The Role of Social Media on Intercultural Communication Competences

by Winda Monika

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Keywords: Social Media, Intercultural Communication

Abstract: Social media is hitting mainstream lately. Since the advancement of technology, it brings people to interact with multi cultures users. Regardless most of social media have all of communication features on their applications, a study figures out that people tend to use more than one social media for different needs. Social media is a powerful online tool that allows people to communicate, interact, get connected, share, express idea and thought and many more functionalities to carry out. In this study, we examine the role of five widely used social media on intercultural communication competences. We conducted a survey on international students of Kyoto University and Tsukuba University, Japan. We try to figure out the motivation of the people using each social media on intercultural communication. The result shows that most of the participants are on Facebook with a motivation to get to know more about their international friends and most of their International friends are already on Facebook. It also shows that participants use social media with the following motivation: supporting social interaction, profiling, information sharing, and communication tools. Social media enhance participants communication competence in a way that communication among international friends goes effective, they adapt faster where social media assist them to get along very well with a strong tie, and finally, social media enhances their English reading skill.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the upcoming of Internet, every aspect in human life changes pertaining the way of people communicate one another. These days, distance is not a matter. As long as someone has access to Internet, interaction and communication among people over continent is possible to be happened. A channel that facilitates the user's interaction and communication is called social media. Social media makes world seemingly borderless. Huge active users are increasing every time, estimated nearly one in four people worldwide is using social media. Over million active social media users exist (Metev and Veiko, 2013) and the number keeps increasing steadily, thus various social media are continuously invented and enhanced.

People use social media for various purposes. Most of people use social media because of the need to connect and interact with others; to gain knowledge and learn about different opinions and perspective of issues, topics, and events; and to socialize (Metev and Veiko, 2013). Moreover, some factors such as age somehow reflects the usage behavior of the tools as well. Mostly generation Y uses social media for contributing, sharing, searching for, and consuming content, plus working and playing (Bolton et al., 2013). This shows that people have motive behind the usage of the tools. The need to stay connected with others and gain information are an instance of the user and the usage behavior.

Undeniably, people who come from different background, continents, countries, races, and so forth, are currently on social media. Social media has brought people from different cultures together in the "global village" (Metev and Veiko, 2013). Which means interaction among the social media users is not limited to the same culture only but also for intercultural communication. Moreover, prior study (Breckling, 2012) states that "social media are changing the way that information is passed across societies and around the world". It comes into questions whether the existing social media applications support their users adequately for intercultural communication or vice versa. Then, what kind of social media functionalities that helps to encourage intercultural communication. To do so, five most used social media were

selected to be further analyzed their features such as Line, WhatsApp, Slack, Facebook and Twitter. We examined the user's motivation on using the social media for intercultural communication. Later on, we analyzed to what extent social media features which mostly used for intercultural communication enhance intercultural communication competences.

2 LITERATURE STUDY

2.1 Social Media Application

Social media is a channel that is provided by social media platform which offers advanced features as well as functions which support social networking such as sharing ideas, information, knowledge, and so forth over network. Some social media is used for chatting and/or making phone call, for instance, Line, WhatsApp, Slack. Other social media are typical microblogging which allows user to post, exchange, share the small content such as sentences, small post, photos, videos, etc., and is also completed by some communication features such as instant messaging, phone call, video calls, for instance, Facebook and Twitter. Five popular social media and networking site used mostly for intercultural communication are Facebook, Line, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Slack.

Facebook website was launched on February 2004 (Padhye et al., 1999) and it has been gaining huge popularity since then. News portal online (Committee et al., 1999) reveals that "Facebook attracted over 130 million unique visitors in May 2010, an increase of 8.6 million people". There are over 800 million users in the world with a population of 6.9 billion, which means that about 1 out 12 people has a Facebook account (Metev and Veiko, 2013).

