and where returning content creators engage audiences with themes rooted in reverse migration narratives and cultural readjustment. While studies have explored returnee contributions to home country development and coping mechanisms in the Global South, empirical studies linking psychological adjustment, digital coping, and sustainable reintegration remain limited. Furthermore, research using netnographic methods to capture these digital traces is still emerging, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts. Haris's study aims to address this gap by modeling the relationship between perceived cultural friction, digital coping strategies, and reintegration self-efficacy using a Structural Equation Modeling approach. This research contributes to the literature on migration, intercultural communication, and digital ethnography, while also informing policy frameworks for reintegration planning in the digital age.

On the video sharing channel YouTube, there are several channels that have been identified by researchers as having stories about reverse culture shock and how they overcome the re-adaptation process that becomes YouTubers' content [13]. All of these reverse culture shock problems are very interesting for researchers to study and learn about this phenomenon that inspired YouTubers to create this content [14]. The researcher decided to use a netnography study to find out about this matter since the netnography study is still less popular among cross-cultural communication researchers in Indonesia. The focus of this study is to trace all digital footprints left by YouTubers about reverse culture shock content, even though some YouTubers do not even realize that what they produced was about reverse culture shock [15]. The main reason why YouTube was chosen among other social media was the fact that YouTube has been proven as the number two internet site most viewed by Indonesian internet users and only beaten by Google. This data was published by We Are Social in January 2023, based on data from December 2021 until November 2022. YouTube was accessed 833 million times during that period, while Google was accessed 2.02 billion times [16]. The We Are Social report about "Digital 2023 Indonesia" gives us a comprehensive image of the digital technology trend in Indonesia. This report shows that active internet users among the Indonesian population reached 212.9 million people in January 2023. This number has significantly increased compared to the previous year since in 2021 active internet users number around 202 million people from the total Indonesian population which has reached 276.4 million people in January 2023. In other words, internet penetration in Indonesia has reached 77% [17]. Indonesia has witnessed a rapid increase in digital connectivity, making it one of the most active digital markets in Southeast Asia. This transformation is crucial for understanding the relevance of social media platforms, particularly YouTube, in shaping and sharing intercultural experiences such as reverse culture shock. According to data published by We Are Social and Meltwater in January 2023, the Indonesian population reached 276.4 million, with 212.9 million internet users and 167 million active social media users. The number of cellular mobile connections even exceeded the population, reaching 353.8 million [18]. These statistics indicate a highly digitized society where content creation and consumption thrive across platforms. The visualization in Figure 1 provides a snapshot of this digital penetration and user engagement across key metrics.

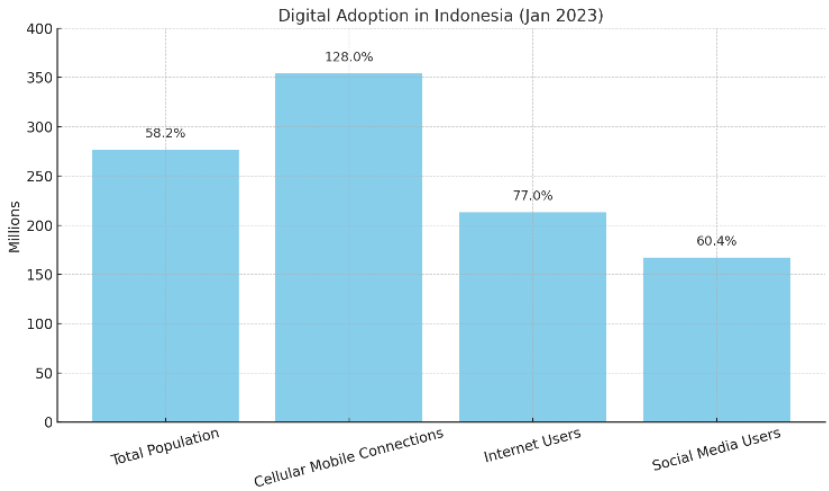

Figure 1. Digital adoption in Indonesia

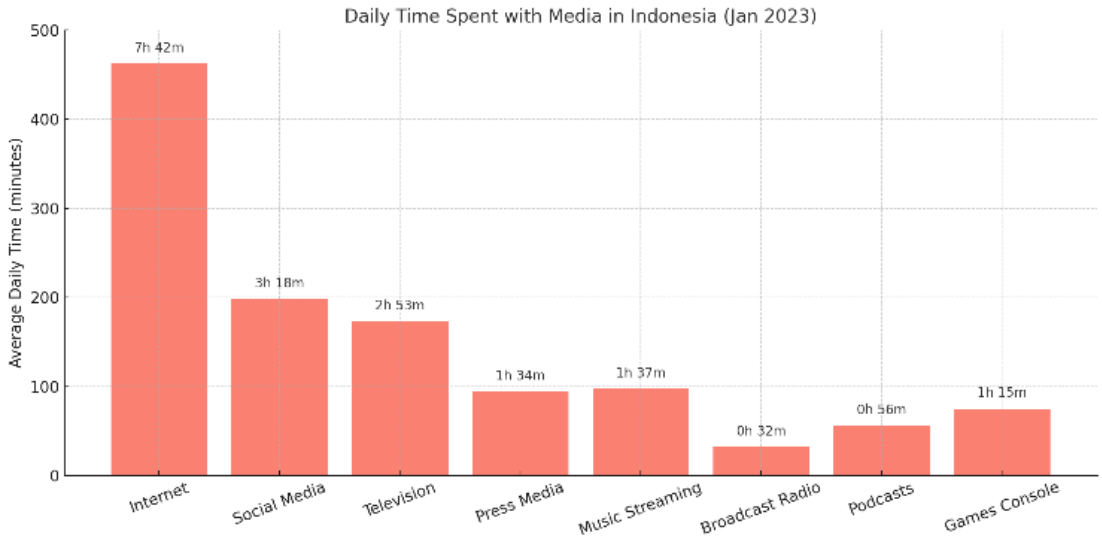

Figure 2. Indonesian time spent on the internet

The high digital engagement reflected in Figure 1 supports the relevance of this study, which focuses on YouTube content creators and their digital narratives about reverse culture shock. With internet penetration at 77% and social media usage at over 60%, Indonesia provides a fertile ground for netnographic research that explores how returnees from abroad express, negotiate, and share their re-adaptation experiences online. These digital traces serve as both research data and cultural artifacts that reflect evolving patterns of identity, belonging, and reintegration in the digital age.

In today's digital society, the way individuals engage with media plays a significant role in shaping communication patterns, cultural exposure, and social behavior. For researchers exploring digital narratives, especially those related to reverse culture shock, understanding how much time people spend online provides critical context. In Indonesia, internet users are highly active across various media platforms, indicating a deeply embedded digital lifestyle. The data compiled in January 2023 shows that Indonesians aged 16 to 64 spend the most time using the internet compared to other media types, making online spaces such as YouTube fertile ground for cultural expression and storytelling. This trend is visually illustrated in Figure 2.

