

Social Media Use Among International Students: Cultural Adaptation and Socialization

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Abstract

The study aims to find out the purposes for which international students use social media and its effects on users in the course of adaptation to a new culture and social environment. In accordance with this aim, international students have been selected as the sample case from Kırklareli University which is located in the northwest of Turkey. In-depth semi-structured interviews have been carried out with 20 students who were contacted through the KLU International Student Club. In light of the obtained data, it has been concluded that international students have made some changes in the social media tools they use to adapt to their new social and cultural environment and their usage purposes. Besides, the research found that students have instrumentalized social media in the context of language learning, expanding their social environment, improving cultural interactions and maintaining cultural&social ties with the homeland.

Keywords: Cultural adaptation, Acculturation, Social media, International students, Communication.

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Uluslararası Öğrencilerin Sosyal Medya Kullanımı: Kültürel Adaptasyon ve Sosyalleşme

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Öz

Çalışmanın amacı, uluslararası öğrencilerin sosyal medyayı hangi amaçlarla kullandıkları ve bu sosyal medya kullanımının yeni bir kültüre ve sosyal çevreye adaptasyon bağlamındaki etkilerini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu amaçla Türkiye'nin kuzeybatısında bulunan Kırklareli Üniversitesindeki uluslararası öğrenciler örneklem olarak seçilmiş ve KLU Uluslararası Öğrenci Kulübü aracılığıyla temasa geçilen 20 öğrenciyle yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler ışığında, uluslararası öğrencilerin yeni girdikleri sosyal ve kültürel çevreye adapte olmak için kullandıkları sosyal medya araçları ve bunları kullanım amaçlarında birtakım değişikliklere gittikleri tespit edilmiştir. Bunun yanında öğrencilerin dil öğrenme, kültürel oryantasyon, sosyal çevreyi genişletme, kültürel etkileşim ve anavatanla kültürel ve sosyal bağları koruma bağlamında sosyal medyayı araçsallaştırdıkları görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültürel adaptasyon, Kültürel uyum, Sosyal medya, Uluslararası öğrenciler, iletişim.

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1. Introduction

Advances in communication technologies have had a wide range of social impacts, affecting politics, the economy, culture, art, and our daily lives. With the emergence of the Internet, boundaries of time and space have begun to disappear in communication while it becomes easier and faster for citizens to access information. After the introduction of various social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) in the 2000s, interaction-based and multi-faceted communication has become possible. Compared to other Internet-based applications, the difference with social media is that it can create social networks and offers users the chance to create, share and consume content and/or ideas (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014: 403). The positive aspects of social media can be sorted as keeping up with the current events and facilitating communication, improving the users by giving them the chance to generate content, contributing to economic development and cultural exchange, encouraging a democratic environment by increasing political participation. However, the negative aspects such as addiction to social media and the Internet, spreading misinformation online and commercial manipulations are also noticeable.

According to Sawyer and Chen (155-156), social media has social, physical and cultural effects in terms of intercultural adaptation. So, it is important to examine the effects of social media through specific groups of people. People who have migrated to a new country in the short or long term for reasons such as unemployment, education, and family reunification use various communication channels in order both to adapt to the society they have just entered and to stay in touch with the social environment they left behind. Kim (2008: 506) stated that communication plays a key role in the adaptation process of migrants and underlined the importance of media in this context. Today, social media seems unrivaled in this regard, especially among young people. In that vein, it appears reasonable to examine the social media use of migrants through young people/students who use social media extensively and are also called digital natives born in the digital world (Prensky, 2001). Today, like most people, international students can stay in constant contact with their families/friends through the internet and social media (Komito, 2011: 1075), socialize via social networks in the migrated society, increase their social and cultural capital (Brekke, 2008: 103-105) and easily have access to some information on cultural codes of the host society that might be crucial for the daily life. However, it is still a difficult process for international students to be included in the social and cultural network of the people in the migrated country. In this context, the extent to which social media

platforms contribute to the social and cultural adaptation process of international students emerges as an important question.