Line is a regular instant messenger apps with additional services such as games, money sending, e-commerce, as well as various number of emojis. It was launched in Japan in 2012 [1]. Line is immensely famous in Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, and Indonesia [2]. According to news states that "Line became Japan's largest social network in 2013, Japan: 54 million registered users" [3]. In March 2019, report said that Line is more popular than Facebook [4]

Slack was launched in August 2013 [5]. Before it was launched to public, it was used as a com-

munication tool among internal employee. Unlike any other social media apps, this app is integrated with a large number of third-party services and supports community-built integrations, such as Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, GitHub, and so on. In 2015, Slack passed more than a million daily active users [6]. There're more than half a million Slack users in London and Tokyo [7].

Twitter is being used by over 328 million users [8]. It is a type microblogging which allows users to post and broadcast short information over the network. Therefore, it has influenced intercultural dialogue because many people worldwide are focused on the individual life of others and have desire for connection and knowledge of events (Sawyer and Chen, 2012).

WhatsApp Messenger is a messaging app for smartphones created in 2009 [9]. It offers features similar to SMS. This app has big number of users as well. WhatsApp now has 1.5 billion users and sees 60 billion messages sent per day [10]. It is mostly used by users due to its simplistic functionality.

2.2 Social Media Features

Social media is a powerful online tool that allows people to communicate, interact, get connected, share, express idea and thought and many more functionalities to carry out. People can easily access social media through an electronic devices such as web-based technologies on desktops (PC or laptops), or download services by using mobile devices (e.g., smartphones and tablets).

To support the needs of users, social media has been continuously inventing new features on it. Basically, social media is used for the communication purposes such as frequently used to support verbal (e.g., making a video call and phone call) and non-verbal (e.g., chatting) communication. Nowadays, social media is used to archiving memories, building reputations, marketing products, searching for job, shaping friendship, acquiring knowledge, exploring information as well as sharing thought and ideas by creating podcasts, blogs and so on. Therefore, features such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos, create user profiles are embedded in the features.

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[1] https://www.techinasia.com/
[2] http://www.businessofapps.com
[3] https://www.techinasia.com/
[4] https://www.nippon.com/
[5] https://venturebeat.com

[6] https://www.theverge.com/
[7] https://techcrunch.com/
[8] https://www.thebalance.com/
[9] http://www.businessofapps.com/
[10] https://techcrunch.com

2.3 Uses and Gratifications on Intercultural Communication

Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) is a renowned theory in media research. Gratification can be defined as "feeling of satisfaction" of the use of something. Basically, the objectives of this theory are to describe and figure out the psychological needs that shape people's motive behind their engagement to utilize certain media for gratifications that fulfill their inherent needs (Rubin, 1981).

People in social media are coming from multicultures, thus having different personality and behavior in using social media. Regardless most of social media have all of communication features on their applications, a study figures out that people tend to use more than one social media. A study concluded that different social media fulfill different user needs (Correa et al., 2010). Many factors effect the use of social media. Young adults have been found to depend heavily on the Internet for entertainment and information. Further, it reveals that the reason of using social-networking sites by young adults are "to experience selective, efficient, and immediate connection with others for their (mediated) interpersonal communication satisfaction and as an ongoing way to seek the approval and support of other people" (Urista et al., 2009). That means age influence the use of the social media.

A study defined that the reason of use and what gratification will people get from social media are for social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others (Whiting and Williams, 2013). They may also use the Internet to "connect and maintain social relationships" (Stevens and Morris, 2007). Other study categorized social media gratification into content and process. Content is driven from acquiring information and knowledge, where process occurs from web browsing or creating content for the website (Kayahara and Wellman, 2007).

There are several researches that have been conducted to examine use and gratification on using social media. However, less study discussing on the motive for choosing a certain kind of social media specially used for intercultural communication.

2.4 Intercultural Communication Competences

Intercultural communication competences (ICC) are generally defined as abilities of people to communicate and interact with people from multi-cultures. The study about ICC had been conducted in the past 50 years (Arasaratnam and Doerfel, 2005) and still ongoing. in this 21st century, ICC encounters a unique research field due to the changes of the social interaction and communication in society. It used to limit the scope on face to face communication. But later on, due to the advancement of technology, the study is expanded to measure the implication of the various media used for communication toward intercultural communication process and competences.

