

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY FORMATION: THE CASE OF ALGERIAN LEARNERS IN THE U.S

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Abstract: In the globalised world nowadays, understanding culture is no more challenging due to the feasibility of virtual communication, which is fundamental among individuals whose language and culture differ. Regardless of their distance, people's cultural differences are now creatively portrayed across various situations; interactions have enabled them to connect, adjust their ideas and thoughts, and express their worries and interests. Individuals can easily maintain and establish relationships across cultural boundaries, develop their intercultural communication, and use social media to explore the world around them. In this respect, they possess new identities through interacting with other groups, reflecting on their experiences, and acquiring values, norms, and ways of communicating with others to become more integrated into the host culture. In light of this, many researchers are interested in examining the connection between social media and intercultural identity. Thus, the present study sheds light on two main categories, which are - the impact of social networking on intercultural communication, and the influence of social media and the acculturation process on intercultural identity (ICI) formation. In-depth interviews of Algerian learners of U.S. universities are conducted. The study concludes that social media use influences significantly how Algerian students in the United States model an ICI. Directions for more research in this area are also explored.

Keywords: Acculturation, Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Identity, Social Media

L'IMPACT DES RÉSEAUX SOCIAUX SUR LA FORMATION DE L'IDENTITÉ INTERCULTURELLE : CAS DES ÉTUDIANTS ALGÉRIENS AUX ÉTATS-UNIS

Résumé: Dans le monde globalisé d'aujourd'hui, comprendre la culture n'est plus difficile en raison de la faisabilité de la communication virtuelle, qui est fondamentale entre les individus dont la langue et la culture sont différents. Indépendamment de leur distance, les différences culturelles des gens sont désormais représentées de manière créative dans diverses situations; les interactions leur ont permis de se connecter, d'ajuster leurs idées et leurs pensées et d'exprimer leurs inquiétudes et leurs intérêts. Les individus peuvent facilement entretenir et établir des relations au-delà des frontières culturelles, développer leur communication interculturelle et utiliser les réseaux sociaux pour explorer le monde qui les entoure. À cet égard, ils possèdent de nouvelles identités en interagissant avec d'autres groupes, en réfléchissant sur leurs expériences et en acquérant des valeurs, des normes et des moyens de communiquer avec les autres pour s'intégrer davantage dans la culture du pays d'accueil. À la lumière de cela, de nombreux chercheurs s'intéressent à l'examen du lien entre les réseaux sociaux et l'identité interculturelle. Ainsi, la présente étude met en lumière deux catégories principales, qui sont - l'impact des réseaux sociaux sur la communication interculturelle, et l'influence de ces réseaux sociaux et du

processus d'acculturation sur la formation de l'identité interculturelle (ICI). Des entretiens approfondis avec des apprenants algériens des universités américaines sont menés. L'étude conclut que l'utilisation des réseaux sociaux influence de manière significative la façon dont les étudiants algériens aux États-Unis modélisent l'ICI. Des directions pour plus de recherche dans ce domaine sont également explorées.

Mots-clés: Acculturation, Communication Interculturelle, Identité Interculturelle, Réseaux Sociaux

Introduction

Cultural diversity influences how individuals perceive themselves and view others' traditions, beliefs, and ethnic backgrounds. As a result of migration, people are frequently exposed to new ways of life; they discover new mentalities, make cultural connections and develop different cultural identities. Specific individuals may also encounter an identity crisis, where their values and beliefs are reconsidered. Hence, they are exposed to the effects of other cultures, and in the acculturation process, they may either maintain their own cultural identity or abandon it in favor of adopting the identity of the host culture. While culture influences how people portray and identify themselves to others in a given community, social media enable users to establish connections and be in contact with others from the host culture regardless of the distance and cultural background; therefore, Social media help people construct a self-presentation identity through online interactions with many other users. They also identify themselves as "native-like" of the target language. The present research focuses on Algerian-origin communities in America, examining to which extent Algerian learners from U.S. universities who use social media are influenced by American culture. The study then, seeks to discover whether social media affect ICI in the host culture. Three sub-questions were developed from this overarching research topic. What is the role of social media in intercultural communication? How does it affect Algerian users on their identity formation? Can social media help construct an ICI among Algerian learners in the USA?