Within this framework, the study aims to find out the purposes for which international students use social media and how this use of social media could be interpreted in the context of adaptation to a new culture and social environment. For this purpose, a research was conducted through 20 in-depth interviews at Kırklareli University, Turkey which has approximately 27,000 students in total, 1,122 of whom are international students.

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: In terms of social media usage of international students, do any changes occur when they enter a new cultural and social environment?

RQ2: Does social media have a role in the process of international students' language learning and adaptation to the new social and cultural settings?

2. Theoretical Background

Social media are websites or applications that encourage users to create and share content or participate in social networking (Leong, 2015: 184). In this new medium, which is also called Web 2.0, where interaction becomes prominent in Internet-based applications, users have started to create and exchange content instead of being passive consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 66). Digital communication networks have made it possible for users who do not know each other to come together on various networks to establish connections, create communities and engage in social interaction (Castells, 2002).

The use of these digital networks has also started to affect migrants' various social and cultural experiences. Some studies investigating the relationship between migration and the use of new communication technologies found that the use of internet and social media: a) provides information to migrants on general rights, citizenship and local support networks, b) prevents migrants from feeling isolated and lonely by providing information in their language, c) increases cultural exchange, d) helps with learning a new language via a variety of digital tools, and e) facilitates especially young people's integration into the society (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014: 401-402; McGregor & Siegel, 2013: 10). In this context, social networks can offer new tools for migrants to interact with both their home country and the community in which they live (Komito, 2011: 1076-1077). Croucher (2011: 259), in his theoretical model related to the role of social media in the socio-cultural adaptation of migrants, underlined the effect of language and

media use in the adoption of different cultural and social norms.

Some researchers approach migrants' use of social media with a conceptual framework of acculturation. Acculturation can be defined as the seeking of balance during the process of adapting to a new culture through interaction between their native culture and the new culture. According to Berry (699-700), acculturation has cultural and psychological dimensions. In this process, people from different cultures can interact and achieve psychological and socio-cultural adaptation in the long run. This intercultural contact leads migrants and locals to become familiar with and knowledgeable about each other's culture, language, and traditions. However, in some cases, with misunderstanding, conflict and prejudice becoming dominant, the process of acculturation can also cause stress. Although universities are institutions where cultural diversity is emphasized, situations such as isolation, prejudice and stereotypes may affect international students negatively (Lim & Pham, 2016: 2174).

In this frame of reference, sometimes the media can either have an effect that reinforces stereotypes and prejudices about various countries and migrants; or contribute to the process of acculturation as a social and cultural mediator (Keshishian, 2000: 94). Mass media can have beneficial effects on issues such as the knowledge of the new culture and the language barrier (Keshishian, 2000: 99). In particular, it has been stated in various studies that the Internet and social networks support cultural adaptation and acculturation by providing means of communication, information, interaction and socialization (Hmida et al., 2009; Tüfekçi, 2008; Ye, 2006; Çömlekçi & Bozkanat, 2019). Moreover, social networks can have an impact on the immigrants' perception of the dominant culture (Croucher, 2011: 260).

When we regard the issue in the context of international students, young people who use social media extensively also referred to as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001), come into prominence. In this sense, the digital natives of the Internet apply to social media for a variety of reasons such as habits, socialization and averting from the feeling of loneliness in a society where they have just entered and are "foreign". Socialization refers to individuals interacting with one another to adopt behavior patterns and norms necessary for being a member of society (Allen et al., 2010: 422). Some studies have shown that international students tend to interact primarily with people from their home countries, ethnic identities or former cultural backgrounds through social media (Gomes, 2015; Ye, 2006). Here, the motivations for coping with the sense of loneliness, reinforcing the sense of belonging and forming a network of solidarity come to the fore.