A concept of new media such as social media would bring a gap as well as challenge in order to attain a successful communication. A study states that "new media has brought human interaction and society to a highly interconnected and complex level, but at the same time challenges the very existence of intercultural communication in its traditional sense"(Chen, 2012). Social media which primarily relies on information technology bring the users in different level of information technology literacy. People must be able to use and manage their social media properly. Moreover, to successfully communicate with people from different cultures, the ability of global communication competence is a must (Chen et al., 1998).

Variable of competences was defined varied by researchers in this filed. Brian H. Spitzberg (1991) presents a model of interpersonal competence which consists of motivation, knowledge, and skill in interaction (Spitzberg, 1991). These three skills are crucial to develop intercultural communication skills. To look into detail, Martin and Hammer (1989) examined social skills perspective which focus on communicative function behaviors, verbal and non-verbal behaviors and conversational management behaviors. Based on these models, in this study we pick up several variables of ICC to be further examined. Those are communication effectiveness, language competences and empathy.

3 METHODOLOGY

Survey had been conducted in two public universities in Japan whose provide international program delivered in English. Those are University of Tsukuba and Kyoto University. The target were international students who come from various countries that have different educational backgrounds, academic standing as well as cultures. Although, they were taking classes given in English which means their English proficiency is already fair, nevertheless English is not their mother-language. Therefore, we selected

this environment as a sample to examine intercultural communication vibes among them.

There were 55 respondents from two universities submitted the feedback. The survey is divided into three parts – Part A, Part B, and Part C. Part A collected the demographic information of the respondents including e.g., university, gender, nationality, age, academic standing and social media used.

Part B analyzed the motivation behind the usage of each selected social media i.e., Facebook, Line, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Slack. We chose those social media due to its popularity among the international students in Japan. Despite the type of social media, we observed some aspect such as strengthen connection with international friend, feature embedded, and functions of the social media which influence the reason. We examined user's motivation on intercultural communication by using U&G theory (Whiting and Williams, 2013) as a based line, futhermore we developed our own questioners to analyse further the reason of users for choosing those kinds of social media on intercultural communication. There were 10 question items asked and students were allowed to choose more than one social media that they use on the daily basis. The motivation items questionnaire was utilized from and we added some additional question items in accordance with social media usage on intercultural communication.

Part C examined to what extent of the social media usage and motivation of the users influence intercultural communication competence. There were two variables in this part. The usage as a variable one includes instant messaging and resource sharing. To look over each social media as well as the reason of using those media are covered by part B. The respondents were asked to choose what kind of social media that they are using for each usage or purpose. The data of the variable one was collected in part B. Variable two examines the intercultural communication competences including four aspects, those are communication effectiveness, adaptation, language competence, and empathy. There were 25 questions for the total. The participants were asked to rate the scale using Likert scale 1 to 5 scale ("5. Strongly agree"; "3. Neither"; "1. Strongly disagree").

4 RESULT

4.1 Demographic Information

Demographic information e.g., age, nationality, academic standing and social media usage of the 55 students is shown in Table 1. It shows that out of 55

total responses conducted in University of Tsukuba (UoT) and Kyoto University (KU), 66.7% were in the range of age 20 – 29 years old. Most of the participant are dominated by Indonesian students (32%). Most of participant are graduate school students; PhD students as (40%) and Master students (37%). In addition, we found that nearly 96% students were on Facebook. Male students use Facebook more than female student. In contrast, others social media for instance Line, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Slack were used dominantly by female student. According to Table 1, most of the participants use more than one social media.

4.2 Social Media That Motivate Users on Intercultural Communication

Results show that about 8 of 10 questionnaire items, Facebook is dominantly chosen by the participants as the most used social media. According to Figure 1, most of the participants are on Facebook with the following motivations: get to know more about their international friends; most of their International friends are on Facebook; find international friends with mutual interest; broaden networking with their international friends; help them to keep in touch with their international friends; their International friends suggest them to use it; utilize it as a resource sharing; and the last one is for chatting. The percentage are 91%, 91%, 89%, 89%, 87%, 75%, 74%, and 62% respectively. Other results show that Line was chosen as the 2nd most used by the participants due to its functionality in creating enclosed group and making a phone call.

