



INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengaruh media sosial terhadap komunikasi lintas budaya di kalangan dewasa muda, dengan menekankan perannya dalam membentuk kesadaran budaya, empati, dan identitas. Dengan menganalisis data yang dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan orang dewasa muda Indonesia berusia 18-30 tahun, penelitian ini mengungkap dampak ganda dari media sosial. Platform seperti Instagram dan TikTok diidentifikasi sebagai fasilitator utama pertukaran budaya, menumbuhkan pemahaman dan mengurangi stereotip melalui konten multimedia yang menarik. Para peserta melaporkan adanya peningkatan kesadaran budaya dan empati, sering kali menemukan tradisi dan norma baru sambil mendapatkan apresiasi terhadap warisan budaya mereka. Namun, tantangan seperti kendala bahasa, salah tafsir, dan stereotip menyoroti perlunya peningkatan literasi digital. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis tematik, penelitian ini menggarisbawahi potensi transformatif media sosial dalam menjembatani kesenjangan budaya. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan media sosial yang bertanggung jawab dan terinformasi dapat memperkuat kapasitasnya sebagai media untuk dialog antar budaya dan saling pengertian.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of social media on cross-cultural communication among young adults, emphasizing its role in shaping cultural awareness, empathy, and identity. By analyzing data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with Indonesian young adults aged 18–30, the study uncovers the dual impact of social media. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are identified as key facilitators of cultural exchange, fostering understanding and reducing stereotypes through engaging multimedia content. Participants reported enhanced cultural awareness and empathy, often discovering new traditions and norms while gaining appreciation for their cultural heritage. However, challenges such as language barriers, misinterpretations, and stereotyping highlight the need for improved digital literacy. Employing a qualitative approach and thematic analysis, the study underscores the transformative potential of social media in bridging cultural divides. These findings suggest that responsible and informed use of social media can amplify its capacity as a medium for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed communication in the current digital era by linking people together across linguistic, cultural, and geographic differences. This phenomenon has changed how people interact with other cultures, especially young adults, opening up new possibilities for understanding and communication across differences in culture. The increasing integration of social media in daily life has spurred research into its influence on cultural adaptation, identity, and communication styles, as it

enables real-time, transcultural exchanges that were previously unattainable (Sawyer, 2011). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter serve as virtual meeting grounds where people from diverse backgrounds can share their cultural norms, values, and perspectives, potentially leading to greater cultural awareness and empathy (Lin et al., 2012).

Among the most frequent users of social media, young adults encounter both advantages and disadvantages from these exchanges. On the positive side, exposure to other cultures through social media has been found to facilitate cultural adaptation and reduce ethnocentrism, as individuals learn about new customs and viewpoints (Sandel, 2014). Studies suggest that social media promotes a sense of digital belonging, which aids in navigating cultural differences and forming connections that support cross-cultural adaptation (Marlowe et al., 2017). However, the immediacy and informality of social media communication can also lead to misunderstandings and reinforce stereotypes, posing challenges for effective cross-cultural communication (Mao & Qian, 2015).

Cross-culture refers to the interaction and exchange of ideas, beliefs, customs, and behaviors between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Communication, in this context, serves as the vehicle for transmitting these elements, enabling mutual understanding and collaboration. Effective cross-cultural communication requires cultural awareness a conscious recognition of cultural similarities and differences and the ability to navigate them respectfully. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have emerged as dynamic spaces for these exchanges, where young adults engage with content that fosters cultural adaptation, empathy, and broader perspectives. These platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for transcultural dialogues, yet they also introduce challenges such as the reinforcement of stereotypes and misinterpretations. This study investigates the role of social media in shaping cross-cultural communication among young adults, emphasizing its potential to enhance cultural awareness and adaptability.

This study is to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of social media platforms in developing cultural awareness and adaptation by looking at how they affect young adults cross-cultural communication. For educators, legislators, and communicators looking to maximize social media's potential as a tool for constructive cross-cultural interaction while reducing its risks it is imperative that they comprehend these relationships.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social media platforms serve as virtual mediators of intercultural dialogue, offering rich opportunities for sharing personal narratives and fostering cross-cultural understanding (Papacharissi, 2014). Theoretical perspectives on intercultural competence, such as (Deardorff, 2009) framework, emphasize the necessity of cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes in navigating cross-cultural interactions. Social media amplifies these competencies by facilitating real-time exchanges that challenge ethnocentric views and promote inclusivity.

(Deardorff, 2009) intercultural competence model emphasizes the fundamental abilities and dispositions required for successful cross-cultural communication. These consist of cultural awareness, flexibility, empathy, and openness. Social media gives young adults a chance to encounter cultural diversity and question ethnocentric viewpoints, which promotes more accepting attitudes (Chen & Starosta, 2000). In real time, users can improve their intercultural understanding by interacting with a variety of cultural narratives.