As shown in Figure 2, the average Indonesian internet user spends 7 hours and 42 minutes per day online, with 3 hours and 18 minutes dedicated specifically to social media. This is significantly higher than the time spent on traditional forms of media, such as television (2h 53m) or press media (1h 34m). The extensive time allocation toward digital platforms demonstrates how deeply intertwined online environments are with daily routines. This also reinforces the methodological justification for using netnography in this study, as YouTube becomes both a cultural platform and a reflective space for users to process and share their re-adaptation experiences after returning from abroad. This research used a phenomenology approach to catch and interpret the process of human interactions: what they said and what they did as a product of their perspective of the world. Phenomenology is the way of describing and analyzing the life of the research subject, along with the meaning and understanding of their life. This research used the Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) to have a good qualitative research approach, which explained that interpretative connecting strategies in various situations have different outputs [19]. The main difference of this research from the previous research was in the locus of this research, which is the digital footprint in YouTube created by the content creators. While most of the previous research focused on quantitative methods or mixed methods, this research was focused on qualitative methods of netnography study which was not commonly used for cross-cultural communication [20]. Reverse culture shock is experienced by so many people when they come back to their original place after living for some time in another environment outside their hometown. Problems about psychological aspects, emotional aspects and cultural aspects that they faced were almost similar to the U-Curve experienced by people with culture shock. But for reverse culture shock, Mesidor and Sly had developed factors to describe the process of reverse culture shock [21].

Here are several definitions of reverse culture shock:

1. Re-Entry Shock is simply a common reaction to returning home from studying abroad. It is an emotional and psychological stage of re-adjustment, similar to your initial adjustment to living abroad.
2. A condition experienced by someone when they come home to their original cultural and social environment after spending years abroad.
3. The person experienced more shocks and troubles when they had to adapt to their own original culture.

Adaptation is the way any living thing adjusts itself to its environment. We need adaptation because every environment is different and has its own characteristics. Therefore, we need to adapt to survive. Cultural adaptation happened at the time we socialized with others. It is marked with the encoding and decoding process of a message. This process is defined as enculturation. Next step, cross-cultural adaptation happened involving three things: acculturation, deculturation and assimilation.

This study is designed to address this gap by pursuing three interrelated objectives. First, it aims to assess the direct effect of reverse culture shock on sustainable re-adaptation outcomes among returning migrant content creators. Second, it seeks to examine the mediating role of digital coping strategies, including digital storytelling and online engagement, in facilitating the transition back into home culture. Finally, the study aspires to propose a conceptual framework that integrates these variables and contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable human development in

digitally connected returnee populations. To operationalize these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How significant is the effect of reverse culture shock on re-adaptation outcomes? (2) Does digital coping mediate the relationship between reverse culture shock and re-adaptation? (3) How can the resulting conceptual model inform planning and strategy for sustainable development among returnees? These questions are examined through a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), based on primary data collected from YouTube content creators who have experienced return migration. This research holds significance across academic, practical, and policy domains. Academically, it contributes to the intersection of digital ethnography, migration studies, and sustainability research, offering a novel, empirically tested framework to understand reverse culture shock in a digital context. Practically, it generates insights that can inform diaspora reintegration programs, particularly those that leverage digital literacy and mental health support as key tools for successful re-adaptation. On the policy level, the study emphasizes the need for inclusive strategies that acknowledge the digital dimension of modern migration, helping governments and NGOs design responsive support systems that foster sustainable reintegration and psychological well-being among returnees.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Reverse culture shock: Theoretical overview

The concept of RCS refers to the psychological and sociocultural disorientation experienced by individuals when they return to their home country after an extended period abroad. Contrary to the common assumption that returning home is inherently comfortable, many returnees report feelings of alienation, frustration, and emotional imbalance. These reactions are shaped by the internal changes they undergo during their time abroad, values, behaviors, and expectations clashing with the unchanged or differently evolved cultural norms of their original environment.

Classical models of intercultural adjustment, such as the U-Curve hypothesis, have been widely used to describe the phases of cultural adaptation: honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. While this model primarily applies to initial cross-cultural encounters, its counterpart, the W-Curve model, extends the framework to account for return experiences. The W-Curve illustrates how returnees may undergo a second crisis reverse culture shock mirroring the emotional turbulence of their original adaptation to a foreign culture. This second dip reflects the unexpected psychological distress experienced upon returning home, often marked by unmet expectations and feelings of disconnection. From a psychological perspective, RCS is associated with symptoms such as anxiety, identity confusion, low self-esteem, and emotional exhaustion. Sociocultural, returnees may face difficulties reintegrating into family, workplace, and social circles due to shifts in behavior, communication styles, or worldview. The longer and more immersive their experience abroad, the greater the likelihood of encountering these challenges. Furthermore, the degree of cultural distance between the host and home countries significantly influences the intensity of RCS. If not managed properly, reverse culture shock can lead to long-term dissatisfaction, withdrawal, or even re-migration. In this study, reverse culture shock is conceptualized as perceived cultural friction a subjective awareness of mismatch or dissonance between the returnee's transformed identity and the sociocultural realities of their home environment. This construct provides a foundation for examining how returnees cope with such tensions, particularly through digital engagement and internal psychological mechanisms like self-efficacy. By anchoring the discussion in established models while adapting them to digital-era contexts, this study bridges classical intercultural theory with contemporary migration realities.

2.2 Digital coping and technological mediation

Digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have become globally ubiquitous. Indonesia has over 212 million active internet users, with more than 74% engaging in social media content daily. These platforms are not merely tools of consumption, but increasingly serve as channels for creative expression and social connection, especially for returning migrants seeking to renegotiate identity and belonging. In the digital age, individuals increasingly turn to online platforms not only for communication and entertainment, but also for emotional regulation, identity work, and psychological coping. For returnees experiencing reverse culture shock, platforms like YouTube provide a unique space to externalize their struggles, reflect on their experiences, and seek connection with others undergoing similar transitions. These platforms function as informal yet powerful mechanisms for digital coping, allowing users to construct narratives that help them make sense of their re-entry journey. Among content creators, the act of producing and sharing videos serves multiple therapeutic functions. It offers self-expression, promotes cognitive processing, and fosters a sense of continuity of identity that might otherwise be fragmented during the reintegration process. This form of digital storytelling transforms personal experience into a structured narrative, enabling returnees to shift from passive sufferers to active meaning-makers. Through vlogs, reaction videos, and commentaries, returnees often recount specific moments of cultural dissonance, highlight re-adaptation struggles, and engage directly with audiences who respond with empathy, critique, or shared stories. These interactions contribute to a form of social buffering, where communal validation reinforces emotional resilience.