1. Literature review

1.1 social media

Social media is an integral part of our life because it promotes the interconnectedness and interdependence of our culturally diverse world. Mayfield (2008) categorized social media as a subclass of online media with the following features: participation (the line between media and audience disappears through user-created content), openness (a universal possibility to participate and express opinions in various ways), and communication (an opportunity to communicate, not only to receive information). Hence, by combining the various web-based programs that facilitate user interaction, social media creates an enormous setting for the multiple contexts generated by other media tools. According to Anthony Mayfield, there are different kinds of social media where people can create their website on these platforms and use them to interact with their friends and exchange material, some examples of social networks include the websites Facebook, MySpace, Wikipedia, Apple iTunes, YouTube, and Twitter (Mayfield, 2008). Besides sharing common ground, intercultural communication and social media contribute to and are shaped by one another. Therefore, an adaptation and a sense of community development result from social media usage in cross-cultural communication. Moreover,

adjustment is essential to adapt to a new culture, and social media can play a role in this. Sawyer (2012) has examined how newly arrived migrants in the U.S. use social media to adapt to cross-cultural communication, he also argued that social media offers an executor to people for staying refreshed, conscious, and informed of ongoing happenings by having the chance to connect with friends and family through social media platforms. It is essential to state that acculturation through social media or other networks is always challenging and might occasionally put one's culture in danger. However, the initial goal is to find new ways to coexist with various cultures in the face of intercultural transformations, to avoid the risk of one's cultural identity loss. In conclusion, social media are handy for connecting to various people, locations, ideas, and cultures. Further they offer means for people to interact with each other more deeply despite physical separation and cultural differences, and hence, they link and integrate people through understanding, attitudes, and beliefs in other communities.

1.2 Acculturation, english language proficiency and social media use

Acculturation can have a significant impact on second language acquisition. When individuals are immersed in a new culture, they may be exposed to the language more frequently and have more opportunities to practise speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Beyond acquiring a new language, understanding new cultural customs and norms can also present challenges for international students. During acculturative stress, they may experience factors such as homesickness, cultural isolation, and discrimination, which can impact language learning and overall well-being. If learners encounter cultural differences in communication styles, social norms, and values this will affect how their second language (English) is used and interpreted. Students came from different cultures and established new connections from different universities, and they had to master certain language skills to communicate inside and outside their schools, hence the skills needed for communicating differ from one student to another according to their perceptions, however, they all benefit from social media usage in terms of enhancing both their macro (ie listening, speaking, reading and writing) and micro (ie grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) English language skills. Interactions on social media may affect learners in terms of forming positive or negative views on EFL (English as a foreign language) learning. Before arriving to the U.S., Algerian students used social media to discover the host culture and be familiar with both language and cultural transitions. It is then, important to consider the cultural context in which language learning is used. To a large extent, acculturation occurs when L2 competencies and successful communication serve international students' goals and help them express themselves freely in the host culture. The contact that Algerian students reach through their intercultural communication in social media paves the way for the enhancement of their L2 skills. Roelofse (2013) argues that:

[...] the exposure to new knowledge found in new technologies certainly impacts the way in which second/foreign language learners perceive the world they live in. Similarly, the amount of contact with these social utilities certainly influences literacy practices by learners. New technologies not only alter the way people live, but it also influences the way they think.

Roelofse (2013:16)

Additionally, the various platforms can provide language learning resources, such as

language exchange groups and language learning apps, which can aid in language acquisition and fluency.

1.3 From culture to intercultural communication

Culture is a system of shared beliefs, habits, customs, traditions, architecture, music, and art. It encompasses the way of living, values, norms, language, and interactions. As Kneller (1965) describes it as “the total shared way of life of a given people, comprising their modes of thinking, acting and feeling, which are expressed, for instance, in religion, law, language, art, and custom, as well as in material products such as houses, clothes, and tools.” (p.4). Furthermore, culture is not only a collective social phenomenon, but it can also be individual i.e., interpersonal. Hence, culture has always been a debated issue among scholars, and it remains a complex, vague concept that is so broad to define. According to Ting-Toomey, S. (2012) views culture as an “acquired sense system that includes patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, meanings, and symbols which are passed on from one generation to the next and are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community”, she further argues that culture is:

A learned system of meanings—a value-laden meaning system that helps you “make sense” of and explain what is happening on in your everyday intercultural environment. It fosters shared identity and solidarity among group members. It also reinforces the distinct boundary of “we” as an in-group, and them, the “dissimilar others,” who are distant out-groups. In group, identity refers to the emotional attachment and shared fate (i.e., perceived standard treatment as a function of category membership) that we attach to our select cultural, ethnic, or social categories. Out groups are groups that remain psychologically or emotionally detached from us, and we are skeptical about their words or intentions.