The media richness theory of (Sundar, 2008) highlights how multimedia elements like text, video, and images can improve communication. Users can share intricate cultural narratives on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which fosters stronger bonds and understanding between people. This richness enables more meaningful exchanges, supporting young adults in building empathy and reducing cultural misunderstandings.

In the digital era, young people can form their own cultural identity based on interactions with other cultures on social media. so that it can help in the process of understanding cultural differences and building a more inclusive identity

This study offers a concise examination of how social media affects young adults' cross-cultural communication by concentrating on these two theoretical frameworks. The findings of this study will help to inform strategies for using social media to improve intercultural understanding while addressing its challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to gain a nuanced understanding of how social media influences cross-cultural communication among young adults. According to (Creswell, 2014), qualitative methods are ideal for exploring complex social phenomena in natural settings. The research focuses on the experiences of young adults aged 18–30 who actively engage with social media platforms.

Participants

The study targets is Indonesian young adults aged 18-30 who are active users of social media platforms. Purposive sampling was used to select young participants who actively use social media and are often exposed to other cultures found on social media to capture various cross-cultural interaction experiences online. A sample of 15 participants was recruited, with 5 completing semi-structured interviews and all 15 completing the questionnaire.

Data Collection

1. Questionnaires

Participants in this study, who are young adults in Indonesia between the ages of 18 and 30, will be given a questionnaire to complete in order to gather data. Their use of social media, the frequency and type of cross-cultural interactions, and their perceived levels of cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptation were all intended to be investigated by the questionnaire.

Social Media Use:

- 1) How many hours do you spend daily on social media? (Options: Less than 1 hour, 1–3 hours, 3–5 hours, More than 5 hours)
- 2) What types of content do you most often engage with? (Options: Cultural posts, news, personal narratives, entertainment, others)
- 3) Which social media platforms do you use most frequently to interact with individuals from other cultures? (Open-ended)

Cross-Cultural Communication:

- 1) How often do you interact with individuals from different cultures on social media? (Options: Rarely, Occasionally, Often, Very often)
- 2) Can you identify any specific cultural insights or knowledge you have gained through these interactions? (Open-ended)
- 3) Have you ever faced cultural misunderstandings during these interactions? (Yes/No, with an optional explanation)

Cultural Awareness and Adaptation:

- 1) On a scale of 1–5, how confident are you in understanding cultural norms different from your own through social media? (1: Not confident, 5: Very confident)
- 2) To what extent has social media contributed to your development of empathy towards other cultures? (Scale of 1–5)
- 3) Can you share an example of how your cultural identity has been influenced by social media interactions? (Open-ended)

2. Interviews

Five participants were chosen from the broader sample, and in addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were held with them to learn more about their experiences using social media for cross-cultural communication. Because the interview questions were open-ended, participants were able to freely discuss their experiences, which promoted a more thorough comprehension of their viewpoints. The following are the interview questions that will be asked:

General Experiences:

- 1) Can you describe a memorable experience of interacting with someone from a different culture on social media?
- 2) What motivates you to engage in cross-cultural conversations online?

Cultural Awareness and Learning:

- 1) Can you share a specific instance where you learned something valuable about another culture through social media?

- 2) Have you faced any challenges or misunderstandings during these interactions? How did you address them?

Cultural Identity and Adaptation:

- 1) How has engaging with diverse cultures online influenced your perception of your own cultural identity?
- 2) Can you provide an example of how social media has helped you adapt to new cultural norms or practices?

Empathy and Stereotypes:

- 1) How have your online interactions shaped your views of individuals from other cultures?
- 2) In your opinion, how effective is social media in reducing cultural stereotypes and biases? Why?

The study's emphasis on the impact of social media on cross-cultural communication is in line with this data collection strategy, which guarantees that the viewpoints and experiences of young adults in Indonesia are appropriately represented.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, a qualitative technique perfect for finding patterns and themes in data, was used to examine the interview transcripts and open-ended questionnaire answers (Creswell, 2014). Using an iterative coding process, this method began with a preliminary analysis of the data to produce broad categories. These categories were then further refined into cohesive themes that represented the viewpoints and experiences of the participants.

Cultural adaptation, identity exploration, empathy development, and difficulties in cross-cultural communication were the main topics of the analysis. Key findings from thematic coding included:

1. Cultural Awareness through Social Media: Participants talked about how social media sites like Instagram and TikTok sparked their interest in and knowledge of cultures outside of Indonesia by exposing them to global cultural trends. They mentioned, for instance, that they follow influencers from various nations to gain knowledge about cuisine, customs, and lifestyle.
2. Identity Exploration and Negotiation: People have said that social media is a place where they can explore and express their cultural and personal identities. Participants talked about how interacting with peers from other countries allowed them to respect their Indonesian roots while adjusting to international cultural standards.
3. Empathy and Understanding: According to a number of participants, watching videos and reading personal accounts from people with diverse backgrounds helped them develop empathy. This frequently resulted in deeper understanding of cultural diversity and more meaningful interactions.
4. Challenges of Stereotypes and Misunderstandings: As both direct participants in online interactions and observers, participants encountered cases of cultural misunderstandings or stereotypes. They emphasized the value of digital literacy and critical thinking in overcoming these obstacles.

By concentrating only on the qualitative elements of the data, this analysis offers a deep, comprehensive understanding of how social media influences young adults' cross-cultural communication.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

From the data collected through questionnaires and interviews, some interesting findings emerged, as follows:

1. Social Media Usage Patterns:
 - Most participants spend 3–5 hours daily on social media, indicating significant integration of digital platforms into their routines.
 - Instagram is the most commonly used platform for cross-cultural interactions, followed by TikTok and Twitter.
 - Entertainment and personal narratives dominate the content consumed, with some interest in cultural and educational posts.

2. Cross-Cultural Communication Frequency and Insights:
 - The majority of participants interact occasionally with individuals from different cultures, with a few engaging often or very often.
 - Participants gained specific cultural insights such as Indian recipes, Korean festivals, and global fashion trends. These interactions provided opportunities to learn about traditions and practices worldwide.
3. Challenges in Cross-Cultural Communication:
 - Few participants reported experiencing misunderstandings, often related to humor, idioms, or cultural gestures. Those who faced such challenges resolved them through translation tools or clarifying discussions.
4. Cultural Awareness and Empathy Development:
 - Many participants rated their confidence in understanding cultural norms through social media as moderate to high (scored 3–5).
 - Social media significantly contributed to empathy development, as evidenced by participants' exposure to diverse narratives and challenges faced by individuals from other cultures.
5. Cultural Identity and Adaptation:
 - Participants expressed pride in their cultural heritage after showcasing it online and receiving positive feedback.
 - Social media facilitated adaptation to global practices, such as adopting Western greetings, meal-prepping habits, or formal email etiquette.

Discussion

Social media platforms have become dynamic tools for young adults to engage with diverse cultures and build cultural awareness. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, known for their multimedia capabilities, make cultural narratives more engaging and accessible. By providing a space for global interaction, these platforms foster curiosity and understanding, allowing users to learn about different traditions, languages and cultural practices. Participants in this study highlighted how these platforms serve as a gateway to cultural exploration, reinforcing their role in raising cultural awareness.

The development of empathy is one of the prominent benefits of cross-cultural communication through social media. The personal stories and real-life challenges shared online allow users to look deeper and not stick to stereotypes, thus enabling a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity. Participants often mentioned that exposure to personal narratives was transformative, helping them to break biases and develop a more inclusive worldview. These findings are in line with existing research that emphasizes the power of storytelling in increasing empathy and reducing prejudice.

However, the study also revealed challenges in navigating cross-cultural interactions, such as language barriers, misinterpretation of humor, and cultural misunderstandings. Although these challenges are not widespread, they underscore the need for digital literacy. Participants who showed resilience in overcoming these issues - using tools such as translation apps or seeking clarification - demonstrated the potential to overcome these barriers through conscious effort and adaptability.

Another important aspect was the role of social media in shaping and negotiating cultural identity. Participants described how their interactions online fostered pride in their cultural heritage while encouraging them to embrace global influences. For example, showcasing Indonesian traditions and receiving international admiration deepened their appreciation of their own culture. At the same time, exposure to global norms inspired some to adopt new practices, demonstrating the two-way nature of cultural exchange facilitated by social media.

Overall, these findings suggest that social media has great potential to promote cross-cultural understanding and reduce bias. However, the effectiveness of these platforms relies heavily on users actively engaging with authentic and diverse content. Encouraging responsible use of social media and promoting digital literacy are important steps to maximizing its potential as a tool for cultural exchange and empathy development. By bridging gaps and breaking stereotypes, social media can be a transformative medium for intercultural dialogue.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the transformative role of social media in facilitating cross-cultural communication among young people. Social media platforms, with their dynamic and interactive features, have proven to be effective tools for fostering cultural awareness, empathy and identity negotiation. Young adults actively engage with diverse cultural narratives, leading to a broader understanding of global traditions and practices. Through personal stories and shared experiences, social media bridges cultural gaps, reduces stereotypes, and promotes an inclusive worldview.

However, challenges such as language barriers, misinterpretations and cultural misunderstandings remain significant. The ability of users to overcome these challenges through tools such as translation apps and critical discussions demonstrates the importance of digital literacy in enhancing cross-cultural interactions. Moreover, the dual influence of social media - fostering pride in cultural heritage while encouraging adaptation to global norms - underscores its role as a medium for two-way cultural exchange.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that while social media has enormous potential to enhance cross-cultural communication, its effectiveness depends on how users approach and engage with its content. Encouraging responsible and mindful use of these platforms, in addition to promoting digital literacy, can strengthen their impact as catalysts for cross-cultural dialog, understanding and the development of empathy. Future research can further explore strategies to overcome existing challenges and optimize the benefits of social media in cross-cultural communication.

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