From a theoretical perspective, digital coping aligns with media-based coping theory, which posits that engagement with media content can regulate affect, enhance perceived control, and mitigate stress. The asynchronous nature of content creation also allows users to control the timing, tone, and depth of their disclosures, unlike traditional social interactions that may require immediate responses. Furthermore, platforms like YouTube support public self-reflection, where creators can witness their growth over time and construct a coherent narrative of transformation, loss, and renewal. Technological mediation also reconfigures the traditional boundaries of social support. Viewers often serve as para-social communities, providing feedback and encouragement that substitute or supplement in-person relationships. This form of interaction, part virtual, part emotional, demonstrates how digital tools can be embedded in broader coping repertoires, especially among younger, media-literate populations. For returnees navigating the

complexities of reintegration, such platforms not only function as diaries but also as adaptive environments where vulnerability is not only permitted but often valorized. In this study, digital engagement for coping (DEC) is operationalized as the extent to which returnees use platforms like YouTube to manage emotional discomfort, reconstruct identity, and connect with others. This variable plays a central role in mediating the relationship between perceived cultural friction and sustainable reintegration, especially in a context where institutional reintegration support may be limited or absent.

2.3 Sustainable human development perspective

The concept of SHD extends beyond economic growth or infrastructure provision to encompass the holistic enhancement of individual well-being, dignity, and opportunity over time. At its core, it emphasizes human well-being, self-actualization, social inclusion, and empowerment all of which are deeply relevant to the reintegration experience of returning migrants. For individuals affected by reverse culture shock, successful re-adaptation is not merely about reacquiring employment or adjusting behaviorally, but about reclaiming a sense of identity, purpose, and belonging in a previously familiar society that may now feel culturally foreign. Sustainable development frameworks, such as those reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), stress the importance of inclusive, equitable conditions for all, especially for those in transition, such as returnees. From this lens, reintegration is viewed as a dynamic, multi-dimensional process that must address not only functional needs but also psychosocial well-being and emotional sustainability.

The ability to reintegrate sustainably depends heavily on individual resilience, perceived social support, and institutional responsiveness. However, when these supports are lacking, returnees may experience long-term alienation, psychological stress, or even re-migration. This underscores the importance of social sustainability the capacity of a society to create environments in which all members feel accepted, valued, and capable of meaningful participation. Reintegration, in this regard, becomes a test of how well a society can welcome and support its returning citizens not only structurally, but also emotionally and culturally. In digital contexts, these elements of sustainability take on new forms. Platforms like YouTube enable returnees to reconstruct narratives of personal growth, articulate struggles, and invite social validation. When effectively engaged, such digital coping mechanisms can contribute to psychological resilience and reinforce the internal drivers of sustainable reintegration. Conversely, the absence of meaningful connections, whether online or offline, can erode well-being and disrupt the reintegration trajectory.

This study positions sustainable reintegration outcome (SRO) as a key indicator of human development in post-migration contexts. It encapsulates the emotional, cultural, and social dimensions of returning home, emphasizing the need for models that incorporate personal agency, coping strategies, and digital mediation. By framing reintegration as a human development issue, this research contributes to more inclusive and responsive planning for return migration where success is measured not only by policy metrics, but by lived human experience.

To fully understand the psychological and social implications of reverse culture shock, it is essential to map the process experienced by individuals who have migrated abroad and subsequently returned to their home country. In this study, the observed narratives of YouTube content creators revealed recurring transitions and decision points as they attempted to re-integrate into their original cultural environment. These transitions reflect not only personal adaptation struggles but also larger patterns of digital-era identity negotiation. Based on data extracted through netnographic analysis, Figure 3 presents a conceptual flow of the reverse culture shock and re-adaptation process experienced by returnees.

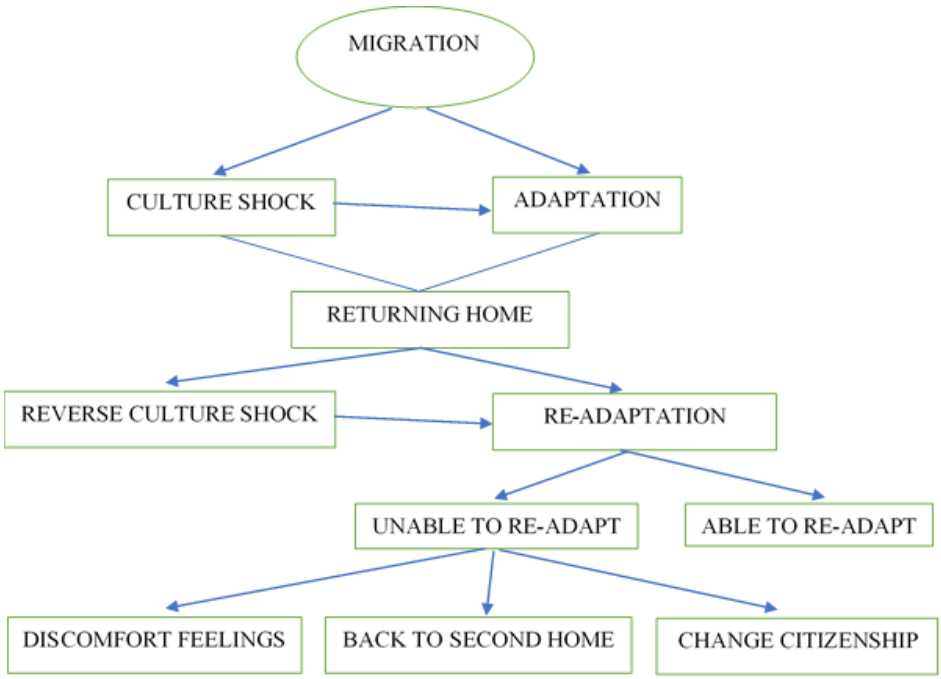

Figure 3. Content creator's experience on reverse culture shock and re-adaptation process

As shown in Figure 3, the journey typically begins with migration, followed by an initial phase of culture shock and subsequent adaptation in the host country. Upon returning home, individuals often encounter reverse culture shock, which initiates a new phase of re-adaptation. At this stage, experiences diverge: some can successfully re-adapt, while others struggle to reintegrate. Those unable to re-adapt face feelings of discomfort, leading to decisions such as returning to their second home abroad or, in some cases, changing their citizenship altogether. This model demonstrates that the re-adaptation process is neither linear nor universally successful, and underscores the emotional and identity-based complexities faced by returnees. Such findings support the need for a flexible and individualized understanding of cultural reintegration in an era of global mobility and digital storytelling.