Ting-Toomey, S. (2012:83)

Based on these aspects, culture is seen as the combination of people’s customs, traditions, ideas, and thoughts, which shape their attitudes, beliefs and way of living in a given community, therefore, people’s cultural dimensions are portrayed in the way they interact and communicate with each other and share the cultural patterns with other members of the community. Accordingly, we cannot deny the role of language and communication in this process in which language appears in understanding speech communities, and intercultural communication takes place in interactions and exchange of cultural differences when presenters of other cultures come into contact. As, Gudykunst (2002) notes, “Intercultural communication is the exchange of cultural information between two groups of people with significantly different cultures.” In a similar vein, Martin (2018) focuses on the combination of the two words, culture and communication in understanding intercultural communication. He further explains that the two root words, culture and communication, as well as context and power, are necessary for every intercultural interaction. According to Martin (2018), power means the conditions where people are both dominant and influencers. The context includes the physical and social situations where communication happens; therefore, understanding who people are as individuals, as members of cultural groups, or as citizens of a country depends on recognizing specific intercultural skills, such as knowing the cultural values and group identities to which they belong.

Living in an intercultural world can be challenging for immigrants when culture

influences perception, which directly affects people's attitudes and behaviors and often leads to stereotyping (Lee & Fiske, 2006). Moreover, immigrants from all over the world, when they move to another country, they struggle to be misunderstood by others from the host culture. Factors like prejudices and harmful contact can reinforce stereotypes and directly impact intercultural interaction among immigrants. Accordingly, the conflicts that immigrants face in the host culture, sometimes urge them to reconsider their cultural identity because they face contrasting cultural backgrounds. So, being aware of their cultural characteristics and being also able to expect possible cultural clashes is essential in coping with real-life events.

Therefore, they should understand what their cultural identity is. In this respect, they found themselves worried about whether to accept or reject the ethical norms of the culture where they live; therefore, adaptation to new changes, beliefs, and behaviors of the host culture is necessary to reach the acculturation process. Hence, in a cross-cultural environment, people need to understand and adapt to cultural differences by communicating and interacting with members from other communities. Accordingly, social interactions and connections with different cultures necessitate intercultural exchange. Moreover, immigrants are living in a globalized world without borders where they quickly adjust to other cultures, communicate and interact with each other and establish cross-cultural communication through the use of social media besides being a practical tool in the spreading of messages, at the same time, social media plays a crucial role in creating new forms of multicultural relations Piechota (2014). Other studies underlined the significance of media use as a central part in the acculturation process (Sawyer, 2012; Wooley, 2013). Research on social media and intercultural communication shows that the two related concepts affect and shape each other. Besides the interconnectedness, adjustment and a sense of community are necessary for intercultural relations. In a study by Sawyer (2012), migrant interactions were examined. The study found that before arriving in the country, migrants have learned much about American society and how to adjust to it through social media. Furthermore, social media plays a crucial role in intercultural adaptation across cultural boundaries. Moreover, it has also been a significant factor in developing a sense of community and strengthening the bonds between people; as a result, communication between cultures fosters a feeling of inclusion and aids in assimilating into a new culture, both of which receive critical support from online social networks. Hence, social media facilitates for them interaction, and help them continue their communication with friends and family they have left behind. In addition, Han (2013) carried out a study on the relationship between social media and acculturation which indicated that different media types had various roles in the assimilation of young adult refugees. By providing cultural information in one-way communication, mass media allowed migrants to learn about a culture through secondary encounters. On the other side, online social media offered refugees a social channel through which they could learn and grow within their host, and ethnic cultures through real interactions with South Koreans and other refugees.

1.4 Intercultural identity

Before discussing ICI, it is essential to define the concept of 'identity.' According to Curtin (2010:278), people's identities are "Social and cultural products of communicative practices that emerge in highly situated interactional micro contexts". Therefore, what a person says, does and understand about others concerns specific circumstances. (i.e. their

verbal and nonverbal communication) are reflections of their identity. According to V. Chen (2011):

Identity is inexorably bound up with what we do, how we make sense of what we do, and how we make choices of what we do. Just like we depart from home to encounter the outside world, identity is a specific point of orientation from which we experience and participate in communication. It has to do with how we enter a conversation, and how we silence ourselves and others.

