

SECTION 16.

PEDAGOGY AND EDUCATION

Bolshak Daria

Bachelor Student of Culture and Creative Industries Faculty
Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Ukraine

Kugai Kseniia 

Associate Professor of the Department of Philology and Translation
Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Ukraine

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN NEW ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction. In the context of globalisation, social media have evolved into a central instrument of communication that transcends geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Digital platforms are no longer limited to entertainment or informal interaction. They function as dynamic spaces where identities are constructed, communities are formed, and cultural meanings are negotiated. For internationally mobile students, who must adapt to unfamiliar academic and social environments, social media often become one of the primary channels for orientation, interaction, and self-expression. Their communicative potential enables individuals not only to maintain transnational connections but also to engage with local contexts in real time. Consequently, the role of social media in contemporary integration processes requires systematic academic consideration.

The work aims to investigate the influence of popular media platforms on the process of socio-cultural integration of international students in the host country.

The intensification of global academic mobility over the past decade has significantly reshaped higher education. The mass movement of students, including Ukrainians studying abroad and international students choosing Ukraine as their destination, has amplified the relevance of integration within host societies. Entering a new cultural and educational system inevitably places the student in the position of a stranger, navigating unfamiliar norms, expectations, and social codes. International students typically have a relatively short-term stay with a strong intention to return to their home country. This temporary perspective often shapes both their motivation to integrate and the strategies they adopt. Upon arrival in the

new host environment, international students may experience “cultural shock” which often affects their psychological and physical well-being [2, p. 5]. Therefore, integration should be understood not only as academic adjustment but also as a complex socio-psychological process.

One of the most significant and immediate challenges faced by international students is the language barrier. They may have to experience great cultural differences between their home and host countries, which may be reflected in their daily life [2, p. 5]. Language operates not merely as a communicative instrument but as a key to cultural participation and social inclusion. English fluency helps overcome communication difficulties and improves social interactions. Increased social contact with host nationals can lead to better cultural adjustment and satisfaction [2, p. 20]. However, formal instruction alone rarely guarantees confidence in everyday interaction. Social media platforms create conditions for spontaneous and informal communication, enabling students to practise everyday language, acquire basic vocabulary, and familiarise themselves with colloquial expressions in authentic contexts. The host country’s social media is considered to play a positive role in reducing international students’ acculturation stress and enhancing their psychological well-being [2, p. 3]. Through digital engagement, students observe behavioural norms, humour, and social conventions in a comparatively safe environment, which gradually supports their linguistic and cultural adaptation.

Another major challenge is social isolation. Upon arrival, many students experience a sense of separation and invisibility within the host environment. Differences in communication styles, academic expectations, and daily routines may intensify this feeling. Participation in collaborative learning, joint academic projects, student societies, and extracurricular activities provides practical opportunities for building interpersonal connections. Digital spaces further extend these possibilities. Social media was widely adopted for social contact with globally dispersed friendship networks. Social media platforms are a key source of information for international students, which help them build a “sense of connectivity with what is happening around them” [3, p. 5]. Maintaining ties with family and friends abroad contributes to emotional stability, while interaction within local online communities supports integration into the host society. Having a Facebook account was seen as a necessity for demonstrating adaptation to local norms, facilitating everyday interaction with Australian and international counterparts [3, p. 5]. In addition, using social media to seek advice from peer groups helps students ease their “culture shock” as well as find the best way to live in the new host environment [2, p. 19]. Participation in social media can help

students join virtual communities online as a way to learn more and become accustomed to the new culture they encounter. Moreover, International students do not receive adequate social support from local colleges, and social media provide them with more such support, thereby compensating for institutional limitations and strengthening their sense of belonging [1, p. 546].

A further difficulty that complicates integration is the dispersion of actions and thoughts during the adaptation process. The necessity to manage academic performance, language acquisition, financial concerns, and social positioning simultaneously may lead to fragmentation and uncertainty. In such conditions, unstructured digital consumption can increase distraction rather than facilitate adjustment. Consequently, integration requires a comprehensive, balanced strategy that combines offline participation with a purposeful, reflective use of social media. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and various applications can serve as tools for making new acquaintances, exploring local communities, and discovering cultural events or exhibitions. Students can also explore the host culture through blogs and personal narratives that reveal everyday practices and social values. Creating one's own content, expressing personal identity, and seeking like-minded individuals transforms the student from a passive observer into an active participant in the socio-cultural environment. Thus, social media function not simply as communication channels but as dynamic instruments of cultural integration.

The findings suggest that social media represent a multifaceted resource in the integration trajectory of international students. Their impact extends beyond communication, encompassing emotional support, informational guidance, cultural learning, and opportunities for active participation in the host society. When used consciously and strategically, digital platforms can mitigate adaptation challenges and facilitate meaningful engagement with local communities. At the same time, the effectiveness of social media depends on balanced usage that complements, rather than replaces, offline interaction. Therefore, social media should be viewed not as a supplementary element but as an integral component of contemporary socio-cultural integration in conditions of global academic mobility.

References:

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