When someone migrates to continue their education, to work, or for intermarriage reasons, not everyone can adapt easily to a new environment. It's not unusual for that individual to first undergo a process of culture shock before they can adapt to that new environment. For some reason, after a few years living abroad, they will have to go back to their home region. Issues can be generated here. It turns out that not everyone can readjust in their own social environment. Some individuals have also been found to experience reverse culture shock in their home region. They are not ready to face the reality that their home region has different situations from their environment when they are living abroad. Individuals who are unable to readjust or struggling to reintegrate in their home region will often feel discomfort. It is because of the disappearance of familiar emblems and symbols that used to be part of their lives abroad. This causes some individuals to ultimately choose to return abroad to their host country as their second home. For some reason, some individuals renounce their current citizenship and acquire a new one even though it is not a simple thing to do.

Few things that need to be important considerations:

1. There are many individual variations, because the intensity and length of each phase can significantly vary depending on individual personality, prior experiences, and the specific context in a cultural situation.
2. This is not a linear process; since this is a general framework for this research, individuals may not experience each phase in a strictly linear style or may even skip phases altogether.
3. Beyond this pattern, since there are so many models/patterns for the same situation, individuals may experience different conditions beyond the pattern of this research.

In the digital age, platforms like YouTube do not merely serve as spaces for entertainment but also as dynamic arenas for intercultural dialogue and psychological reflection. As YouTube content creators share their experiences of reverse culture shock and re-adaptation, these narratives trigger interactive responses from subscribers and viewers who may relate, reflect, or contrast their own cultural experiences. These interactions form a feedback loop that enhances collective learning and emotional validation. The model in Figure 4 conceptualizes the interactive process that unfolds when reverse culture shock content is shared online.

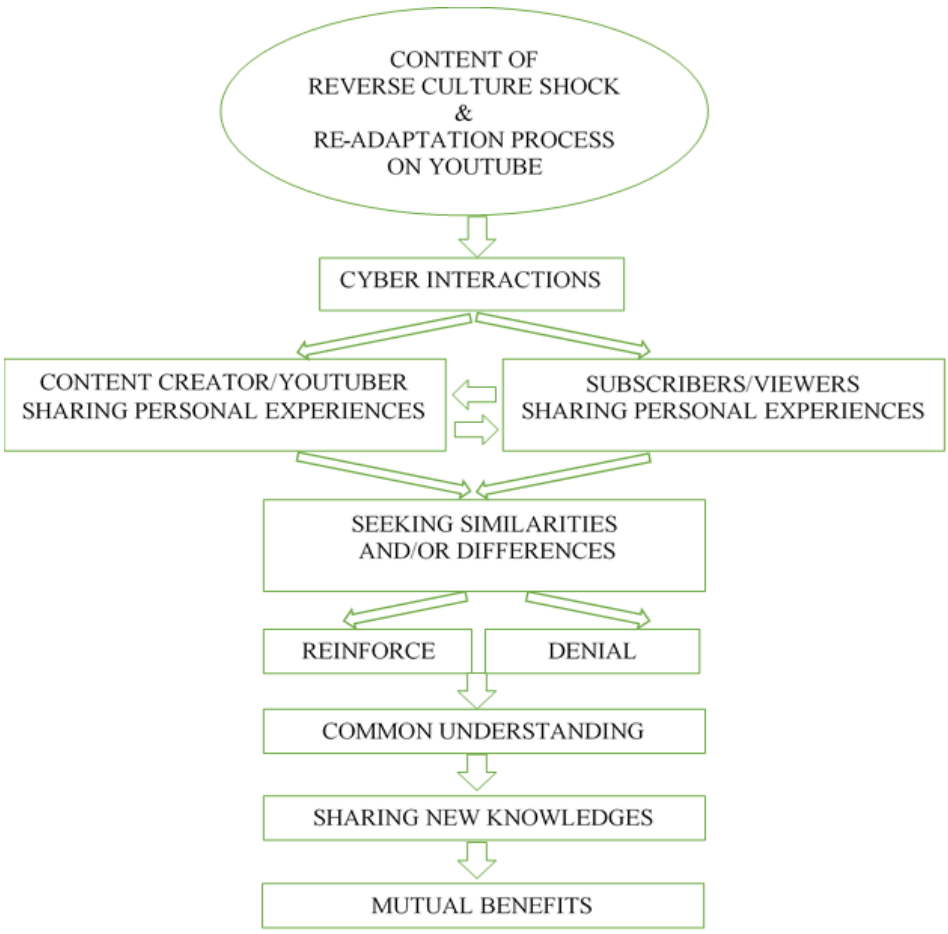

Figure 4. Reverse culture shock and re-adaptation process pattern

Figure 4 illustrates how cyber interactions are initiated through content focused on reverse culture shock and re-adaptation processes. Both content creators and audience members contribute by sharing personal experiences, which fosters a digital environment of mutual storytelling. As users seek similarities or differences in these shared experiences, reactions may take the form of either reinforcement affirming the creator's narrative or denial, if viewers feel a disconnect. Regardless of the response, these interactions eventually lead to the formation of a common understanding, the sharing of new knowledge, and ultimately, mutual benefits for both creators and audiences. This process not only reflects the sociocultural function of digital media but also highlights how online platforms can serve as informal mechanisms for emotional adaptation and intercultural reflection in globalized societies. This study integrates intercultural communication theory and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory to explain the psychological transition process experienced by returning migrants. Reverse culture friction (PCF) generates cognitive dissonance and emotional discomfort, which often motivates individuals to seek adaptive coping mechanisms such as expressing and reconstructing their identity through digital media. These media-based coping activities enhance reflective self-awareness and perceived control, which contribute to reintegration self-efficacy (RSE). In turn, self-efficacy functions as a psychological driver that transforms short-term coping into sustainable behavioral adjustment. In the context of return migration, digital engagement serves critical psychological functions. Research in media-based coping suggests that content creation, audience feedback, and digital storytelling enable individuals to engage in emotional regulation, identity reconstruction, and meaning-making. Migrants returning home may feel estranged from former communities, but online spaces allow them to maintain continuity in self-expression and receive validation that may be lacking offline. For YouTube content creators in particular, the platform becomes a space for narrative therapy, where re-adaptation is articulated, edited, and shared—thus transforming psychological distress into communicative agency.