4.3 Intercultural Communication Competences

Table 2 through Table 5 describe the items and the average score of each item which measure intercultural communication competence variable. We analyzed the scale's internal reliability by calculating its Cronbach's α coefficients. As a result, the coefficients of the four scales were .767, .754, .818, and .607 respectively.

We examined intercultural communication competence of the participants by asking 23 questionnaire items. We look thoroughly four (4) aspects of intercultural communication competence; communication effectiveness, adaptation, language competence, and empathy.

As shown in Table 2, on communication effectiveness aspect, most of the participants agreed that there were not any communication barriers with their international friends (IF) when using chatting as "they do

Table 1: Demographic Information

Demographic	UoT (n = 33 (58.2%))		KU (n = 22 (41.8%))		Total
	Male (n=13)	Female (n=20)	Male (n=17)	Female (n=5)	55
Age					
20–29 years old	10.52%	24.6%	22.8%	8.77%	66.7%
30–39 years old	12.28%	7.02%	7.02%	1.75%	29.8%
40–49 years old	1.75%	1.75%	-	-	3.5%
Nationality					
Indonesian	7	13	10	2	32 (56%)
Chinese	-	-	1	-	1 (2%)
Taiwanese	-	-	-	1	1 (2%)
Thailand	3	-	1	1	5 (9%)
Lebanon	-	-	-	1	1 (2%)
Indian	-	1	-	-	1 (2%)
Sri Lankan	-	1	-	-	1 (2%)
American	3	2	4	-	9 (16%)
Norway	-	-	1	-	1 (2%)
Nepali	-	1	-	-	1 (2%)
Moroccon	-	1	-	-	1 (2%)
Academic Standing					
Undergraduate	1	3	-	-	4 (7%)
Master student	3	8	8	3	21 (37%)
P.hD student	6	8	7	2	23 (40%)
ExchanceStudent	1	-	-	-	1 (2%)
ResearchStudent	2	1	2	-	5 (9%)
Social Media	Male		Female		n
Facebook (FB)	30		25		52 (96%)
Line	20		24		44 (77%)
Twitter	7		10		17 (30%)
WhatsApp (WA)	5		10		15 (26%)
Slack	9		12		21 (37%)

Table 2: Communication Effectiveness

Items	Mean	Std Dev
I don't find any difficulty communicating with my IF on phone call	3.49	1.14
I don't find any difficulty communicating with my IF on chatting	4.11	0.93
I understand with the context of information shared by my IF	3.92	0.87
I don't mind making mistake (such as typo, grammar-error, so on) while chatting on social media with my IF	4.02	0.95

α = .767

Table 3: Adaptation

Items	Mean	Std Dev
I don't judge my IF during communicating or interacting with me through social media	3.54	1.09
Social media makes me can get along very well with my IF	3.68	1.01
Social media helps me bonding or having a close relationship with my IF	3.54	0.88
My IF helps me to survive in the university through social media	3.07	1.14
My IF help me to settle in Japan through social media	2.98	1.07
I rely a lot on my IF through social media	3.81	1.01

α = .754

not find any difficulty communicating with my IF on chatting" was selected with mean 4.11.

The second aspect examined is language competence. As shown in Table 4, due to all participants are fluent in English where English is as their second language, therefore "they easily understand or relate to what is being discussed with their international friends on social media" is fairly chosen with mean 3.65. In addition, it seems that social media is fairly enhancing the participant's English reading,

writing, speaking and listening skills with mean 3.54, 3.47, 3.14, and 3.08 respectively. Moreover, it seems that most of the participants preferred to communicate through chat (mean 3.63) over phone-call (3.54).