Gomes (2015: 526), in his study with Asian international students in Australia, showed that people often identify themselves as “foreigners studying in Australia” and that their social networks are largely made up of people from their home countries or Asia in general. Similarly, Kim et al. (2009: 165-166) concluded that international students tend to establish new online ties with people of their ethnic and cultural identities in the country they live in. Another main motivation is to conduct academic studies and collaborative research activities. Ye (2006) carried out a study with Chinese international students in the USA and concluded that online communities formed by students with students from their home countries reinforce the sense of belonging in a lonely environment and reduce the stress of cultural adaptation. As stated by Kramer (2003: 8), it was observed that negative emotions such as stress and loneliness, which may be experienced by people who have problems with adapting to a new culture, can be reduced by communication networks established through online communities (Ye, 2006: 5).

Similarly, another study of Indonesian and Vietnamese students studying in Singapore showed that social media plays an important role in building and developing social relations for international students. Besides, students can stay in touch with their social network in their home countries receiving the emotional support they need for adapting to the new environment through social media. However, students' intense communication with people from their home countries and ethnic groups through new communication technologies may cause problems in the long run in terms of adaptation to the host society and its culture (Lim & Pham, 2016: 2183).

On the other hand, some studies conclude that the use of social media by international students has a positive effect especially in the context of their adaptation to the new social and cultural environment. For example, Lin et al.'s (2011: 435) study with international students in the USA concluded that the use of Facebook contributes to the social and cultural adaptation of students to their new social environment. In the research conducted by Forbush and Foucault-Welles (2016: 1) on the adaptation of Chinese university students in the USA, it was found that students who frequently use various social media platforms have a wider social environment in their new societies compared to others. According to the research, establishing connections through social media starts even before the international students set foot in their classrooms.

Sawyer and Chen's (2012: 164) study conducted with international students in the USA argued that individuals establish and strengthen relationships through social media, and these relationships reinforce the sense of belonging to a

community by eliminating adaptation difficulties. Furthermore, in the study, it was observed that international students usually communicate with people from their home countries in the first place, but as their stay in the USA continues, they increase their social and cultural capital by contacting people from the host society through social media.

3. Methodology

According to the Council of Higher Education, Turkey (YÖK)* , the number of international students in Turkey was 125.030 in 2018. Located in northwestern Turkey, Kırklareli University (KLU) has a total of 1,122 international students from 24 different countries as of the 2018-2019 academic year. The number of international students enrolled in KLU has been steadily increasing since 2016. Within the scope of research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 undergraduate students (10 female – 10 male) currently studying at KLU. Cresswell (2007) suggests that semistructured/in-depth interviews require a minimum sample size of between 5 and 25. The reason for choosing this method was the intention to collect data including detailed and subjective experiences related to the research subject (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Following Mears (2012: 23), in-depth interviews can be regarded as “purposeful interactions in which an investigator attempts to learn what another person knows about a topic, to discover and record what that person experienced”. By conducting face-to-face interviews, it was aimed to provide an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Yu & Wright, 2016: 53), as they adapted to their new lives and culture in Turkey. The reason for choosing KLU as the research population is that KLU hosts a large variety of international students studying in a wide range of disciplines.

In the framework of this study, especially newly arrived students (4-26 months) to Turkey were contacted through international student club of the University and students from various countries were reached using the snowball sampling method. (Turkmenistan 5, Indonesia 5, Gambia 3, Bulgaria 2, Macedonia 2, Kosovo 2, Afghanistan 1) The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 22 years. During the interviews (which were held in English and concluded in Kırklareli University between April and May 2019), it was tried to find out which social media platforms international students use and for what purposes as well as how effective these uses are in adapting to a new culture, social environment and language. Interviews recorded with the permission of the interviewees lasted for

* <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> Accessed 25 May 2019.

about 60 to 80 minutes and then were transcribed. Interviewees were informed that their names would not be used in the research.

