

UDC 81:37.016; IRSTI 16.01.45

<https://doi.org/10.47526/2025-3/2664-0686.251>**Z. DUISEMBEKOVA** 

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## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE (ICC) AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

**Abstract.** In the modern era of global interconnectedness, social media platforms have a profound impact on how university students engage with cultural diversity and develop their intercultural communicative abilities. This research examines how students' understanding, perspectives, and skills – crucial for effective intercultural communication – are shaped by their daily interactions on social media platforms. Drawing on Byram's (1997) framework for intercultural communicative competence, the study explores how students perceive and interpret intercultural encounters on digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, and language exchange apps.

Twenty-four students, enrolled in international and multilingual programs in one local university in South Kazakhstan, participated in a semi-structured interview and maintained a reflective digital journal for six weeks, employing a high-quality research methodology. Through thematic analysis, four key themes emerged: (1) the impact of cultural perspectives outside the classroom, (2) the negotiation of identity and empathy in intercultural conversations, (3) the cultivation of critical cultural awareness through online discourse, and (4) obstacles such as stereotyping and miscommunication. The research suggests that social media fosters spontaneous and meaningful cross-cultural interactions, which contribute to the development of intercultural competence, particularly in terms of openness, curiosity, and critical thinking. Even seemingly, harmless actions, according to students commenting on posts, participating in online discussions, or joining virtual communities, offer a wealth of opportunities to learn about cultural norms, beliefs, and communication experiences.

Research shows the benefits of incorporating digital multiculturalism into the education experience of learning a formal language. Promoting and developing global citizenship through international education, the study suggests that language teachers and educational institutions need to encourage students to think critically about social media and digital platforms.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communicative Competence, Social Media, University Students, Digital Intercultural Learning, Reflective Practice.

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### \* Бізге дұрыс сілтеме жасаңыз:

Duisembekova Z. The Role of Social Media in Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Among University Students // *Ясауи университетінің хабаршысы*. – 2025. – №3 (137). – P. 289–298. <https://doi.org/10.47526/2025-3/2664-0686.251>

### \*Cite us correctly:

Duisembekova Z. The Role of Social Media in Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Among University Students // *Iasaui universitetinin habarshysy*. – 2025. – №3 (137). – P. 289–298. <https://doi.org/10.47526/2025-3/2664-0686.251>

Date of receipt of the article 15.04.2025 / Date of acceptance 30.09.2025

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**Әлеуметтік желілердің университет студенттерінің  
мәдениетаралық коммуникативтік құзыреттілігін дамытудағы рөлі**

**Аңдатпа.** Жаһандық өзара байланыстың қазіргі дәуірінде әлеуметтік медиа платформалары университет студенттерінің мәдени әртүрлілікпен танысуына және олардың мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынас қабілеттерін дамытуға қатты әсер етеді. Бұл зерттеу тиімді мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынас үшін маңызды студенттердің түсінігі, перспективалары мен дағдылары олардың күнделікті әлеуметтік медиа өзара әрекеттесуінен қалай қалыптасатынын зерттейді. Байрам (1997) жасаған мәдениетаралық коммуникативті құзыреттілік тұжырымдамасына сүйене отырып, зерттеу студенттердің Instagram, TikTok, Reddit және тіл алмасу қосымшалары сияқты цифрлық платформалардағы мәдениетаралық өзара әрекеттесуді қалай қабылдайтынын және түсіндіретінін зерттейді.

Қазақстанның оңтүстігінде орналасқан оқу орнында халықаралық және көптілді бағдарламалар бойынша оқитын жиырма төрт студент жартылай құрылымды сұхбатқа қатысып, алты апта бойы жоғары сапалы зерттеу әдістемесін қолдана отырып, рефлексивті цифрлық журнал жүргізді. Тақырыптық талдау төрт негізгі тақырыпты анықтады: (1) сыныптан тыс мәдени перспективалардың әсері, (2) мәдениетаралық әңгімелердегі сәйкестілік пен эмпатияны талқылау, (3) онлайн дискурс арқылы сыни мәдени хабардарлықты дамыту және (4) стереотиптер мен түсінбеушілік сияқты кедергілер. Зерттеу көрсеткендей, әлеуметтік медиа мәдениетаралық құзыреттіліктің дамуына ықпал ететін стихиялы және мағыналы мәдениетаралық өзара әрекеттесуге ықпал етеді, әсіресе ашықтық, қызығушылық және сыни ойлау тұрғысынан.. Студенттердің пікірінше, тіпті посттарға түсініктеме беру, онлайн пікірталастарға қатысу немесе виртуалды қауымдастықтарға кіру сияқты зиянсыз болып көрінетін әрекеттер де мәдени нормаларды, нанымдарды және қарым-қатынас әдістерін үйренуге көптеген мүмкіндіктер ашады.