The third aspect analyzed is empathy. As shown in Table 5, most of the participants agreed to show
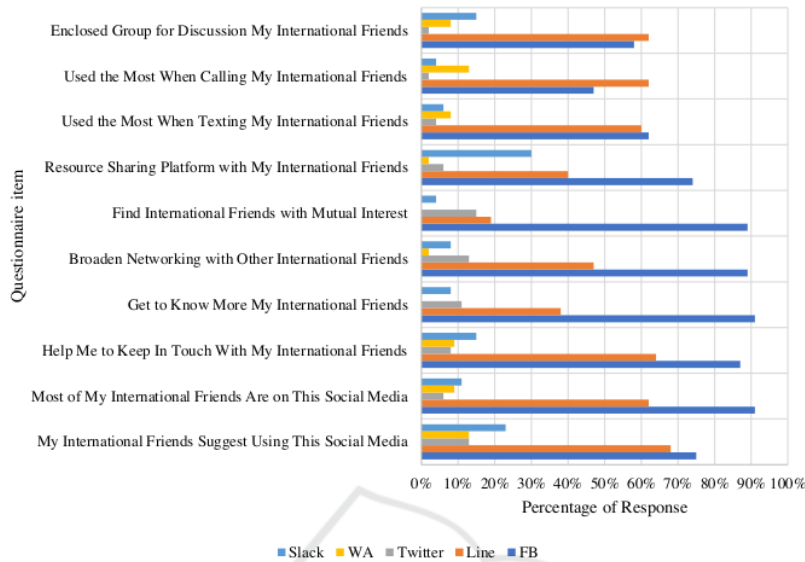
Figure 1: Motivation on Intercultural Communication Using Social Media.

Table 4: Language Competence

Items	Mean	Std Dev
I am confident with my English writing skill when chatting with my IF through social media	3.63	1.14
I am confident with my English-speaking skill when communicating with my IF through social media	3.54	1.16
I easily understand or relate to what is being discussed with my IF on social media	3.65	0.96
I feel social media helps me to enhance my English writing skill	3.47	1.28
I feel social media helps me to enhance my English-speaking skill	3.14	1.22
I feel social media helps me to enhance my English reading skill	3.54	1.20
I feel social media helps me to enhance my English listening skill	3.08	1.27

α = .818

their empathy toward other international friends by "always trying to make their international friends feel comfortable communicating with them on social media". This item has a mean 3.95. Moreover, most of the participants agreed that "if they don't understand during the chatting and the context of the information being discussed, they would not hesitate to reconfirm and ask their International Friends" with mean 3.87 and 2.17 respectively. In addition, for phone call was chosen fairly with mean 3.02.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Survey Respondents - Gender Ratio, Age, Nationality, Academic Standing, Social Media Usage

Previous study (Ye and Murota, 2014) mentioned that the younger student with higher level of English language ability would like to communicate with foreigner more. Therefore, to confirm the factor, we analyzed age toward intercultural communication com-

Table 5: Empathy

Items	Mean	Std Dev
If I don't understand during chatting, I will reconfirm with my IF	3.87	0.76
If I don't understand during the enclosed group discussion on social media, I don't mind to re-explain several times.	2.17	0.73
If I don't understand during making phone call, I ask my other friend to help me instead	3.02	1.00
I don't avoid communicating on social media with whom I don't understand well his/her English (English native speaker)	3.72	1.08
I don't avoid communicating on social media with whom I don't understand well his/her English (English nonnative speaker)	3.64	1.13
I always try to make my international friends feel comfortable communicating with me on social media	3.95	0.93

α = .607

petence by conducting regression analysis. We did not analyze the English language ability of the students because we assumed that their English level is already high since they enroll to the English program. Fig. 1 shows age (β=-.13, p<.05) where the result apparently was similar to the previous study.

In this study, the participant are students who utilize social media to communicate both with their same country and international friends frequently. Table 1 shows that mostly the participants are dominated by young generation or commonly called generation Y. Generation Y are the first generation to spend their entire lives in digital environment; information technology profoundly affects how they live and work (Mayfield, 2008). Generation Y actively contributes, shares, searches for and consumes content – plus works and plays- on social media (Chen, 2012). In addition, participants are mostly well educated which have a good level of academic standing. No wonder that most of them are already being a digital native. Nevertheless, there is no significant relationship between the number of social media used with the level of academic standing of the participants (p>.05).