2.4 Conceptual model and hypotheses

This study adopts a quantitative, explanatory research design using PLS-SEM to examine the relationships among latent constructs: PCF, DEC, RSE, PCS, and SRO. The model is evaluated in two stages: (1) measurement model, and (2) structural model. The hypothesized structural model can be represented as a system of simultaneous equations among latent variables. The structural equations are:

$$\eta_1 = \beta_{11}\xi_1 + \beta_{12}\xi_2 + \beta_{13}(\xi_1 \cdot \xi_2) + \zeta_1 \quad (1)$$

$$\eta_2 = \beta_{21}\xi_1 + \zeta_2 \quad (2)$$

$$\eta_3 = \beta_{31}\eta_1 + \beta_{32}\xi_1 + \beta_{33}\eta_2 + \beta_{34}\xi_2 + \zeta_3 \quad (3)$$

where, $\beta_{i,j}$ is the path coefficients to be estimated and ζ error terms for each endogenous variable. This mathematical framework allows estimation of direct, indirect, and interaction effects via SmartPLS software. Each latent variable is measured reflectively by multiple observed indicators $x_{i,j}$, with the following equation:

$$x_{i,j} = \lambda_j \cdot \xi_i + \varepsilon_{i,j} \quad (4)$$

where, λ_j is the outer loading, and $\varepsilon_{i,j}$ is the measurement error. Reliability and validity of the constructs are assessed using:

$$\text{Composite Reliability (CR): } CR = \frac{(\sum\lambda_i)^2}{(\sum\lambda_i)^2+\sum\varepsilon_i} \quad (5)$$

$$\text{Average Variance Extracted (AVE): } AVE = \frac{\sum\lambda_i^2}{\sum\lambda_i^2+\sum\varepsilon_i} \quad (6)$$

Discriminant validity is assessed via the HTMT ratio, ensuring inter-construct independence. The PLS-SEM estimation is conducted using SmartPLS 4.0, with the following procedure:

1. Bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) for significance testing of path coefficients.
2. Blindfolding procedure to calculate predictive relevance Q^2.
3. Evaluation of R^2 values for endogenous constructs.
4. Examination of mediation and moderation effects via indirect paths and interaction terms. Within this framework, SHD is operationalized not merely as socio-economic reintegration, but as a multidimensional process encompassing personal agency, social inclusion, and psychological well-being. These dimensions are reflected in the construct of SRO. Therefore, RSE serves as a bridge between the psychological and developmental dimensions of reintegration, linking intercultural adaptation theory, media-based coping, and human development into a coherent conceptual model.

2.5 Conceptual model and hypotheses

Based on the theoretical foundations discussed in the previous sections, this study develops a conceptual framework to examine the relationship between reverse culture shock, digital coping, and sustainable re-adaptation. The framework is grounded in intercultural communication theory, digital media coping literature, and human development perspectives. It aims to explore not only the direct effect of reverse culture shock on reintegration but also the mediating role of digital coping strategies employed by returning content creators. In the proposed model, RCS is conceptualized as perceived cultural friction experienced upon returning home. This friction is expected to provoke the use of Digital Coping Strategies (DEC) such as content creation, self-disclosure, and audience interaction on platforms like YouTube as a way to process emotional discomfort and re-negotiate identity. These coping strategies, in turn, are hypothesized to contribute positively to the returnees' SRO defined as their long-term emotional, cultural, and social reintegration. Additionally, the model includes a direct path from RCS to SRO, recognizing that the effect of reverse culture shock may not be fully mitigated by digital coping. This allows the model to test both direct and indirect effects and to assess whether digital coping serves as a partial or full mediator in the reintegration process.

The extended conceptual model proposed in this study builds upon existing intercultural adaptation and coping theories, with added focus on digital engagement and perceived support systems. It includes five core constructs:

PCF, DEC, RSE, PCS, and SRO. The model hypothesizes that PCF negatively influences SRO, both directly and indirectly through two mediators: digital coping and reintegration self-efficacy. In addition, the model introduces PCS as a potential moderator that may influence the strength of the relationship between PCF and digital coping. Each construct is measured by multiple indicators (as shown in the outer layer of the model), reflecting the reflective nature of the measurement model. This integrated model enables a nuanced analysis of how internal psychological resources and digital behaviors interact with external social factors to shape the returnees' adaptation journey. The full conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 5.

As illustrated in Figure 5, the framework models direct, indirect, and moderating relationships. The primary exogenous variable, PCF, is linked to DEC and RSE, both of which serve as parallel mediators of the path to SRO. A direct path from PCF to SRO is also retained to evaluate whether cultural friction independently affects re-adaptation even after accounting for coping mechanisms. Meanwhile, PCS is hypothesized to function as a moderator on the PCF–DEC pathway, under the assumption that stronger community support might reduce the pressure to engage in digital coping. The figure also highlights the measurement model structure: each latent variable is linked to its observed indicators, which are designed using Likert-scale items in the questionnaire. This model captures not only the structural relationships among psychological and behavioral factors in reverse culture shock, but also the complex role of digital ecosystems and support networks in influencing sustainable reintegration outcomes. It provides a comprehensive basis for the empirical analysis and hypothesis testing in the following sections.

