

# New social media and intercultural understanding

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*Abstract – New social media have become increasingly popular components of our everyday lives in today's globalizing society and cover almost the entire world today. They provide a context where people across the world can communicate, exchange messages, share knowledge, and interact with each other regardless of the distance that separates them. With its digital, convergent, interactive, hypertextual, and virtual nature, new media that nowadays transforming communication across cultures has brought human interaction and society to a highly interconnected and complex level.*

Key words – new social media, intercultural, understanding, communication, globalization.

The rapid transformation of human society due to the impact of the convergence of new media and globalization directly influences the construction and development of cultural identity. Intercultural adaptation and understanding involves the process of promoting understanding through interaction to increase the level of fitness so that the demands of a new cultural environment can be met. Research shows that people tend to use new social media to become more integrated into the host culture during their adaptation and to maintain connections to their home countries [1], [2].

Intercultural communication has existed since the earliest times of history and civilization of mankind, and now the Internet has made it possible to access and create social networks and link between people from all over the world. In fact, we can access information, which is related to the culture of any person, the geographical location, climate and so on any continent.

Religion and culture can provide deep meaning and richness to our lives. Yet, throughout history, they have also been flashpoints for conflict and misunderstanding. In the wake of tragedies there is heightened interest in finding new ways to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Unless ignorance and hatred can be overcome by tolerance and understanding, religious and cultural conflicts are likely to continue—and intensify. New technologies propel our interconnected world, with the Internet giving us powerful ways to connect to a diversity of people, places, and ideas. New social media has become a versatile and increasingly important part of our online lives. Websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube allow users to communicate, engage, and create content and information at an unprecedented level of speed and accessibility [3].

New social media has an impact on us because it promotes the interconnectedness and interdependence of our culturally diverse world. Media for social interaction allows for people to communicate and engage with Lviv Polytechnic National University, Institute of Jurisprudence and Psychology, Lviv, Ukraine, olena\_astakhova@ukr.net information that is quickly accessible on the Internet. In today's society, there is an increasing number of Internet

users so new social media has become more popular in daily patterns and routines.

The communication that occurs in these online contexts promotes interactive dialogues that build understanding of different points of view. In social media, people have the opportunity to express their opinions to the public and participate in conversations and dialogue through a common virtual medium. While providing a common way of linking people together through knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes, a sense of belonging to a greater social network other than one's own local community is effectively created. The Internet exemplifies such a significant means in connecting to a diversity of people, places, ideas, and cultures [4].

“The multicultural world is enhanced by the experiences of sojourners, immigrants, and others who successfully make the transition from one culture to another”, declares a professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Oklahoma Dr. Young Yun Kim. Intercultural studies focus on the interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds and adaptation is a dynamic process. A conversation between individuals from distinct traditions for the primary purpose of engaging religious difference in order to deepen one's own faith while expanding knowledge of the other.

The stages of intercultural adaptation are important to consider when drawing connections to social media use. The four stages are honeymoon, crisis, adjustment, and biculturalism (Lysgaard, 1955 in Chen & Starosta, 2005). During the honeymoon stage people experience initial euphoria with being abroad in a different country. The crisis stage consists of hostility and frustration with living in an unfamiliar culture. Then there is gradual adjustment and recovery, and biculturalism is the full adjustment and adaptation. In addition, communication is an important feature in this intercultural process. Having control over emotions affects the ability to engage in learning and understanding, while being more open and flexible in adjusting to living in another culture [5].

Another result of impact of social media is globalization that develops intercultural understanding. The advent of the new century, after years of immersion in the capitalism system, may mean a gradual transformation of the old society into a new one which demands a different way of thinking and lifestyle. The globalizing society represents a state of competition and co-existence among different cultures.

Although the history of contact between different societies or ethnic groups has been thousands of years, the impact of globalization on modern society is far beyond what people could imagine a few decades ago. In economy, for example, to succeed in global competition a modern company must possess the ability to seek for open markets around the world, to gain enough profits through effective management in global business transactions, and to meet the needs of global clients by acquiring the knowledge and understanding of local markets.

From social and cultural perspectives, globalization has a significant impact on sense of community,

establishment of civic society, and cultural diversity. Globalization has redefined the meaning of community with a new look at inclusiveness and collective sense of identity. The wall between traditional communities also collapsed due to the constant flush of globalization. This transformation, based on extension and expansion from the local to global level, provided citizens in the 21st century opportunities and challenges for learning how to harmoniously co-exist and develop an ideal future world.

Nevertheless, the coming of a global society won't necessarily guarantee that a new sense of human community will follow. A new sense of community requires members to fully involve in the construction of the global society through a learning process. It aims to tolerate the differences of races, classes, cultures, religions, and genders, and to cultivate the capacity of solving the problems or conflicts caused by stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudices. In other words, the ideal goal of the new global community is to develop a space in which members can co-exist peacefully through communication and dialogue. The change of the meaning of traditional community demands a redefinition of the concept of citizenship, which deals with the relationship between local community, national community, and global community [6].

Beyond the importance of establishing an initial "common ground" between individuals, there is little consensus on how to maintain and develop the conversation using new social media tools.

In recent years, interest in talking about religion, faith, tolerance, and dialogue on a variety of websites, pages, and social networking tools has increased rapidly. Popular fan pages and groups on Facebook, such as Faithbook, Beliefnet, and Peace.Facebook, demonstrate that people are interested in discussing their faith and culture on the same website they use to post their spring break pictures and connect with old friends. Additionally, many in the religious community see the utility in having a new social media presence, as evidenced by the increase in churches, synagogues, and mosques using sites like Facebook and Twitter to connect with their congregants and reach out to new members. Overall, respondents recognize that the opportunities—and challenges—represented by the use of new social media for dialogue are important, and many are working to carve out their most effective niche in this rapidly evolving field [7].

Each of us is the product of a society and culture, reflection on what we see by reference to our own experience and culture, are sometimes surprised in agreement of disagreement, admiring or criticizing the new, and event-social novelty. And new social media involves increasing contacts and more diverse between individuals coming from different cultures. If in the past

concrete acts of communication between representatives of different cultures involved a relatively small part of the world's population, today, modern and contemporary realities, circumstances and consequences of these processes of communication have increased dramatically in frequency and complexity, which could be possible due to scientific and technological progress that led to a real explosion of social media. They have made it possible that planetary multicultural society now the classic history of theories of communication media.

The internet computer-mediated communication, social networks sites, mobile phones, Skype, text messaging, on-line games, virtual worlds, and blogs have dramatically increased contact between individuals and groups from different cultures. No longer restricted primarily to face-to-face encounters, people worldwide utilize new social media to communicate instantaneously with others regardless of geo-political boundaries, time, or space. Despite this revolution in cross cultural contact, communication researchers have largely ignored the impact of new media on intercultural communication and, instead, concentrated their limited scholarship on how new media is utilized in different cultures and how internet computer-mediated communication is influenced by culture [8].

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