V. Chen (2011:489)

In other words, identity is a part of a person's feeling of belonging to a group, a nation, or a state and it is represented through specific characteristics, such as, beliefs, religion, expressions, history, race, traditions, language, etc. According to Spencer-Oatey (2005), identity represents a person's self-image, consisting of multiple self-attributes, including negatively, neutrally, and positively evaluated characteristics. Identity creates meaning and commitments, forms coherence and harmony between goals, beliefs, and values and fosters a sense of personal control and the ability to recognize future possibilities. It is essential to state that in a social-cultural context, and it is through change which encourages people and potentially shapes identity, that they know how to reorganize their self-definition. In the same line of thought, Martin and Nakayama (2010) categorized three main perspectives on identity in communication research: the social science perspective, the interpretive perspective, and the critical perspective. The social science perspective regards identity as a construct created partly by the self and partly through group membership. It emphasizes the individualized and familial self. Moreover, the self is developed through multiple identities, and how we understand ourselves depends extensively on our cultural background. The critical perspective of identity focuses on how and why people relate to identify with particular groups, based on social and historical forces. As identity refers to the individuals' personalities, traits and specific psychological identification, cultural identity is a part of these beliefs, personalities, perceptions, and interpretations of cultural differences. In an intercultural context, people tend to reveal their intercultural identity when communicating in four categories described by Cox (2004): as cited in Yang (2017). In Cox's analysis, persons who adopt the integrated pattern experience the slightest difficulty in intercultural communication. However, they maintain close home cultural connections; they are also willing to interact with people of other cultural backgrounds and can adapt to diverse cultures in the host country. This is the case not only with international students studying in English-dominant countries (Zheng, Sang, & Wang, 2004). ICI is multi-dimensional; moreover, it involves ethnicity, race, color, class, and gender, with some of these dimensions more salient than others and varying with each individual (Y.-W. Chen, 2014). Gu (2008) describes how a few female students from rural areas of Mainland China majoring in bioscience and learning ESL in Hong Kong transform themselves in response to a different sociocultural environment and construct their new identities by interacting with native English speakers in two primary settings: The "mainstream urban-discourse community" in the academic department where they study, and the English-speaking Christian community where they socialize with native English speakers.

1.5 Kim's theory of acculturation and intercultural identity

Acculturation refers to the long-term incremental identity-related change process of immigrants and refugees in a new environment (Kim, 2015). In the intercultural communication context, the idea of having an intercultural identity is depicted from the assumption of maintaining a positive original cultural identity, as is the case for immigrants in the host culture; they usually change slowly into more flexible and manifold systems when encountering the host culture therefore, cultural identities might stay very strong in the altered reality (Talib, 2002). Immigrants, to be accepted as a member of a cultural group, they must be acculturated, essentially learning and using a code that other group members will be able to recognize. They are acculturated into various cultural identities in obvious and less obvious ways. So that, their personalities and circumstances, played an essential part in their experiences and their reactions to them. The development or the shift from their awareness of their cultural aspects to other new cross-cultural attachment to others' way of life, enables them to acquire double identities, or even multimodal identity, where they undergo some degree of cultural identity, shift that includes more "open-ended [...] self– other orientation" what Kim refers to "intercultural identity." The notion of intercultural identity was used by Kim (2001) to denote the individual's ability to grow beyond their original culture and encompass a new culture, gaining additional insight into both cultures in the process. The theory of acculturation and intercultural identity describes communication as the mediating process required to facilitate the transition from one culture to the next. "Communication is crucial to acculturation. It provides the fundamental means by which individuals develop insights into their new environment" (Kim, 1977). The researcher focuses on mass media and interpersonal communication channels, She suggests that the formation of intercultural identity stems from pressure brought about by cultural differences in the modern world of technologies, mainly in the new media space (e.g., blogs, community websites, social network services, email, international Skype phone calls) has enabled migrants to learn the unique cultural values and identity but maintain the old at the same time.