Зерттеу цифрлық көпмәдениетті тәжірибені ресми тіл үйренуге енгізудің білім беру артықшылықтарын көрсетеді. Халықаралық білім беруді ілгерілету және жаһандық азаматтық ұстанымды қалыптастыру үшін, зерттеуге сәйкес, шет тілдерінің оқытушылары мен білім беру мекемелері студенттерді әлеуметтік желілермен және цифрлық платформалармен белсенді өзара әрекеттесуге ынталандыруы керек.

**Кілт сөздер:** мәдениетаралық коммуникативтік құзыреттілік, әлеуметтік желілер, университет студенттері, цифрлық мәдениетаралық оқыту, рефлексиялық тәжірибе

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**Роль социальных сетей в развитии межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции  
у студентов университетов**

**Аннотация.** В современную эпоху глобальной взаимосвязанности платформы социальных сетей оказывают глубокое влияние на то, как студенты университетов знакомятся с культурным разнообразием и развивают свои межкультурные коммуникативные способности. В этом исследовании исследуется, как понимание,

перспективы и навыки студентов, которые имеют решающее значение для эффективной межкультурной коммуникации, формируются в результате их ежедневного взаимодействия в социальных сетях.

Опираясь на разработанную Байрамом (1997) концепцию межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции, в исследовании исследуется, как учащиеся воспринимают и интерпретируют межкультурные взаимодействия на цифровых платформах, таких как Instagram, TikTok, Reddit и приложения для языкового обмена.

Двадцать четыре студента, обучающихся на международных и многоязычных программах в одном из местных университетов Южного Казахстана, приняли участие в полуструктурированном интервью и вели рефлексивный цифровой дневник в течение шести недель, применяя высококачественную исследовательскую методологию. В ходе тематического анализа были выделены четыре ключевые темы: (1) влияние культурных перспектив за пределами классной комнаты, (2) обсуждение идентичности и эмпатии в межкультурных беседах, (3) развитие критической культурной осведомленности посредством онлайн-дискурса и (4) препятствия, такие как стереотипы и недопонимание. Исследование показывает, что социальные сети способствуют спонтанному и значимому межкультурному взаимодействию, которое способствует развитию межкультурной компетентности, особенно с точки зрения открытости, любопытства и критического мышления. По мнению студентов, даже такие, казалось бы, безобидные действия, как комментирование постов, участие в онлайн-дискуссиях или вступление в виртуальные сообщества, открывают множество возможностей для изучения культурных норм, верований и методов общения.

В исследовании подчеркиваются образовательные преимущества включения цифрового мультикультурного опыта в формальное изучение языка. Для продвижения международного образования и формирования глобальной гражданской позиции, согласно исследованию, преподаватели иностранных языков и образовательные учреждения должны поощрять студентов к активному взаимодействию с социальными сетями и цифровыми платформами.

**Ключевые слова:** межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция, социальные сети, студенты университетов, цифровое межкультурное обучение, рефлексивная практика.

## Introduction

The development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become a key objective in language and higher education in an increasingly digital, networked, and globalized environment [1]. Effective and positive communication with different people in a cultural environment is a requirement of ICC, which includes affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects that are distinct from linguistic competence [2]. The main focus is on providing students with the perspectives, information, and abilities necessary to interact across cultural barriers, which have grown into World Mobility and Multiculturalism classes [3].

ICC has historically developed through intercultural learning, study abroad opportunities, and classroom instruction. However, recent research has shown that the transformative potential of digital technologies, especially social media, is a new platform for informal learning and intercultural interaction [4; 5; 6]. Language exchange apps like HelloTalk and Tandem, as well as social media sites like Instagram, Reddit, and TikTok, have evolved into virtual spaces where students can connect spontaneously, multimodally, and frequently without moderation with people from other cultural backgrounds.