4. Findings

4.1. Social Media Use and Platforms

Regarding the social media use, Instagram is the most popular social media platform among the international students interviewed. All students from different countries stated that they have an Instagram account that they actively follow and share. This was followed by YouTube and Facebook. The main reasons for students using social media could be summarized as making use of their free time; reducing the feeling of loneliness; expanding their circle of friends; staying in touch with the existing ones; getting news from their home countries and accessing information for academic and cultural purposes. The content shared by the students on social media is generally related to their personal and daily lives. However, two students differ in this sense with their content creation. The first of these students (R6, Indonesia, age: 21) calls himself a Vlogger. He shoots videos of the city and culture he has started living in and shares them with his followers on YouTube. Another student (R4, Indonesia, age: 20) regularly creates content related to the products he promotes via Instagram in the context of digital marketing. Both students stated that their proactive use of social media has expanded their circle of friends and their professional/academic networks.

International students also use social media to stay in touch with their families and friends in their home countries. In this sense, WhatsApp stands out as a leading platform, followed by IMO, Viber, Instagram and Line applications. Especially, video conversations made through WhatsApp and Viber make it easier for international students to maintain regular and healthy communication with their families. Moreover, social media provides opportunities for students to learn about social, cultural and political debates in their home countries and to follow the recent news. Facebook is the most popular application for this purpose.

FB is an app that sets the agenda in my own country. Everybody uses it. Everything about the Afghan public opinion is on FB. So, I have an idea about the events in my country. I also shared my opinions here for a while. (R20, Afghanistan, age: 22)

I followed the elections in my country through Facebook and Instagram. There was some misleading news, but even though I was far away, I was aware of the news moment-to-moment. (R7, Indonesia, age: 19)

Thanks to social media, we do not lose connection with the news in our country. It's

not just political. For example a flood, an accident. We are constantly following the news in the country. (R11, Turkmenistan, age: 22)

Social networks can allow some international students to closely follow the agendas of their countries, participate in ongoing public debates, and still feel part of the public opinion in their country. Thus, students keep up with the agenda and socio-cultural developments of both the country they reside in and their homeland.

Another issue regarding the social media use is the distrust towards social media for some international students.

You can get information from social media much faster than other news sources. But these are generally unconfirmed information. There's always a scam. I check the information I find on social media 1-2 times to see if it's true (R5, Indonesia, age: 21)

As can be seen from the above quote, the distrust is particularly related to fake news phenomenon and disinformation that spread through social media. Also, concerns such as addiction caused by social media and the Internet, isolation in the virtual world, putting social relationships on the back burner and wasting time were expressed by the students.

I restricted my Instagram usage to 1 hour a day. When I first came, I used a lot of social media to socialize. But it takes all my time. (R20, Afghanistan, age: 22)

I think social media is all about marketing. Because of that, I prefer face-to-face communication. (R19, Bulgaria, age: 20)

4.2. Language Learning Process and Cultural Orientation

One of the most significant problems for migrants, whether they are students or not, is the process of language learning. Language constitutes an important barrier for social and cultural integration into a new society. Besides university language courses, practices with schoolmates and their own studies, international students also utilize social media for language learning purposes.

I'm watching YouTube mostly to improve my Turkish. I watch mostly stand-up and comedy videos. Since only one person speaks in those videos, it is easier for me to follow Turkish. (R14, Kosovo, age: 19)

I watch Turkish movies and TV series from YouTube or similar channels. With subtitles. It helps me improve my Turkish. (R1, Gambia, age: 19)

I started watching the Turkish series on the Internet even before I came to Turkey. Thanks to those series, I was able to speak a little bit of Turkish when I first arrived. (R9, Turkmenistan, age: 20)

YouTube seems to be one step ahead for international students in language learning. The series, movies, stand-up shows and entertainment videos made by Vloggers on YouTube with the help of subtitles, combine the use of social media for entertainment purposes with the aim of language learning. Watching Turkish TV series and films is also related to the process of transferring cultural norms as well as language learning. The cultural norms and practices acquired from soap operas have the potential to accelerate the cultural orientation process of international students.