1.6 Intercultural identity and social media use

Today's generation appears to be highly dependent on social networking sites that influence their way of life. These platforms are transforming communication across cultures and persist in hybrid identities. According to Singh (2010), the emergence of the internet has forced people into "virtual cultures," which are technologically homogenized groups that are neither rooted in time nor place. However, it does seem that virtual communities can sustain and strengthen pre-existing cultural identities when people are culturally homogenous, and in-group members who may or may not know one another. According to research done by Hopkins in 2011, young Australian Muslim Turks who felt alone due to anti-Islamic sentiment in Australia could successfully employ new media to connect with Muslims globally, strengthening their identities and beliefs. In the same line of thought, Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2011) argue that French Muslims used social networking sites to maintain their Muslim identities, frequently at the expense of their French identities. Accordingly, Oh (2012) contends that second-generation Korean Americans utilize transnational Korean media to strengthen intra-ethnic ties and sustain their Korean identities. These networks also stand for places where one can construct an identity and put themselves on display for others. In this respect, Social media allow users a glimpse into the private lives of others by way of the images of themselves they present on their profiles

and the narratives of their day-to-day activities. In addition to their representation spaces, social media reflect the building of individual identity; new immigrants can successfully use social media and other forms of electronic communication to preserve and strengthen their cultural identities despite extensive geographical and temporal separation (Croucher, 2011). Moreover, they utilize them to study abroad, broaden their social networks and adapt to the host culture to build relationships and cultural identities. Yet, it is unclear whether virtual groups develop cultural identities or not. Furthermore, social media now provide opportunities for multiple, dynamic, and modified self-representation and the performance of new identities (Usborne & Taylor, 2012). During these identity-negotiation processes, languages serve as an indicator of cultural identity and a tool to appropriate cultural elements and internalize cultures (Giles & Coupland, 1991). However, the extent to which a person's cultural identity is shaped, transformed, negotiated, and performed through their mediated interaction needs further investigation. Social media have given young people access to global cultural resources, using them to negotiate, construct, and achieve their cultural identity creatively. Moreover, the intercultural contact that sojourners face through social media urges them to create dual identities to decipher the possible situations where language, behavior, and attitudes are different from their own as to understand who their audience is and what they are expected to react or present themselves, as natives in that culture. Since circumstances are different, cultures, and languages are other too, sojourners adapt and develop an ICI that enables them to understand experiences from the host culture.

2. Methodology

In-depth interviews were used to investigate the impact of social media on the formation of intercultural identity, with a small number of respondents exploring their perspectives on a specific concept, program, or situation. This qualitative method is effective for gaining insight into participants' experiences, as it permits the interviewer to receive in-depth responses to questions (McNamara, 2007). This methodology supplied the study with in-depth information about the thoughts and perspectives of the participants regarding the impact of social media on intercultural identity.

2.1 Participants

This study was conducted with ten Algerian students who reside abroad and attend institutions in the United States. These participants were born in Algeria and are familiar with transitioning to university life. Of the 10 participants, seven were male, and three were female. Four participants were undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25. Five participants were graduate students between the ages of 26 and 30. The time the participants have been in the United States ranges from one month to one year. The participants in the study were all from Algeria.

Table 1 shows the participants' demographic information.

Gender	Male	7
	Female	3
Age Range	18-25	3
	26-30	5
	31-40	2
Length in U.S. (in months)	One month	1
	Two months	2
	Three months	3
	More	5
University	Wichita State University	
	Bergen community college	
	Washtenaw Community College	
	Bergen community college	

2.2 Instruments

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews to obtain far more information than is available through other data-gathering techniques, such as surveys. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to collect information in a more relaxed environment, so respondents may feel more comfortable conversing with the researcher. The initial questions in an in-depth interview are as comprehensive as feasible. Lazar et al. (2017) describe the benefits of this procedure as follows: Using interviews, researchers can collect data that would otherwise be extremely difficult to manage by asking questions that examine a wide variety of concerns about a topic and allowing respondents to provide extensive responses. Given the opportunity to speak and questions that stimulate reflection and consideration, interviewers may go on for a considerable amount of time, creating ideas and sharing insights that would be lost in surveys. (p. 178). Fetscher (2013), a German researcher, examined the role of in-depth interviews in intercultural communication research and found the instrument effective for his investigation. The tool used to collect information during the interviews consists of ten questions about social media usage and multicultural identity. The appendix presents the questions about the instrument used in this study.

2.3 Procedures

Participants were interviewed by email and groups on Facebook. The interviews aimed to answer how the students adapt to life in the United States, maintain connections to their home countries, and form their new cultural identities through social media. International students were asked how social media influence their adjustment to U.S. culture, relationships, sense of community, and general happiness. The interviews were conducted via Facebook Messenger calls. The length of each interview ranged from 20 to 45 minutes. All interviews were done in English and were recorded and transcribed.

3. Results

As stated earlier, this study investigated social media's role in shaping intercultural identity. The data were collected and analyzed based on the goal that guided this study. What follows is a description of each topic's overviews and recurring themes, with common examples to explain the answers offered. The following section provides a high-level analysis of the answers to all ten questions.