As Table 1 mentioned that mostly the participants use more than one social media. Users do not embrace a single form social media but, tend to employ a range of tools for communication (Quan-Haase et al., 2002). As shown in the Table 1, one participant at least utilizes two social media tools for communication. Findings show that Facebook and Line are used mostly by the participants as a communication tool. Social media as a communication tool has basic features such as texting and making phone call. For these basic functions, Line is used for phone call while Facebook is for texting. In addition, social networking such as finding more international friends, resource sharing, broaden networking and so on, Facebook is chosen

the most.

Facebook is a complete and huge social media platform. It is used not only as a communication tool but also micro-blogging which allow user to share their and others thought through posted information, videos and pictures on the wall. It helps disseminating information goes faster through out the connected friends. In addition, Facebook is utilized with emoticon on the chat box, although Line is also having emoticon, but Facebook's is chosen more preferable by the participants. Moreover, Facebook registers personal information of the users and that information is accessed openly so that people may use it for profiling. General information such as school, working place, address, current location, hobbies and so forth are easily bringing user to get connected and find mutual international friends with the same interest. Above all functions, Facebook and Line are subsequently creating, developing and deepening social engagement and physiological attachment among the users. Which later on effect dependencies toward this channel.

5.2 Use and Gratification of Social Media for Intercultural Communication

Results show that participants use social media for various motives or reasons. Here are some motives which reflect the gratification they get from using such kind of the social media features.

- *Supporting Social Interaction*. According to findings as shown in Figure 1, several motives behind the usage of social media in intercultural communication are revealed such as for 'finding international friends with mutual interest", 'getting to know more about their international

friends","helping them to keep in touch with their international friends", "broadening the networking with their international friends". Therefore, it reveals that social media firmly supports creating, maintaining the strong tie as well as expanding network.

- *Profiling*. Features of social media that provide personal information openly to public allow users doing profiling toward stranger. As profiling is very crusial in social media, this kind of features enable users to analyse someone's bahaviour and personalities that is reflected from their post and information shared on their social media.

- *Information Sharing*. Feature of social media that enable users to share information in multi-format (e.g., as text, image, code, etc) is needed. Since the participants are university students, this kind of feature is commonly and actively used in their daily basis.

- *Communication tools*. According to finding in Figure 1, social media used as a communication tool is voted as the last place after support social interaction and information sharing. Most of the participants use social media for texting and calling. Findings also show that participants prefer use social media for making phone call over texting.

5.3 Intercultural Communication Competence Enhancement

As shown in Table 2, even though most of the students are not English native speaker and in Japan, English is considered not even as a second language, communication among international friends goes effective where most of them agree that they do not find any difficulty communicating one another whether by chatting or phone call.

According to Table 3, most of participants agree that social media helps them to adapt with their new international friends. Social media support their adaptation faster where social media assists them to get along very well and bond the relationship to be strong tie. As mentioned by (Mayfield, 2008) there is a significant relationship between ISs' communication media usage and adaptation situations. Nevertheless, there is no high dependency toward their international friends via social media.

As shown in Table 4, majority of the participants agree that social media helps them to enhance their English reading skill. Social media is updating its content every second, thus in order to keep informed makes users have to read the latest news on social me-

dia. In addition, the findings show that most of participants already have good empathy. it is shown from majority of the participants agree that they always try to make their international friends feel comfortable during communication with them on social media.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Social media is a powerful online tool that allows people to communicate, interact, get connected, share, express idea and thought and many more functionalities to carry out. We examined the role of five widely used social media, i.e., Facebook, Line, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Slack on intercultural communication competences. We conducted a survey on 55 international students of Kyoto University and Tsukuba University, Japan. The result shows that most of the participants are on Facebook with a motivation to get to know more about their international friends and most of their International friends are already on Facebook. It also shows that participants use social media with the following motivation: supporting social interaction, profiling, information sharing, and communication tools. Social media enhance participants communication competence in a way that communication among international friends goes effective, they adapt faster where social media assist them to get along very well with a strong tie, and finally, social media enhances their English reading skill.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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