Students who make use of social media a part of their daily lives have the chance to practice their new language through reading, sharing and messaging through these platforms.

My language learning process has accelerated as I constantly text in Turkish through WhatsApp. Especially writing. (R15, Kosovo, age: 20)

As you know, we always check social media accounts. I was constantly exposed to Turkish that way. It sticks in your mind. I always come across texts in Turkish through the accounts I follow. I sometimes take screenshots of words and sentences that I don't understand and then look at the meaning. (R17, Macedonia, age: 20)

The participants stated that daily social media use is especially helpful for learning everyday language and some culture-specific expressions. Continually texting and reading in Turkish language via social media can facilitate the adoption of idioms and cultural expressions, which provides various hints about the local culture.

4.3. Adaptation to Social Environment

It has been observed that international students tend to use social media as a tool in the process of adapting to the new social environment. In this adaptation process, the social media usage habits of the students undergo some transformations.

People here use a lot of Instagram. They meet via Instagram, which may have encouraged me to use Instagram more. (R14, Kosovo, age: 19)

Here, everybody asks for their Instagram accounts when they meet each other. We are doing the same thing. (R13, Turkmenistan, age: 21)

I didn't use Instagram very much when I was in the Gambia. When I came here though, I started using it a lot. Because everyone uses it and it's very popular. (R1, Gambia, age: 19)

Instagram is a social media platform that is used extensively in Turkey, especially among young people. According to the latest digital report of We Are Social (2019)*, Turkey is the 4th in the world in terms of Instagram use (%58). As the quotes show, international students entering a new social environment have changed their habits of social media use for numerous reasons including adapting to the environment, not feeling isolated, expanding their friendship networks and staying in constant contact with those friends. This trend is supported by the fact that students who did not use Instagram before opened an account on this platform. Also, those who already had an account used Instagram more actively after coming to Turkey. A similar situation is observed for the communication platform called WhatsApp:

I started using a lot of WhatsApp in Turkey. Here, all communication is established through WhatsApp. A separate WhatsApp group is set up for each event (birthday, study group, trip, etc.). So I kept up with it, my usage of WhatsApp has increased considerably. (R15, Kosovo, age: 22).

For example, I follow the page of the city I live in, Kırklareli Municipality, through Instagram and other platforms. Here I follow the news, information and announcements about the city. (R3, Gambia, age: 22)

As the communication network between the students is mostly established through Whatsapp, international students have adapted to using it as well.

In addition to that, the majority of international students tend to connect with people they meet in social life later through Instagram. Thus, the continuity of the established friendships is ensured and a continuous communication channel is built. Besides, some international students choose to expand their social environment and join new social networks directly through Instagram.

I found my current roommate on Instagram. My friend is Turkish. Social media has helped me a lot in this sense. I also found a part-time job on Instagram, I'm dealing with digital marketing. (R4, Indonesia, age: 21)

When I first arrived, Instagram helped me a lot in socializing and finding friends. The friends of the friends I followed came out as suggestions. So I met new people. (R10, Turkmenistan, age: 22)

At first, I felt a little lonely in a different country. I used social media a lot more during those days. Both to spend time and to find new friends. (R13, Turkmenistan, age: 21)

* <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2019/01/digital-2019-global-internet-use-accelerates> Accessed 21 May 2019

International students can use social media to facilitate their daily life and expand their social network in a variety of ways, such as finding roommates, “tandem partners” for language practice, and part-time employment. In this sense, social networks allow the first contact between people with common interests or expectations. When migrants or international students try to adapt to the new country and have limited social connections, the first contacts made via social media become critical.