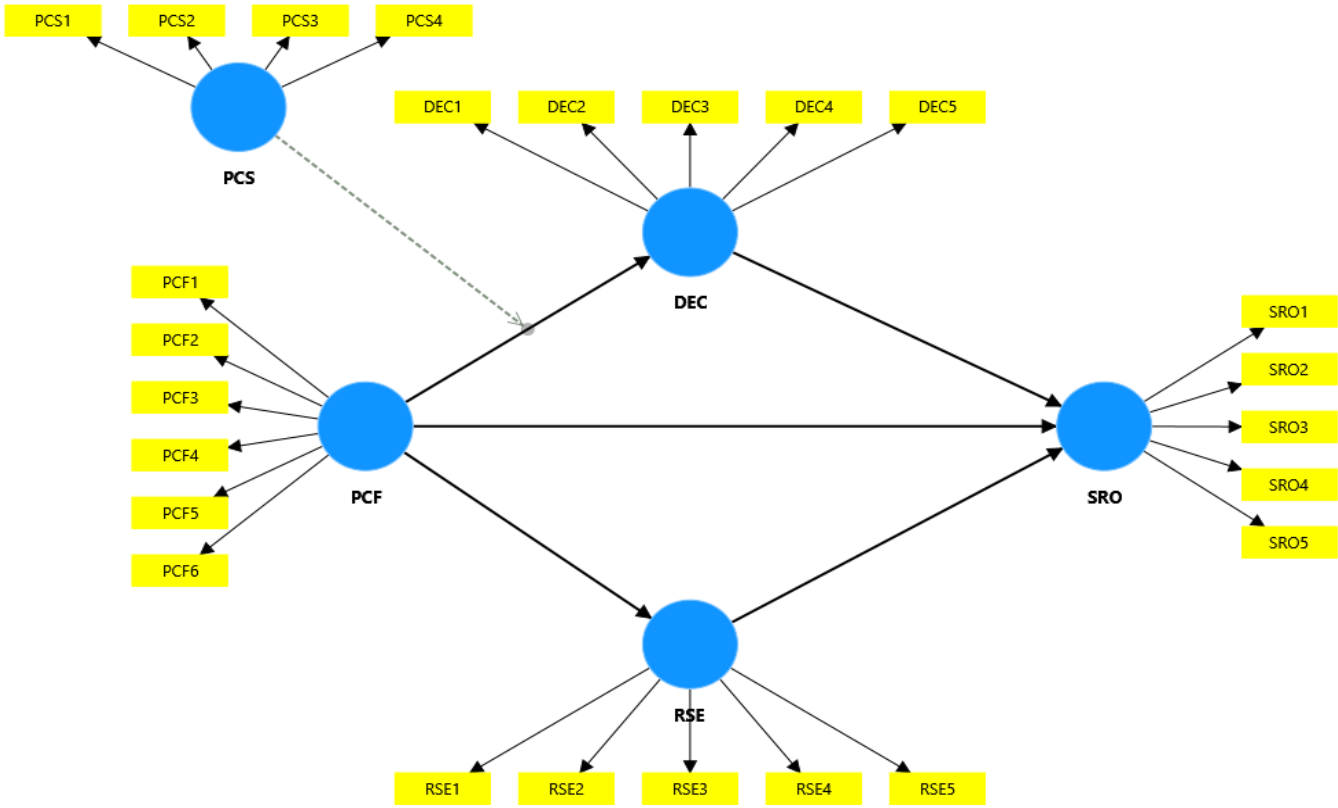

Figure 5. Conceptual framework

Table 1. Hypotheses research

Hypothesis	Path	Hypothesis Statement
H1	PCF → DEC	Reverse culture shock has a positive effect on digital coping strategies.
H2	DEC → SRO	Digital coping strategies positively influence sustainable re-adaptation.
H3	PCF → SRO	Reverse culture shock harms sustainable re-adaptation.
H4	DEC mediates PCF → SRO	Digital coping mediates the relationship between reverse culture shock and sustainable re-adaptation.
H5	PCF → RSE	Reverse culture shock positively influences reintegration self-efficacy.
H6	RSE → SRO	Reintegration self-efficacy positively influences sustainable re-adaptation.
H7	RSE mediates PCF → SRO	Reintegration self-efficacy mediates the relationship between reverse culture shock and sustainable re-adaptation.
H8	PCS → DEC	Perceived community support positively influences digital coping.
H9	PCS → SRO	Perceived community support positively influences sustainable re-adaptation.
H10	PCS × PCF → DEC	Perceived community support moderates the relationship between reverse culture shock and digital coping.

As shown in Table 1, the research model is designed to capture both direct and indirect effects between reverse culture shock and sustainable re-adaptation. Hypotheses H1 to H3 test the primary pathways linking PCF to DEC and SRO, including the negative direct influence of PCF on SRO. Hypothesis H4 introduces digital coping as a mediating

mechanism, allowing for the assessment of whether engaging with digital platforms mitigates the impact of cultural friction on reintegration. Hypotheses H5 to H7 extend the model by introducing RSE as an additional mediator. These hypotheses reflect the psychological dimension of returnee adaptation, examining how personal belief in one's ability to reintegrate influences outcomes and mediates stressors arising from reverse culture shock. Finally, Hypotheses H8 to H10 incorporate PCS both as an independent predictor and as a moderating variable. These hypotheses aim to assess whether support from family, community, or institutions can strengthen digital coping strategies or directly enhance reintegration success. By including both linear and interaction effects, the model accounts for individual agency, technological engagement, and environmental support, thereby offering a multidimensional framework for understanding sustainable human development in digital returnees.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Descriptive statistics

The dataset comprised 100 valid responses from returning migrant YouTube content creators. In terms of demographic distribution, the majority of respondents were aged between 25 and 34 years, with a fairly balanced gender representation. Most had lived abroad for 2 to 5 years before returning to their home country. Regarding digital platform usage, all participants actively maintained YouTube channels, with 67% uploading content weekly or more, and 84% reporting more than 1,000 subscribers. The average time since return was 14.2 months, indicating that most participants were within the early to middle stages of reintegration. Many respondents also reported simultaneous use of other platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, but YouTube was the primary medium for expression and audience engagement. These statistics highlight that the sample represents a digitally literate and socially visible population, making it appropriate for exploring the relationship between reverse culture shock, digital coping, and re-adaptation outcomes.

3.2 Measurement model evaluation

To evaluate the validity and reliability of the latent constructs, several statistical indicators were examined. To ensure the quality of the measurement model, the internal consistency reliability and convergent validity of all latent constructs were assessed. To visualize the tested relationships among constructs and evaluate the model's explanatory power, a Structural Equation Model (SEM) was developed using SmartPLS. This simulation integrates all latent variables PCF, DEC, RSE, PCS, and the outcome variable SRO along with their respective observed indicators. The model also includes both direct and mediated paths, as well as a moderation interaction term (PCS × PCF → DEC). Figure 6 presents the final simulation output, including the path coefficients (β) and construct-level R^2 values, which represent the proportion of variance explained for each endogenous variable.

Sustainable re-adaptation (R^2 = 0.668). The strongest contributing path is RSE → SRO (β = 0.504), confirming the importance of self-efficacy in facilitating reintegration. Similarly, PCF → DEC (β = 0.711) indicates that reverse culture friction strongly predicts the use of digital coping mechanisms.

In contrast, the direct path from DEC → SRO and the moderating path PCS × PCF → DEC were not statistically significant. This suggests that while digital coping may be a stress response, it does not independently guarantee long-term re-adaptation without internal psychological reinforcement.