According to academics like Blattner & Fiori [7] and Godwin-Jones [8], social media promotes intercultural communication by providing real, interactive settings that push students to consider cultural presumptions, negotiate meaning, and grow in empathy. These platforms facilitate

what Kramsch [9] calls “third space” communication, in which dialogic encounters co-create identities and cultural norms.

There is still a dearth of empirical studies on how college students themselves view and feel the growth of ICC through casual interaction with social media, despite the field's increasing popularity. This study examines students' thoughts on their digital intercultural experiences using a qualitative methodology based on Byram's [1] paradigm. It seeks to comprehend how social media aids in the development of important intercultural competencies for the twenty-first century, such as an optimistic outlook on other cultures, a critical understanding of cultural differences, and efficient communication techniques. In order to investigate how students acquire these competencies, the study relies on their first-hand narratives.

### *1. Intercultural Communicative Competence: Foundations and Evolving Definitions*

The concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been a cornerstone of language and intercultural education for more than two decades. The widely known model developed by Bayram [1] views ICC as a multifaceted construct that includes openness and curiosity, knowledge of social groups, interpretation and relationship-building skills, the ability to explore and interact, and critical cultural awareness. Building on this foundation, Deardorff [10] presented a pyramidal model of ICC, which emphasizes that internal outcomes such as empathy and adaptability are prerequisites for effective external intercultural behavior.

Given that global interaction is no longer limited to traditional mobility programs, scholars are increasingly focusing on digital and informal contexts, such as social media, as new environments for the development of ICC [6; 8]. These conditions provide a unique platform for the spontaneous development of ICC, as people are required to navigate cultural differences in real time without formal training.

### *2. Social Media as an Intercultural Learning Space*

The integration of social media into intercultural education aligns with contemporary learning theories such as connectivism and participatory culture, as learners collaboratively create meaning in digital networks [11]. Thorn [4] views social media as a “third place” for intercultural interaction, offering authentic experiences of interacting with different perspectives outside the home and classroom. This is particularly important for learners who do not have access to traditional international mobility programs.

Empirical evidence increasingly supports this pedagogical approach. For example, Blattner and Fiori [7] demonstrated that language learners using Facebook groups not only practiced language patterns but also explored cultural nuances through interaction with peers. Later studies have deepened the exploration of this area. Godwin-Jones [8] highlighted how mobile platforms such as Tandem and HelloTalk facilitate unstructured real-time communication, which promotes informal language acquisition and intercultural understanding. Furthermore, Astagno [12] found that TikTok develops students' cultural flexibility and communication skills by exposing them to diverse cultural content and encouraging interaction in the comments section.

Taken together, these findings support the idea put forward by Liaw and English [6] that online intercultural exchanges can mimic some aspects of the “virtual study abroad” experience.

### *3. University Students and ICC in Digital Contexts*

Social networks serve as both a means of communication and an environment for cultural learning for university students. Recent qualitative studies confirm this: Tao et al. (2025) found that Chinese students who participated in international digital communities such as Reddit and Discord demonstrated increased intercultural sensitivity and self-reflection. Similarly, Ofoosu-Koranteng et al. (2025) noted that Ghanaian students developed intercultural awareness and digital literacy by engaging with educational content on global platforms.

Despite these promising developments, significant challenges remain. Yun [13] expresses concern about algorithmic bias and echo chamber effects, which may limit exposure to diverse

perspectives on digital platforms. This potential for unintended cultural isolation in homogeneous networks can hinder effective intercultural interaction. This is consistent with Kramsha's (2009) concept of symbolic competence, which emphasizes the need to critically interpret cultural signs and avoid superficial understanding. Furthermore, Pagliavani [14] notes that while social media can improve digital literacy, it does not automatically lead to deep intercultural development unless learners are encouraged to engage in critical reflection.

This finding supports Deardorf's [10] argument that metacognition and reflection are crucial for the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

#### *4. Reflective and Narrative Approaches in ICC Development*

Two essential techniques for evaluating how ICC evolves throughout time are narrative inquiry and reflection. Social media diaries, interviews, and reflective journals might assist uncover the internalized change that conventional evaluations could miss. Students who generated cross-cultural narratives for social media showed more emotional resonance with foreign cultures, according to Hazarika's (2025) study on digital storytelling.