Furthermore, online communities and groups established through social media platforms can create both solidarity and socialization opportunities:

For example, I visited 23 different city of Turkey. There's a FB group founded by Afghan citizens like me living in Turkey. When I write them the city I go to, a group member answers immediately, we meet, it's easy to find places to stay. This way, I met not only new Afghan friends but also locals, and their friends. So, we are creating a solidarity network on social media. (R20, Afghanistan, age: 22)

I have online communities that I follow, on Facebook. Kirklareli University Students group is one of them. I get a variety of information about the school and the city, have the chance to talk to and meet other students, and follow the activities. It's also nice to help newcomers, to help each other for adaptation (R10, Turkmenistan, age: 22)

These online communities can provide opportunities for solidarity to fight against the sense of loneliness that may occur in a new social setting and can lead to different types of sharing (social, academic, cultural, etc.) through their interaction.

4.4. Cultural Adaptation and Interaction

In the process of adapting to a new cultural environment and learning cultural values and practices, international students also resort to social media. Thanks to the features of digital networks that eliminate time-space constraints, this cultural learning process begins before they even arrive in the country. From such a perspective, activities like watching movies and series that have cultural and historical content; keeping this information up-to-date through social media accounts and researching the country from different sources are more significant.

Before I came here, I started to get information about Turkish culture through social media. Things like history, food, social life. Apart from that, I watched many Turkish TV series on the Internet. There were many clues about the daily life, culture and history in those series. (R11, Turkmenistan, age: 21)

When I first arrived, I had a hard time adapting to the culture, people and social envi-

ronment. It was hard to get involved in the conversations of my college buddies. For example, in my country, young people talk a lot about cricket. But Turkey's culture is very different. Facebook has helped me a lot in this sense. When I first came, I made many friends over Facebook. I started following them and learned a lot from their sharing. What they do, where they go, what they are interested in. It was easier for me to join them, find common interests and conversation topics. (R20, Afghanistan, age: 22)

I watched many Turkish series on YouTube before and after coming to Turkey. For example, "Muhteşem Süleyman". I had the opportunity to learn many things about Turkish history and culture from these series. (R10, Turkmenistan, age: 22)

I followed the influencers on social media. Especially on YouTube and Instagram. I learnt what is in fashion, what is on the agenda, how the everyday language is, what draws reaction, etc, from their posts. (R9, Turkmenistan, age: 20)

Like all migrants, international students may experience difficulties in adapting to a different culture and everyday life. Although it can be used as an information source for easing these difficulties, on social media, clichés and stereotypes related to some cultural elements can also be circulated. Even though social media can give a general idea about culture, some stereotypes can prove to be wrong when encountered in real life.

I watched videos about the culture here, during my adaptation process. You can find some clues about traditions and social life in social media. But sometimes they exaggerate some traits, for example, that the Turks immediately ask the person they meet about his/her salary. But in a face-to-face relationship, I saw that this is not exactly the case. Social media can sometimes be misleading in that sense. You cannot fully understand culture and mentality through social media. You need to meet people for that. (R14, Kosovo, age: 19)

I use social media not only for entertainment but also for my education. For example, I follow famous Turkish historians and cultural personalities on social media. So I can improve myself academically. Every day I get new information about the culture and history of this place. Of course, some clichés are not true, but you understand them in time in the flow of social life. (R16, Macedonia, age: 20)

In addition to creating cultural interaction in the process of adaptation to a new culture, students also share information about their home countries, dishes, dances and traditions with their friends in Turkey via social media.

Social media also allows me to introduce Indonesian culture to Turkish and other foreign friends. (R6, Indonesia, age: 21)

I share contents related to my own country, culture, family life, etc. on social media.