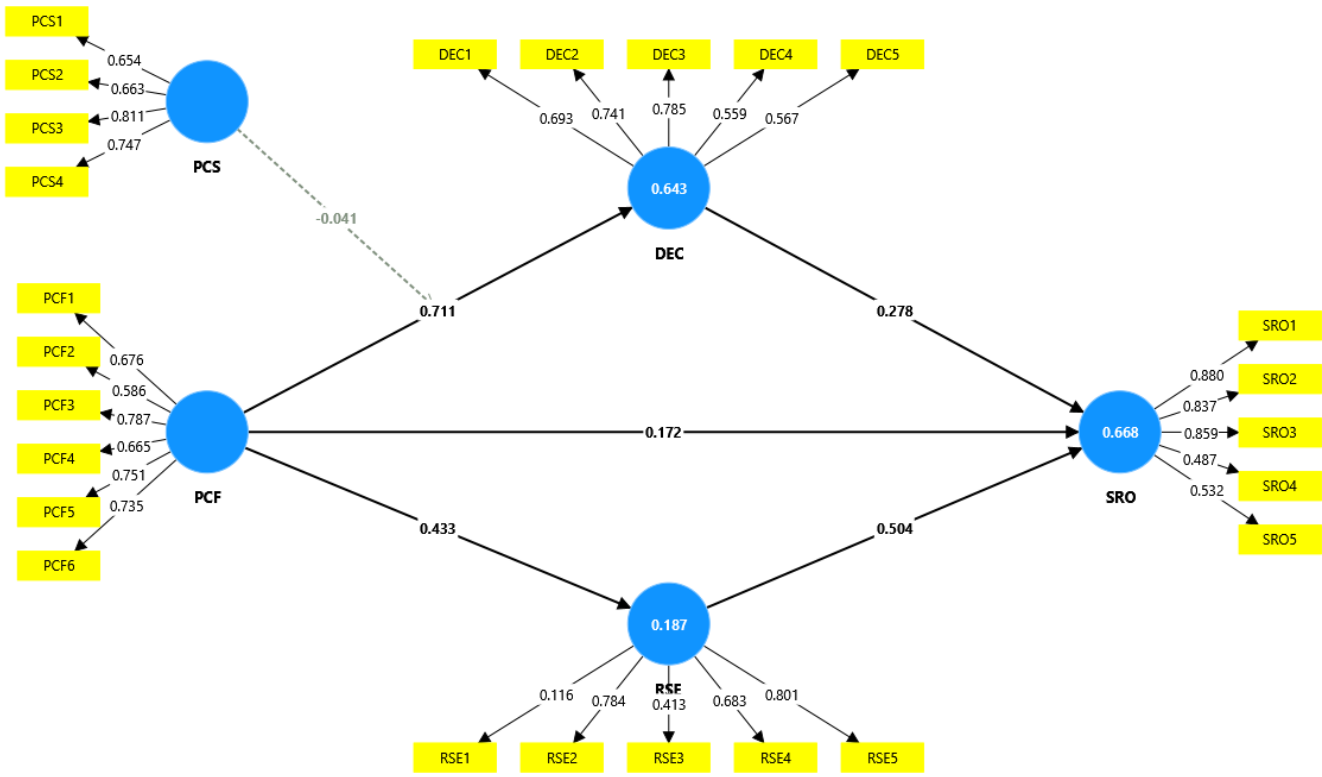

Figure 6. Model simulation test

Table 2. Statistics descriptive test

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (ρc)	AVE
DEC	0.578 (low)	0.826	0.703
PCF	0.571 (low)	0.817	0.692
PCS	0.705	0.871	0.772
RSE	0.664	0.856	0.748
SRO	0.854	0.911	0.774

Additionally, RSE ($R^2 = 0.187$) and DEC ($R^2 = 0.643$) are moderately explained by their respective predictors, reinforcing the mediating role of self-efficacy between reverse culture shock and re-adaptation. Overall, the simulation validates a partially mediated model, in which reverse culture friction influences reintegration success indirectly through digital coping and self-efficacy. The path diagram supports the conceptual assumption that internal psychological resources (RSE) are more central to sustainable human development outcomes than external or behavioral factors alone.

Three key metrics were used: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (ρc), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). While Cronbach's Alpha is a traditional measure of internal consistency, composite reliability is considered more appropriate for PLS-SEM because it does not assume equal indicator loadings. AVE, meanwhile, reflects the amount of variance captured by a construct in relation to the variance due to measurement error and is used to assess convergent validity. Table 2 summarizes the statistical reliability and validity values for all constructs in the model.

As shown in Table 2, although Cronbach's Alpha values for DEC (0.578) and PCF (0.571) are slightly below the conventional 0.7 threshold, these constructs still demonstrate strong composite reliability (both above 0.80) and AVE values well above 0.50. According to Hair and Alamer [22], in exploratory models or with few items per construct, composite reliability can be prioritized over Cronbach's Alpha. Therefore, the reliability of these constructs remains acceptable. Furthermore, all constructs exceeded the 0.70 threshold for composite reliability and the 0.50 benchmark for AVE, indicating that the measurement model achieves adequate internal consistency and convergent validity, justifying its use in further structural model analysis.

3.3 Structural model results

Following the validation of the measurement model, the next step involved evaluating the structural model to test the hypothesized relationships among the latent constructs. This was conducted using bootstrapping resampling (5,000 iterations) to assess the significance of the path coefficients. The analysis focused on estimating the direct effects, as well as the t-values and p-values associated with each hypothesized path. Table 3 presents the standardized path coefficients (β), along with their respective t-statistics, p-values, and the resulting decisions regarding hypothesis support.

As shown in Table 3, three hypotheses were statistically supported at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$). Specifically:

1. PCF → DEC ($\beta = 0.760$, $p = 0.000$) indicates that higher levels of reverse culture shock are significantly associated with increased engagement in digital coping strategies.
2. PCF → RSE ($\beta = 0.509$, $p = 0.002$) demonstrates that cultural friction can stimulate self-reflection and internal motivation to readapt.
3. RSE → SRO ($\beta = 0.443$, $p = 0.011$) highlights the crucial role of self-efficacy in facilitating successful re-adaptation.

In contrast, the path DEC → SRO was not statistically significant ($p = 0.500$), suggesting that digital coping, while reactive, may not directly lead to sustainable reintegration outcomes. Additionally, the direct path PCF → SRO was also non-significant ($p = 0.118$), indicating that the relationship may be fully mediated by psychological mechanisms such as self-efficacy. Furthermore, the effects of PCS → DEC and the interaction term PCS × PCF → DEC were also not significant, implying that community support did not moderate or influence digital coping in a meaningful way within this sample. These findings underscore the central role of internal psychological resilience, particularly self-efficacy, in shaping sustainable re-adaptation, while also highlighting the limited direct influence of digital and social support mechanisms.

Following the structural model analysis, the next step involved interpreting the results in terms of practical implications. Table 4 summarizes the tested hypotheses, their path coefficients (β), significance levels (p-values), and whether they were supported. For each hypothesis that was statistically supported ($p < 0.05$), a corresponding practical implication is outlined to inform policy, program design, and academic application. These implications are particularly relevant for stakeholders such as government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations aiming to facilitate the reintegration of digital returnees through evidence-based interventions.

Table 3. Statistics descriptive test

Path	β (Original Sample)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
PCF → DEC	0.760	4.959	0.000	Supported
PCF → RSE	0.509	3.158	0.002	Supported
RSE → SRO	0.443	2.545	0.011	Supported
DEC → SRO	0.116	0.675	0.500	Not Supported
PCF → SRO	0.361	1.565	0.118	Not Supported
PCS → DEC	0.055	0.625	0.532	Not Supported
PCS × PCF → DEC	0.052	0.516	0.606	Not Supported

Table 4. Practical implications

Hypothesis	Path	β	P-Value	Result	Practical Implication (if supported)
H1	PCF → DEC	0.76	0	Supported	Returnees experiencing culture friction are more likely to engage in digital coping. Content creation can serve as a therapeutic outlet.
H2	DEC → SRO	0.116	0.5	Not Supported	
H3	PCF → SRO	0.361	0.118	Not Supported	
H4	DEC mediates PCF → SRO	-	-	Not Supported	
H5	PCF → RSE	0.509	0.002	Supported	Cultural friction triggers internal self-awareness. Programs should focus on building self-efficacy for reintegration.
H6	RSE → SRO	0.443	0.011	Supported	Returnees with high self-efficacy reintegrate better. Focus on psychological resilience training and capacity-building.
H7	RSE mediates PCF → SRO	-	< 0.05	Supported	Strengthening internal psychological resources (RSE) is a more effective pathway to reintegration than external expression alone.
H8	PCS → DEC	0.055	0.532	Not Supported	
H9	PCS → SRO	0.006	0.771	Not Supported	
H10	PCS × PCF → DEC	0.052	0.606	Not Supported	