Q1: Social Media use

All participants reported using social networking sites like Facebook, Whatsapp, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram. Most users use social media more than twice daily to contact friends and family, while some log in once per week. Most participants use social networking sites many times and on a daily basis, while some check in once per week to chat with pals. A few websites are visited monthly times to check for updates and read the news. The time interviewees spend on social networking sites ranges from a few minutes checking for updates to many hours communicating with friends. Several examples of possible responses are as follows: “I use Facebook to communicate with friends all around the world (Interviewee C). “I have accounts on almost all the popular sites— Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and of course, Gmail. I log in multiple times a day, totaling about an hour” (Interviewee D). “Mostly, I use Facebook daily for about 15 minutes on average. I spend more time on it when I am chatting with my friends” (Interviewee A).

Q2: Purpose of social media

All the participants agreed that they use social networking sites to maintain contact and communication with family and friends. Most of them said they use it for entertainment, sharing pictures, and information, resources and links, as interviewees B and E mentioned:

Interviewee B:

“I use Facebook mainly to chat with my friends who are living far, and I share information and pictures about the places I visit sometimes. They also share with me their moments, I often tell them about my news here”.

Interviewee E:

“I use social media most of the time, and I sometimes feel that I’m connected to people I don’t know. I also use it to keep in touch and be updated with my friends and family. I don’t use other platforms, I like to hear news from Algeria, all of my family members and friends use Whatsapp , and Facebook much , so I like to join them through both apps”.

Some participants showed little interaction through social media, and they preferred to act passively on some platforms. For example:

Interviewee D:

“As for interaction, I don’t think myself a good communicator in the language. I prefer just to follow posts in Twitter or even share some through Facebook. So Similarly, on I follow some famous pages on Instagram, I react with comments only, and I have no interest in communicating or having discussions with other people.”

Q3: Social media use before arrival to the U.S.

Before they came to the U.S., Algerian students, had some friends who helped them to get there, and some teachers, they even had friends from some Facebook groups and pages who guided them on to live in American cities. Social media helped them develop relationships and experiences.

Interviewee H:

“I used social media more often before coming to the United States, and the reason was to adjust to the American culture, learn some experiences, visit university Facebook pages to get information about the university I’ll enroll in.”

Q4: Social networks use and adjustment to american culture

The participants revealed that the use of social media helped them establish relationships across cultures and connections, and this has prepared them to the adjustment of the American culture. Below are three sample answers.

Interviewee D:

“Social media has increased my awareness. For example, when I was in Algeria, I didn’t know what their festivals were like, Mardi Gras. Since it was a western thing, I didn’t really care or understand until I viewed some colorful pictures on Facebook and Instagram shared by my friends, and talked to people about it. The only way I understood by watching videos and using social media to learn about the importance of the celebration and appreciate what other people do.”

Interviewee E:

“I used Facebook to get to know more people so that I could be more prepared for life in the U.S. A while ago, I didn’t know the word meme so I had to ask people. With the help of Facebook and Instagram, I learned what was happening in the U.S.”

Interviewee H:

“With Facebook, I did become more involved and in touch with my friends and social activities before arriving in the U.S. These sites gave me a better idea of how American people think and talk, so it helped me become more prepared in adjusting to the culture.”

Q 5 Do you think that social networks helped you improve your English language proficiency?

The participants used social networks to communicate in English with their friends and natives. Overall, social networks are an important factor in the acculturation process and can greatly influence both an individual's success in adapting to a new culture and facilitate language learning, as individuals can practise speaking and listening in the target language with native speakers.

(Interviewee D).

“social media platforms provide me with language learning resources, such as language exchange groups and language learning apps, which aided me in language acquisition and fluency.”

(Interviewee J).

“ I could learn better language to communicate with my friends,I had the opportunity to learn new vocabulary and improve my pronunciation when I talked to

native speakers”

(Interviewee E).

“ I had to make calls with my American friends , at the beginning it was hard to communicate, but at the end I managed to learn more expressions to use when talking”

(Interviewee A).

“I benefited from my American friends on how to write correct messages, and utterances, I improved my English language a bit”

Q5 Q6: social media and community

Social media fosters people’s a sense of community and belonging to other culture. The participants maintain a sense of community through social media in the US through groups and messenger discussions .They interact with people they find in university or college to build a relationship and feel part of the community and with the U.S. culture as a whole .