The integration of social media-based reflection tasks into language learning curricula by Nasir et al. [15] produced a similar result, demonstrating that narrative construction (e.g., writing about cultural miscommunications) fosters critical cultural awareness and tolerance of ambiguity, two essential components of ICC.

#### *5. The Need for Qualitative Inquiry*

Qualitative research provides the distinct advantage of shedding insight on how and why students acquire intercultural competency using social media, even though many studies emphasize statistical results (such as increases in ICC scores). According to Helm [15], quantitative evaluations by themselves are unable to fully convey the breadth of emotional development or perspective-taking. Thus, it is becoming more widely acknowledged that story and ethnographic methods are crucial to comprehending student agency, voice, and identity negotiation in cross-cultural online environments.

Klimczuk et al. (2025), who support "co-created social research" that involves student reflections, conversations, and peer mentorship in virtual intercultural spaces, also endorse this viewpoint. Qualitative approaches are well-suited to investigate this changing environment since social media makes it harder to distinguish between formal and informal learning.

#### *6. Summary and Research Gap*

The body of research shows that social media channels offer significant, albeit complicated, chances for ICC growth. They make it possible for university students and language learners to interact with people from different cultures in ways that might not be possible otherwise. Comprehensive qualitative research that emphasizes the student voice in these experiences – more especially, how students reflect on their intercultural development through routine digital encounters – is still lacking in the field, nevertheless.

This study aims to close that gap by examining how university students perceive social media's role in their ICC development through qualitative methodologies (interviews and reflective diaries). In order to give a comprehensive, learner-centered explanation of digital intercultural learning in the twenty-first century, the study is based on Byram's [1] approach.

### **Research methods and materials**

#### *1. Research Design*

In order to investigate university students' lived experiences of gaining intercultural communicative competence (ICC) through social media use, this study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach. The goal is to offer profound, contextualized insights into how digital interactions promote cross-cultural learning, not to generalize. Exploring perceptions, reflections,

and meaning-making processes associated with cross-cultural interactions in digital contexts is best done within a phenomenological framework.

## 2. Participants

Purposive sampling was used to choose participants, with an emphasis on university students who:

- Actively participate in at least one international social media platform (such as Instagram, Reddit, TikTok, Tandem, or HelloTalk);
- Have engaged in cross-cultural communication via these platforms;
- Are enrolled in undergraduate or graduate programs in multilingual, international, or culturally diverse environments.

Participation was open to 24 students from a university located in South Kazakhstan. Rich data collection is made possible by this figure, which also keeps things manageable for in-depth thematic analysis.

## 3. Data Collection Methods

### a. Semi-Structured Interviews

Depending on participant availability, individual semi-structured interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes each and could be done in-person or by Zoom. The interviews were directly transcribed from audio recordings. While ensuring uniformity across participants, the semi-structured framework provided flexibility to delve deeper into developing concepts.

### b. Reflective Journals (Optional)

It was optional for participants to keep a one-week digital reflective notebook in which they recorded any tensions or cross-cultural experiences they encountered on social media. In order to validate the themes that emerged from the interviews, these reflections were used as triangulating data.

## 4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data in accordance with the six-phase model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Getting acquainted with the data;
2. Producing preliminary codes;
3. Finding themes;
4. Examining themes;
5. Identifying and characterizing themes; and
6. Writing the report.

In addition, themes were mapped against Byram's (1997) ICC dimensions: critical cultural awareness, knowledge of social groups and cultural norms, attitudes (such as openness and curiosity), and abilities (such as understanding, relating, and engaging).

## 5. Trustworthiness

Member checking was done by sending transcriptions and topics back to participants for comments in order to verify credibility. Reliability was increased through the triangulation of reflective diaries and interviews. In order to promote transferability, detailed descriptions were given. Confirmability was enhanced by keeping a research journal to record analytical choices.

## 6. Ethical Considerations

The appropriate institutional ethics board gave its approval. Informed consent papers were signed by each participant. Participants had the option to withdraw at any moment, and data were anonymized. The findings were reported using pseudonyms.

## Results and discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how college students view the growth of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as it relates to their regular interactions on social media. Based on Byram's [1] ICC model and examined using a qualitative phenomenological method, the data provided complex and multifaceted insights into how digital interactions either promote or impede cross-cultural development. In order to highlight theoretical congruence and divergence, the debate is structured around the four main elements of Byram's model: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. It is also cross-referenced with pertinent literature.