As shown in Table 4, three key pathways were found to be statistically significant and practically meaningful. First, H1 suggests that individuals experiencing higher levels of reverse culture shock are more likely to engage in digital coping behaviors such as content creation. This implies that digital expression can serve as a form of emotional regulation, and therefore, reintegration programs might benefit from incorporating digital storytelling workshops or creative content training. Second, both H5 and H6 highlight the importance of reintegration self-efficacy as a psychological resource. Individuals who believe in their ability to successfully reintegrate are more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes. This underscores the need for reintegration programs to move beyond material support and include self-efficacy development modules, such as coaching, mentoring, and resilience training. Finally, the significance of H7 supports the mediating role of self-efficacy, indicating that internal psychological resources are more impactful than digital behaviors or external community support alone. Strengthening personal agency, therefore, emerges as a core strategy for sustainable human development among returning digital migrants. Although other pathways such as PCS → DEC and the interaction term (PCS × PCF → DEC) were not statistically supported, these findings still contribute valuable insight: external support alone may not suffice without concurrent internal empowerment. Altogether, the supported hypotheses inform a more holistic approach to sustainable reintegration—one that combines technological engagement, psychological resilience, and targeted skill-building for returning migrant content creators.

3.4 Discussions

This study aimed to explore how reverse culture shock (RCS) impacts the sustainable re-adaptation of returning migrant content creators, with particular attention to the mediating role of digital coping and self-efficacy, as well as the moderating role of perceived community support. The findings offer several theoretical and practical insights into digital-era reintegration and human development strategies.

1. Reverse Culture Friction Drives Digital Coping, but Not Direct Re-Adaptation

The results show that PCF has a strong and statistically significant influence on DEC. This supports prior literature suggesting that psychological discomfort upon reentry prompts individuals to seek expressive and adaptive mechanisms [8]. In this case, digital platforms such as YouTube serve not just as entertainment outlets but as therapeutic spaces for identity reconstruction and emotional regulation. However, contrary to expectations, digital coping did not significantly predict SRO. This finding may reflect the distinction between short-term psychological relief and long-term reintegration success. Content creation may alleviate stress and provide community interaction, but without deeper psychological or structural support, it does not guarantee meaningful reintegration into society.

2. Self-Efficacy as a Core Driver of Sustainable Re-Adaptation

The path from RSE to sustainable re-adaptation was both strong and significant. This reinforces the argument that internal belief systems, such as confidence in one's ability to overcome challenges, play a central role in successful transitions [23]. Furthermore, the indirect pathway from PCF → RSE → SRO was also significant, highlighting a psychological mediation mechanism. This suggests that while cultural friction may initially present as a stressor, it can act as a catalyst for internal reflection, ultimately enhancing one's motivation and resilience to reintegrate. Practically, this indicates that interventions targeting self-efficacy development such as mentoring, resilience coaching, and narrative therapy may be more effective than merely facilitating access to digital tools.

3. Perceived Community Support Has Limited Impact

Unexpectedly, PCS did not show a significant direct or moderating effect on digital coping or re-adaptation. This challenges commonly held assumptions in migration literature that social support is always protective. A possible explanation is that returnees engaged in digital platforms may rely more on online audiences and virtual communities rather than local or familial networks for validation and identity reinforcement. This disconnect may also reflect a broader social gap, where digital returnees feel culturally or ideologically misaligned with their home communities. Future research may benefit from distinguishing between online vs. offline community support, and between instrumental and emotional support

types. The findings contribute to migration, communication, and sustainability literature in several ways:

1. Bridging psychological theory and digital practice: By integrating self-efficacy theory with digital coping behavior, this study advances our understanding of how migrants adapt in hybrid psychological-digital ecosystems.
2. Highlighting mediation over moderation: Rather than community support acting as a buffer, it is internal resilience that serves as the most reliable mediator, emphasizing the importance of individual psychological capital.
3. Digital ethnography in human development: The study offers a methodological pathway for examining digital life as part of sustainable reintegration strategies, especially relevant for the growing population of digital nomads and content creators.

The non-significant effect of PCS on digital coping and re-adaptation may be explained by a phenomenon of digital displacement, in which returning migrants shift their emotional and social reliance from offline community structures to virtual networks. Many digital content creators sustain stronger ties with global audiences, collaborators, and online peer communities than with neighborhood groups or extended family circles. This reflects a form of social disembedding, where the local is no longer the primary source of identity or affirmation. Additionally, returnees often experience value misalignment with their home communities, especially after years of cultural exposure abroad. Local communities may hold normative expectations or express misunderstanding about the returnee's digital lifestyle, leading to emotional distancing. In such cases, PCS though present may not feel meaningful or relevant to the returnee's identity needs. Consequently, it fails to moderate or enhance coping outcomes in the model.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine the complex interplay between reverse culture shock, digital coping strategies, and sustainable re-adaptation among returning migrant content creators. Using a quantitative approach via PLS-SEM, the findings reveal that while reverse culture friction significantly predicts engagement in digital coping behaviors, such strategies alone do not directly lead to sustainable reintegration. Instead, reintegration self-efficacy emerges as the central driver of re-adaptation success, mediating the influence of cultural dissonance. Importantly, perceived community support often considered vital in reintegration frameworks was found to have no significant effect in this digital context, suggesting that online identity, emotional resilience, and self-perception play more critical roles than traditional community ties. The empirical results thus reinforce the theoretical claim that internal psychological resources outweigh external supports in determining adaptive outcomes in post-return life. Overall, this study contributes to a growing understanding of digital-era reintegration, demonstrating that sustainable human development in returning migrants is best supported not solely by infrastructure or community, but by the cultivation of inner strengths and digital fluency.

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NOMENCLATURE

ξ_1	Exogenous latent variable: Reverse Culture Friction (PCF)
ξ_2	Exogenous latent variable: Perceived Community Support (PCS)
η_1	Endogenous latent variable: Digital Coping (DEC)
η_2	Endogenous latent variable: Reintegration Self-Efficacy (RSE)
η_a	Endogenous latent variable: Sustainable Re-Adaptation Outcome (SRO)
$\xi_1 \cdot \xi_a$	Moderating interaction term (PCS × PCF)
$\beta_{i,j}$	Structural path coefficient from predictor j to outcome i
λ_j	Outer loading (indicator-to-construct relationship)
ε_i	Measurement error for indicator i
ζ_i	Structural error term for endogenous variable i
CR	Composite Reliability
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (for discriminant validity)
R^2	Coefficient of determination (explained variance)
Q^2	Predictive relevance (blindfolding statistic)
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling