The youth on social media: Exploring social media for intercultural communication among international students in Chinese universities

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The growing use of social media across the world has attracted several scholarly investigations on the actual impact of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, WhatsApp among others for intercultural communication purposes in higher educational institutions. With the Theory of Technological Determinism as the theoretical basis, this study investigates how social media use impacts intercultural communication among international students in Chinese universities. The research design consisted of online questionnaires administered to 1635 cross-cultural international students from ten (10) different countries and across ten (10) universities, randomly sampled from the Beijing municipality of China. The online questionnaire was distributed via the QuestionPro platform and administered via the WeChat groups of participating universities. The data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, standard deviations, mean, and coefficient of variation. The findings generally showed that social media users have impacted positively promoting intercultural communication among international students studying in Chinese universities. The implications of the findings suggest that encouraging social media use among international students from different cultural backgrounds have helped in sustaining intercultural communication processes among students from different background and cultures.
Keywords: social media, intercultural communication, youth, international students, Chinese universities

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media undoubtedly forms an essential aspect of our present lives as it not only enhances interconnectedness but also facilitates interdependence, especially in our culturally diverse globe. As essential tools for social interaction, social media enables individuals to communicate as well as engage with diverse information that can quickly be accessed via the internet. Certainly, there is a growing number of individuals who can access the internet in the current society, thus social media has turned out to be more common in our daily routines. Without a doubt, communication within these virtual contexts enhances interactive interchange that facilitates an understanding or tolerance for diverse viewpoints. As argued by Zaw, (2018) and Farrell, (2016), the increasing use of social media has not only offered individuals an opportunity to express their viewpoints on issues of both national and international concerns, but also an opportunity to engage in conversations via shared virtual channels and online communities.

As highlighted by Chan, (2016), Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, (2015), and Hruska & Maresova, (2020), many reasons explain why individuals utilize social media. Firstly, individuals' need to connect and interact with others is apparent. As established by Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, individuals wish to satisfy their sense of belonging, an aspect that is acquired through their relationship with other individuals. Social media undoubtedly offers this opportunity, allowing individuals to not only connect with others but also belong to various networks through virtual communities. Other than using social media to facilitate online interactions with others, individuals also use social media to acquire knowledge as well as learn about diverse opinions and outlooks on topics, issues, or events. Above all, social media offers an important tool that is used

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to facilitate socialization, enabling individuals to engage in conservations and virtual dialogue devoid of face-to-face interactions with others.

Universities in China are recording a growing number of international students who are not only conversant with social media use but also becoming knowledgeable of the different cultural orientations. While some communication scholars are of the view that social media use affects intercultural communication negatively, another school of thought augured that social media use has the potential to greatly influenced the process of intercultural integration, of the youth and particularly international students. This study is therefore aimed at examining how social media use can impact intercultural communication amongst youths (international students) in various universities in China.

II.   REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
2.1   The Effects of Social Media on the Youth
Concerns about social media effects have existed for a long period. Indeed, technological progress instigates excitement and fear alike. Over the last two decades, several studies have been conducted on the impacts of social media use on the youth, particularly students in higher educational institutions. Hendrickson & Rosen, (2017) emphasize that the new media technologies such as social media channels have redefined the various ways the youth communicate. Social media channels provide economical, fast-paced online engagements. While it appears somewhat paradoxical, there is still a lot to learn. Nonetheless, the disparities in our understanding are, to some extent, due to the remarkable transformations in the ways social media is applied by the youth especially students. In the 2000s, for instance, teenagers and children spent, on average, four hours each day with the media. However, these statistics have presently skyrocketed to an average of nine hours per day for teenagers and six hours per day for children. Present-day teenagers and children spend relatively more time with the media. Despite this, Joshi et al., (2019) and Thomas et al., (2017) argue that several researchers are less interested in what the youths learn in schools as compared to what they are acquiring from the many hours they spend on those screens.

Our knowledge disparities regarding the impacts of social media use on youth are also instigated by the sweeping as well as the rapid changes within the media landscape. New technologies are developing, replacing each other at a remarkable pace. Certainly, the social media platforms that existed a few years ago currently appear outdated (Joshi et al., 2019; Fuchs, 2017 and Potter, 2017). The changes witnessed within the media landscape are attributed to not only the growth of social media platforms but also the repurposing of conventional media (Bowd, 2016). The youth, just like adults, are consuming television media differently as compared to how they did decades ago. Without any doubt, the youth are consuming more online programs, recording numerous programs to consume later (Lapierre et al., 2017). Presently, the youth consume programs that they deem enjoyable, with a majority of the youth spending hours on streaming services, such as Netflix, as well as on their smartphones, tablets, or their televisions (Matrix, 2014). Although most youths still enjoy watching the news, several of them believe that consuming the evening news on television and purchasing newspapers is outdated. Consequently, the youth have turned out to be "news gazers" with a good number of them argued to be consuming news from the various offline and online sources, depending on the most convenient source at that moment. Indeed, the commercial situation surrounding the youth is experiencing great transformations as well (Badri et al, 2017; Chukwuere, &Chukwuere, 2017 and Singh & Guruprasad, 2019). During the 1990s, for example, gaming was viewed as a domain of the youth, however, it has progressively become normal for the young as well as the old. A decade ago, a reference to video games elicited an image of a home-based computer or items such as PlayStations. Certainly, games such as Counterstrike and Street Fighter are one of the first to come to one's mind. On the other hand, when we talk of games nowadays, our initial thoughts are most likely to be Candy Crush or Pokémon GO games that are played using smartphones or individual tablets. As Joshi et al., (2019), DuBois, (2019), Hobson (2020), Mageto, (2017), Sommer, (2019), and Ehmke, (2019) state, the internet, and touch-screen technology have greatly influenced how gaming is performed.

Currently, stories concerning the youth, especially students, and the use of social media features on news headlines nearly on daily basis. The stories often have four major characteristics. Firstly, they report more about the negative as compared to the positive impacts of social media. Secondly, the news stories also tend to focus more on extreme incidents, including online sexual predators and cyberbullying cases. Thirdly, journalists often quote health specialists such as psychiatrists to offer professional credibility to the issues, yet these particular health specialists often talk from their day-to-day experience, which does not necessarily represent the ordinary youth. Lastly, the journalistic reporting of youth and issues on social media often lacks some form of research findings (Umarani, 2019; Sommer, 2019; Singh and Guruprasad, 2019).

As mentioned by Nelson, (2019) and Appel et al., (2020), the constructive effects of the use of social media on youth, especially students in higher educational institutions include; enabling students to network as well as keep in touch with their colleagues without physical engagements, in addition to keeping them updated

on various events taking place across the globe. Social media use thus helps the youth to bridge the gap existing between various friends. Given this, students in Chinese universities can now network as well as engage their friends both within and in other countries in the world. Additionally, youth, especially students are also able to create pages as well as groups on various social media channels. This ensures the attainment of not only more connections but also increasing opportunities being created for their disciplines. Besides, it can also result in additional employment creation opportunities being created for jobless youths. Indeed, from the numerous interviews conducted every day, youths mention that social media not only ensures that their lives are pleasurable and efficient, but it has also become part of their lifestyle (Kapoor et al., 2018 and Demuyakor, 2020).

Although the various social media platforms appear to connect an increasing number of individuals as well as keeping them up-to-date on many matters, it also promotes cultural breaches by way of social exclusion. Indeed, social media cuts the number of physical interactions among youths as they often spend a great part of their day on these particular social media platforms. Besides, an investigation from various studies conducted by numerous scientists reveals that the use of social may also lead to several impacts, including physical, psychological, emotional, as well as mental issues amongst youths. This may, in turn, result in depression, anxiety, as well as other health issues. Social media use has also been associated with misuse as well as a misspelling of words and tenses by way of abbreviations and short forms. Hawi & Samaha, (2017) and Chukwuere & Chukwuere, (2017) argue that this may have a significant negative effect, especially on students as it affects their language capabilities, leading to poor grades.

The use of social media also exposed the youth to online predators who entice them into conducting sexual acts, such as lesbianism, as well as other sexual misconducts. Moreover, it also exposes them to pornographic content that is easily accessible in some online social groups. Consequently, this results in early pregnancies among young girls, resulting in early school dropouts. Furthermore, DuBois, (2019) and Orben, Dienlin & Przybylski, (2019) state that the youths' morals are also affected negatively as they get to access immoral literature and videos.

Spending lengthy hours interacting on various social media platforms also lower productivity among the youth (Kapoor et al., 2018). Consequently, this has led to a growing number of youths who are not self-dependent, and who greatly depend on parents or other family members for their upkeep. The lengthy hours wasted on the various social media platforms may be channeled towards carrying out useful activities that may enable an individual to earn some money or even acquire education, for example, through online tutorials. As noted by Thomas et al., (2017), the various social media sites also offer platforms where cyberbullying and cyber theft are conducted, and this enhances the opportunities and frequencies relating to identity theft. This possesses numerous implications for various youths as their private information may be stolen.

2.2 Intercultural communication and social media usage

Intercultural communication entails interactions between individuals from diverse cultures. Many individuals are currently experiencing intercultural integration since cultures within this globalizing society are strongly intertwined. According to Osgerby, (2020), Mesch, (2017), and Alamri, (2018), this multicultural society is shaped by the encounters of immigrants, sojourners, as well as other individuals who effectively make the essential transition from one culture to another. Forbush &Foucault-Welles, (2016), and Alamri, (2018), argue that intercultural research centers on the relations between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, with adaptation being viewed as a dynamic process where people, upon relocating or moving to a new cultural environment as a result of education, economic, political and social, establish or re-establish and maintain not only a stable, mutual but also an efficient relationship with their new environment.

The intercultural communication stages are very essential to take into consideration when examining links to social media usage. As Alamri, (2018) and Forbush& Foucault-Welles, (2016), the four major stages comprise honeymoon, crisis, adjustment, and biculturalism. In the honeymoon phase, individuals experience euphoria as a result of being in a foreign country (China). The crisis phase, on the other hand, entails frustration with residing in a new and unfamiliar culture, with adjustment, recovery, and biculturalism stages involving not only complete adjustment but also integration. As Murphy, (2020) indicates, culture shock is simply the psychological disorientation that most individuals face when they relocate for a lengthy period to a new environment, and where culture is markedly distinctive from their culture. Culture shock thus forms the major distress that every individual experience during intercultural integration, and which significantly shapes their behavior and communication. Zaw, (2018) has suggested that Social media have considerably reduced the stress students and other migrants go through during intercultural integration.

Social media communication also forms a vital feature of the intercultural process in recent years. Since many individuals migrate to study, work or live in a new environment, interacting with others before as well as after one's migration is valuable. Social media platforms such as Facebook have offered students and other migrants the opportunity to become familiar with the new cultures and shapes one's emotions as well as

adjustments. Furthermore, Dumitraşcu-Băldău & Dumitraşcu, (2019) say that being in control over one's emotions influences an individual's ability to learn while being open to adjusting to life in a different environment and culture. Liu, (2019), highlighted that to effectively communicate with individuals from diverse cultures, one must cultivate his/her global communication competency. Indeed, global communication competency forms a vital skill that one must develop to not only help us comprehend other cultures but also enable one to communicate effectively in present-day society. According to Liu, (2019) and Liu, Gallois, and Volčič ,(2015), competence entails cognitive, affective in addition to behavioral aspects related to the four major global communication competency dimensions, including global mindset, mapping a culture, unfolding the self, and aligning interaction.

Liu, (2019) pointed out that a global mindset entails broadening an individual's perspective, in addition to being open-minded about life. This means that individuals ought to have the urge to acquire further knowledge, learn more, as well as think critically as regards cultural differences. Liu, (2019), again, described the intercultural communication processes as "unfold the self" as a process that involves transforming in addition to pushing oneself from a lower level to a higher level of human development. The empathy or compassion that is integrated into this particular dimension significantly influences the growth of sensitivity. These particular traits promote learning as well as enhance global communication competency. Mapping the culture involves a comparison between diverse cultures, in addition to examining both the similarities and contrasts. Shocks and frustrations may be apparent when individuals directly experience the differences. On the other hand, after exploring the diverse aspects, it is essential to immerse oneself in the new cultures as well as make efforts to effectively understand their new environment. Finally, Liu, Gallois, and Volčič, (2015) state that aligning interaction ensures that the ultimate objective of effectively interacting, establishing cultural adroitness, and achieving communication behaviors that elicit intended responses within social media global communication environment, and which does not infringe their colleagues' norms is attained. Certainly, effectiveness and appropriateness are viewed as two essential elements within this particular process as they not ensure flexibility, but also manage interactions and changes.

Chen's 2005 model of global communication competence reveals the significance of improving the way we think. Indeed, as noted by Neuliep, (2018) and Sorrells, (2016), thinking globally has turned out to be an essential aspect of life in the current globalizing society, which has become not only increasingly interconnected but also more interdependent amid the diverse cultures across the globe. Social media enable this ability to be exercised by individuals around the world, hence facilitating a better understanding of other cultures. This offers an important opportunity to examine the role that social media plays in as far as the intercultural adaptation process is concerned. Consequently, it is undeniable that the internet has turned out to be among the most popular media utilized by immigrants, which they use to electronically interact with their families and friends not only within their home nations but also with the locals of the host nation. According to Potter, (2017), Neuliep, (2018), and Sorrells, (2016), within a virtual environment, ethical social communication as well as the host's social communication form essential components that may aid or impede adaptation. Social media consist of physical, social well as the cultural effect on intercultural integration.

2.3   The theoretical underpinning of the study

The theoretical position of this study is anchored on *technological Determinism Theory*. The technological Determinism theory was established by Marshall McLuhan in the year 1962. This theory holds that media influences how people think, feel, as well as behave, in addition to how a society transforms from one technological era to another. It argues that people learn, feel, think, or perceive things the way they do as a result of the influence of the messages they acquire through the presently available technology. The new media platforms such as social media, for instance, required individuals to listen as well as develop some sense of hearing. Television, on the other hand, engages both an individual's hearing as well as visual senses. Individuals thereafter transfer the developed senses into their day-to-day lives, with the above-highlighted media then becoming their source of acquiring message. Social media, which has been generated by emerging technology demands individuals to not only listen but also to be engaged often. Individuals then decode the message that they have received from the various social media platforms in their daily life. Consequently, whatever the general society is employing to communicate is adopted by nearly every individual to communicate. Given this, it can be argued that there is some truth judging by what has occurred over time. Indeed, the reality has been that, as a given medium changes, so do society's means of communicating. The theory justifies that when new technological systems are established, then culture and society are transformed to reflect the senses required to utilize the new technology. The theory thus confirms that cause and effect analysis are important considerations associated with new technology (social media), as new technology not only influences changes in a society's manner of thinking, and acting, but also their perceptions of other cultures. Based on the literature review, the theoretical framework, the following key research questions that this study seeks to investigate are:

2.4. Research Questions (RQs)
RQ 1. What specific social media platform(s) do international students use most in China and for what purpose?
RQ 2. How do social media platforms improve intercultural communication among international students in China?
RQ 3. What are the effects of social media use on the youth regarding utility on intercultural communication process of international students in Chinese Universities?

III. METHODS

This study aims to investigate how social media use impacts intercultural communication among final-year international students in 10 purposively sampled universities in China. Purposeful sampling was used because it offered the researchers the opportunity to identify and select data-rich cases that are closely related to the survey targeted people that were of phenomenon interest (Wagner, 2017 and Bhat, 2019). The study made use of simple random sampling as a method of data collection. In this case, a sample was selected for review from a larger population. There were no specific criteria for choosing a response, it was purely based on chance, and every member of the selected population had a chance of being part of the sample (Depersio, 2018). The study targeted International final year students (youth) at some selected universities in China, aged between 20 and 50. The research design consisted of online questionnaires with a 5-point Likert scale question *(1= [strongly disagree], 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree, 4=somewhat agree, 5= [Strongly agree]).* Universities were randomly identified and sampled within the various districts located in Beijing municipality China, and a research assistant was recruited in each of the sampled universities to oversee the survey with the collaboration with some volunteer international student's association leadership of the sampled universities. The resultant effect is that there was a very high rate of response from the respondents. The responses were unique in their ways because every student received the online questionnaire and responded according to the ways they differently understood the questions. The researchers distributed 1800 online survey questionnaires hosted by QuestionPro via the WeChat groups of the international students from 10 different countries and 10 sampled universities. Out of 1,800 questionnaires distributed a total of 1,635 international students validly responded, which translates to 90.8 % of the total population for the study. The Universities in Beijing were divided between central or urban and peripheral districts, the researchers subdivided the sample into smaller sub-samples of around 10% and 6.35 % for each zone; the first sub-sample targeted international students attending higher educational institutions (universities) which are located within the central urban districts of Beijing, where the majority of Beijing's Universities are located and the other 6.35%, for universities located in the peripheral districts. The comparison of the outcome obtained from the two samples taken revealed that both samples had the same outcome. They were therefore combined for analysis. The entire survey took three months (January, February, and March 2021). The analysis was done using frequencies, percentages, standard deviations, mean, and coefficient of variation. The following are the details of the data analysis and the findings.

3.1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 indicates that there are 1,635 participants of whom 961 majorities (58.8%) were male while the female was 671 (41.0%) and the other 3 respondents (.2%). The imbalance in gender cannot be a cause of concern because the nature of the research and the type of questions that were fielded did not put into consideration the issue of gender sensitivity. Therefore, any error that is likely to be encountered could be tolerated. The age of the respondents was also required. The majority (42.7%) of the respondents were between 31-40 years, 28.7% were between 41-50 years, 21.1% were between 21-30 years and 7.5% were 50+ years. The respondents that were in different age groups were also included. The respondents strengthened the nature of the study because the outcome reflected the ideas as well as opinions from the various categories of the respondents. There were five categories of respondents who were mainly based on academic qualifications. Out of the 1635 respondents, 189(1.1%) were diploma holders, 149(9.1%) Bachelor's degree, 502(30.7%) Masters, 842(51.5%) Ph.D., and 124(7.6%) others. The nationality of respondents was also taken into consideration. Respondents were from different countries including Ghana (n=467, 28%), India (n=124, 14.3%), Pakistan (n=569, 34.8%), Nigeria (n=133, 8.1%), Turkey (n=62, 3.8%), Russia (n=30, 1.8%), South Africa (n=38, 2.3%), Japan (n=66, 4.0%), France (n=20, 1.2%), and Peru (n=16, 1.0%). See table 1;

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age			
	21-30	345	21.1
	31-40	698	42.7
	41-50	470	28.7
	51+	122	7.5
Sex			
	Male	961	58.8
	Female	671	41.0
	Others	3	.2
Educational level			
	Diploma	18	1.1
	Bachelor's degree	149	9.1
	Master's degree	502	30.7
	PhD	842	51.5
	Others	124	7.6
Nationality			
	Ghana	467	28.6
	India	234	14.3
	Pakistan	234	34.8
	Nigeria	133	8.1
	Turkey	62	3.8
	Russia	30	1.8
	South Africa	38	2.3
	Japan	66	4.0
	France	20	1.2
	Peru	16	1.0

IV.   RESULTS

4.1.   Specific social media platform usage by international students

The respondents were asked to indicate the social media platforms they use most as international students in China. The number of respondents who use WeChat, n=557, that of WhatsApp, n=622, Facebook, n=399, 82.2%), Weibo, n=42 and Tencent QQ, n=15.See table 2 shows the detailed analysis of specific social media users bases on males and females. However, the authors did not consider the gender dimensions for the discussion section, because this is not the objective of the study. See table 2;

Table 2: Specific social media platform usage by international students

Variable	Gender		Total
	Male,n (%)	Female, n (%)	
Facebook	328 (82.2)	71 (17.8)	399 (100)
WeChat	432 (77.6)	125 (22.4)	557 (100)
WhatsApp	399 (64.1)	223 (35.9)	622 (100)
Sina Weibo	22 (52.4)	20 (47.6)	42 (100)
Tencent QQ	9 (60.0)	6 (40.0)	15 (100)

5.1.2. The purpose of using the social media platform by international students in China

Table 3 below also indicates the data in repeated distributions. There is a clear demonstration of explanatory variables that mainly focus on questions. *The actual purpose of using the social media platform international students in China is to communicate with my friends and online shopping, he actual reason for using social media platform by international students in China is to Communicating with my Professors and Communicating with other members of the Chinese community and for online shopping is the reason for using social media platform, and The primary purpose of using the social media platform by international students in China Communicate with my friends, Professors and for online shopping.* See table 3;

Table 3: The purpose(s) of using the social media platform by international students in China

Questions	Value, mean (SD)	Coefficient of variation	Relative importance
The purpose of using the social media platform by international students in China is to communicate with my friends and for online shopping	2.18 (0.93)	39.66	74.667
The purpose reason for using the social media platform by international students in China is to Communicating with my Professors and for online shopping	2.68 (0.63)	21.51	89.532
Communicating with other members of the Chinese community and for online shopping is the reason for using the social media platform by international students in China	1.96 (0.88)	46.9	61.433
The primary purpose of using the social media platform by international students in China Communicate with my friends, Professors and for online shopping	2.74 (0.62)	19.63	94.33
Total	**2.39 (0.765)**	**31.93**	**79.99**

4.2.   How social media platforms improve Intercultural communication among international students

The study went out to investigate how social media improves Intercultural communication among students from other countries that are currently studying in China. The descriptive result is presented in table 4 below. *Social media platforms are the best means of fostering intercultural communication*(μ = 3.72), *I feel the platform plays a big role in building a sense of community to both the host country and the other countries abroad among the students*(μ = 4.12), *I feel contented and happy after using social media for communicating with other students from different cultures* (μ = 4.32), and *in my opinion, Social media keeps international students from different cultures together and is highly convenient for communication* (μ = 3.32*). See table 4;*

Table 4: Social media platforms improve Intercultural communication among international students

Measurement Items	Mean	SD
In my opinion, Social media platforms are the best means of fostering intercultural communication	3.72	.34
I feel the platform plays a great role in one's sense of community both within the region and across the borders.	4.12	.99
I feel contented after using social media for communicating with other students from different cultures	4.23	.35
In my opinion, Social media keeps international students from different cultures together because they can share different experiences amongst themselves.	3.32	.87

Note: [Strongly Disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), Neither agree (3), Somewhat Agree (4), & Strongly Agree (5)]

4.3.   The effects of social media use on the youth for intercultural communication process of international students in Chinese Universities