Because my Turkish friends are asking and wondering. I introduce my country and my culture. (R2, Gambia, age: 19)

I also used Facebook groups to promote and express my own culture. For example, we have a Facebook group called “We are from Turkmenistan”. Here I shared poems from our poets. (R10, Turkmenistan, age: 22)

Through social media, we can promote our country, culture, food, traditional dances. We also created an Instagram page for this. Our consulate also supports us on this issue. (R4, Indonesia, age: 21)

This cultural interaction can be provided through the activities carried out within the university, and social media is frequently used to announce these activities and to allow instant photo/video sharing during them. Also, cultural activities and various information are shared via social media (Instagram, Facebook and YouTube) through student community accounts. According to the students, the response to sharing (such as likes, re-posts, comments) also creates the motivation for them to continue creating content related to their native culture. Also, it is seen that cultural promotion activities of this kind are sometimes supported by national consulates.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

According to the data gathered from the interviews, international students do not see social media as a primary tool for socialization in the long term, but they place more emphasis on making friends through social media especially before they arrive and during the first months of their residence. Following the first adaptation stage to the social environment, social media communication continues as a factor for supporting face-to-face communication. Apart from that, the motivation to use social media could be summarized as making use of leisure time and reducing the feeling of loneliness; staying in touch with existing friends; getting news from their home countries and accessing information for academic and cultural purposes.

Another remarkable point of the study is that international students’ use of social media changed after arriving in Turkey in terms of platforms and their purpose. All the students expressed that they created a new Instagram account or increased their use of Instagram because the Instagram application is very popular in Turkey. As it is seen, students are regulating the use of social media to adapt to a new socio-cultural environment and not to feel like “outsiders”. Being part of the flow in local digital networks makes it easier to learn current topics spoken in daily life and to participate in popular chat topics among students at the university.

Also, students arriving in a new country develop new habits such as using social media to learn the language. Student (R6) who share content/videos about his daily life in Turkey by opening a YouTube channel and who says that he (R5) will open a YouTube channel with similar objectives are other examples in terms of changing social media use. Another point mentioned by the students regarding the length of time spent on social media is that this increases considerably because they feel lonely in the first few months after they arrive.

It has been identified that social media can also contribute to overcoming the language barrier. First of all, international students can acquire new information about the culture and try to improve their language skills consciously thanks to the Turkish movies, series and comedy shows they watch on YouTube. Thus, their familiarity with everyday language, which is not found in textbooks, may also increase. Besides, around-the-clock communication via applications such as WhatsApp, keeping up with social media posts and sharing contents increase the practical possibilities in the language learning process. These practices support the language learning process at the university.

Another important point is that thanks to the internet and social media, international students' learning processes related to the new social environment, language and culture begin before they arrive host country. In this context, the transfer of cultural values through online series and films begins before the immigration experience, and the use of social media also supports the language learning process. In parallel with research by Sawyer and Chen (2012), it was found that international students established or strengthened social relations through social media; they also benefit from social media to understand cultural norms, traditions and stereotypes. Social media, which has become a part of the process of acculturation, helps students to reflect on their cultural practices, values, and characteristics to the new society they share with, as well as to learn the characteristics of the culture they are trying to adapt more quickly. However, in our study, it was observed that there were also suspicious approaches to news and stereotypes spreading through social media. Some statements that emphasize distrust towards social media show that the information received from these channels is not immediately accepted, but tested in an offline environment.

Moreover, in parallel with the findings of Komito (2011), it is possible for international students to intervene in the political, social and cultural debates in their home countries by exceeding the time-space constraints using social media (forums and communities). This provides migrant students with the opportunity to continue to feel part of their country's public opinion and to fulfill mutual cultu-

ral interaction. Keeping in touch with their families, friends and social circles in their home countries through video chat and messaging via free applications also helps students to cope with the feeling of loneliness they sometimes experience.

In terms of the limitations of the research, expanding the sample by interviewing more international students from different geographic regions and universities would enhance the validity of the conclusion in future studies. Also, examining the social media communities/groups established by international students for solidarity will be important in terms of revealing the forms of solidarity of migrants on digital platforms.

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