### *1. Attitudes: Openness, Curiosity, and Tolerance of Ambiguity*

A key finding from participants' stories was the significant role of social media in developing positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, particularly openness and curiosity. Students often described social media as a “window” into cultures they had not previously encountered. For example, interacting with content creators from around the world on platforms such as Reddit, Instagram, or TikTok sparked a genuine interest in the customs, values, and daily lives of people from different cultures.

This finding is consistent with the work of Liao and English [6], who argue that social media facilitates authentic, informal interactions that promote empathy and intercultural sensitivity. Similarly, Godwin-Jones [7] argues that these platforms promote qualities such as tolerance for uncertainty, especially when users encounter unfamiliar or conflicting cultural practices. Study participants demonstrated this tolerance by expressing a willingness to “pause and reflect” rather than immediately judge behavior that initially seemed strange or disturbing. Interestingly, students also reported deeper introspective thinking as they analyzed the sources of their discomfort or confusion during specific digital intercultural interactions.

However, not all participants reported positive attitudes. Some participants reported feelings of resistance or fatigue after repeated exposure to content that challenged their personal beliefs. This finding highlights an important point: unmoderated exposure alone may not lead to personal growth without targeted support and guided reflection, as emphasized by Kramsh [9].

### *2. Knowledge of Social Groups and Cultural Practices*

Through both direct interaction and passive observation, participants reported learning a variety of cultural information. Students reported contextual, nuanced, and emotionally impactful learning, ranging from using Instagram stories to learn about religious holidays in Southeast Asia to using YouTube commentary to comprehend gender conventions in the Middle East.

Jenkins' [11] notion of participatory culture, which holds that students can cooperatively create knowledge in open, digital settings, is consistent with this. Students can ask questions, share experiences, and challenge preconceptions in the social media environment, which blurs the boundaries between content provider and consumer. Many of the students in this study claimed to have been “accidental cultural learners” as a result of online debates, conversations, and comment threads sparked by current events or cultural controversies throughout the world.

Exposure to languages has evolved as a particularly rich method of knowledge acquisition. A number of individuals reported that they learned simple expressions or idioms in other languages through casual conversations, music, or memes. Such linguistic knowledge, albeit not the subject of this study, helps ICC by encouraging meta-awareness of the ways in which language creates culture.

But questions have also been raised over the veracity and breadth of information gleaned via social media. A few people questioned if the cultural material they came across was stereotype-filtered or representative. This worry is in line with Helm's [5] warning that, despite their abundance of content, digital spaces have the potential to spread superficial or exoticized depictions of culture.

Some students took the initiative to compare various viewpoints or confirm facts through outside research in order to lessen this. As we discuss below, this voluntary triangulation points to a developing kind of critical cultural awareness.

### *3. Skills of Interpreting, Relating, and Interacting*

Interacting with culture, interpreting it, and connecting with it are key elements of Bayram's concept, and the participants in this study demonstrated these skills in several ways. In particular, they showed that they could deal with intercultural misunderstandings and adapt their communication styles in online discussions.

Students shared numerous experiences of resolving confusion on platforms such as Discord, Reddit, and language exchange apps. These instances ranged from simple misunderstandings of humor or slang to more complex issues related to differences in values, such as gender roles, politics, or religion. Notably, these moments often became valuable learning opportunities as participants took the time to clarify terms or reflect on the source of the misunderstanding.

As Blattner and Fiori [7] noted, the digital environment provides language learners with a dynamic space to practice their skills in real time. Participants in this study often used emojis, GIFs, or visual metaphors to overcome language barriers and express empathy. This type of multimodal communication has become a common strategy for ensuring mutual understanding, reinforcing Kramsha's [9] idea of symbolic competence in a digital context.

In addition, several participants reported using code-switching, simplifying language, or providing additional explanations based on the characteristics of their interlocutors' experiences. This highlights the communicative flexibility and adaptability that Deardorff [10] considers necessary for effective intercultural communication, especially in the unstructured and unpredictable environment of social media.

### *4. Critical Cultural Awareness and Identity Reflection*

A key finding from the interviews was the extent to which digital engagement encouraged students to think critically. Many participants described experiencing “cultural dissonance,” which led them to rethink their own social attitudes. For example, exposure to activist content on platforms such as TikTok and Twitter on topics such as gender, race, or postcolonial identity stimulated both discussions with peers and intrapersonal exploration.