The study wanted further to find out the resultant outcome of sharing information through the internet on the intercultural communication process of international students in Chinese Universities. This included the positives of social media offer to cultural integration. As shown in the table, *In my opinion, sharing information through the internet on social media platforms can be an efficient way of communicating with other people from other cultures, 70.9% somewhat disagree or strongly disagree and 19.9% somewhat agree or strongly agree, I feel social media platforms initiate a learning process that entails sharing of information via links from colleagues, 71.4% somewhat disagree or strongly agree and 19.0% somewhat agree or strongly agree, and Social media platforms are sources where international students can be able to get connected with friends across the world from different countries and cultural orientations, 21.4% somewhat disagree or strongly disagree and 60.6 somewhat agree or strongly agree. See Table 5;*

Table 5: Impacts of social media on the intercultural integration process

	Strongly Disagree		somewhat disagree		Neither agrees		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
In my opinion, social media platforms are convenient and efficient to communicate with people from other cultures	597	36.5	562	34.4	150	9.6	185	11.3	141	8.6	1635
I feel social media platforms initiate the learning process by use of messages and exchanging links and information, and resources from colleagues	631	38.6	536	32.8	157	9.6	167	10.2	144	8.8	1635
Social media platforms are sources where international students can stay socially connected to their friends, family, peers, and make acquaintances with other students from different countries and cultural orientations	135	8.3	215	13.1	295	18.0	400	24.5	590	36.1	1635

Note: [Strongly Disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), Neither agree (3), Somewhat Agree (4), & Strongly Agree (5)]

V.   DISCUSSION

In the first instance, the researchers wanted to understand how social media is affecting the student's intercultural communication process. The study was to also assess the resultant outcomes of the effects of using social media for the communication process among international students who are currently studying in various Chinese universities. This study was guided by three main Research Questions (RQ).

The outcome of the analysis of the first research question indicates that 622 of the respondents use WhatsApp, which is closely followed by which had WeChat 557 of the sampled population, and Facebook was the third most commonly used social media platforms with 399 of the respondents. Even though is the prime social media platform been used in China, our study showed that it is the second most popular application among international students studying in China for intercultural communication purposes. This finding contradicts a previous study by Zhu, & Chhachhar, (2016) who reported that WeChat was the number one social media platform among international students. This finding could be well understood from the dimension of this study since WeChat is primarily used by international students for financial transactions of shopping and other non-social activities hence have little role in intercultural integration (Zhu, & Chhachhar, 2016; Hou, et al., 2017).

The second part of the research question was to investigate the actual purpose of using the social media platform by international students in China. Our findings reported that the primary purpose of using social media platforms among international students is to communicate with my friends, Professors, and for online shopping. The findings revealed that WeChat, to communicate with colleagues, professors and buying online shopping. In terms of relative importance, 94.33% of international students think social media platforms help them foster a better relationship with friends from other countries and Professors. These findings again are in line with a study done by (Seo, Ebrahim, & Aldana, 2016).

On the question of how social media platforms improve Intercultural communication among international students in China, a good number of respondents feel that social media is now the best avenue for intercultural integration despite it been used more for financial and other transactions among international students in China.

Some of the negative effects of social media on international students according to our study indicates that some students feel social media infringes on the Privacy of the youth, others think, Social media is time-consuming and addictive and affects the academic performance of the youth negatively, while the last group of international students is of the view social media affects youth physical, emotional, mental, and psychological (Gan, & Li, 2018; Ji et al., 2010; Wen, Hu, and Hao, 2018).

VI.   CONCLUSIONS

According to our study, social media platforms are a very important tool in all intercultural cultural integration efforts. Even though our study had reported some challenges of using social media to foster intercultural integration, our study can conclude, that the impact of social media on intercultural communication is positive and has greatly helped to enhance cross-cultural relations among international students in China.

Suggestions for future research and limitations

Future studies could take the current study a step further by examining responses on a large scale to include more students, countries, provinces in China. One of the main limitations of the study is that it focused solely on international students from only 10 countries, so the findings cannot be generalized to all international students. Another very important research limitation is data that is self-reported from the respondents that self-selected themselves considering that the coronavirus period was a constraint in that there was no time to get more representative data. It was not easy to find respondents who were willing and ready to take part in the study hence took three months to get the target population for this study.

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