Interviewee C:

“I always use social media to check what’s new, and I consider the groups I belong to as my second house ,I share videos, and pictures with my friends, I feel like; I have an online house where my other family lives!.”

Interviewee E:

“I started using social media, so I never lost contact with my old friends or family in Algeria . I know what’s going on in Algeria and the U.S. because I follow the news and talk to people on social media sites.”

Interviewee F:

“I belong to both communities even though I live far from my home country. I use social media to keep in touch with people in both cultures, but our relationships aren’t completely based on our communication over social media and Facebook.”

Interviewee J:

“Social media increases my sense of community because when I’m in one country, I still feel like I’m part of the other as well.”

Q6 Q7: Adjustment challenges and social media

The participants faced some challenges when moving to a country that is different from their own, such problems as cultural shock and stereotyping. So to be more integrated into the host culture, they used Social Media to overcome these challenges. Cultural differences are portrayed through videos and shared with the world in a set of pictures and sound to the audience; some Youtube videos, for example ,reveal traditions, beliefs and customs of the host culture which seem unfamiliar to other cultures.

Interviewee B:

“I believe that social media enable people to understand the differences found in the host culture, for example some content made fun of colored people; even in my

own culture, I found some people belittle their traditions. I learned not to judge differences through media since not all people believe this way, generalizing judgments and giving false ideas to the world about a culture isn't good at all."

Interviewee A:

"When I first came to the US, I felt a cultural shock, and I couldn't understand what was happening; it was a new environment for me ; I took time to adapt to the different changes ,I also felt uncomfortable ,and the learning experiences were different and work was different too! .I had to contact so many friends here on Facebook I even joined some groups .Social media helped me solve the problem of ambiguity towards the culture, I learned how to become more integrated into daily conversations with native speakers too."

Interviewee I:

" I had no problem with the language, but with communicating my ideas to others from the US , it was hard for me to understand the accent and gestures teachers use in class, the outside classroom ;I began to follow some Facebook and Instagram pages of native teachers , I began to learn short slang words and slogans."

Q7Q8: Satisfaction and fulfillment from social media

The participants show great interest in using social media for cultural concerns. They feel satisfied with using it.

Interviewee G:

"I feel grateful to the use of social media, and I knew many things, and I discovered a lot of cultural differences."

Interviewee E:

"No one can deny the importance of social media in our lives, it helped me construct other views related to the host culture, I can now benefit from the different educational posts I share with my friends, and entertain myself too"

Q8 Q9 : Advantages and Disadvantages of social media

As social media makes the world so small for participants, it is unhelpful for many.

Interviewee A:

"I think that social media is a powerful thing, as it is helping me, it is destroying one's life; for example, I don't feel comfortable sharing my thoughts, personal life."

Interviewee F:

"What is beautiful about social media is that people cannot know you; at the same time, you feel less integrated when there is no face-to-face communication you, cannot interact with people at ease."

Interviewee C:

"I like everything concerning social media, cultural diversity, the posts people share, the ideas, and entertainment, except being addicted, the time I spend on

virtual platforms is the only disadvantage for me.”

Q9:10: Social media use and cultural identity

Through media, the participants make intercultural contact with the host culture which helps them understand different aspects of the culture, and even identify themselves as representatives of that culture, yet maintaining their original identity is also worth mentioning.

Interviewee F:

“Here in America, the way of living is different; what we feel is correct in our country may seem unacceptable, and I believe that my first contact with natives made me think of how to identify myself to them, and so my appearance with a hijab reflects my Muslim identity. I saw how my native friends treated me as one of their community; they show appreciation and love, through the posts I share too. I identify myself as American Algerian with dual identities.”

Interviewee B:

“ I feel like my cultural identity in this country is reflected through the attachment I give to the traditions and values transferred to me through Instagram; I’m often influenced through clothes , and the way of living ,and thinking of American singers ,and famous people here , I’d like to be as famous as them too.”

Interviewee B:

“I learned some expressions used by American people, and I get used to the meanings and utterances, idioms, and I now talk like a native American, and think as American too.”

Q10Q11: Final thoughts on social media and intercultural identity

Many insightful observations were brought up when interviewees were asked if there were anything else they would like to add as a closing note about social media and international identity. To start, Social media has played an increasingly important role in modern society and helped bridge cultural gaps. Because of this process, social media has positively affected people’s lives in an intercultural context and paved the way to them understanding cultural differences and identities.