This outcome reinforces critical cultural awareness, which Bayram [1] defines as the most developed characteristic of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). This concept implies more than passive acceptance of cultural behavior; it requires evaluation according to clear criteria, including one's own. Students demonstrated an ability to abandon ethnocentric judgments and engage in dialogic analysis, leading to a deeper understanding of cultural narratives, power dynamics, and privilege.

However, this introspective process was not without its difficulties. Some students admitted that they felt defensive, depressed, or isolated when their beliefs were challenged. Others, especially those from conservative backgrounds who were exposed to liberal or progressive online discourse, experienced identity confusion. These complex emotional dynamics highlight the affective aspect of CCI development, which is often underestimated in the context of digital studies.

Ultimately, students' active participation—seeking interpretations from peers, rereading comments, and revisiting posts—demonstrates genuine engagement with cultural complexity rather than passive consumption of information. Thus, social media served as both a lens and a mirror, simultaneously offering a glimpse into other cultures and revealing aspects of students' own identities that are often hidden in traditional learning environments.

### *5. Challenges and Ethical Ambiguities in Digital ICC Development*



Although the study results indicate that social media can be a powerful tool for intercultural learning, they also highlight significant risks associated with using these platforms to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC). A recurring concern was the danger of stereotyping, as some students questioned whether they were interacting with authentic cultural voices or exaggerated caricatures created for online consumption.

Another concern was how algorithms can narrow a user's worldview. Platforms such as YouTube and TikTok personalize feeds in ways that can reinforce existing biases. Without deliberate efforts to expand their digital networks, students risk becoming stuck in echo chambers, which can hinder their development of intercultural understanding. This finding is supported by Yung's [13] research on social media "bubbles" limiting exposure to cultural diversity.

Participants also reported varying levels of emotional safety. Cross-cultural discussions, especially on sensitive political topics, sometimes escalated into arguments, bullying, or trolling. While such interactions can be beneficial, they also pose serious psychosocial risks that require careful management.

These concerns point to the need for support from educational institutions and the provision of programs to develop digital intercultural literacy. Without such guidance, the potential for meaningful intercultural digital interaction on social media may not be fully realized and may even become dangerous.

#### *6. Implications for Education and Future Research*

This study adds to a growing body of evidence that social media can be a valuable educational platform for developing intercultural competence, rather than simply a distraction. To maximize this potential, educators must purposefully integrate reflective, dialogic, and critical pedagogy into their curriculum.

Language and communication courses can incorporate assignments such as digital ethnography, critical media literacy, and intercultural journaling to encourage students to reflect on their online experiences. Teachers can also guide intercultural interaction in apps such as Tandem, using reflection questions based on Bayram's concept.

Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies to track the long-term development of intercultural interaction on specific platforms. In addition, cross-cultural comparisons could reveal how local norms and practices influence digital intercultural experiences in different parts of the world.

#### **Conclusion**

This study examined how college students perceive and experience the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) through the use of social media. Using Bayram's (1997) ICC model as a framework and qualitative data obtained from student interviews, the study found that social media provides an ideal environment for developing key intercultural skills. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, and Tandem allow students to form positive intercultural attitudes, acquire cultural knowledge, practice communication skills, and develop critical cultural awareness.

The study emphasizes that these online spaces often serve as dynamic, learner-centered "third places" for intercultural interaction. Thanks to these platforms, students can interact with different people, challenge their biases, and find meaning in a multicultural context.

However, the results also point to significant problems. The study identified risks such as stereotyping, algorithmic filtering, and emotional discomfort during conflicts. These problems indicate that in order for students to fully utilize social media, educational institutions must provide them with structured guidance and opportunities for reflection. The study concludes that social media should be viewed not as a replacement for traditional learning, but as a supplement that provides ongoing, spontaneous exposure to intercultural differences.

In other words, social media is a powerful, albeit complex, tool for developing intercultural interaction in higher education. This requires a thoughtful approach that emphasizes critical thinking, digital intercultural literacy, and institutional support. The study calls on educators and researchers to seek ways to integrate informal online environments into formal educational practices to help students develop the global communication skills needed in today's world.

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