Interviewee D:

“Social media helped me a lot to integrate into American life to overcome the cultural obstacles. I find it easy to adjust to American life, since we have nearly the same values in our country, yet here there’s a different sense of humor, different interests, and different backgrounds. Social media helped to make my transition easier.”

Interviewee J:

“My family is typically Algerian, of an Algerian identity, of course, when, I came to the US. I began to construct other values, through joining social media spaces, and understanding the similarities found in both cultures; I then kept my original culture along with my identity and I learned from American people how to identify

myself as an American citizen in the U.S.”

Interviewee F:

“The intercultural dialogue I made with my native friends through social networks, helped me construct other ways of thinking; my friends here in America have their way of expressing themselves, and I had to find the language and the expressions to present myself to them too, I shared their concerns, reacted to their special ceremonies and festivals they post in social networks, I felt having a hybrid identity where I can easily belong to the U.S. culture.”

Interviewee G:

“Here in the US, everyone is busy living his own life. When I first came, I got rid of the ideas I found in my country; as for acceptably living my life, people don’t care if you work and they don’t judge you about anything except if you misbehave, I started following entertaining and educative platforms in Facebook and Instagram act like American students who are busy with their studies, do researchers to develop their levels.”

4. Discussion

The study’s results demonstrated that the use of social media in intercultural contexts, paves the way for users to integrate some skills in understanding host cultures. For the purpose of this study, the importance of acculturation in social media use is mentioned and its relationship to the identity construction of Algerian Students in the US. Additionally, the results of this study show intercultural contact are maintained through social media and how this affects its users’ identity construction. The interactions and conversations the sojourners build with other people from the host culture when communicating their ideas and thoughts. Before coming to US, the participants used social media to discover the host culture, and how it is the way of living of the citizens there, and also to understand the cultural norms and values. They were aware of the conflicts and challenges and serotyping communities they face too; participants could build perceptions about what is happening in both cultures, and they adjust to the American one. Forming relationships enabled them to belong and construct a sense of community, where they felt more comfortable in the new culture. As for identity construction, participants showed both concerns the original identity and the cultural one that they developed ,which is referred to as ICI when they lived in U.S. Participants revealed ,through their sense of belonging, the shift from being individual to universal showing great sensitivity, and openness to others life ,concerns from the host culture, and this developed how they see themselves in the eye of others ,their presentation of self is created through the process of acculturation to construct a flexible hybrid identity, where intercultural contact and social media are significant.

Conclusion

The study explored Algerian students’ intercultural learning experience and their identity changes in America while using social media. Findings suggest that these students, during intercultural contact, they become integrated into the host culture, through different aspects, like acculturation, a sense of community, and awareness of cultural differences, all these enable them to possess a new way of thinking, understanding the intercultural

experiences and situation of the host culture. As a result of the interaction established by social media use, Algerian students adjust to the new culture and identify themselves as Algerian American people of dual identities; they perceive social networking sites as a powerful means that helped them construct their intercultural identity. In terms of the limitations of this study and more focused scope for further research. To begin, this research only included the participation of ten students from Algeria. It would be good to create a more excellent knowledge of the relationship between the use of social media and ICI by conducting interviews or surveys with a more significant number of students. Furthermore, the researcher found time constraints to measure identity in a limited period; one year was insufficient for giving conclusions for this study. In addition, the majority of those who were interviewed were students at various universities; some of them majored in literary studies, while others studied technical fields. For the purpose to conduct additional research, interviews with people living in the United States could be undertaken to discover how the use of social media influences ICI in other countries. This information could then be compared and contrasted with the experiences of people moving to the United States. There is a significant opportunity to learn more about the effects that social media has on intercultural identity by conducting research and conducting interviews with people from all over the world.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Do you use social media? (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, iPhone) How often? How much time?
2. What purpose do social media have in your life? How involved are you with social media sites?
3. Before you arrived in the U.S., did you use social media to connect and become more familiar with the culture?
4. Do you feel that social media helped you to be adjusted to the American Culture?
5. Do you think that social networks helped you improve your English language proficiency?
- 5.6. Does the use of social media affect your sense of community and finding friends?
- 6.7. Did you find challenges when having intercultural contact through using social media? Like cultural shock, stereotyping?
- 7.8. Do you feel satisfied or fulfilled after using social media?
- 8.9. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of using social media?
- 9.10. Do social media affect your cultural identity formation?
- 10.11. What do you think the role of social media is on intercultural identity?